National Public Policy Proposal:
Prevention of Youth-Involved
Violence in Belize 2012-2022

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National Public Policy Proposal:

Prevention of Youth-Involved Violence in Belize 2012-2022

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Prologue

Juan Daniel Alemán
SICA Secretary-General

The Central American Security Strategy is an essential integrated vision geared towards the coordination and harmonization of actions leading to the design of policies, programs and integral strategies. The strategy has been oriented towards the development and strengthening of both national and regional management capacities within each nation, taking into consideration the asymmetry between the countries of Central America. Since 2007, Central America has adopted this shared and integrated vision which focuses on understanding and confronting the insecurity challenges facing the region as a whole. It is within this context that the General Secretariat of SICA and the Secretariat of Social Integration of Central America (SISCA) have taken the initiative to support the countries of the region in the construction of participatory public policies for the social prevention of violence. Within these public policies, there has been convergence between differing views from governments, non-state actors, and civil society, typically through non-governmental organizations (NGOs) – especially the youth- based organizations. The intent is for these resulting policies to be taken and implemented by the governing institutions responsible for violence prevention within each country.

Currently, the principal challenge will be the harmonization and regional integration of the national policies for social violence prevention. The ultimate objective is to have local, national and regional articulation of common violence prevention strategies, coherent with the concept of 'democratic security' and other democratic methods, in order to achieve citizens' security. The added value of this regional initiative has been its commitment to the development of national and regional prevention policies that are guided by a restorative philosophy, which addresses the analysis of violence and social scenarios within an interconnected context. Simultaneously, this initiative has focused on transforming conflictive human relationships into peaceful relations, as well as promoting dialogue between and among societies and building willingness among the population to promote a culture of peace and lawfullness.

The General Secretariat of SICA and SISCA, through their regional representations (the Regional Commission for Social Prevention of Violence, formed by the Ministers of Security or Government of all the Countries of the Region, and the Social Integration Council, constituted by the ministers coordinators social areas), accompanied the institutionalization and implementation of these public policies for the prevention of violence within each member country of SICA, and in line with the Central American Democratic Security Model and Social Strategic Agenda.

Message from Hon. Minister Herman Longsworth

Minister of State with Responsibility for Youth and Sports
Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports

The opportunity for greater collaboration and inter-sectoral coordination in developing a comprehensive policy to prevent youth violence is very important and instrumental to the development of Belize. The reduction of youth violence is of top priority in our country, and the sentiments outlined in this document reflect the approach our young people and partners have shared will be useful in combating crime and violence.

This document will serve as a guide to ensure a safe future for Belize's youth and our communities, and will seek to complement the Belize National Youth Policy in utilizing a Positive Youth Development approach in creating the proper mechanisms to support young people.

To achieve this goal, this public policy proposal outlines seventeen (17) strategies for youth violence prevention, some of which are already being operationalized; however, it illustrates a collaborative approach that must be functional in building a social protection system to ensure that youth violence prevention begins from an early age and that the family and community, as institutions of socialization, are strengthened and supported by government and civil society. In working together, we will create a Belize where all adolescents and youth can grow in a safe environment.

Sincerely,

Herman Longsworth

Hon. Herman Longsworth
Minister of State
Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports

Presentation

Concerned by the increase in the phenomena of violence associated with youth in Central America, associates of the project, *"Development of Policies and Initiatives at the Regional Level in Favor of Young People at Social Risk and in Conflict with the Law"*, began to pursue the development of policy proposals in Panama, Costa Rica, Nicaragua and Belize. The project is co-executed by the Central American Integration System (SICA) and the Secretariat of the Social Central American Integration (SISCA) with the technical assistance and support from the International Peacebuilding Alliance (Interpeace). The project is coordinated by the Population Fund of the United Nations (UNFPA), with the financial support of the Italian Cooperation.

The methodology of Interpeace is characterized by promoting processes of dialogue that integrate: research, participation and action. In Belize, the policy proposal herewithin is the result of a broad inclusive process of exchanges involving more than 150 people representing government and non-governmental institutions. Participants all had a relationship to issues of youth-associated violence prevention, including representatives of the criminal and juvenile justice system, civil society organizations, community youth organizations, as well as institutionalized youth. The dialogue, focus group discussions, and interviews were recorded and included key stakeholder representatives, government officials from the security and justice system, penitentiary workers, the Ministry of Human Development and Social Transformation, and the Ministry of Education and Youth. This policy proposal includes the main recommendations expressed by the participants in the process of consultation. It should be noted that the process was accompanied by representatives of the Youth for the Future Secretariat of the Ministry of Education and Youth.

In Belize, the path of prevention runs through the generation of opportunities for children, adolescents and youth, therefore, these young adults and children are grateful for the technical and financial support provided by the Italian Cooperation, the United Nations Populations Fund

(UNFPA), the technical support and facilitation of consultation and coordination spaces provided by Interpeace, SG-SICA and SISCA in this national effort focusing on the prevention of violence and the promotion of social peace.

Herewithin is the resulting proposal for a public policy of youth-associated violence preventionfor Belize. The policy proposed considers a timeframe of 10 years, from 2012 to 2022. This document is a tool to guide the efforts of those State officials and members of civil society who work towards the prevention of violence associated with youth; it meets Belize youths' aspirations of a peaceful and harmonious coexistence. We believe that to have a country without violence it is necessary to invest in the human development of its population.

Introduction

Belize has a population of approximately 316,000 persons, 60% of whom are under 19 years old. Over the last decade, the country had seen an increase in their violence indicators: increases in property crimes, drug-related crimes, gang-related violence, homicide and other serious crimes. Notably the increase is mostly in violence involving adolescents and the youth.

Youth involvement in violence is a common thread that runs through the social fabric of the Latin American and Caribbean region. The main risk factors commonly associated with this social phenomenon are shared across nations in this region. However, the dialogue regarding the issue of youth involvement in violence within the country of Belize has yielded findings that are specific and unique to the country's demography.

Firstly, this phenomenon is more specifically an urban issue, concentrating heavily in two parts of the country: the urban ghettos of south side Belize City and the highly populated areas of the Cayo district. Both of these highly congested urban areas are breeding grounds for pervasive levels of crime, violence and civil unrest. Secondly, the typical youth involved in violence in Belize are those most exposed to risk factors such as those subjected to *institutional and structural inequity*, those living in *violent, undeveloped and socially divided neighborhoods*, those with *limited parental support or guidance*, those with *unskilled parents or guardians*, those with *limited access to legitimate forms of self-sustainment and employment opportunities*, and finally those with high exposure *to unconventional forms of socialization* (violent sub-cultural values and ideologies). Thirdly, as mentioned during the dialogue process by many youth participants, school conflicts which are closely related to domestic and sexual violence is also a factor that is increasingly gaining notoriety among the Belizean youth. Fourthly, and perhaps most importantly, the violence involving youth in Belize can be consistently correlated to the lack of adequate support and services, especially regarding education, employment and psycho-social counseling options.

