

Forum Cities and Faith-Based & Neighborhood Groups Convene with Federal Partners to Focus on Youth Violence Prevention

Posted by Eugene Schneeberg on September 14, 2012

I, along with other federal partners of the [National Forum on Youth Violence Prevention](#), an initiative launched by President Obama in 2010, visited several cities across the country to listen, learn and share experiences from working to prevent youth violence. The cities visited included:

- [Boston, Massachusetts](#);
- [Detroit, Michigan](#);
- [Memphis, Tennessee](#);
- [Salinas, California](#); and
- [San José, California](#).

[The Forum cities](#) were selected based on need, geographic diversity, as well as willingness and capacity to undertake the comprehensive efforts that are the hallmark of the Forum.



Faith-based and community groups are highly engaged within these site. For example, during the Boston site visit, leaders from the community and local, state, and federal governments spent the second half of the first day at the [Teen Center at St. Peter's](#), a program of Catholic Charities Greater Boston which serves teens from the Bowdoin/Geneva neighborhood of Dorchester. “There are approximately 200 members of the Teen Center, with as many as 80 participating in educational or recreational activities daily.”



While at St. Peter's, the federal team met with staff and young people from the Start Strong/Engaging Men and Boys initiative and participated in a peer led workshop designed to highlight the [Defending Childhood Initiative](#) and the [OVW Start Strong grants to the Boston Public Health Commission](#).

Faith-based and community groups were also active in other cities during site visits. For example, Salinas hosted a discussion with the faith-based community where the federal team and community participants talked about the faith-based community's role in abating youth violence. The city, county and church leaders have a program called “Night Walks” where up to a dozen community members walk the streets of violent neighborhoods and talk to the neighbors, shake their hands and hand out information on city programs.

San Jose also hosted a Faith Based Roundtable discussion with representatives from the Mayor's Office, the Federal team and members of the newly formed Faith-Based Task Force including Pastor Jon Talbert, West Gate Church and [White House Champion of Change](#) Pastor Danny Sanchez, Calvary Chapel.

Also, during the Memphis site visit, I learned that the juvenile court system there is increasing referrals to diversion programs for at-risk youths, such as the nonprofit [Juvenile Intervention and Faith-based Follow-up, JIFF](#). We had the privilege of touring JIFF, where they have a high-quality facility for youth including a basketball court, exercise room and pool tables. JIFF also offers tutoring, mentoring, culinary training and GED and or college preparation to ensure these youth are directed toward a more positive future. We also participated in an amazing Back to School Block Party sponsored by the Gang Reduction Assistance for Saving Society's Youth (GRASSY) Program.



The role of faith-based and neighborhood partnership is paramount to the success of professional and volunteer work dedicated to the improvement of the lives of those in need—particularly our youth. The support fostered within faith-based communities and neighborhoods combined with the outreach and visibility of these groups on the ground and at high levels of administration places partnership at the crux of opportunity to make a lasting impact that is both widespread and, at the same time, tailored to particularized communities.



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