



Youth Violence Prevention Action Table Status Update 2023

Presentation to Denver City Council, Safety, Housing,
Education and Homelessness Committee

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Supporting Programs and Initiatives that GROW with Denver's Children



Prenatal – Age 5

Denver Great Kids Head Start
Child Care; Family, Friend and Neighbor Care
Maternal/Child Health Services
Mental Health (children/providers)
Universal Pre-K

Age 5 – 18

Out-of-School Time Initiatives
Mental Health (children/providers)
MY Denver Card
Tasty Food

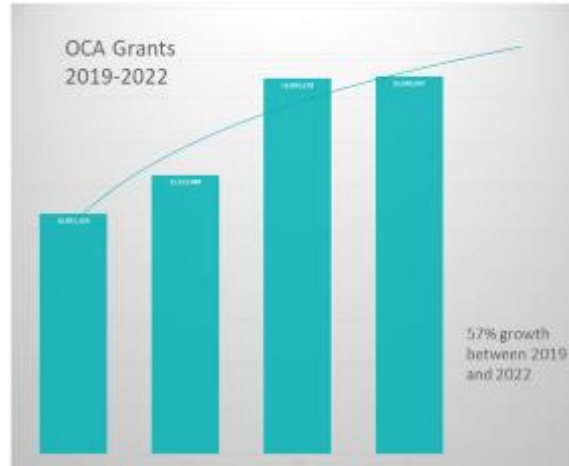
Age 12 – 24

Mayor's Youth Commission
Mental Health (children/providers)
Youth Empowerment Center
Youth Violence Prevention

Budget Growth

KEY TACTICS

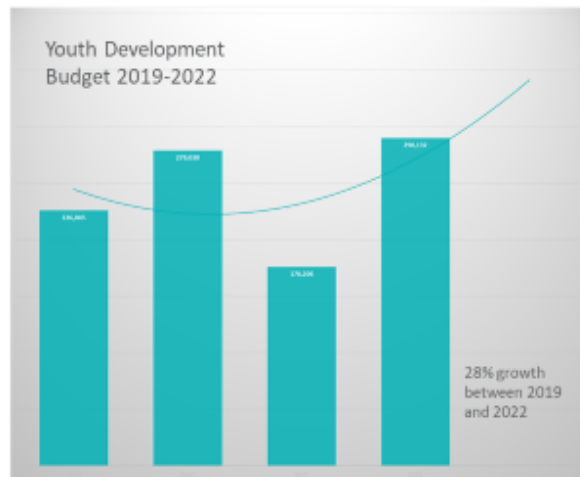
- ❑ OCA grants have also grown in addition to general fund, creating even more operational burden
- ❑ Addition of ARPA funds, though temporary, has meant growth across programs that we anticipate will continue



Budget Growth

KEY TACTICS

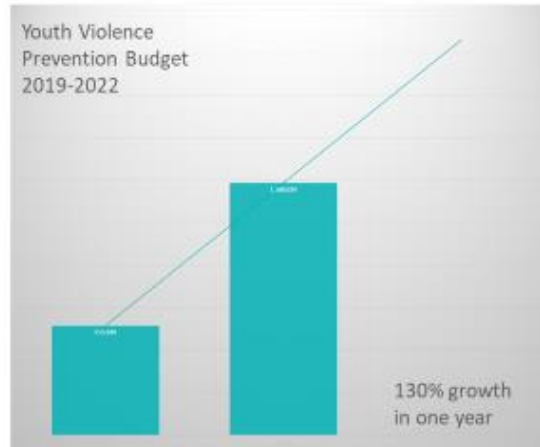
- ❑ Youth Development program area houses both Youth Violence Prevention (YVP) and early childhood, key priority areas for the office and the City
- ❑ Further anticipated growth in both areas—visibility of YVP work at local and national level; anticipated rollout of Universal Pre-K in 2023



Budget Growth

KEY TACTICS

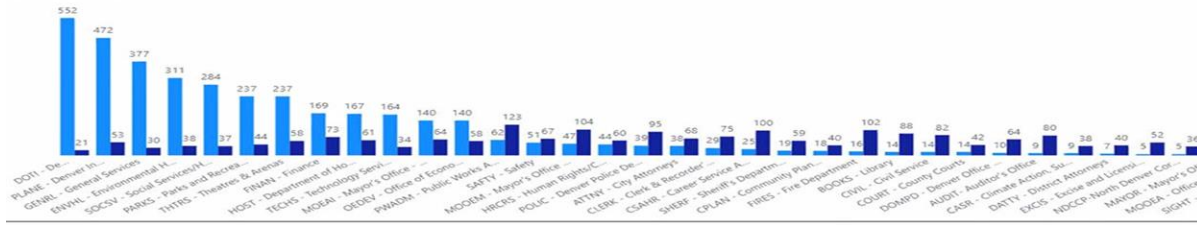
- ❑ The largest growth in the office has been within the area of Youth Violence Prevention, which falls within the Youth Development Team
- ❑ Particularly with the promotion of Melissa to Interim Executive Director, additional program support is needed for the day-to-day operations of the Youth Development team