The point was made clear during the consultations: the availability and access to education and employment, as well as the essential social support services that would enable Belizean youths to grow and flourish into productive and healthy citizens, is the answer to deter youth in-

volvement in violence. However, access to these essential services are chronically limited in Belize.

As a result, the socio-economic status of Belizean youth has been drastically diminishing over the last decade. The official statistics show that since 2000, Belizean youths between the ages of 14-24 years are: overrepresented in the prison population, increasingly becoming victims of violence (physical and psychological), dropping out of primary and secondary school at very high rates, increasingly contracting the HIV virus, increasingly having children out of wedlock, and getting involved in the illegal drug trade at a very young age. It is generally agreed in the Belizean society that the future of the country highly depends on the youths of today. However, based on the realities shared above, it may seem that the Belizean society as a whole (government, civil society, private sector, community leaders) has not adequately galvanized their energies and resources together in order to efficiently empower and support the young people in the country. This reality is noted within the National Youth Policy of Belize (2011) which cites the five (5) priority goals deduced by the youths: *participation, socio-economic opportunity, education, health and well-being, and protection.*

This document constitutes a public policy proposal for addressing violence associated with youth. It will be presented officially to the Government of Belize for their adoption of it as a public State Policy, with an implementation timeframe of ten years (2012-2022). The proposal includes a comprehensive conceptual framework to guide the national work on youth-associated violence prevention. Additionally, it includes a summary of the main policies, programmes and actions that the Government of Belize has developed in this area over the last 5-10 years. Finally, this document provides an analysis of the legal and political framework that provides the basis for this policy proposal.

This policy proposal's aim is to promote the holistic approach to youth violence prevention by reducing the risk factors commonly related to youth involvement in violence (as victims and perpetrators), promoting community participation, a generation of employment for youth, opportunities for citizen coexistence, dialogue, education, sports, recreation and culture, as well as, comprehensive reintegration and rehabilitation initiatives. The proposal responds to the priorities and actions developed by the Ministry of Human Development and Social Transformation and The Ministry of Education and Youth. It is a technical tool that outlines a series of strategies for public action to prevent violence related to adolescence and youth. The proposal also complements -with more detail- what has already been established by the RESTORE Belize program and the National Youth Policy (2011).

Acroymns

ACE	Adult Continuing Education
BBA	Belize Broadcasting Authority
BCC	Belize City Council
BFLA	Belize Family Life Association
BTIA	Belize Tourism Industry and Association
B.P.D	Belize Police Department
CARICOM	Caribbean Community
CAPS	Community Action for Public Safety
CBO	Community Based Organization
CCC	Crime Control Council
C.E.O.	Chief Executive Officer
CEMO	Central Emergency Management Organization
COMPAR	Community and Parent Empowerment Programme
CRC	Convention on the Rights of the Child
CRD	Community Rehabilitation Department
CRO	Community Rehabilitation Officer
CPA	Country Poverty Assessment
CYDP	Conscious Youth Development Programme
DOC	Department of Corrections
ECED	Early Childhood Education and Development
FACA	Families and Children's Act
GoB	Government of Belize
G.R.E.A.T	Gang Resistance Education and Training
GSU	Gang Suppression Unit
HECOPAB	Health and Community Participation Unit
HRC	Human Rights Commission
IDB	International Development Bank

Interpeace	International Peace Building Alliance
ITVET	Institute of Vocational Education Training
JICC	Joint Intelligence Coordinating Centre
LAC	Latin America and Caribbean
MDC:	Modern Developing Country
MDGs:	Millennium Development Goals
MHDST	Ministry of Human Development and Social Transformation
MOED	Ministry of Economic Development
MOEY	Ministry of Education and Youth
MOH	Ministry of Health
MOHUD	Ministry of Housing and Urban Development
MOPS	Ministry of the Public Service
NCFC	National Committee for Families and Children
NCTO	National Crime Trends Observatory
NDACC	National Drug Abuse Control Council
NGO	Non-Government Organization
NHDAC	National Human Development Advisory Committee
NICH	National Institute for Culture and History
NPA	National Plan of Action for Children and Adolescents
NPES	National Poverty Elimination Strategy
NSC	National Security Council
NGO	Non-governmental Organization
NWC	National Women's Council
P.E.P.E.P	Police Crime Prevention Education Program
PUP	People's United Party
SIB	Statistical Institute of Belize
SICA	Central America Integration System
SISCA	The Central American Social Integration Secretariat
SPEAR	Society for the Promotion of Education and Research
S.R.O	Social Resource Officer Program
UDP	United Democratic Party
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme

UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
WHO	World Health Organization
WYF	Wagner's Youth Facility
YES	Youth Enhancement Services
YFF	Youth for the Future
YMCA	Young Men's Christian Association
YWCA	Young Women's Christian Association
Z.B.L.O	Zone Beat Liaison Officer

Conceptual and legal framework

Conceptual and legal framework

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

This conceptual framework defines the concepts of *youth*, *adolescents* and *juveniles*. It also outlines and describes some key concepts and terminologies regarding violence related to youth within a social context, including risk factors, violence prevention, youth groupings and culture, youth gangs and principles of restorative justice.

Adolescents and youth defined:

the definitions of "youth" and "adolescents" are numerous and varied. In contemporary society, the criteria often used to conceptualize either term include **age; completion of formal education**; **economic independence,** and **readiness to start and to provide for a new family**. For example, the Commonwealth Youth Programme and affiliated Governments of the Caribbean Region argue that in normal circumstances, a young person should successfully make the transition from child to adult before the age of 30. Within this context, the agreed chronological age of youth is therefore 15 to 29 years. Accordingly, the World Health Organization (WHO) defines adolescence as the period in life in which individuals reach reproductive maturity, move from psychological patterns of childhood to those of adulthood, and establish their socioeconomic independence. This transition generally takes place between the ages of 10 and 19 years.

In Belize, the National Youth Policy (2011) offers the following definitions for *child, adolescent and youth*:

- **Child** all persons between the ages from 6-9 years.
- **Adolescents** all persons between the age of 10 to 19 years
- **Integrated Youth** all persons between the ages of 15-34 years.

