

Chapter 3

How It Works – CNE's Community Partners

The VFZ is implemented in each locale by community-based organizations. CNE selects and partners with organizations that have the goal of stopping violence in their neighborhoods and that have the trust and confidence of young people. Formally designated as VFZ program Site Leader Organizations (SLOs), the organizations receive intensive technical assistance, training, and linkages to sources of support from the Center for Neighborhood Enterprise. CNE provides overall management and direction to the Violence-Free Zone sites and coordinates communications and best practices among the sites throughout the country.

CNE's community partner organizations are deeply rooted in their communities and share the cultural background represented by the students in the schools. They are respected, trusted, and have established ties which they are able to use to help the school systems build bridges and create support. Because of these ties and information they receive from community members, VFZ staff

members often are able to alert school officials or police about impending fights or gang threats.

The Violence-Free Zone initiative is unique in that it harnesses the strong positive influence of caring young adults known as VFZ Youth Advisors. Selected, screened, trained, and hired by the Site Leader Organizations, the Youth Advisors are mature young adults who are from the same neighborhoods as students in the schools they serve. The Youth Advisors command trust and respect because they have faced and overcome the same challenges as the youths. Youth Advisors assist students and teachers in the classroom, hallways, cafeteria, and at school events. Because of their backgrounds, they are trusted by students who are willing to confide their problems and receive counsel. They have the ability to inspire and heal troubled young people and families. They also serve as an "early warning system," alert to impending disputes or violent behavior, and eliminate the students' fears of

"Before this program was put into place in Fletcher-Johnson, we had a student killed on the parking lot. We had fights. We had stolen cars on the playgrounds. We went from that to zero. We went from gang fights every week to zero. We had order, a 100% change in climate. It is the best program I've had in any school I've been in."

– Darrin Slade
Former Principal
Fletcher-Johnson K-8
Washington, DC

The Latino Community Center

"I think that one thing that's really worked for us working with these young people is that with our combination of our programs, we're actually able to see a kid sometimes for more than 12 hours a day. We'll see them during the morning here at the school, we're able to work with them all day when they're struggling if they're having issues here in the school. After school, they come to the Latino Community Center, just down the street. So, we get them in a different environment now, they're one-on-one, they're building that relationship with that young person. And then we do midnight walks sometimes at night and we see some out in the street at night. So, sometimes we're able to work with these young individuals from



Older youths help younger kids in the Milwaukee VFZ's Latino Community Center afterschool program.

8:00 in the morning all the way to midnight and having that ability for them to talk to us at any time when they are at school, after school, and when they are at home is really the key for our programs and what we've done for these young people."

– Jorge Perez, Latino Community Center



Atlanta VFZ's VisionsUnlimited afterschool program.

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cooperating with the authorities. The Youth Advisors are available to the young people all hours of the day.

In addition to their services to the school as a whole, each Youth Advisor is assigned a caseload of high-risk students that they meet with and mentor on a daily basis. The students are referred by school staff. Others ask to join the VFZ program because they seek help. The Youth Advisors serve as role models that demonstrate that change and success are possible no matter how dysfunctional the young person's home and/or neighborhood environment.

The Site Leader Organizations also provide after-school, weekend, and summer programs and involve parents and other family members. The VFZ program always respects the authority of school officials and parents. The staff creates strong relationships with students' families, engaging in home visits and encouraging parents who might otherwise not be involved to come to the school and participate in their children's education.

The VFZ program also teaches responsibility and citizenship through community projects created and mounted by the young people, and by having older students tutor their younger or less advanced schoolmates in school or in after-school programs.

The Center has created an extensive data collection protocol and receives data from school and police officials to provide a comparison before and after the Violence-Free Zone program is initiated, and to track the progress of individual students. (See Results, Chapter 7, page 16).