- Comparison with DEDO
- Translate # into FTE's needed

2020 Total Contract Volume and Average Process Time by DEPARTMENT

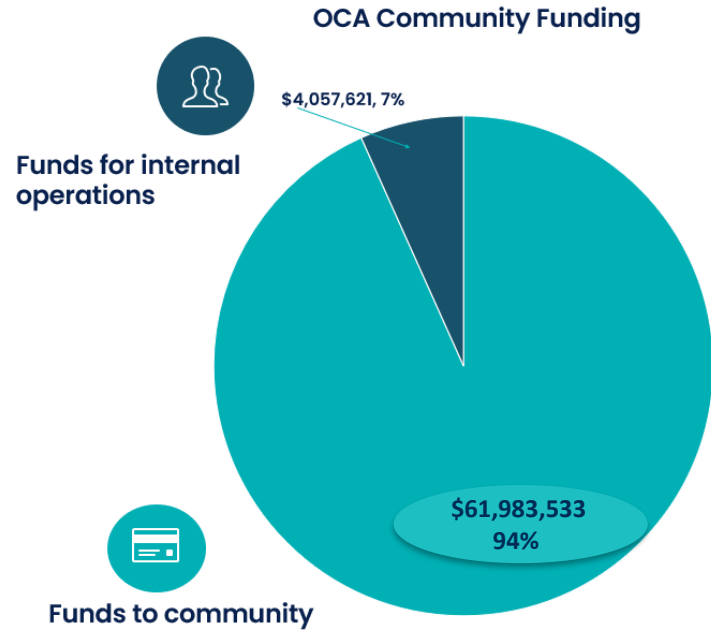
● Count of Contract Number ● Average of Total Time



OCA MANAGES A TOTAL BUDGET OF

\$88.44 Million

(grants, general funds, special revenue funds)



PROGRAM GROWTH

- OCA's total budget has increased 20% between 2019 and 2022
- OCA grants budget has increased 50% between 2019 and 2022
- Youth Violence Prevention budget has increased 130% since 2020

EXPANDING SERVICES

- Increased demand on community partners to meet emergent needs of families
- Expansion in both mental health, and maternal and child health services

STAFF RETENTION

- Staffing shortages across the city
- Rightsizing OCA's staff to meet the growth and expansion of the work

YVP Program Overview

Youth Development Team

- Youth Violence Prevention
- Youth Mental Health
- Maternal Child Health/Maternal Mental Health
- Childcare/Family Friend & Neighbor Care
- Transportation, My Denver, 5x5
- Mayors Youth Commission
- Community Engagement

Staff

- 1 Program Manager
- 1 Contract Compliance Coordinator
- Executive Director
- Senior Policy Advisor

Funding

- YVP 2022: Awarded 24 Organizations, 60 sites, 3,764 youth served
- YVP 2023: Awarded 32 Organizations

safe communities save youth



Photos Courtesy of Denver Public Schools Student Voice & Leadership Program



2023 YOUTH VIOLENCE PREVENTION PLAN



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the time is now

“We lost some momentum due to COVID in 2020, so now we need to go back and revisit how we started - **what is our purpose, how has the problem evolved?** We need more collaboration and communication, we need a broader scope of collaborators.”

- Nicole Monroe, Director, Office of Community Violence Solutions

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Youth are participating in and experiencing acts of violence, throughout the nation and at home. Increasingly, we hear stories on the news and social media about tragic school shootings, teen suicides, youth human trafficking, and other forms of youth violence. But more importantly, in Denver, we feel the impact on our community and on our residents. Youth violence is a critical community problem and a state and citywide public health problem. But we must be the change we hope to see. That means to save our youth, we must become a safe city where they can grow and thrive.

In 2019, Mayor Michael B. Hancock and the Denver City Attorney convened the Denver Youth Violence Prevention Action Table (YVPAT), a coalition of city departments, independent agencies, and community-based organizations. This multidisciplinary collaboration created the first Denver Youth Violence Prevention Action Plan in 2020. The plan outlined our public health and data-driven approach that included long- and short-term strategies for addressing youth violence.

