

Voices from the field: a community conversation about violence and the need for coordination of violence prevention programs in suburban Cook County

Executive Summary

Violence prevention has been identified as a prioritized public health issue among the residents of suburban Cook County. In October of 2008 the Cook County Department of Public Health (CCDPH), Office of Violence Prevention Coordination (OVPC) began contacting past community partners to solicit feedback on their work and identify needs to assist their efforts in preventing violence in their communities. In February 2009, the OVPC conducted a series of regional meetings with a variety of community based organizations to acquire a more in-depth perspective on violence and the its impact on municipalities throughout the county. These conversations provided opportunity to:

1. Share public health data on the incidence and prevalence of violence;
2. Acknowledge strengths and resource that currently exist; and
3. Further identify current needs from the community.

As a result of both of these efforts, a report was created to summarize the meeting process, identify common themes and trends across regions, recognize gaps in services and analyze feedback from participants.

The OVPC is dedicated to coordinating sectors of the community by assisting in policy development to prevent violence, building coalitions among various disciplines and ensuring all areas of the spectrum of prevention are addressed. Based on best practices, training, research and “voices” from the community conversations and meetings, this office recommends and is committed to serving, strengthening and building the capacity of the community through:

1. **Strengthening individual knowledge and skills:** teaching the community how to access violence prevention information and resources and linking them with committed partners capable of providing additional training and education
2. **Promoting community education:** creating media advocacy campaigns that increase the community's awareness of prevention and emphasizes shared responsibility for healthier behavior, norms and policy change
3. **Educating providers:** utilizing and sharing violence prevention best practices. Expand the definition of "providers" to include all those serving the community, mobilizes a larger group in preventing violence
4. **Fostering coalitions and networks:** forming a county-wide violence prevention steering committee committed to working together, conserving resources fostering cooperation between diverse sectors of society, and increasing the credibility and impact of collective efforts
5. **Developing organizational practices:** Assessing the safety practices and needs of organizations and businesses and assisting them in changing the internal norms that could positively affect the work environment

It is the vision of the OVPC that all residents of suburban Cook County are supported by communities that are equipped with resources to prevent violence and its impact on the health and well being of its residents. By expanding and building upon the capacity of the community by including the recommendations above and developing a 5-year strategic plan inclusive of the recommendations, the OVPC will coordinate evidence based efforts in the community to increase protective factors that will decrease the incidence and prevalence of violence throughout suburban Cook County.