The Center for Neighborhood Enterprise (CNE) Violence-Free Zone Initiative: A Milwaukee Case Study

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CNE Founding Principles: “Better ingredients make better programs”

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>What it Says…</th>
<th>What it means…</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Those suffering from the problem must be involved in the creation and</td>
<td>Programs and program staff must share the same “cultural zip code” to those they are serving.</td>
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<td>implementation of the solution.</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. The principles of the market economy should be applied to the solution of</td>
<td>Effective programs are committed to demonstrating the outcomes of their programs. For social programs, outcomes are revenues/profits.</td>
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<td>societal Problems.</td>
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<td>3. Value-generating and faith-based programs and groups are uniquely</td>
<td>Relationship-capacity, not organizational capacity, is the key. The ability to reach youth where they are (i.e., ‘second family’).</td>
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<td>qualified to address the problems of poverty.</td>
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The Violence-Free Zone (VFZ) Initiative: Origins

Principles of VFZ derived from successful, community-based youth violence and gang interventions:

• House of Umoja (Philadelphia) – community-based gang intervention;
• Benning Terrace (Washington, DC): crafting peace agreements with warring factions, using life skills, job training and placement services;
• Original VFZ site: Madison High School (Dallas, TX) in response to high levels of school expulsions – dramatic improvements in safety and atmosphere of school.
The VFZ Strategy: The 10% rule

If you have a high school of 1,000 or more kids, there are usually about 10% of those kids responsible for most of the incidents and disruptions occurring within the school. About 10% of these kids, in turn, are the leaders that orchestrate much of the disruptions, usually in the form of one gang acting out on another gang. Much of the VFZ strategy boils down to first identifying, and second, trying to develop relationships with these 10 or so leaders. So, the 10% rule is really about the 10% of kids causing the disruption at school, and then drilling down to the 10% of those that are really the driving force behind those conflicts. By engaging and re-directing these leaders, we have seen significant reductions in incidents, particularly gang-related incidents, in the schools where the VFZ initiative is operating.

(Kwame Johnson, national coordinator of VFZ programs – CNE)
How VFZ works: “It’s simple, but not easy”

A Day in the Life of a Youth Advisor

- **Walking the Streets** – The youth advisors walk around within about 1,000 feet outside the school before the day begins. The advisors encourage students towards school and pick up information on any brewing gang conflicts, touching base with any police officers in the immediate vicinity;

- **Greeting the Students** as they come in to school, offering any support they can to school security personnel, making themselves visible and available to any students that may have issues from home or for other reasons;

- **Tardy Hall** – For students arriving late to school, youth advisors meet with youth that are chronically late to find out why the student is continually tardy. Sometimes, advisors will also put calls to home for late or absent students to identify issues affecting their attendance;

- **Walking the Halls** – Between classes youth advisors walk around the halls, redirecting students, maintaining a presence/ keeping radar up for any possible individual ‘beefs’, neighborhood rivalries, or gang-related conflicts, and touching base with teachers on any behavior issues in the classroom;

- **Lunchtime** – A critical relationship-building opportunity for the youth advisors with the students, building trust and maintaining visibility;

- **Mediation** – As scheduled throughout the day, participate in teacher-student, parent-student, and student-student mediation to surface and resolve issues causing disruption within the school and classes.
What VFZ Expects to Change

The Milwaukee VFZ is demonstrating an impact in three primary areas:

1. **Improved safety** within the schools, as measured both by student and parent perceptions and by actual reported decreases in the number of violent and non-violent incidents reported in the school;

2. **Increased presence** of students in school (i.e., reduced suspensions and truancy); and

3. **Improved academic performance** (i.e., higher average GPA in school).
Milwaukee VFZ

- One of six VFZ sites across the nation;
- Beginning in September of 2005, CNE partnered with a local FBCO, the Latino Community Center (LCC), to implement the VFZ initiative in South Division High School, which had been plagued with escalating youth violence and gang-related conflicts in recent years;
- The first year of VFZ was funded entirely with private foundation dollars, through a consortium of local foundations coordinated through the Bradley Foundation;
- Program has since expanded through partnership with another FBCO, Runnin’ Rebels Community Organization, and is now in seven high schools.
## Milwaukee VFZ – About the Schools

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of School</th>
<th>Sub-Division?</th>
<th>VFZ Launch Date</th>
<th>FBCO Partner</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>South Division</td>
<td></td>
<td>September 2005</td>
<td>Latino Community Center (LCC)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bay View</td>
<td></td>
<td>September 2007</td>
<td>LCC</td>
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<tr>
<td>Custer</td>
<td></td>
<td>September 2007</td>
<td>Running Rebels Community Organization (RRCO)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Marshall</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>September 2007</td>
<td>RRCO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Washington</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>September 2007</td>
<td>RRCO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Division</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>November 2007</td>
<td>RRCO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bradley Tech (not included in outcomes)</td>
<td></td>
<td>September 2008</td>
<td>LCC</td>
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Improved Safety: # of Violent/Non-Violent Incidents

- Regular VFZ: -20%
- Sub-division VFZ: -32%
- Non-VFZ: -8%

% change in # of non-violent incidents

% change in # of violent incidents
Milwaukee VFZ Outcomes:
Pre-(2006-2007) and Post-VFZ (2007-2008)

Perceptions of Safety: Parent/Student Climate Survey:
- Safety: “My school makes sure that classrooms are safe and orderly”
- Environment: “My school has a friendly and welcoming atmosphere”

Changes in % of Respondents that agree/strongly agree
Milwaukee VFZ Outcomes:
Pre-(2006-2007) and Post-VFZ (2007-2008)

Increase presence: Truancy and Suspension rates

- Truancy Rates
- Suspension Rates

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<tr>
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<th>Regular VFZ</th>
<th>Sub-division VFZ</th>
<th>MPS High School Avg.</th>
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<tr>
<td>Increase presence</td>
<td>-37%</td>
<td>-44%</td>
<td>6%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Truancy Rates</td>
<td>-3%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>13%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Suspension Rates</td>
<td>-4%</td>
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Improvements in Academic Performance:
Promising preliminary results

Increase in GPA

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<tr>
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<th>Sub-division VFZ</th>
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<tr>
<td>Avg. Increase in GPA</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>4.6%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
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<td></td>
<td>3.3%</td>
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VFZ – Final Thoughts

• Data based on preliminary results, measuring only one year’s data (to be updated annually);

• Milwaukee Public Schools like what they see – Superintendent William Andrekopoulos:

  *We are expanding the Violence Free Zone Initiative because it works. This pilot program, using community engagement and the support of key community organizations, has proven to be a pro-active way to support the needs of young people in lieu of having them get trapped in the criminal justice system.*

• CNE’s commitment and accountability: A new standard for social services programming??
More Information

For copies of the Milwaukee Case Study Report


Follow-up questions for the case study authors:

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• William H. Wubbenhorst, Non-resident Fellow, Institute for Studies of Religion, Baylor University – 301-572-0561 – fourwubbs@yahoo.com

Follow-up questions for the Violence-Free-Zone Initiative

• Kwame Johnson, VFZ National Coordinator – Kjohnson@cneonline.org – 202-518-6500