This policy proposal document endorses the Commonwealth Youth Programme definition of youth as persons between the ages of **15-29 years**. In addition, although this policy proposal is focused primarily on adolescents and youth, it is very important to underline the necessity to consider them in their own familial context and from the life cycle approach. Also, we recognize that the most successful violence preventive ap-

proach starts at early childhood (before 15 yrs.); however the special characteristics and needs of children is a matter that warrants a specific rights-based policy centered on addressing the unique issues relevant to the protection of children in Belize.

Youth Groupings and Youth Culture

The concept of **youth culture** refers to the particular behaviors, styles and interests of youth. Youth typically develop their own identity outside of the traditional institutions of family, school and work; this identity is expressed through fashion, music, dance, food, beliefs, language and behavior. In many cases, cultural expressions also create group identity, for example, a specific type of music might be associated with a group or movement, like rockers, punks, Goths, etc. The cultural expressions of youth are charged with symbolism that often clashes with dominant culture.

Largely, the cultural expressions of youth are also linked to class, gender, race/ethnicity, locality, sexuality, and the context in which they grow up. In that sense, some cultural manifestations of youth are approved of by the dominant culture, depending on class and gender; other youth cultural dimensions are disapproved of, particularly if they belong to groups of youth, which are deemed subordinate in society.

Youth Gangs

Usually, using the term "youth gangs" has a negative and stigmatic implication. It is often rejected automatically by the public because youth gang members have a particular style of clothing, speaking and acting that provokes unease in dominant culture. Generally, **youth gangs** are seen as "dangerous" and "delinquents" in the public's eye, and many youth are discriminated against and become victims of abuse due solely to their appearance or the unique style of the group they associate with.

According to some sociological studies youth gangs are groups of individuals that live in poverty and marginality but have found in their gang a social group that offers an opportunity for identity, self-esteem and their own culture[1]. They are the result of social exclusion and "structural violence". This structural violence creates reactive violence—criminal and/or political—exerted by the excluded[2]. The conditions of extreme poverty, frustration and desperation, which are prominently found throughout the LAC, create the potential for conflict, acts of violence and delinquency.[3]

During the last few years, the term *youth gangs* has incriminated the participation of adoles-

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1   Sanchez-Jankowski, 2003.
2   Anderson, 1999; Spergel, 1995; Vigil, 2002.
3   Briceño-León & Zubillaga, 2002.

cents and youths in acts of delinquency and criminality in the Central American region and Belize is no exception. In Belize, gangs are often classified as groups of adolescents and youths that typically live in poverty and marginalized areas. These youth come together in a feeling of belonging and have found in the gang a social group that offers an opportunity for identity, self-esteem and a place where their own culture and socialization system is valued. [4]

In relation to the rise of gangs and gang-related violence in Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) on the whole, the socio-ecological approach considers that gangs are a product of the disorganization of urban zones and in some cases, are a structure that partially replaces social institutions like the family. In reality, it is difficult to arrive at a universal definition of youth gangs or to know what comprises the membership, including composition, structure, size, organization and activities, which correspond to the contexts in which they are found[5].

Youth Related Violence

In typical terms, *youth violence* refers to all youth who are involved in acts of violence as perpetrators, but the term does not typically include the dimension of youth as victim. This perspective further contributes to the negative stigmatization and labeling of youths as criminal and violent, which is not generally the case. As a result, the term ***youth related violence*** or ***youth involved violence*** are used to define a broad concept that refers to the multiple ways in which violence affects young people as victims and as perpetrators, as well as, the different expressions and causes of that violence. This distinction is very important to note particularly because the cycle of violence illustrates an almost symbiotic relationship between victims and perpetrators of violence. More often than not, the youths who are perpetrators of violence were once victims of violence themselves. In fact, one study of homicidal male youth in Belize pointed out that many of the youths who kill were victims of physical and verbal abuse at some point during their childhood and/or adolescence[6]. Violence begets violence, and as such, adolescents and youths who are exposed to violence (as victims or as residents living in violent neighborhoods) are more susceptible to developing violent thoughts and behaviors. This ultimately is manifested in victims becoming perpetrators of violence.

Violence Defined

Johan Galtung (1991) offers one classification of violence which helps to provide a more complete and dynamic view of how violence operates. He

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4   Gayle, H.; Mortis, N.; Vasquez, J.; Mossiah, J. (2011).
5   Rodgers, 2003; Sanchez-Jankowski, 2003.

6   Haylock, N. (2008). *Perceptions of Homicidal Youth in Belize.*

refs to three types of violence, which are closely related: **Direct violence, Structural violence and Symbolic or Cultural violence.**

Direct Violence: is the most visible of the three. It manifests itself in violent acts, such as physical, verbal or psychological actions. In this sense, the World Health Organization (WHO, 2002) concept of violence helps clarify direct violence, "The intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, against oneself, another person, or against a group or community that either results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, mal-development or deprivation".

Direct violence is classified into three (3) types, violence against:

i)   **Individuals** (murder, gender violence, family violence, verbal violence, threats, torture, beatings, etc.)

ii) **Groups** (wars, genocide, terrorism, etc.)

iii) **Nature** (pollution, deforestation, induced erosion of soil, abuse of natural resources, etc.)

Structural Violence: Structural violence is based on the negation of opportunities, and refers to the ways in which society structures itself and how it systematically marginalizes or even slowly eliminates certain groups by not offering food, housing, education, health, employment, security, recreation, etc. Structural violence expresses itself through social exclusion, socio-economic inequality, racism, sexism, homophobia, and other forms of discrimination. It is considered structural violence when systems cause hunger, poverty, disease or even death to the population. Examples would be the states or countries that do not contribute to, nor prioritize the basic necessities for their population. It is seen in numerous instances of injustice: while some eat and drink in abundance, others pick through garbage, do not have enough to eat and live in the street.

Symbolic or Cultural Violence: Symbolic violence is the imposition and/or reproduction of a system of thought and perception that maintains the social order of inequality in power relations between different groups[7]. In the case of youth gangs, for example, symbolic violence operates through the collection of stereotypes and social stigma that are reproduced in the public imagery. Targeted members of these groups are labeled "delinquent", "dangerous", "violent" and other derogatory expressions. Symbolic violence is expressed through religion, ideology, language, art, science, laws, media, education etc. Symbolic violence serves to legitimatize direct and structural violence. It also serves to inhibit

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7   Bourdieu, 1977.

or repress the responses from those who suffer from it, and offer justification for humans to destroy one another and even be rewarded for it. For example, it is symbolic violence, which creates the justification for violence in defense of faith, honor, race or capitalism.