PANDEMIC IMPACT

At the launch of the 2020 Youth Violence Prevention Action Plan the city was faced with the global COVID-19 pandemic and its far reaching impact statewide. Everything came to a standstill, including how to effectively move forward. The pandemic derailed the youth violence prevention efforts and began dismantling much of the social fabric necessary for communities to thrive. The pandemic exposed our community's vulnerability, the gaps in our system and services, and the negative results of long-term isolation. Across the U.S. and Denver, we saw unprecedented levels of stress for youth and their families.

The outcomes were less contact with vital service providers, fewer opportunities for intervention, and increased self-harm, domestic violence, and other forms of youth violence.

Today, we continue to see and feel the impact of the triple pandemic of COVID-19, a rise in community violence and mental health issues. Combined with social justice instability and a looming economic recession, youth violence has increased to a crisis level. In all, it calls for the much-needed community healing our city deserves. As we continue to emerge from the global pandemic, we see an opportunity to change direction, reprioritize violence prevention, and rethink how we provide youth services. In addition, there is a renewed call for social change with the rise of racial, sexual and hate-based violence that has come to the forefront of our collective consciousness.

Traditional systemic inequities have been exposed in creating divisions, and people are recognizing and working together to change the paradigm. The city of Denver is at the forefront, in which the time is now to create a new path forward to prevent youth violence, and Denver is ready.

OUR PLAN

We move beyond thinking about youth violence as gun violence and take a broader, more comprehensive look at the types of youth violence and key contributing factors. The 2023 Denver Youth Violence Prevention Action Plan will hold everyone accountable to a more expansive set of strategies. The plan is intended to support the work of other city agencies involved in this work and to be an actionable resource guide for our community providers. In addition, it will give the community a transparent insight into our vision, strategy and multi-level plans to address youth violence and create a safer city.

Members of the YVPAT and other organizations across the city are collaboratively creating a comprehensive people-first system. Led by the Office of Children's Affairs, they will guide and grow the work to enable Denver to support youth across a broad spectrum of services that address the root causes of youth violence. But collectively, we are working together to build a safe Denver where youth and their families look forward to the future ahead of them.



youth violence defined

Early efforts to address youth violence focused primarily on gun violence.

As we evolve Denver's plan, we are **intentionally moving beyond gun violence** to a more comprehensive understanding of youth violence encompassing **all the types of violence** that negatively impact youth, both directly and indirectly.

Bullying - aggressive behavior that is intentional and hurtful, that repeatedly occurs over time, where there is a power imbalance present, be it size, strength or social status.

Child Abuse - physical, sexual, or emotional abuse of children or youth, or maltreatment including neglect or other failure to meet children's needs for well-being.

Cyber Bullying/Harassment - the use of mobile phones, the internet, social media, or other technology to intentionally, repeatedly harass, insult, embarrass, or threaten youth.



Intimate Partner Violence - also known as teen dating violence, includes physical, sexual, emotional and verbal abuse between dating teens, as well as stalking behaviors from partners or acquaintances.

Domestic Violence - for this plan domestic violence refers to IPV that occurs in the home between parents or other adults to which youth are exposed.

Gun Violence - firearm-related deaths and injuries, including homicide, suicide and accidental injury.

Human Trafficking - the use of violence, fraud or coercion to force youth into labor or commercial sex.

Peer-to-Peer Violence - also known as aggression, peer-to-peer violence differs from bullying because it is conflict or fighting between youth of the same or similar size, strength and social status.

Prison Pipeline - known as the school-to-prison pipeline, these are systemic practices and policies in schools, public safety and courts that disproportionately place youth of color into the juvenile justice system.

Runaways - youth who choose to leave home for various reasons, without the permission of a parent or legal guardian, who stay away from home for one or more nights.

Secondary Trauma - single or repeated exposure to traumatic events, including domestic violence, school violence, community violence and other adverse events all known to increase youth violence.

Self-harm - the intentional infliction of self-pain as an emotional outlet, means of expressing overwhelm, or shifting emotional pain to physical pain; may include cutting, burning, or picking at oneself or other behaviors intended to hurt oneself.

Sexual Violence - includes all forms of sexual violence committed against youth, including sexual assault, rape, sexual abuse, and intimate partner sexual assault.

Substance Misuse - this includes the use of illegal drugs, and the inappropriate use of legal substances such as tobacco and alcohol; in addition, this category refers to the practices that disproportionately link substance use to the prison pipeline.

Suicide - for this plan includes suicidal thoughts and suicide attempts, causing one's death intentionally due to extreme emotional distress and usually a desire to end suffering.

Unhoused Youth - youth who have no fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence, whether due to running away or being asked to leave the home of their primary parents or legal guardians.

Victim - for this plan, a youth harmed, injured, killed or otherwise hurt by an act of violence, crime, or other actions.