Chapter 4

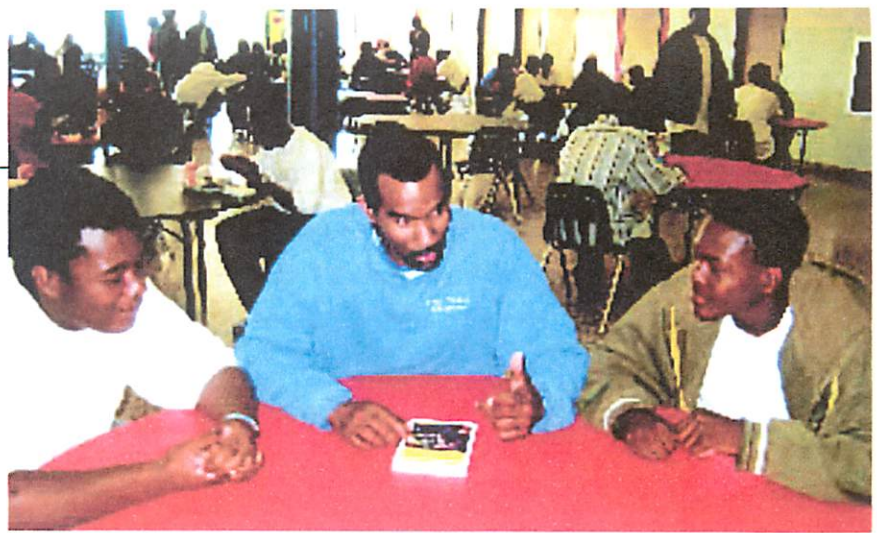
The Youth Advisors

The overall goal of the Violence-Free Zone initiative is to reduce violence and disruptions in the schools and prepare students for learning. But the reality goes much deeper than that. The objectives of the Youth Advisors who mentor high risk students are to guide them to positive paths and encourage their personal, academic, and career success.

What the Youth Advisors Do

Depending on the school size, a team of from seven to twelve Youth Advisors is assigned to each school, one of whom is selected as the VFZ School Site Supervisor. Youth Advisors are recruited from the community through word of mouth, among youth workers and other nonprofit organizations, and occasionally through advertisement. Each Youth Advisor is chosen for his/her genuine "heart" for young people who are struggling, and for his/her ability to understand and relate to their issues. The prospective Youth Advisors are carefully screened by VFZ staff for their suitability and experience, and must pass all school system, state, and local screening requirements. They then undergo a comprehensive course of training in VFZ procedures, code of conduct, and on how to handle various situations. Before being employed they intern and shadow an experienced Youth Advisor. School Site Supervisors participate in a regular videocam teleconference led by the CNE National VFZ Program Director to receive information and share best practices.

The VFZ Youth Advisors work closely with and



Baltimore VFZ's New Vision Youth Services Founder and Executive Director Billy Stanfield, Jr. (center) in discussion with students.

support school safety staff, police School Resource Officers, teachers, and counselors, adding a new layer in a comprehensive system of support. They greet the students each day and work as cafeteria and hall monitors, encouraging students to get to class and enforcing dress and behavior codes. They respond if teachers ask for assistance in calming a class. They are able to defuse conflicts before they erupt into violence. Because the Youth Advisors are trusted and respected, the students respond to them and share confidences with them in ways that are not seen by the students as "snitching," thereby making it possible to head off dangerous situations.

If requested by the schools, the VFZ Youth Advisors oversee a special "suspension room," where students under suspension are carefully supervised and given homework and discuss behavioral issues. This ensures that the student will maintain his or her schoolwork in a disciplined setting rather than being unsupervised at home or on the street. In some of the schools, suspended youths are assigned to meet

"When I was a struggling teenager coming to this same school, South Division, it was hard for me. I was trying to find my way. I was trying to find that person that I could connect to in the school and I never found it. I had many struggles. Later, when I was actually working at a job as a receptionist, I was seeing these students coming in, looking for these youth workers and I told myself, 'That's something that I want to do. I want to be that person that they're looking for. I want to help them.' And now I'm back in South Division in the same school that I came from, and I am walking around here trying to be that person that I was looking for to most of these kids that are looking for help. I get up every morning and I love coming to work."