Causes and Risk Factors of Violence in Belize

In the Belizean society, many of the social and economic conditions that are symptomatic of rapid urbanization form the driving force of much of the crime and violence affecting the country. Particularly, these conditions tend to magnify those risk factors that predispose children and adolescents to become involved in criminal activities from a very early age. Risk factors can be defined as any characteristic statistically associated with, although not necessarily causally related to, an increased risk of violence involvement. Common risk factors for youth-involved violence in Belize include inequality, unemployment, lack of access to education and health services, and the culture of violence, among others.

According to the opinion of the youths that were consulted during this process the following further amplifies some of these factors as they pertain to the Belizean context:

• **Poverty and Inequality**

 "Money controls Belize. Vanity is everything; money is power; it determines your self-value and respect in Belize. So, you need to pick up a gun to get what you want because no one will provide you with it or with the opportunities to get it, so you just have to go get what you need. Guns equal to power on the streets. Without guns how will a youth survive?"[8]

Many Belizeans believe there is a causal relationship between poverty and crime rates in Belize. In a report prepared for UNICEF's Xchange Campaign (2005), the issue of poverty and its effects on children was highlighted. The report contends that children and adolescents in particular are more likely than other population groups to suffer from poverty in the Belizean society and that poverty is one of the major underlying causes that push young people towards negative behavioral pursuits. The 2009 Country Poverty Assessment (CPA) in Belize revealed that 41.3 % of the population now lives below the poverty line (unable to meet basic food and non-food costs). The assessment also shows that poverty in Belize increased substantially between 2002 and 2009. The implication is that a larger number of households are finding it increasingly difficult to make ends meet.

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8   Focus Group Participant; Wagner's Youth Facility (2011).

Table 1: Distribution of Poverty by Age (Population percentage)

Age Group	Indigent	Poor	Not Poor	Total
Under 15	45	41	29	34
15-24	20	21	19	20
25-44	22	22	28	26
45-64	9	11	17	15
65+	5	5	7	6

Source: Country Poverty Assessment CPA (2009).

In effect, it is widely acknowledged among many genres of the social sciences, including criminology, that poverty impacts crime. However, suggestions that poverty *itself* constitutes a crucial determinant of crime are disputable. Some researchers argue that crime and violence does not originate in poverty per se, but rather in impoverishment and inequality[9]. Youths who believe that money equates to power, and that money defines a person's self-worth, will be most vulnerable to turn to illegitimate means of gaining financial power. Adolescents and youths of the lower classes in Belize are increasingly susceptible to the attraction of wealth, power and social status. Having limited opportunity to attain such material and symbolic success in legitimate ways (education, employment and hard work) results in their considering illicit ways to achieve those goals.

- **Unemployment:** Unemployment is also a very important variable that directly affects the spate of youth involvement in crime and violence in Belize, both as victims and perpetrators. Where there are limited opportunities for gainful employment, young people will be forced to turn to informal means to obtain money (drug peddling, prostitution, robbery etc.). Research in the Caribbean and Latin American region consistently shows that increases in crime are clearly correlated to increases in unemployment rates[10].

"Lots of youths are hungry out in this society. Do you know what it is like to wake up and have no idea what you will eat? You are out of school; you do not have a job, nor money and nobody to help you get something to eat? If we cannot get things the legal way, then we just have to do it the illegal way: grab someone's chain, rob a Chinese vendor, sell some weed- we need to hustle to live."[11]

The Belize National Census (2011) shows a national unemployment rate of 23.1%, which equates to about 30,000 people in the country. It also indicated that about two-thirds of persons 14 years and over were either working or looking for a job. Further, the CPA states that there was a gradual decline in unemployment from 1998 to 2007 in Belize followed by a sub-

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9   Ramos, 1996; Stack, 1984.

10   Harriot, 2002; Kazi, 2003; WHO, 2004.
11   Resident, Wagner's Youth Facility, 2011.

stantial jump, from 9% to 13% in the last 2 years as the economic situation has worsened.

Table 2: Unemployment Rates by Age Group (2009); Population Percentage

Unemployment by Age Group 2009	Women	Men	Total
14 -19	43%	26%	**33%**
20-24	28%	16%	**20%**
25 -49	16%	5%	10%
50-64	21%	6%	11%
65+	9%	5%	6%
All ages	**20%**	**8%**	**13%**

Source: Country Poverty Assessment (2009).

This table shows that the largest unemployed groups in the population are youths between the ages of 14-24 (50%) and that more women than men are unemployed in the country. This suggests there is also a lack of gender perspective which affects women more than men.

• **Lack of Access to Education:** Closely related to the issue of unemployment is another correlation that defines the face of poverty in Belize: access to education. Many parents cannot afford to send their children to school because of the high costs related to formal education in Belize (tuition, fees, books, uniforms, supplies etc.). Hence,

poverty, unemployment and access to formal education are highly interrelated factors that underlie the youth-involved violence phenomenon in the country. It is well established that the development of any nation directly hinges on its capacity to educate and empower its human polity. And yet, while the 2010 Population Census revealed that a total of 88,000 persons of the population of Belize were enrolled in formal education in 2010, the Horizon 2030 report[12] on national developmental issues in Belize cites that approximately 11,000 primary school aged children (5-13 years) are not attending school and that almost 60% of the secondary school age (14-17 years) population is not enrolled in school.

The implications of these statistics are easy to recognize. The Horizon 2030 Report states, "first, a significant percentage of the population is not being educated to basic standards of literacy and numeracy as is provided in primary school. Second, over half of the youth population does not have access to basic education required for employment, since most entry level jobs require a high school diploma. Therefore, the majority of young people who are preparing to enter the workforce are without minimum qualifications for employment. This youth are therefore largely unemployed and unemployable."(2010)

• **The Subculture of Violence:**

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12 Second Progress Report: Horizon 2030 National Development Framework for Belize.

"I don't see anything wrong with selling drugs. It is a legitimate way of making money, as long as you are not killing anyone. I believe it is ok to sell drugs."[13]

The quotation above reflects the socialization of youth who are products of the subculture of crime and violence existing in the urban ghettos of Belize. Within this subculture, *money* and the processes involved in attaining it are revered as the most valued good. Unfortunately, however, Belizeans are living in a country where there is a chronic disparity between those who have and those who do not have but really want to have. The rich are very rich in Belize and the poor are extremely poor[14]. Between the myths and the realities, there are few, very few, who have moved from the extremes of poverty, to the realms of wealth through illegal means. It is this perception that allows even the principled, those who understand what is wrong, to justify an initially nuanced involvement in the subculture of violence.