Witness - for this plan, a youth that sees violence occur or other types of crime and traumatic events; also see *secondary trauma* definition above.

Youth - includes teens, adolescents and young adults ranging in age from 10 to 24.

Youth Violence - all the types of violence listed above, along with the surrounding factors that inhibit a youth's ability to thrive in their environment.



“Youth violence is both internal and external. We think about the violence we see externally such as gun violence. But it is **just as important to think about the violence we do not see** - suicide and self harm are also forms of youth violence. To have a comprehensive plan, we need to address all types of youth violence.”

- Rick Padilla, Suicide Prevention Manager,
Denver Public Health & Environment



a public health approach

In a public health approach, the focus is on **improving the health and well-being of the entire population** rather than afflicted individuals. A public health approach is based on the belief that **violence is preventable** and has a negative impact on the entire population's health.



The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) developed a four-step framework for communities across the country to implement youth violence prevention strategies on a local level, using a public health approach.

In Denver, we are applying this public health approach to our efforts, building on the CDC's work and University of Colorado at Denver's Youth Violence Prevention Needs Assessment completed by Dr. Sheila Huss to ensure our strategies are created with a comprehensive local lens.

THE CDC PUBLIC HEALTH APPROACH TO VIOLENCE PREVENTION

1. Define and Monitor the Problem
2. Identify Risk and Protective Factors
3. Develop and Test Prevention Strategies
4. Assure Widespread Adoption

NATIONAL PILLARS OF PRACTICE

The CDC also created a technical package to guide communities across the U.S. in developing youth violence prevention strategies. The package identifies six overarching strategies we are adopting as pillars of practice. We keep these pillars in mind as part of our guiding philosophy on this work. However, we have developed a more tactical strategy outline to help partners implement the work. These pillars include:

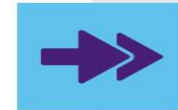
- Promote family environments that support healthy development
- Provide quality education early in life
- Strengthen youth skills
- Connect youth to caring adults and activities
- Create protective community environments
- Intervene to lessen harms and prevent future risks



1. Define and Monitor the Problem



2. Identify Risk and Protective Factors



3. Develop and Test Prevention Strategies



4. Assure Widespread Adoption

- 4 work groups were created in 6 policy areas; Youth Engagement & Messaging, Juvenile Justice, Community Involvement & Outreach, Race & Social Equity, Data Sharing, and Mental Health Services
- 26 Action items were created and completed fall of 2020
- Denver's plan included 22 long-term strategies consistent with the public health approach endorsed by CDC and The Prevention Institute
- Prepared in conjunction with needs assessment by CU Denver

progress since yvp comprehensive plan 2020



COMPLETED



**ONGOING / EVOLVED
IN NEW PLAN**

The YVPAT has been working collaboratively to implement the recommended strategies from the 2020 plan. Below is a list of the original strategies, an update on the progress made, and where they are being included in the 2023 update.

In addition, we have highlighted stories of progress from individual partners throughout the plan to spotlight achievements from city and community partners.

ORIGINAL 2020 YVP STRATEGIES



Expand access to parenting resources and family skill development programs.



Expand the Youth Violence Prevention Micro Grant Program.



Increase access to mentoring for young people through the implementation of a city employee mentoring program.

PROGRESS MADE

DDPHE and DHS are working with the state on the Essentials for Early Childhood program to provide family supports.

OCA increased funding by \$250,000 in 2021, maintained for 2022, 2023.

DEDO provides a summer youth employment program, apprenticeships and internships, and incorporates financial empowerment education through OFEP.

FIND DETAILS IN THE 2023 YVP ACTION PLAN

- > Center Community
- > Embrace Best Practice
- > Integrate Mental Health Support
- > Prioritize Holistic Safety

- > Center Community
- > Embrace Best Practice
- > Champion Policy Change

- > Engage Youth Directly
- > Focus on Professional Development

ORIGINAL 2020 YVP STRATEGIES



Create a City Corps program that employs young people between the ages of 18 - 24 to serve as peer mentors for other young people and youth.



Expand the Safe Zone Project to increase the frequency of events in communities where youth violence is more likely to occur.



Create a network of Youth Centers in communities where young people are facing barriers to success.



The city will promote safe storage practices in collaboration with youth, community, public and private partners.



The city will engage local public health agencies to support implementation of strategies focused on supporting youth violence prevention efforts.



The city will invest in community-led youth violence prevention efforts and will work with community-based organizations working to prevent youth violence to enhance communication and collaboration between the city and community.



The city will create a position dedicated to supporting the implementation of the YVP Strategic Plan in conjunction with the YVPAT.