— Amelia Stuckart, Youth Advisor, Milwaukee



Youth Advisor

Qualifications

- Must be at least 18 years old
- Must pass a background check with no sexual offenses or crimes against children
- Must know the culture of the community
- Have at a minimum a GED or working towards one
- Must pass a health examination (communicable diseases) and TB test
- Must pass a drug and alcohol test (given periodically)

Training

- Child Abuse and Sexual Misconduct Training
- Character Development Training
- Conflict Resolution Training
- Leadership Development Training
- School System Policies Training
- Youth Advisor Training
- Weekly Peer Meetings to Share Approaches

"I think one of the main reasons they respect me is that I was one of them. So most of the stuff that they're getting ready to do, I've already done it. And I can kind of look down the road and say, 'Dude, if you continue to do this, then this is where you're headed.'"

– Tim Dash
Youth Advisor
Atlanta

with VFZ staff upon their return to school to work out issues that might have led to their suspension. In some schools, VFZ Youth Advisors manage a "tardy room," also with the goal of identifying and helping resolve students' reasons for being tardy. If students are truant for more than a day, Youth Advisors will call their homes and try to address the reasons.

Typical Youth Advisor Day

Morning Greeting: The Youth Advisors welcome each child with an encouraging word as they arrive at the school. They also look for signs of tension or that a student needs someone to talk to.

Game Room: Offering a safe and enjoyable environment for students in school where they can also talk with Youth Advisors.

Violence-Free Zone Meetings: During free period or lunch meetings students come to talk

out problems and receive motivational and character coaching.

Supportive Conversations, Mediations, Conflict Resolution, and Interventions:

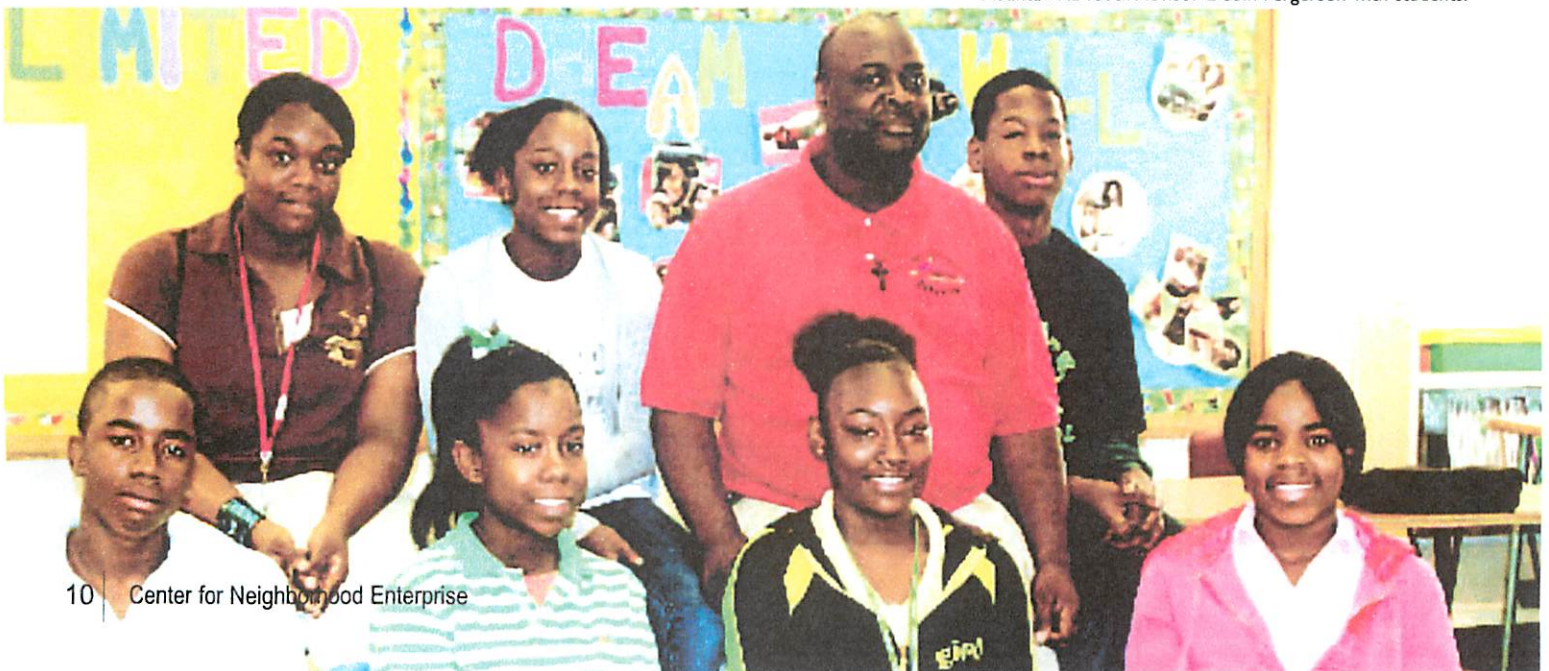
Youth Advisors respond throughout the day to problems presented by students or school staff.