Where wealth exists besides poverty in any society, it is inevitable that there will be many problems, including increases in property crimes, violent crimes, organized crimes, as well as other economically motivated crimes such as corporate crimes, money laundering and embezzlement[15]. All of these types of crimes are prevalent within the Belizean society. Combined, these have become , drug-related gang wars, which are the major source of current public dismay and anxiety in the tiny country.

Elijah Anderson (1998) presented a subculture theory of violence to describe the plight of African Americans living in inner cities in the United States. He noted that these people lived in accordance to a particular "code of the street", which defines the shared values and expectations between individuals. Many people in the lower classes tend to form separate, identifiable *subcultures* in which they try to reach some sense of equilibrium and symbioses within their environment. Anderson describes the degradation that exists in these environments: poverty, declining number of legitimate jobs, increasing number of illegitimate ways to earn, violence, widespread drug use, and gun availability.

In Belize, the "code of the street" clearly exists in much of the urban ghettos of the capital city. The "Live by the gun, die by the gun", as well as, the "You have to fight to live, and do whatever it takes to survive and the streets" ethos are all the mantras emanating from this code. At the heart of this street code is the issue of respect. The resounding cry of many of today's youth is

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13   Focus Group Participant; Wagner's Youth Facility (2011).
14   World Bank, 2003.

15   Townsend & Gordon, 2002; Moser & Winton, 2002.

that they want to feel respected; they want people to recognize their worth and value, and give them their "props", even though many of them do not even acknowledge their own self-worth. In the subculture of violence, saving face is very important. As pointed out in the focus group discussions with the institutionalized youths of Belize, if at any time there is a slight inclination that their "face" has been disrespected, deadly outcomes can result. Throughout the urban ghettos, there is a common cry from the youth decrying that they do not feel respected by anyone. This perceived and real lack of respect frustrates them and leads them to feel justified in their violence, even in their killing. Fundamentally, feeling powerful, respected, and in control is a dimension of the subculture of violence in Belize that has deep-rooted and multifarious underpinnings.

"Everybody wants to be known as the "big man" out on the streets. We do not want to be seen as weak; we want everyone to think we are "bad" enough, and that we are willing to do anything. Even going to prison is power; the image and reputation of being a "killer, murderer, or a prisoner" is seen as big and something to be valued and respected."[16]

Violence Prevention

Violence prevention should be understood as a set of measures designed to avert violent acts. Furthermore, when violent acts occur, systems of violence preventioncan make amends for the damage and promote rehabilitation of the offender, reducing the possibility that the violence should happen again. From the perspective of sociology and criminology, violence prevention is classified across three levels: ***primary, secondary and tertiary prevention.*** The levels of prevention correspond to moments in time in which the violence occurs: before an act of violence, when violence is present, and when violence has occurred. In order to prevent violence on the whole, both the general and specific factors associated with violenceneed to be addressed.

- **PRIMARY VIOLENCE PREVENTION** is aimed at reducing the risk factors commonly associated with violence and the increased probability that a young person or group of young people would become victims of violence or act violently. The objective is to prevent violence from occurring in the first place. The youths who are targeted in primary violence prevention initiatives are all youths who have yet to become involved in violence, either as victims or perpetrators.

16　Focus Group participants; Wagner's Youth Facility (2011).

- **SECONDARY VIOLENCE PREVENTION** focuses attention on both vulnerable groups already caught up in subcultures of violence who are at risk of victimization and special groups who express violent attitudes or behaviors. Secondary prevention often includes programs that attend specifically to homeless adolescents and young adults, youths with addictions, victims of abuse and institutionalized youth. This level also includes programming for youth gang members or those involved in violent groups. Specifically, the strategies are aimed towards deterring youths who are exposed to three or more of the risk factors commonly associated with youth involvement in violence. These youths are most vulnerable to violence because of the physical, emotional and psychological effects that are often associated with its risk factors (stress, depression, anger, anxiety, hopelessness, cognitive deficiencies etc.).

- **Tertiary violence prevention** involves a focus on the rehabilitation of young people who are perpetrators of violence and have been incarcerated by the state. The main objective focuses on restoring the harm caused to the victims of the violence, and prevention of repeat offenses. Some examples of tertiary level violence prevention include community-based substance abuse rehabilitation programs, post-institutionalized counseling, restitution programs, restorative justice programs etc.

Youths who are institutionalized or who have been in contact with the criminal justice system at some point, (arrested, detained, remanded, institutionalized) need unique and specialized programs geared towards rebuilding and restructuring their lives along a positive and more self-empowered path. Tertiary level prevention strategies therefore contribute to helping violent youths re-focus and start afresh so that they can become more productive and have a law-abiding and productive future. This is often a very challenging and difficult task, since institutionalization comes with a great many negative, hard to curb ramifications on youth (loss of self-esteem, shame, anger, bitterness, aggression and rage, mental health problems, fraternization with criminals, etc.). The goal is therefore to breakdown the dependencies and emotions that have captivated these youths and helps them to rebuild themselves positively. These youth need the support to start over with a better attitude, better health, better perceptions of themselves and society and better, more realistic life goals.

In order for prevention to be effective it needs to be understood as an integral and integrated collection of measures that contribute to the well-being of youth, particularly the most vulnerable groups. It must also recognize the absence of peaceful coexistence and seek ways to build peace. In that sense, prevention strategies need

to take the long view and should be designed and implemented as a set of measures coordinated by the institutions of the State in alliance with national and local civil society and youth organizations.

Restorative Justice and Violence Prevention

Restorative justice is a new movement in the fields of victimology and criminology. Acknowledging that crime causes injury to people and communities, it recognizes that justice repairs those injuries and that all parties affected must be permitted to participate in the justice process. Restorative justice programmes, therefore, enable the victim, the offender and affected members of the community to be directly involved in responding to the crime. They become central to the criminal justice process, with governmental and legal professionals serving as facilitators of a system that aims at offender accountability, reparation to the victim and full participation by the victim, offender and community. The restorative *process* of involving all parties – often in face-to-face meetings – is a powerful way of addressing not only the material and physical injuries caused by crime, but the social, psychological and relational injuries as well. In addressing victim and offender reintegration, they can include material, emotional and spiritual support and assistance. This approach brings the human dimension of all sides

into focus and can demystify the motivations of crime, while bringing into the spotlight the human tragedies that the violence and the crime bring.