PROGRESS MADE

Long-term planning effort for future implementation.

Renamed to Youth Zones; awarded 16 community-based organizations \$178,200, which supported over 60 events May-June of 2021, continued in 2022, 2023.

The first Youth Empowerment Center is now serving the community in partnership with Life Line Colorado.

OCVS conducts Handgun Intervention Program (HIP) events on a regular basis to reduce incidents of gun violence.

DPHE is an active participant in the YVPAT and is implementing a variety of programs geared toward YVP.

The ReCAST program provides federal funding for community partnership. OCA provides annual community microgrants and various departments integrate community-based organizations into program operations.

A dedicated FTE position in the Office of Children's Affairs coordinates all YVP efforts.

FIND DETAILS IN THE 2023 YVP ACTION PLAN

> Focus on Professional Development

> Engage Youth Directly

> Engage Youth Directly

> Prioritize Holistic Safety

> Integrate Mental Health Support
> Health Practice Area
> Public Health Approach

> Center Community

> DONE

ORIGINAL 2020 YVP STRATEGIES



The city will designate a city agency to serve as the lead agency responsible for supporting and leading the implementation of the YVP plan.



The city will pursue partnerships with local higher education institutions to support essential operations related to research, data collection and analysis, and project evaluation as well as supporting strategies that focus on academic and/or vocational support for young people.



The city will work with existing youth violence prevention programs or initiatives to identify opportunities to align effective strategies that can be expanded or enhanced.



The city will work with Denver Parks and Recreation to support programming and operations that enhance safety in and around recreation centers.



The Denver Department of Public & Environmental Health (DDPHE) will dedicate agency resources to incorporate youth violence prevention strategies into the agency's strategic plan.



The city will engage youth as subject matter experts to ensure YVP strategies are youth informed.

PROGRESS MADE

The Office of Children's Affairs was selected to lead all plan implementation.

The City partnered with CU Denver City Center to complete the needs assessment and analyze crime data.

The city also partnered with the Center for the Study and Prevention of Violence at the University of Colorado, Boulder to collaborate on grant applications.

OCA convenes the DYVPAT on a regular basis to discuss opportunities for collaboration across the city and with the community.

DPR expanded the "Night Moves" program and is now a critical support partner for Youth Zone events.

The 2020 Community Health Assessment is complete, and informs the DDPHE Community Health Improvement Plan and the larger DDPHE Strategic Plan.

Partnered with DPD on the the youth Advisory Council, DDPHE conducts an annual youth survey.

FIND DETAILS IN THE 2023 YVP ACTION PLAN

> DONE

> Share Data Across Systems
> Education Practice Area

> Engage Youth Directly
> Embrace Best Practice

> Engage Youth Directly
> Environment Practice Area

> Integrate Mental Health Support
> Health Practice Area

> Engage Youth Directly

ORIGINAL 2020 YVP STRATEGIES



The DYVPAT will work with the municipal and district juvenile court systems to support strategies that reduce the number of youth entering the juvenile justice system and improve outcomes for youth who have entered the juvenile justice system.



The city will review existing youth services housed within city agencies to identify opportunities to align programs, people, and budgets for the purpose of improving outcomes or expanding services.



The city will promote the Youth Program Locator and encourage community-based organizations and treatment providers to increase the number and type of services included in the database.



Enhance early identification and response protocols for supporting youth at higher risk to experience or perpetrate violence.



The city will engage community partners to develop a marketing strategy to raise awareness about youth violence prevention efforts.



The city will work with community-based organizations to reduce barriers to behavioral health treatment and expand access to services.

PROGRESS MADE

The Denver District Attorney has a dedicated juvenile diversion program and the Denver Juvenile Court offers in-community supervision and more reentry support partnerships.

OCA completed a program inventory in 2020 that provides a directory of programming and contacts across the city.

To be eligible for YVP funding, organizations must be listed in the Denver AfterSchool Alliance (DAA)/OCA developed database.

DPS participates actively in the YVPAT and is setting up systems to identify students that need support and referring them to city and community programs.

OCA is updating the YVP Action Plan for 2023 and including outreach materials to inform community partners and the public.

The cross departmental ReCAST program provides federal grant support for evidence-based intervention and community partnership.

FIND DETAILS IN THE 2023 YVP ACTION PLAN

> Evolve Juvenile Justice

> Embrace Best Practice

> Share Data Across Systems

> Evolve Juvenile Justice
> Prioritize Holistic Safety

> Center Community

> Integrate Mental Health Support

practice areas

The **2023 Denver YVP Action Plan** contemplates youth violence prevention across **five different areas of practice:** health, education, economy, community and environment.

