



# REMEMBER YOUTH FUND

## YOUTH VIOLENCE PREVENTION INITIATIVE PROPOSAL FOR BALTIMORE

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## Overview

The Remember Youth Fund proposes a holistic approach to support and help coordinate local stakeholders (public, private and Community Based Organizations) to address youth violence activity in the Coldstream-Homestead-Montebello, Sandtown and Cherry Hill neighborhoods of the City of Baltimore.

### Theory of Change

RYP was created to fight social exclusion among young people and to prevent youth from engaging in violence and crime by using arts and sports as a tool to effect social change. Its work focuses on four hypotheses as its theory of change.

- First, that higher levels of participation of children and youth in the practice of arts and sports improves concentration, self-esteem and willpower.
- Second, that an increase in concentration, self-esteem and willpower reduces levels of truancy and abandonment of professional training programs.
- Third, reductions in the levels of school truancy and abandonment of professional training programs increases the possibility of successful participation in civil and professional life.
- Fourth, that successful participation in civil and professional life lowers the risk of engaging in violence and delinquency.

Together, these hypotheses envision a virtuous cycle that begins with getting children and youth involved in the arts and sports, and ends with increased youth engagement and lower levels of violence. This result, in turn, strengthens cities and urban areas' long terms sustainability.

## The RYF Difference: Using the Arts and Sports to strengthen life skills

Strengthening children and youth's life skills is critical to building their resilience and mitigate risks that lead to youth social exclusion and violence. Without them, family and social structures break down, making advancement and success – be it in school, the workplace or in society in general – increasingly unlikely. Access to those skills (schooling, group sports and activities, job training) are disproportionately available to those with adequate resources to access them. This leaves youth without resources disproportionately fall prey to gangs, experience higher than average school failure and dropout rates, and diminished professional opportunities when they leave school and enter the workplace.

Remember Youth Fund's model for youth violence prevention seeks to take these challenges head on, through the focus on the promotion of the participation in arts and sports programs as vectors of change. Violence prevention strategies based on the implementation of arts/sports related programs originated in the 20th century in the United States through the "basketball at midnight" programs in Western states. Today, these kinds of interventions have evolved, and they are now centered in the improvement and development of life skills through the means of arts/sports. Both arts and sports are recognized as useful means for the creation and spreading of values, and thus can serve as useful tools in the context of a larger-scale interventions, by not only training in the specific type of art or sport, but also holistic skills such as improved team-work capabilities and the creation of a positive sense of community and belonging.

Therefore, through the implementation of arts and sports related programs in those neighborhoods where juvenile gang involvement or youth violence and criminality is common, we seek to improve the life skills of the youth and provide them with the sufficient skills that would enable them to acquire a successful future. Our underlying values and past experiences have shown that both data and life skills are key tools for a successful future. By combining these two tools, we expect to reduce gang affiliation and youth violence through:

Life skills aimed at reducing school desertion and abandonment, opening up the possibilities of improved job performance.

- RYF will link teachers that have identified children in their classrooms with weak life skills and at the risk of disconnecting from class and from the school with local CBO's focused on building life skills.

Provide support to those teachers working with at risk youth, and their schools in their education and job counseling activities and programs.

- RYF will link teachers with local CBO's working with youth to set mid and long-term life goals, develop focus, teamwork and other life skills, with the goal of giving them a solid base for their successful preparation to successfully continue their studies and/or employment.

Connect the community with mediation venues and techniques to tackle and understand the problem of violence, talk to perpetrators as well as the affected groups' such as shopkeepers, public transport workers, etc.

- RYF will link youth to CBOs working to find constructive and non-violent forms of engagement, as well as working to reduce inter-group violence through community mediation and violence prevention schemes.

Connect and provide support to the municipality in its work on data collection and analysis

- RYF will connect existing capacities of data collection and data analysis to measure the evolution of violence and crime in Baltimore with the goal of empowering citywide initiatives focused on youth violence and social insertion. Information is power and lack of information is inefficiency.

## **OUR PROPOSAL**

### **Youth Violence Context in Baltimore**

Baltimore, MD has a population of 619,493. As of 2019, approximately 21% of its population was under the age of 18 (US Census Bureau, 2019). Along with the rest of the population, Baltimore's youth face historic socioeconomic and challenges, experiencing high poverty levels as well as high levels of violence compared to much of the rest of the country.

With more than 300 murders a year for the previous five years, Baltimore's homicide rate similar to that of New York, even though its population is 14 times smaller. In 2019 the city recorded a total of 348 homicides, its 2nd deadliest year on record, and occupied the 7th position of the country's cities with the highest violent crime rate average per 1,000 people. And while youth arrests have been gone down since 2012, the number involving violent crime has increased.