Tutoring: Youth Advisors offer homework assistance and where possible, tutoring.

Safe Passage: Youth Advisors assist the school staff and security officers outside the schools, even walking students home if needed, to ensure safe passage. They also watch for outsiders who may gather outside the school buildings to cause trouble and they work to defuse tensions.

After-School Programs: Individual sites have established a variety of creative programs to motivate young people, including sports programs, positive "rap" clubs, and discussion and activity groups focusing on issues concerning youth.

Atlanta VFZ Youth Advisor Deoin Ferguson with students.



How VFZ Mentoring Program Addresses Problems

Community Risk Factors and Needs:

- Absence of positive male involvement
- Lack of appropriate male and female role models
- Lack of supportive positive guidance
- Lack of motivation and encouragement for educational achievement
- Disconnection from school
- Violent environment
- Feelings of abandonment and alienation, nowhere to turn
- Lack of social competence



Dallas VFZ Youth Advisor with students.

Violence-Free Zone Mentors Provide:

- Caring adult males with integrity
- Men and women who model successful living, no matter what the environment
- Supportive positive guidance and suggested positive options for behavior
- Tutoring, motivation, encouragement, and celebration of educational achievement
- Create feeling of belonging, being loved, being welcomed
- Conflict mediation and resolution
- Teach problem-solving skills
- Create acceptable links to law enforcement and other sources of support
- Referrals to counseling and health providers as needed
- Create referrals to employment
- Provide opportunities for community service
- Youth Advisors give mentees their cell phone numbers and are available 24/7
- Mentee relationships continue as long as the youth is in the school or in the community

"You all make us feel loved because you never know what people go through at home. You're like second parents and things like that."

– Atlanta middle-school student

"They always tell me don't give up. There've been some hard times when I wanted to give up." – Charity

"If they weren't here to keep me out of trouble, I wouldn't be at this school." – DeAngelo

"They've been through the stuff we've been through. That means something to us. They see something in us that we usually don't see, and they bring it out so we can see. And it makes you feel good inside." – Mikayla

When I was in 6th grade I got in a lot of trouble. I used to get suspended every day and when I got in seventh grade and Mr. Jackson started telling me and changing and now I'm in the 8th grade I changed more. Now I'm growing up." – AnnQuisha

Innovation and Best Practices

For the Violence-Free Zone staff, the school day does not end with the closing school bell. All of CNE's VFZ community partners mount extensive activity programs for youth after school and on weekends and vacations.