These areas of practice are aligned with the social determinants of health - environmental factors that play a vital role in the overall health of individuals.

Social determinants of health impact morbidity (rates of disease or health conditions), mortality (number of deaths in a population), life expectancy, health expenditures and general quality of life.



HEALTH - Healthcare and Quality includes health coverage, provider availability, provider cultural competency, quality of care and nutrition.



EDUCATION - Education Access and Quality includes literacy, language, early childhood education, vocational training and higher education.



ECONOMY - Economic Stability includes employment, income, expenses, debt, opportunity and support.



COMMUNITY - Community and Social Context includes community engagement, community-based resources, social integration, support systems, discrimination and stress.



ENVIRONMENT - Neighborhoods and Built Environment includes housing, transportation, safety, walkability, geographic location, parks, playgrounds and open space.

integrated strategy matrix

PLAN ORGANIZATION

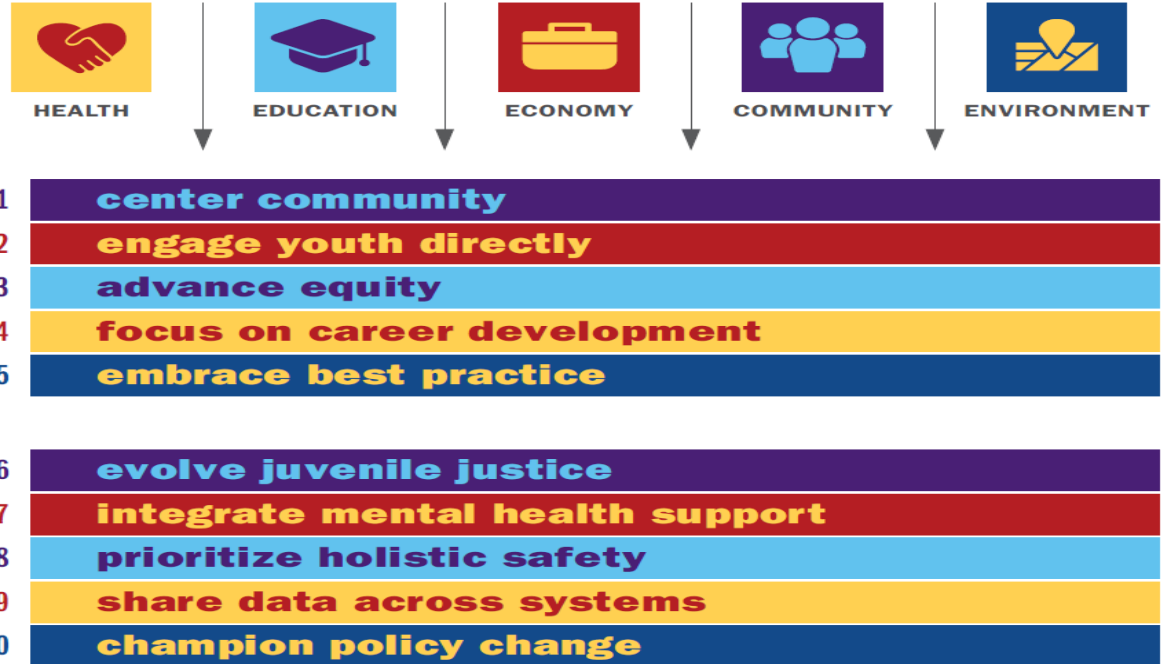
The primary function of the 2023 Denver YVP Action Plan is to provide actionable strategies and tactics for Denver's provider community to proactively collaborate on serving the needs of our youth.

We have identified ten overarching strategies, each with specific action items relevant across the five practice areas.

Each strategy includes tactics and opportunities that are

1. practice-specific downstream strategies to impact individuals and
2. system-wide upstream strategies to impact communities.

Both types of strategies are critical to youth violence prevention and becoming a safe city. Each strategy section is followed by a description of the strategy, desired outcomes, relevant practice areas, actionable tactics and opportunities, and indicators for measuring progress.



engage youth directly

Engaging youth directly means violence prevention efforts are youth-informed, incorporating their voice, insights and perceptions.

This strategy calls for embracing youths’ “nothing for us, without us” mantra and maintaining the idea “safety starts with me” across all practice areas. But also to ensure that the plan remains community led, youth informed and city supported.



DESIRED OUTCOME

Youth actively participate in community development and design their own successful futures.



TACTICS & OPPORTUNITIES

Expand youth empowerment centers - Fully realize the vision for creating a network of youth empowerment centers where youth are fully supported with safe spaces, supportive services and unconditional belonging.

Collaborate with youth on program design - Develop youth led, youth designed programming and curriculum where youth can provide input on what safety means to them. Allow youth to be part of the decision-making process and where engagements are proactive and positive.

