

# Chicago YAP:

## Preventing Violence And Fostering Educational Outcomes for the Highest Risk Young People

Chicago's youth violence problems made national headlines with the videotaped beating death of Chicago Public Schools student Derrion Albert in 2009. Over the two years preceding his death, 528 Chicago Public Schools (CPS) students were shot, 56 fatally. CPS responded by analyzing its population and identifying which students were most at risk for being victims or perpetrators of gun violence. CPS identified the 250 students most at-risk and hired Youth Advocate Programs, Inc., (YAP) to work directly with these students and their families to reduce gun violence, get the youth back to school and to graduation. YAP was CPS's first partner in a citywide anti-violence effort. By the beginning of the 2011 school year, YAP had expanded its reach to work with over 500 CPS students.

"Officials know that deadly violent outbursts are not truly random. The students at highest risk of violence, by statistics, are most likely to be black, male, without a stable living environment, in special education, skipping an average of 42 percent of school days at neighborhood and alternative schools, and having a record of in-school behavioral flare-ups that is about eight times higher than the average student. Attacks have typically happened beyond a two-hour window from the start and end of school — that is, late at night or very early in the morning — and blocks away from school grounds, where neighborhood boundaries press against one another," said Ron Huberman, Former CEO of Chicago Public Schools, in the *New York Times*, October, 2009.

With these findings in mind and following its wraparound/advocacy model, YAP began work in Chicago's most violent neighborhoods, reaching over 90 schools. Advocates, hired from the communities they serve, partner with families, schools and communities to reduce violence, promote school success and develop employment opportunities for young people. YAP's intensive services worked to keep youth connected and engaged with school, addressed social, economic and environmental needs of each youth and family, and ultimately, made schools and neighborhoods safer while helping youth and families chart new lives for themselves.

***"Have you ever been shot?  
No? Wow, almost everybody I know's been shot."***

These chilling words, spoken by a Chicago Public High School senior and quoted by New York Times reporter Susan Saulny, reflect the culture of youth violence that Chicago Youth Advocate Programs is working to change. The young man featured in Saulny's article (*Big Sunshine, July 1, 2010*) is one of over 500 youth served by YAP. When he listed his own bullet wounds: upper thigh, left hand and scalp, Veronica Tinajero, Big Sunshine's Advocate, realized the obstacles she was facing. However, she lived out the YAP philosophy of "doing whatever it takes" and Big Sunshine and his family were relocated to a safer neighborhood. Big Sunshine became the first in his family to graduate high school and he is now attending college.

## Youth Outcomes

### Outcomes reported by the Chicago Public Schools (June 7, 2011):

- 46% decrease in serious misconducts leading to suspension and expulsions
- 26% decrease in minor misconducts
- Out of school suspensions decreased 58%; in-school suspensions decreased 7%
- 8% improvement in school attendance (some students had been absent for over a year)

### Education Outcomes

*MEASURABLE CHANGES IN SCHOOL BEHAVIOR, ATTENDANCE AND GRADUATION, AS WELL AS POST-SECONDARY SCHOOL ENROLLMENT AND EMPLOYMENT REVEAL REMARKABLE ACHIEVEMENTS*

### Outcomes reported by YAP of 557 students served through September 4, 2012:

- 179 students (32%)—chronically truant or suspended—were re-enrolled in high school
- 124 (87%) of seniors *discharged* from YAP graduated from high school including 7 who obtained their GED; of these graduates 51 (41%) are enrolled in college and 11 (9%) are enrolled in trade school
- 30 YAP students (5%) achieved honor roll status; 177 (32%) made significant school progress
- 68 students (12%) were placed in GED programs; 48 students (9%) continued in alternative schools
- Only 26 students (5%) dropped out of school; 37 students (7%) moved out of the district
- 51 students (9%) were incarcerated
- 36 students (6%) were injured by gang shootings; all but 5 survived their injuries

### Violence and Safety Outcomes

*DESPITE HEAVY GANG ENTRENCHMENT, DESPITE THEIR STATISTICAL "HIGH RISK" OF BEING SHOT OR SHOOTING, PROGRAM PARTICIPANTS PROVED THAT WITH YAP THEY CAN OVERCOME VIOLENCE AND HELP PERPETUATE SAFETY WITHIN THEIR NEIGHBORHOODS*

- 332 students (60%) experienced school/community conflicts; YAP staff responded with 1014 gang conflict mediation sessions
- Although statistically 20 times more likely to be shot, 94% of YAP program participants were not shot despite an increasing number of city-wide murders during the program
- 24 families targeted by rival gangs for retaliation by specific death threats were relocated from their homes and moved to safer neighborhoods.

- 100 advocates and 15 case management staff were hired from the communities served, reflecting each neighborhood's diversity and understanding of unique cultures—an economic investment in distressed communities and pivotal to the success of every student and family
- 300 youth were employed through our Supported Work Program

### Employment Outcomes

*YAP'S NEIGHBORHOOD-BASED SERVICES ENHANCE INDIVIDUAL/FAMILY SUCCESS AND INVEST MEASURABLE ECONOMIC RESOURCES IN AREAS OF EXTREME POVERTY AND FINANCIAL DISTRESS*