Overall, of the larger American cities whose violent crime levels are high, Baltimore's trendlines are some of the worst in the United States (as a measure of the average of a city's violent crime rate relative to its increase in violent crime over the last year of available data). This is particularly acute for Maryland's African-American community, contributing to the highest incarceration rate of young black men in America, 25% higher than the second state, Mississippi.

This reality is particularly challenging for Baltimore's youth, where juvenile trauma has been shown to approximate levels shown by veterans of combat in Afghanistan, and higher levels of PTSD than those who had survived Iraq

War. And trauma is consequently an important negative contributing factor to youth violence and gang involvement, as those adolescents exposed to firearm violence are twice as likely to commit acts of violence themselves.

## Coldstream-Homestead-Montebello, Sandtown and Cherry Hill

As with any city, particular neighborhoods have been hit harder by chronic poverty and violence. RYF's proposal focuses on three of those neighborhoods: Coldstream-Homestead-Montebello; Sandtown and Cherry Hill.

Sandtown is located in West Baltimore, and is a historical African-American neighborhood that never fully rebounded from de-industrialization in the 1970s, as well as historically institutionalized segregation and redlining policies<sup>5</sup>. It came to national attention in 2015 when 25-year-old Sandtown native Freddie Gray died in police custody, provoking widespread protests and looting across the city. Most recent data show median family income in Sandtown-Winchester is \$24,374.6 A 2015 report by the Justice Policy Institute reported that prisoners from the Sandtown census tract made up the largest of number of prisoners in the Maryland penitentiary system.



Cherry Hill is a neighborhood in South Baltimore. While violence – as measured by the number of homicides – has decreased since 2013 when a two-decade rivalry between gangs subsided, overall levels continue to be elevated. The area still contains a number of gangs vying for territory, and recent murders in the last year point to a potential uptick in murders that had dissipated for the year prior.

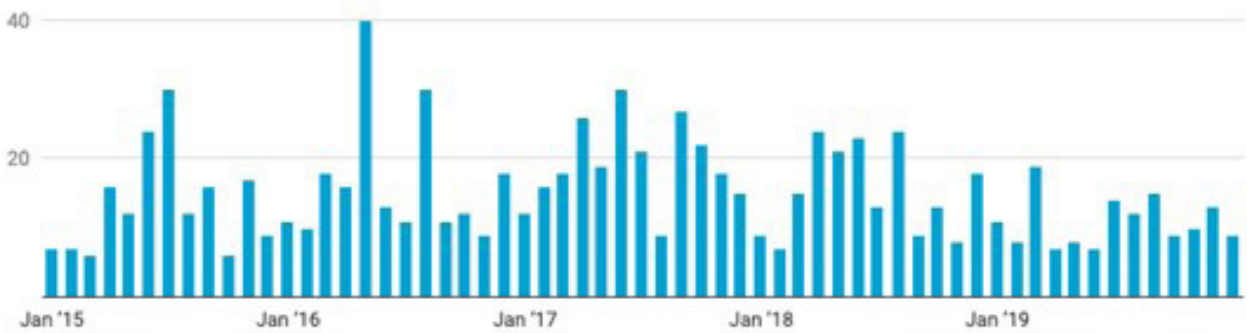


Impromptu candlelight vigil at 615 Roundview Road for the third murder victim in three days in Cherry Hill on April 22, 2014. (Karl Merton Ferron/Baltimore Sun Staff)



## Monthly violent crime totals for Cherry Hill

Amid swings in the number of violent crimes logged by police in Cherry Hill, aggravated assaults were the most common offense in all but a handful of months, when they were eclipsed by robberies. Non-fatal shootings, homicides and rapes constitute the rest of the totals.



Source: Baltimore Police Department, Open Baltimore · [Get the data](#) · Created with [Datawrapper](#)

Coldstream-Homestead-Montebello is located in East Baltimore. The city's Master Plan of 2006 for the neighborhood reported that the previous decades had been marked by "substantial loss of population, a growing trend of abandonment, and a growth of deterioration and blight among the most vulnerable within the community." This dynamic continues into the present, and is most chronic for the neighborhood's youth. A recent investigative report done by the Baltimore Sun showed that the neighborhood is also one of the most lethal for violent crime, as measured by the death rate per shooting, and juvenile arrest rates are some 65% higher in Coldstream-Homestead-Montebello than the city average.