Motivation

In California's Antelope Valley, the guys call it RealTalk while the girls have GirlTalk. Combining all the best attributes of a club and a program, this Violence-Free Zone activity offers young people the opportunity to discuss issues of concern to them, to learn from guest speakers, and to engage in activities that challenge and entertain. Similar groups are mounted by CNE's community partners across the country to supplement the in-school mentoring with additional support in a more informal environment. The goals are the same—to further build relationships and infect the youth with life-affirming values.

Responsibility and Reciprocity

The Violence-Free Zone program encourages young people to give back to the community. Many of the groups have mounted food, clothing, and toy drives—all organized and run by the students themselves. The young people in the VFZ program enlist other students, teachers, and community residents and have been able to make substantial donations of goods to the Salvation Army and other worthwhile organizations. In doing so, they gain confidence and self-esteem. Some of the VFZ programs also have installed smoke and carbon monoxide alarms, and held neighborhood clean-up and fix-up days.



Washington, DC afterschool program.

Sports and Other Recreation

The Latino Community Center in Milwaukee hosts several hundred children and teens every day after school. They are required to do homework first, then can play at a variety of games or work on computers and a meal is served. Older teens are given a small stipend to organize games and help younger children with homework. The Atlanta VFZ runs community Violence-Free Zone programs every day after school in several public housing communities. CNE's Atlanta community partner VisionsUnlimited mounts summer programs that bring together residents of four public housing developments. These "Unity" programs are credited with bringing down tensions between neighborhoods that usually are considered to be antagonists. Milwaukee's Running Rebels Community Organization has an extensive basketball program that brings youth from all over the area. The goal is to engage youth in healthy sport, but also to break down barriers and build relationships between neighborhoods, especially in racially divided cities.

"The impact on the school has been in a lot of key areas: student discipline referral decrease; increase in mentoring and a good positive role model for our students; and also decrease in our students being in off-task behavior, such as in the hallways, our cafeteria and at bus dismissal. They [VisionsUnlimited Youth Advisors] provide an extra round of support and security for our students."

– Royce Sublett
Principal
Ben Carson Middle
School, Atlanta

Preparation

Particularly in a bad employment market, inexperienced youth from low-income areas have limited chances to succeed. And even if they acquire a job they are at high risk of losing it because they lack the life skills to function successfully in the workplace. The Young Professionals Academy was created to address these factors and not only prepare young people for work and to keep a job, but to learn healthy behaviors to take them into adulthood.

Developed by Milwaukee's Latino Community Center, the Young Professionals

Academy program has three phases: Employment Skills—self-responsibility, including appearance, non-verbal and verbal communications, filling out applications, and preparing for interviews; Job Retention—having a positive attitude, attendance, effort, focus, accepting guidance and direction, managing emotions, addressing customers, and professionalism; and Life Skills—coping skills, belief systems, and avoiding self-destructive behaviors. The one-hour classes are taught after school for 20 consecutive days. The program creates partnerships with businesses and internship programs to aid in securing employment.

Nine times out of ten, a lot of problems don't come to me because there's that buffer there where the kids go and talk. The kids can work with them and work through whatever problems they have.

— School Resource Officer
Bennie Bridges, Atlanta

R.O.S.E.S. (Reaching Out to Sisters Educationally and Socially)

R.O.S.E.S. is a unique program created by VFZ Youth Advisor Barbara Green of Milwaukee's Running Rebels Community Organization and is open to girls in several high schools. The organization has a year-long activities curriculum with empowering and inspiring meetings and events. One moving and emotional event created by R.O.S.E.S. was a mock funeral in which the girls wrote their own mock obituaries and "buried" their past negative experiences and actions so they could move on with their lives.

"The purpose of this ceremony is so the girls can bury some of the secrets and pain they have been carrying. Until they do this, it is difficult for them to go to the next level," says Green. R.O.S.E.S. followed the Mock Funeral with a "New You Birthday Party," where the girls celebrated their new lives. "We wanted them to just have fun—be children. Their childhoods have often been taken. We wanted to give them a piece of childhood back so they can grow up."

