

Blueprints for Violence Prevention Project Overview

Demand for effective violence, drug, and crime prevention programs continues to grow. Across the country, a raft of programs aimed at preventing violence and drug abuse is underway. All of these programs are well-intentioned. Yet very few of them have evidence demonstrating their effectiveness. Many are implemented with little consistency or quality control.

How do we know what works?

Blueprints for Violence Prevention (soon to be rebranded as “Blueprints for Healthy Youth Development”), a project of the Center for the Study and Prevention of Violence at the University of Colorado, provide answers to that question. The Blueprints mission is to identify truly outstanding violence and drug prevention programs that meet a high scientific standard of effectiveness. In doing so, Blueprints serves as a resource for governments, foundations, businesses, and other organizations trying to make informed judgments about their investments in violence and drug prevention programs.

Blueprints staff systematically and continuously review the research on violence and drug abuse programs to determine which are exemplary and grounded in evidence. To date, it has assessed more than 1,000 programs. Blueprints’ standards for certifying model and promising prevention programs are widely recognized as the most rigorous in use. Program effectiveness is based upon an initial review by Blueprints staff and a final review and recommendation from a distinguished advisory board, comprised of experts in the field of violence prevention.

Why do we need to know what works? For two reasons.

First, many programs, despite their good intentions, are either ineffective or actually do more harm than good. Second, ineffective or harmful programs are a waste of scarce violence prevention dollars.

For example, Scared Straight, which is supposed to deter delinquent youth from a life of crime by showing them life in prison, actually increases crime. Yet shock probation programs like Scared Straight continue to be used throughout the country. Ineffective prevention programs include boot camps, gun buybacks, peer counseling, summer jobs for at-risk youth, neighborhood watches, and home detention with electronic monitoring.

But other prevention programs, like Life Skills Training and Project Towards No Drug Abuse, not only work but are highly cost-effective. They are among 9 model programs certified by Blueprints, meaning that they have a high level of evidence supporting their effectiveness and should be replicated in other communities to prevent violence and drug abuse. In addition, Blueprints has designated over 30 promising programs that have shown good results but require either replication in another community or additional time to demonstrate their effectiveness and sustainability.

Blueprints strongly believe in ongoing program evaluation to maintain high scientific standards for violence prevention. In addition, Blueprints advocate faithful replication of proven prevention programs – otherwise known as fidelity. When communities “tweak” a program to suit their own preferences or circumstances, they wind up with a different program whose effectiveness is unknown.