Encourage leadership opportunities - Continue providing opportunities for youth to engage in the five practice areas with programs such as the Denver Department of Safety Youth Services Leadership Program inclusive of the Youth Advisory Council.

Convene youth for input and action - Continue hosting the annual Youth Summit and Youth Survey to gain valuable perceptions from youth and gather input on how to address youth violence.

Deliver wrap around services - Integrate additional services into all five practice areas, for example, Denver Public Schools Secondary Schools pilot where mental health services, substance use intervention, and therapeutic supports are offered in an after-school setting.

Provide positive alternatives - Ensure youth have safe spaces and activities to keep them engaged, particularly during peak times for potential violence, for example the Parks & Recreation program Night Moves to open rec centers for basketball and other activities in the evenings.

Invest in arts, music and cultural programming - Convene an array of programming partners to engage youth in artistic expression and culturally relevant activities to encourage creativity as a violence prevention effort.



“Youth violence prevention work is about connection more than anything else. Youth **need to feel included and connected**. We need to change the narrative that these are “bad” kids - kids have many challenges. **Our job is to help them navigate those challenges.**”

- Kris Rollerson, Executive Director, Sun Valley Youth Center



TACTICS & OPPORTUNITIES, Continued

Increase the frequency of youth-friendly events - Continue evolving programs like Youth Zone, formerly Safe Zone, in partnership with Denver Parks & Recreation and community partners to produce events specifically in communities where youth violence is likely to occur based on the prevention index.

Embrace youth as subject matter experts - Conduct listening sessions with youth with the intent to hear, to understand and to integrate input into programming—ensuring YVP strategies are youth informed.

Continue to give youth a seat at the table - As we fund youth programs, hire partners and make decisions on behalf of youth that they have a say and work is informed by them.



YVP INDICATORS TO MONITOR

- Visits to Youth Empowerment Center (OCA)
- Meetings of the Youth Advisory Council (DOS)
- Participants in Night Moves program (DPR)
- Number of Youth Zone events (DPR)
- Number of responses to annual youth survey (DDPHE)



“We are having **conversations with the community** to determine response to incidents as they occur. These conversations have led to formal partnerships with local service providers. We are **building important relationships with those that are already serving in the community.**”

- Seth Howsden, Recreation Director, Denver Parks & Recreation



PROGRESS STORY - NIGHT MOVES - RECREATION AS PREVENTION

Denver Parks & Recreation (DPR) originally began the Night Moves program in the early 90s as a collaboration with the Denver Nuggets.

The program had vans that picked up youth in the community and brought them to special after-hours recreation centers that open to play basketball and other pro-social activities on Friday evenings - at a time and in locations when violence was more likely to occur. The program relaunched in 2022 in response to violence in neighboring cities in the fall of 2021.

DPR and its city partners wanted to be proactive about preventing the violence from moving into Denver and took a collaborative approach to the new program design.

Three program partners from the community operate within six different rec centers during the Night Moves sessions.

Partners for the program are entrenched in each community. For example, the Montbello Recreation Center program is operated in partnership with Struggle of Love Foundation, a local non-profit foundation focused on mentorship, and La Alma Recreation Center is operated in partnership with Youth on Record, a non-profit that offers music-centered programming. Night Moves also operated in St. Charles, Athmar and Aztlan Recreation Centers in 2022 and will have new partners and centers for the program in 2023.

The program had more than 2,300 visits in 2022, helping youth develop relationships with caring adults, offering fun activities and food, and ensuring youth stay safe.





PROGRESS STORIES - THE LIFE LINE VISION: YOUTH EMPOWERMENT CENTER

The vision for Denver's Youth Empowerment Center (YEC) began in 2019 as part of the original convening of the YVPAT. Inspired by conversations with Denver youth and community, the need for a safe and welcoming space for youth was identified. The Office of Children's Affairs and partners are realizing this vision through a youth informed, community-led and City supported process.

In late 2020, the city secured a 9,600-square-foot space near Alameda Avenue and I-25, using federal Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funds. Life Line Colorado, a local non-profit focused on supporting at-risk populations, was selected through a competitive process in 2021 to manage operations of the new YEC.

Leo Alirez, Life Line Colorado's Founder and Executive Director, describes the YEC as a safe haven, a place where youth will be able to get out of the day-to-day challenges in their neighborhoods. The space will have everything from homework stations to gaming systems, televisions to pool tables, and even free internet provided by Comcast.