Young ladies in R.O.S.E.S. also were treated to grooming sessions and new outfits and conducted a fashion show for other students. In doing so, they attained new confidence and goals.



Top: girls get a hug after burying negative memories;
Above: celebrating a new beginning.



Milwaukee's Latino Community Center took 25 students in the VFZ program to Aurora, IL, for the Slight Edge entrepreneurship conference for teens. The youth were accompanied by LCC Youth Advisors and South Division High School Assistant Principal Mary Kohl (far right).

"I hope I never have to go back to a high school that doesn't have this support, these people that are connecting to the kids, connecting us to the community."

– Mary Kohl
Assistant Principal
South Division High
School, Milwaukee

Building Community Relationships

CNE community partners constantly look for ways to be of service to their communities and to build relationships with community members. In Milwaukee, staff members from the Latino Community

Center received training in tax preparation so they could offer help to families in the community. Their efforts resulted in an estimated \$1.7 million being returned to the community in tax refunds for the 2007 tax year, and created deeper bonds of trust with parents and community members.

VFZ Wins Social Entrepreneurship Award

CNE was the recipient of one of the Manhattan Institute's 2008 Social Entrepreneurship Awards for the Violence-Free Zone program. In accepting the award for the Center, CNE National Violence-Free Zone Program Director Kwame Johnson noted that he wished that the VFZ had been around when he was a youth and got into trouble. But he was able to overcome the challenges, graduated from high school and college, and now works to help other young people. "I am proof that no matter what your circumstance, you can succeed. That is what we teach in the Violence-Free Zone program."



CNE National Violence-Free Zone Program Director Kwame Johnson (right) accepted the award from Manhattan Institute's Howard Husock.

Principles of the Violence-Free Zone

What Is Unique About the VFZ: External measures such as metal detectors, cameras, and security guards can temporarily suppress but cannot change the culture of violence. Whether it is for individuals, schools, or communities, change must come from within.

Who Is Qualified: The most effective change agents share the same cultural background and experiences as the young people they serve. They have faced and overcome the same challenges and are witnesses that success is possible no matter the environment.

Long-Term Commitment: The community organizations that implement the Violence-Free Zone initiative in each locale are led by grassroots leaders who make a life-long commitment to those they serve and their service is not determined by the length of a grant or the terms of a contract.

The Zipcode Test: CNE's VFZ community partners are located in the neighborhoods they serve.

Familial Role: Youth Advisors fulfill the role of a parent or big brother or sister; providing not only authority and structure, but also the love that is necessary for the individual to undergo healing, growth, and development.

Availability: VFZ staff and Youth Advisors are available 24/7 to those they serve. The young people being mentored are given their cell phone numbers.

Reciprocity: The young people are required to give to others in order to be eligible to receive support. Thus, they avoid becoming clients, and they become positive forces in their communities and thereby gain self-respect.

Respect the "Need to Belong": Grassroots approaches do not try to destroy youth gangs but provide healthy ways to fulfill the needs the gangs provide—status, excitement, power, praise, profit, protection, mentoring and an opportunity for advancement.

Transformation, Not Rehabilitation: Once young people are transformed from predators to ambassadors of peace and their character changes, their characteristics have a market value. They are witnesses to others that it is possible to improve one's life even in a toxic, violent, drug-ridden environment.

Celebrating Change: Young people attempting to improve their behavior and academic performance should have constant encouragement and public acknowledgement of their achievements, no matter how small.

Cost-Benefits: The Violence-Free Zone program not only is effective in salvaging young lives but it saves taxpayer money in reduced police and emergency calls, court costs, incarceration, and the many other costs of youth crime and violence.