One definition of restorative justice that emphasizes the importance of both the restorative processes and its outcomes is as follows: "*Restorative justice is a theory of justice that emphasizes repairing the harm caused by criminal behavior. It is best accomplished when the parties themselves meet cooperatively to decide how to do this. This can lead to transformation of people, relationships and communities*"[17].

Restorative justice is different from contemporary criminal justice in several ways. First, it views criminal acts more comprehensively. Rather than defining crime as simply an act of breaking the, it recognizes that offenders harm victims, communities and even themselves. Second, it involves more parties in responding to crime rather than giving key roles only to government and the offender. It includes the victims and those in the affected communities as well. Finally, it measures success differently. Rather than measuring how much punishment is inflicted, it measures how much harm is repaired or prevented, thus focusing on the resoration of peace rather than the punishment of perpetrators (which can be perceived as the prolongation of conflict between perpetrators and the State)

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17   Center for Justice and Reconciliation; Nov (2008).

The key objectives of restorative justice are:

- to attend fully to *victims' needs* – material, financial, emotional and social (including those personally close to the victim who may be similarly affected);

- to prevent recurrence of violence by *reintegrating offenders* into the community;

- to enable offenders to assume active *responsibility* for their actions;

- to recreate a *working community* that supports the rehabilitation of offenders and victims and is active in preventing crime;

- to provide a means of *avoiding escalation* of legal justice and the associated costs and delays;

- to focus on building peace rather than perpetuating the conflict between perpetrators and the State.

Overall, Restorative Justice is based on the following assumptions:

- that crime has its origins in social conditions and relationships in the community;

- that crime prevention is dependent on community engagement and opportunity

to take some responsibility (along with local and central governments' responsibility for establishing social policies intended to remedy conditions that foster crime);

- that the aftermath of crime cannot be fully resolved for the parties themselves without their personal involvement;

- that approaches to justice must be flexible enough to respond to the particular exigencies, personal needs and potential for action in each case;

- that partnership and common objectives among justice agencies, and between them and the community, are essential to optimal effectiveness and efficiency;

- that effective justice consists of a balanced approach in which no single interest is allowed to dominate the others.

Restorative Justice Programs are typically characterized by four key values[18]:

1. **Encounter:** Create opportunities for victims, offenders and community members who want to do so to meet to discuss the crime and its aftermath.

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18   http://www.restorativejustice.org/university-classroom/01introduction

2. **Amends:** Expect offenders to take steps to repair the harm they have caused.

3. **Reintegration:** Seek to restore victims and offenders to whole, contributing members of society.

4. **Inclusion:** Provide opportunities for parties with a stake in a specific crime to participate in its resolution.

Some examples of Restorative Justice Programs include: Victim-offender mediation; Conferencing, Victim Assistance, Ex-offender Assistance, Restitution, and Community Service.

LEGAL AND POLITICAL FRAMEWORK

The State is ultimately responsible for protecting and safeguarding its citizenry against crime, violence and social harm. Therefore, the legal framework should incorporate those structures, institutions, and systems that are grounded in "the rule of law" and are set in place to protect, safeguard and solidify the democratic principles of justice, equity, and freedom for all citizens of a sovereign nation. The various constitutional rules, regulations and legislation in Belize that cover the jurisprudence of adolescents and youth involved in violence are listed below:

- **The Belize Constitution**: The Constitution is the bedrock of any nation-state. It sets the foundational blocks for the implicit social contract that exists between the State and its citizens. It is a social contract that was created to ensure and protect the rights and freedoms of every citizen within its jurisdiction, while in turn stipulating what needs to be done on the part of the citizenry to enable humanity to thrive.

- **The Juvenile Offenders Act**: The Act defines the child as a person under 18. The Act sets out how child offenders should be dealt with under the law and it also establishes the Juvenile Court to hear and adjudicate issues concerning children and young persons under the age of 18.

- **Penal System Reform (Alternative Sentences) Act**: This Act sets out alternative sentences for first time offenders, juvenile offenders and persons convicted of the offence of failure to maintain their children. The Act establishes the Community Rehabilitation Department (CRD) staffed with Community Rehabilitation Officers (CRO's) who are responsible for the rehabilitation of persons given alternative sentences under the Act.

- **Criminal and Justice Code:** The Criminal Code sets out the offences for which juvenile

offenders are arrested and charged. It also establishes that the age for criminal responsibility as 12 years old, which is the standard used in the Caribbean Region. Notably, the Code allows the use of corporal punishment or the use of violence on juveniles in custodial institutions and in the Wagner Youth Facility (WYF).

- **Summary Jurisdiction Procedure Act:** This Act defines a child as "under the age of 14" and an adult as "over the age of 16". Clearly, the Act is in contradiction with the Juvenile Offenders Act, which defines a child as "fewer than 18". Further, the Summary Jurisdiction Procedure Act governs the procedures in the Magistrate Court in which majority of the cases against juveniles are charged. Accordingly, the Act sets out procedures for the Summary Jurisdiction (Offences) Act, most juveniles are arrested for offences under this Act; therefore, the age requirement must be brought in agreement with other juvenile offender's legislation.

- **Indictable Procedures Act:** Establishes the indictable offences in Belize, some of which are committed by children. These offences are tried in the Supreme Court where the prosecutor is an attorney-at-law attached to the Department of Public Prosecution's (DPP) Office. If convicted of these crimes, juveniles will face a custodial sentence.

- **Families and Children Act** (FACA): This Act sets out the legal framework in which children are protected and cared for in Belize. It includes and outline of the rights of children and the responsibilities of parents, guardians and the state representatives in charge of residential institutions for children. The Act also seeks to protect the privacy of juveniles.

- **Social Services Agencies Act and Regulations:** The Social Services Agencies Act and Regulations requires all facilities housing children and providing day care for children to become registered. The Act also prescribes minimum standards that must be maintained in the physical upkeep of the institution to ensure the proper care of children housed there. [19]

- **Misuse of Drugs Act:** The Act makes the illicit use of drugs a crime. However, there is a lack of strong enforcement to prevent shops from selling alcohol and pharmaceutical drugs to juveniles, which often leads to substance abuse.

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19 The major deficiency of the act is that it does not require social services institutions to have on staff, persons trained in social work. This creates problems where institutions undertake the care of children who have committed crimes and who are in need of specialized rehabilitative services.

POLITICAL FRAMEWORK

The political framework includes the policies, programs, plans, and projects instituted by the government to enhance the quality of life for all citizens on a national and local level. Most of the sectorial policies, programs and action plans assessed and included in this document are derived from the United Democratic Party (UDP) Political Manifesto 2008-2013. Furthermore, there are three other policy doctrines that closely coordinate and complement this policy document. These include The National Youth Policy (which is being constructed parallel to this document), the RESTORE Belize Program and Strategic Plan (2011-2015), and the National Security Strategy of Belize.