More importantly, the YEC will provide healing opportunities and supportive services for youth and their families. This 2gen approach is designed to work simultaneously with youth, parents and the community to understand and address intergenerational impact. The center will connect young people and their families to a network of supports, serving people who are re-entering the community, living in recovery or transitional homes. Services will include trauma-informed practice, collaboration with therapists of color, group therapy, individual counseling sessions, and medical Accudeton funded by CDPHE.



"We are creating a space where **all youth are invited** to come in and be themselves, where they will be **treated with respect and genuine love.**"

- Leo Alirez, Founder/Executive Director, Life Line Colorado



The YEC also integrates economic development services with financial empowerment support, career training, entrepreneurial opportunities and an on-site culinary station.

The center has already served the community with over 2,000 individual visits to the YEC since opening.

"Our approach is based on Maslow's hierarchy of needs," Alirez explains. "We begin with the basics and move toward meeting higher levels of need to help people become the best version of themselves."

The YEC experience will go beyond safe spaces and services - the goal is to help people find their purpose, create communities with intention, and develop youth on a mission to contribute positively to their communities.



YVP INDICATORS TO MONITOR

Number of community partners awarded prevention funding (OCA)

Number of annual YVPAT meetings held (OCA)

City and community partner membership in YVPAT (OCA)



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PROGRESS STORIES - STRUGGLE OF LOVE FOUNDATION

"Violence is like an addiction and should be treated as such. It offers a release for anger, depression, whatever emotions youth are experiencing without relief. **We need to offer an alternative.**"

- Joel Hodge, Founder, Struggle of Love Foundation



THE EMOTION OF PREVENTION

Struggle of Love Foundation is a Denver non-profit offering youth and community better ways to deal with difficult emotions since 2000. Joel Hodge, affectionately known as Coach Eye, and his wife and partner LaKeshia Hodge, operated the program out of their garage for over 17 years. They recently opened their dream location,

The Love Center, and are a shining example of the city investing in community-based solutions for youth violence prevention with a variety of strategies and partnerships.

Struggle of Love Foundation partners with Denver Parks & Recreation on the NightMoves program at Montbello Recreation Center. They also have a partnership with the local Denver Police district to respond to violence in the community offering on-site support with their in-house mental health team, made up of two women of color. "We are often the bridge

between community and police, helping to de-escalate tense situations when emotions are high, providing grief support, and working to interrupt violence by combatting retaliation," said Joel.

Struggle of Love Foundation focuses on the root causes of violence and that usually means going much deeper and farther into the youth's lives - thinking about the entire environment that leads to violent behavior. It includes working with families and teaching youth to think critically about media. "We need to look at what we are telling our kids. Violence is everywhere - from social media fights to video games to anger and yelling in the home."

The Love Center offers a variety of support services and programs including mentoring, therapy, acupuncture and even aromatherapy. Through a partnership with Denver Public Health & Environment, the Wellness Winnie mobile RV offers support to youth each Tuesday. The center also encourages personal expression and career exploration with an on-site music studio and t-shirt making art station. Approximately 200 youth are served in the center each week, along with delivering one to two hundred fresh food boxes daily.

In addition, the program focuses on how to include parents in services. Simple things like allowing parents to select and wrap Christmas gifts for their children during the foundation's annual toy drive that gives away 3,000 gifts each year. "Sometimes, the parents need just as much support as the youth," said LaKeshia Hodge. Joel continued, "change begins with changing perspectives. We need to start by admitting something is wrong. It's okay to say, 'I don't know how to...' or 'I'm scared.' Then we can start to work together as a family."



"I was raised in a violent environment. I thought it was the answer for a time - until I woke up in the hospital with my eye missing. **We need to teach kids a better way.**"

- Joel Hodge, Founder, Struggle of Love Foundation



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Youth Violence Prevention Action Table 2023



- Strengthen Alignment with Denver Public Schools (DPS)
- Community Crisis Response Team
- Create Professional Development Opportunities-Community Partners (YVP Training Toolkit)
- Develop City-wide Funding Assessment Tool
- Continue to Engage Youth & Enhance Youth Voice

Looking Ahead

- The YVPAT will become a working group meeting to allow for collaboration at the practice level. In addition, the YVPAT will report to the Denver Children's Cabinet at the executive level, which will meet quarterly.
- The YVPAT will meet bi-monthly to discuss continued opportunities for collaboration, progress made, areas of concern and joint response to incidents.
- Each metric in the dashboard will be assigned ownership to a department and staff member who will pull from existing metrics in their department to update the joint dashboard.
- OCA will implement dashboard updates at YVPAT meetings as a standing agenda item so assigned owners are able to provide progress reports and share concerns at meetings.
- OCA will develop a community reporting mechanism to share metrics and analyze findings to keep the public informed about YVPAT progress.



Questions, before we hand this over to The Department of Safety?