Chapter 7

Results

CNE focuses heavily on measurement and accountability, and continually assesses the program's effectiveness to learn and improve its operation. CNE trains the community-partner staff and the Youth Advisors in the use of measurement tools that have been developed by the Center specifically for the Violence-Free Zone initiative. Reports are made on a daily, weekly, and monthly basis to CNE. In addition to data on individual students enrolled in the VFZ program gathered by program staff, CNE negotiates a Memorandum of Understanding with the school systems to receive school data regarding detentions, trancies, suspensions, incidents, and other measures that reflect behavior in the schools.

In addition to individual student and school outcomes, CNE is developing a cost/benefit analysis for the Violence-Free Zone initiative to determine what costs are avoided and what savings may be achieved when the VFZ initiative is in place. Costs that may be avoided include police and security forces, fire calls, ambulance calls, emergency room visits, and even youth incarceration.

I think there's enough hard evidence here. From what I've seen so far, not only is the program helping the children behaviorally in terms of fewer incidences of violence, fewer suspensions, more good citizenship marks, but it's also beginning to affect the grades, even though that's not actually how the program was constructed nor was that what they expected to do. The implications, I think, are huge for the way we approach really working with young people in troubled urban environments."

– Susan Kinnevy, Ph.D., Co-Director, Center for Research on Youth and Social Policy University of Pennsylvania

In the first two years in Dallas, where the VFZ was first piloted, gang incidents were reduced from 113 to 0. Similar evidence is available from the Richmond Violence-Free Zone, inaugurated in September, 2008 at Richmond's high-risk George Wythe High School. Incidents were down 22%, suspensions down 3%, expulsions down 71%, and drop-outs down 17%. Richmond Police reported that arrests of students at the school were down 38%, and incidents reported by the police School Resource Officer were down 46%. Motor vehicle thefts in the sector around the school were down 73%, which the Richmond Police attributed to the Violence-Free Zone program.

VIOLENCE-FREE ZONE DATA TRACKING POINTS & MEASURABLE OUTCOMES

SCHOOL DATA	PROGRAM PARTICIPANT DATA	COST/BENEFIT DATA
Attendance	Attendance	School Enrollment Cost
Suspensions and Expulsions	Suspensions	School Attendance Cost
		School Attendance Cost
Drop Out Rate		
Truancy	Truancy	
Violent Incidents (i.e. gang violence, fighting)	Violent Incidents (i.e. gang violence, fighting)	Police Staff Cost
		Security Staff Cost
		Ambulance Call Response Cost
		Fire Call Response Cost
Misconduct and Violations (i.e. class disruptions, bus misconduct)	Misconduct and Violations (i.e. class disruptions, bus misconduct)	Police Call Response Cost
	Program Enrollment	
	Academic Achievement (i.e. GPA)	
	Grade Promotion	
	Criminal Involvement	Youth Incarceration Cost

Baylor University Case Study

IN 2008 AND 2009, BAYLOR

UNIVERSITY RESEARCHERS examined six Milwaukee public high schools that had the VFZ program for the full 2007/2008 school year and compared them pre-and post-VFZ. Three of the schools are large single faculty (Regular VFZ); and three schools have two or more sub-division schools housed on the same campus (Sub-division VFZ). The researchers concluded that there was an immediate effect of the VFZ on the schools in three areas: improved safety, increased

presence of students (reductions in suspensions and truancies) and improved academic performance.

While academic achievement is not a function of the VFZ, CNE tracks GPAs and other measures. In Milwaukee, for instance, at six schools, there was an overall GPA improvement at the VFZ schools while the non-VFZ schools' overall GPA remained flat.



Studies of Religion

"I believe that the youth intervention aspects of the Violence Free Zone at George Wythe High School has impacted Motor Vehicle Theft in Sector 312. With the introduction of the VFZ, kids are staying in school more and are less of a negative impact on the adjacent neighborhood."