The main national-level programs and policies that form the Political Framework for violence prevention in Belize include:

National Plans:

- Horizon 2030 Long Term National Development Framework

- National Plan of Action for Families and Children (NPA 2004-2015)

- National Poverty Elimination Strategy and Action Plan

- Central Emergency Management Organization (CEMO) Strategic Plan for Crime and Violence (2010)

- Medium Term Macro Economic Development Strategy:

National Programs:

- Conscious Youth Development Program-CYDP

- National Crime and Violence Trends Observatory

- Youth for the Future-YFF

- National Youth Cadet Core and National 4H Program

- Southside Poverty Alleviation Project

- Community Action for Public Safety (CAPS) Project

- Community Policing Programs:
  1) G.R.E.A.T Program (Gang Resistance Education and Training)
  2) Zone Beat Liaison Officers (ZBLO)
  3) Pólice Crime Prevention Education Program (PEPEP)

4) Belize Police Department Youth Cadet Corp

5) Social Resource Officer Program (S.R.O).

As mentioned above, this policy proposal can be closely linked and integrated with three other policy documents, namely the RESTORE Belize Strategic Plan (2011-2015), the National Security Strategy, and the Belize National Youth Policy (2011). The latter of these three is the policy document that best complements the Violence Prevention Policy Proposal.

The Belize National Youth Policy (2011)

At the national level, the development of a Youth Policy stands out as the most significant intervention that correlates directly to the issue of youth involvement in violence, both as victims and perpetrators. In fact, the Draft National Youth Policy (2011) listed the top (5) priority goals/needs identified by the youths who participated in the national consultations for the development of the Youth Policy. Those five priority goals include: *Participation, Education, Socio-economic Opportunity, Health and Well-being, and Protection*.

The Protection Goal within the National Youth Policy addresses the degree to which adolescents and youth are protected – through laws and policies as well as social practices – from exploitation and harm. It is within this context that a need for a National Youth-Involved Violence Prevention Policy is most relevant. All Belizean youths have a right to live, grow and develop within a peaceful, caring and organized society, free from social ills such as poverty, inequity, social injustices, crime and violence. It is the duty of the government and policy makers to enact and institute programs, policies and interventions that can safeguard the overall well-being of all Belizeans youths. The Youth-Involved Violence Prevention Proposal is the first step in enacting meaningful change about decreasing youth involvement in violence in Belize, whether as victims or perpetrators.

Diagnostic of the situation of violence related to youth in belize

Diagnostic of the situation of violence related to youth in belize

The Belizean society is rich with cultural diversity, an intriguing historical legacy, and a vivacious youthful citizenry. With a population of approximately 316,000, Belize sits nestled in the heart of Central America. It is indeed one of the smallest modern developing countries in Latin American and the Caribbean encompassing a total area of 22,700 km, Belize is 274 km (170 miles) long and 109 km (68 miles) wide, with a population density of approximately 30.9 inhabitants per square mile. Its human polity is a melting pot, compromising of six major ethnic groups: Creoles (21%), Mestizo (50%), Garinagu (4.6%), Mayas (10 %), Mennonite, and East Indians (3.0%). In addition, immigrants from all over the world, including Asia, Africa, Eastern and Central Europe, as well as, India come to Belize and enjoy building their livelihood in a free, and democratic, developing society[20].

However, similar to rest of its Latin American and Caribbean neighbors, during the last decade the Belizean society has been pervasively confronted by what seems to be "importunate plagues of social crisis". These challenges include: consistent and turbulent political and civil turmoil, tragic economic downturns, inflation, decreased productivity and exportation, increased unemployment, increased rates in crime including property crimes and crimes against persons, and compounded by perhaps the most unfortunate of all these social ills: increased violent crimes. It is the high rate of homicide, and more particularly, that involving youth under the age of 25, which is the most troubling. It is estimated that approximately 29.5 percent of homicide in Belize occur among youths between the ages of 14-24[21]. This is particularly discouraging in a tiny country like Belize, with 60% of the country being under 19 years[22]. Marginalization, poverty, a serious yearning for upward social mobility among the classes of the social hierarchy, stringent economic inequality, and the existence of an isolated subculture that challenges the normative values of mainstream society are some of the challenging by-products of modernization. [23]

20　PAHO, 2005.

21　IDB, 2003.
22　SIB, Preliminary Census Report, 2011.
23　Durkheim's theory of modernization purports that

In Belize, increases in property crimes, drug-related crimes, gang-related violence, homicide and other serious crimes are all primary indicators of the breakdown of the traditional forms of normative controls and the invasion and dominance of a new money-driven cultural ethos., This emerging phenomenon is generating significant social strain particularly among those in the lower sectors of the social hierarchy, who find themselves struggling against the contradictory dilemma of satisfying their wants as opposed to their need.

Table 3: Serious Crimes in Belize (2001-2010)

CRIMES	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	TOTAL
MURDER	64	87	67	79	81	92	97	103	97	128	**1553**
RAPE	56	54	50	53	47	44	38	38	30	18	**838**
ROBBERY	546	571	441	442	653	526	514	532	526	430	**8754**
BURGLARY	1942	1986	1713	1660	1758	1514	1256	1303	1286	769	**28855**
THEFT	1866	1886	1704	1533	1587	1587	1233	1413	1332	803	**30265**
CARNAL KNOWLEDGE	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	66	98	62	39	**265**
TOTAL	**4474**	**4584**	**3975**	**3767**	**4126**	**3763**	**3204**	**3487**	**3333**	**2187**	**70530**

Source: Belize Police Department, 2011.

The table above illustrates the fluctuation of serious crimes in Belize including: murder, rape, robbery, burglary theft and carnal knowledge over the last decade (2001-2010).

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rapid economic changes usually bring with it the breakdown of traditional modes of social control such as the family, moral traditions, and cultural norms. He refers to this breakdown of normative controls as *anomie* (Vold, Bernard & Snipes, 2002). Much of this anomie, is attributed to the by-products of modernization, and has created a social environment that is conducive for crime and lack of social control.