All three neighborhoods register high levels of poverty, with the latest data from 2018 showing percentage of family households living below the poverty line, standing at 39.5% in Cherry Hill, 36% in Sandtown, and 23.9% in Midway/Coldstream. These rates are higher than the overall Baltimore City poverty levels of 22.4% registered in the 2013–2017 American Community Survey five-year average. The city also demonstrates persistent poverty levels, as the previous two censuses show (22.9%, Census 2000 and 21.9%, 1990 Census).

All three neighborhoods show lower than average educational preparation, with less than 50% of students in all three neighborhoods' showing indications of 'readiness to learn in composite', and all below the Baltimore average. In addition, more than 80% of children live in single-parent households, with Sandtown having the highest rate of 89.5%, 25% above the Baltimore city average (American Community Survey, 2011-2015).

Pre-COVID19 levels of unemployment ranged from 15.9% in Cherry Hill to 26.1% in Midway/Coldstream (American Community Survey 2011-2015). The economic picture post-COVID19 is likely to be significantly worse. Finally, the Hardship Index - which integrates six socioeconomic indicators to a single index - housing, poverty, unemployment, education, income, and dependency - shows highly elevated hardship levels compared to the city as a whole (51), from 72 in Midway/Coldstream to 80 in Sandtown (American Community Survey, 2011-2015, 5-year estimates).

In terms of security, all three neighborhoods suffer from high levels of violence, criminality and homicide rates. Not surprisingly, youth violence is an important part of this statistic. While the youth homicide mortality rate (rate of death due to homicide that occurred per 100,000 youth under 25 years old) in Baltimore City is 31.3 per 100,000 residents, that same rate is 56 in Midway/Coldstream, 68.4 in Sandtown, and 40.8 in Cherry Hill (Maryland Department of Health and Mental Hygiene Vital Statistics Administration, 2010-2014).

According to the Baltimore Police Department Victim-Based Crime Data (2012 - 12/30/2017), both Sandtown and Coldstream appear in the list of neighborhoods with the most shootings and homicides, with Sandtown ranked as 1st. Coldstream and Sandtown both appear in the list of neighborhoods with the most aggravated assaults (Sandtown is again ranked 1st), and Sandtown and Cherry Hill with the most rapes.

The overall picture for youth growing up in these neighborhoods is that of a challenging environment, and some turn to gangs and violence for a variety of reasons related to these contextual conditions.

## **Target population and previous/current attempts to address Youth Violence**

The list of programs, projects and initiatives organized both at the individual and neighborhood level to reduce youth violence over the past two decades in Baltimore is extensive. Operation Safe Kids is one of the longest running programs, having started in 2002 and run by the Baltimore City Health Department in coordination with city and state agencies. It provides case management and monitoring of high-risk juvenile offenders, working with them to prevent them becoming victims or perpetrators of violence.

Subsequent to that program, the most comprehensive focus on reducing youth violence - specifically targeted at gangs - was the Baltimore City Gang Violence Reduction Plan, created by the Baltimore City Criminal Justice Coordinating Council for the Governor's Office of Crime Control and Prevention in 2006. Its focus was comprehensive and multidisciplinary, prioritizing Community Mobilization, Opportunities Provisions, Social Intervention, Family Support and improving relationships between police and youth.

Safe Streets Baltimore was established in 2007 as a public health program based on Chicago's Cease Fire program, focused on community de-escalation and mediation. It is now present in six neighborhoods across the city, including Cherry Hill and Sandtown, two of the target neighborhoods for this project.

At the federal level, Project Safe Neighborhoods (PSN) was created by the Department of Justice in 2002 to reduce gun violence. Focused mostly on suppression activities, it has worked extensively in Baltimore coordinating operations with DEA, FBI, ATF, state and Baltimore city officials.

The most relevant work done from an academic perspective has been done by the Johns Hopkins Center for the Prevention of Youth Violence, one of the six that are currently supported by the Center for Disease Control. It is focused on data as well as interventions, documenting fatal and non-fatal youth violence in Baltimore as well as conducting research on reducing youth violence and associated morbidity and mortality. The University of Maryland Medical Center also has an active youth violence prevention program, working with both perpetrators within the system, as well as victims of violence.

As statistics show, many juveniles join gangs and engage in violence because these groups provide them with a community or family sense that they lack. Moreover, most of the juveniles join these gangs because they perceive criminal activity as a more accessible alternative to limited job opportunities. Hence, by providing juveniles with access to practical training, mediation and job opportunities, the chances of them joining a gang, or staying in one, are diminished. The project will focus on those that have already been in contact with a gang – either directly (that is, they themselves have been members) or indirectly (they are in contact with someone belonging to a gang), or have committed or been in contact with criminal violence. In addition, we will provide support and mediation to families and teachers working in areas with gang-related activities.