– Lieutenant Scott C. Booth
Third Precinct
Sector 312
Richmond
Police Department

	REGULAR VFZ	SUBDIVISION VFZ	MPS ALL or NON-VFZ
Violent Incidents	Down 32%	Down 8%	Non-VFZ up 3%
Non-Violent Incidents	Down 20%	Even (+0.2%)	Non-VFZ up 10%
Suspensions	Down 37%	Down 44%	All MPS up 6%
GPA	Up 3.82%	Up 4.56%	Non-VFZ 0%



"They helped me with the temper. I have a real bad one. If anybody said like anything to me, I would be ready to fight. But the Running Rebels sat me down and showed me a better way. And I'm pretty sure every young man in here can say it's helped them. The Running Rebels was put here to make us better men. And it's helping us a lot." – Sylvester

"Last year I wasn't doing so good in class and stuff. And they told me, don't be in the hallways running around, don't be trying to act hard and show everybody that you're going to be the class clown. This year I came up with a 4.0." – Kevin

"Last year – around this time I probably would have been in the hallway, running from security or something, or trying to start a fight or something, instigating something. But since they came, I'm like a whole different person. I done been to class like every day this week, and I'm going every day next week." – Terry

What It Takes to Start a VFZ

- A strong commitment to reduce violence and disruptions in schools and communities and to help young people find a positive path for their lives.
- An understanding and commitment to the community-based principles of the Center for Neighborhood Enterprise's Violence-Free Zone and a willingness to accept guidance and direction from CNE regarding this program.
- An individual or community-based organization within the affected area that has the trust and confidence of young people in the community and has a track record of working with them for at least 18 months. The leader of this organization must be able to demonstrate his or her credibility and leadership skill through references and constituent recommendations. If needed, CNE can help find an effective grassroots organization in a community.
- Demonstrated cooperation with city or county officials, school officials, law enforcement, and other community leaders.
- Baseline information documenting the need for a Violence-Free Zone in the community, including crime, violence, and school incident statistics.
- Identification of sources of funding in the community that can provide support for the Violence-Free Zone initiative.
- A willingness to accept training and receive extensive technical assistance from CNE to bring the organization to a high level of management skill and financial accountability.
- A commitment to cooperate in acquiring tracking, measurement, and evaluation data so that outcomes can be documented.
- A willingness to share best practices and participate in the Center for Neighborhood Enterprise's Violence-Free Zone network.



Dawn and Victor Barnett, leaders at CNE Milwaukee community partner Running Rebels Community Organization.

"I think that if you're looking for things that make significant change – and as superintendents you look for what are the things that give you significant impact, not little impact, not incremental impact, not continuous improvement, but significant change – this is a program that will bring about significant change in the culture of a school and community."

– William Andreopoulos, Superintendent
Milwaukee Public Schools

"I have extremely positive things to say about the Violence-Free Zone program. It brings a huge chunk of support to the schools. The Youth Advisors are some of the most talented people I have ever met. We have been trained by the Youth Advisors. Their ability isn't just in the schools, they are in the homes and in the community, so they have immediate rapport with the students. Few adults fill that role."

– Dr. John Deasy, Former Chief Executive Officer
Prince George's County Public Schools
Maryland



Staying True Awards

At a time when a fight or disturbance among youth is front page news, the goal of CNE and its Violence-Free Zone community partners is to hold up young people who are courageously turning away from negative behaviors. The Staying True awards were created by the Center for Neighborhood Enterprise to honor young people who are succeeding against the odds—for turn-arounds in their behavior and/or for excelling in academics despite challenging circumstances. Youth Advisors at each school select students for Most Improved Behavior and for Academic Achievement awards. The awardees receive trophies and medallions at a ceremony attended by city officials, business, community, and philanthropic leaders. School system executives and principals help confer the honors. As part of the award, CNE and the VFZ community partners take the young people to a local clothing store to pick out a business attire outfit suitable for their introduction as responsible members of the larger community. The young people have been celebrated in the local media, further motivating them and their peers to achievement.





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