## **Working Methodology**

Our projects have been driven by following the underlying logic that the sum of causal factors plus identifying types of criminality leads us to focus prevention mechanisms. To that extent, we first analyze and study the most common causes leading to juvenile delinquency. Research has shown that the 10 factors that most influence juveniles' involvement in criminal activities are: values,



school environment and neighborhood, mental health, drug trafficking and drug abuse, poverty and social exclusion, internal armed conflict, the state and its functioning, impunity and the overall society. Of these factors, we will focus on the school environment and neighborhoods alongside drug trafficking and abuse, poverty and social exclusion, the factors most closely linked factors to juvenile gang involvement.

## **Technical Approach / Intervention Strategy**

Since its establishment in 2017, RYF programs have been designed and implemented following the ecological model firstly developed by Bronfenbrenner (1979). Following this approach, the main features to take into account for analyzing and predicting the development of an individual are: first, the microsystem (the family, directly attached to the subject and, hence, the greatest influential factor in the development of a youth); second, the mesosystem (the different environments in which an individual takes different roles: school, community); third, the exosystem (combination of the systems, from which the individual may or may not take part, such as a parent's job) and, lastly, the macrosystem (e.g. political system). Since its establishment, this model has been widely accepted both by the academia, international organizations – such as the World Organization for Migration – and those international cooperation agencies working on the implementation of intervention programs for preventing youth delinquency.

A common approach of intervention programs is to analyze risk and protection factors. On the one hand, risk usually encompasses an inadequate support structure offered by parents, schools and communities, often leading to victimization (that is, the child has suffered from violence himself). The presence of multiple risk factors increases the chances of criminal activity. On the other hand, protection factors refer to those personal or social skills of the juvenile, his/her values, relationship with adults, etc.

With the aim of analyzing these factors, RYF establishes “risk zones” within its areas of intervention. We understand by “risk zone” as an area where there are high levels - or potential for developing - of risk factors (e.g. often but not always in low-income neighborhoods in metropolitan areas). These “risk zones” are key as to selecting neighborhoods for program implementation. Intervention strategies must seek to diminish risk factors – or increase protection factors – in order to have a positive impact on the possibility of development of criminal/delinquent behavior by the youth. RYF seeks to achieve this important task by the strengthening local arts and/or sports related programs, reducing causes of school and professional training abandonment, improving education and job counselling, and community mediation.

Taking this approach to the specific situation of youth gang membership, it has been argued by scholars – such as Calle Dávila - that the benefits of physical activity resemble those features provided by gangs that have been seen as explanatories for the joining of these criminal groups, mainly: excitement,

sense of belonging to a group, protection, sense of identity and a sense of status. Hence, these programs can help the decrease of delinquent activity by:

- Keeping juveniles engaged and occupied, decreasing their time and opportunities for carrying out delinquency activities. This is the main focus of the programs.
- Helping fulfill juveniles' need to feel excitement or "adrenaline rush".
- Empowering the juveniles and provide them with something to look forward to.
- Improving self-esteem.
- Improving cognitive capabilities.
- Providing youth with mentoring on the part of the adults.
- Strengthening youth's decision-making capacities.
- Helping them feel special.
- Fulfilling their needs for taking risks.
- Creating an environment in which the youth can connect with other youngsters and adults.
- Providing youth with opportunities for a peaceful resolution of problems.
- Increasing team-work skills.
- Providing youth with better job opportunities.
- Providing youth with an opportunity for exercising their leadership capabilities.
- Helping youth build a positive identity and sense of living.
- Providing youth with better hopes and expectations for the future.

Remember Youth Fund's Youth Violence Initiative for the Baltimore neighborhoods of Coldstream, Cherry Hill and Sandown seeks to increase youth engagement and reduce levels of violence among the roughly 10,000 youths living in the three neighborhoods, benefitting not only the youths themselves, but their families, schools, teachers and communities. It seeks to engage and contract a minimum of seven Community Based Organizations in the area, which would in turn be supported by RYF as well as other nationally recognized organizations. The proposed program would take place over the course of 2 1/2 years, with a cost of \$499,470.

The following link and QR code offer a more detailed proposal online, including more information about the proposed program, partners, and budget.



We need your support in order to get started on this important program. Donate here. Please indicate Baltimore Youth Violence Initiative in the subject area to support this specific initiative.



Should you have any questions regarding the proposal, please do not hesitate to contact us.

*<https://rememberyouth.fund/en/contact/>*