In all these crimes the growing tendency goes in ascendant, except to recent years where some improvements had appear in crimes such as rape, robbery, and burglary, theft, carnal knowledge. Even given these statistical tendencies, it is impossible to compare the statics to the perceptions of the population as there is no official victimization statistics to draw from yet.[24]

Youth Associated with Violence

The statistical data of the Department of Correction (DOC) of Belize illustrates that between 1990 and 2002, the number of prison detainees aged sixteen years and under had tripled. In addition, statistical data obtained from the Kolbe Rehabilitation Center[25] showed that the number of juveniles who have been convicted and/or reprimanded within the prison from 2002 to 2009 had been steadily increasing as well. In 2002, 88 youth (under 20 years) were institutionalized at the Wagner's Youth Facility (WYF). By 2005, that number had increased to 277. In 2009, the number of persons under the age of 25 confined to the Belize Central Prison totaled 393.

Table 4: Numbers of convicted prisioners by Age and Group: 2003, 2009.

Age	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009
Total	1,167	1,331	1,345	1,338	1,086	1114	1,114
Under 16	23	22	11	52	25	55	3
16 - 20	201	137	178	210	152	210	160
21 - 25	244	309	296	280	222	208	230
26 - 30	182	227	256	225	185	215	198
31 - 35	184	190	196	156	161	142	168
36 - 40	159	154	133	140	101	123	136
41 - 45	163	289	275	275	240	161	86

Source: KOLBE, Records Department, Belize Central Prison (2010).

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24 A victimization survey was requested by the Government of Belize as part os the CAPS program of IDB but has yet to be implemented.
25 The Hatteville Prison was once governed by the Department of Corrections, under the Ministry of National Security; however, in August 2002, the institution was privatized, and it is now under the administration of the KOLBE foundation. Today it is called the Kolbe Rehabilitation Center.

The previous table illustrates that there is a clear disproportionate number of individuals between the ages of **16-25 years** who comprise the total inmate population in the Belize Central Prison from 2003-2009. Essentially, the majority of the inmate population in Belize is youth.

Youth, Gangs & Violence in Belize:

Research and reports show that over the last decade (2000-2011), much of the violent crimes occurring in Belize City were attributed to drug-related gang violence, and the common factors leading to youth involvement in gangs are **poverty, the availability of drugs and the lack of sense of belonging to the school, the community, the family or a job.** This point could be further illustrated in the voice of the youth in Belize today:

> *"Now in Belize there is heavy competition about who can get the most "bodies". The more people you kill, the more notoriety you get; the bigger the man you become; the youths out here want that power and respect that comes with being a murderer; your reputation and fame is the most important thing where I come from.[26]"*

In 2005, Micheal Rosberg conducted a study of the impact of crime and violence on children; the report highlighted the extent of participation in criminal activity among children and adolescents in Belize. The study found that 12% of the boys and 5% of the girls surveyed said that they had joined a gang at some point, and 14% of the boys and 12% of the girls had carried drugs. The report also pointed out that some of the risk factors associated with Belizean children and adolescents getting involved in antisocial behaviors, juvenile delinquency, and later on criminal activity include: economic variables such as poverty and unemployment, emotional factors such as not having a sense of belonging, having a low self-esteem, and feeling unloved or emotionally neglected by their care givers, and physical factors such as physical, mental and sexual abuse in their home, community and other institutions[27].

It is extremely important to note that not all youths who are members of a gang engage in criminal activities. In fact, there are numerous cases where youth members of gangs are actually victims of their circumstance, since brutal tactics and violence (verbal threats, physical assault to themselves and family) are often used to coerce young people in violent neighborhoods to join the local gang. By extension, some youths choose to join so as to avoid being the target of violence by other gang members in their neighborhoods.

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26 Focus Group Participant; Wagner's Youth Facility (2011).

27 M. Rosberg (2005).

Chart I: Escalation of Murder Rate (2006-2008)

ANNUAL MURDER RATE PER 100,000 POPULATION
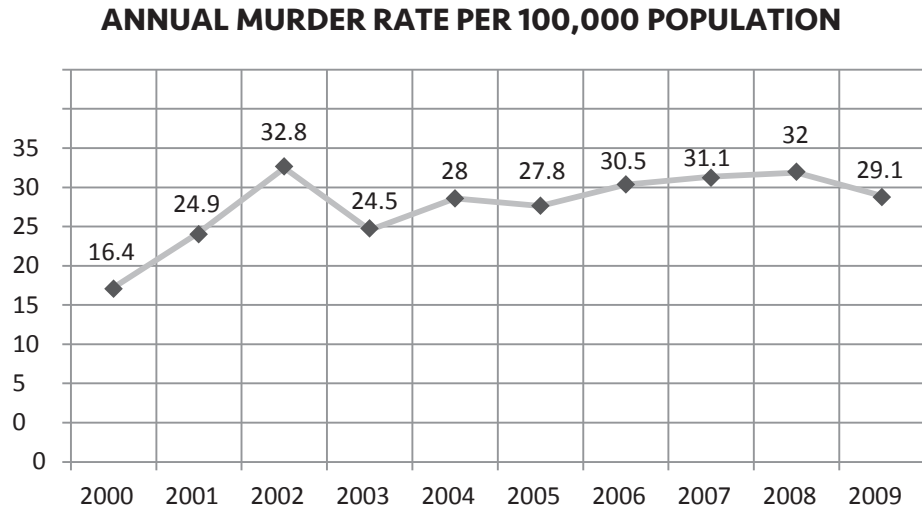
Source: The Belize Police Department, Statistical Unit (2010).

Chart 1 above illustrates the growing murder rate in the country of Belize from 2000-2009. The years 2006-2008 were considered one of the most violent times in the country. During this time period in Belize City, gang violence began to generate much concern and anxiety across the nation.

Unfortunately, the gang subculture in Belize provides a haven for many of youth who are experiencing the strain of society and of being pressured to pursue goals and values. Pressures that are virtually impossible to overcome , at least through the traditional means (education, career, hard work) as set forth by mainstream society. Many of the participants of focus group sessions used in researching policy options are currently members of a gang. Each expressed that their reasons for joining a gang involved financial, social and emotional motives. (See the section above on the culture of violence and risk factors).

Belize City: Urban Epicenter of Violence

In 2010, the national murder rate of Belize increased to a record level 128, essentially 39:100,000, and as high as 75:100, 000 in Belize City[28], which has been dubbed, "the epicenter of violence in the country", by the Belize Police Department.

In 2008, the Ministry of National Security reported that involvement and affliation with organized gangs were among the leading cause of death within the country of Belize. , and more specifically in Belize City, which is home to approximately 20-30[29] organized street gangs with about 530 youths involved (ranging in age from 13-35). Approximately thirteen (13) of these street gangs are affiliated with the BLOODS, and ten (10) are affiliated with the CRIPS.

In 2008, there were 24 suspected gang related murders recorded in Belize City, as compared to 13 in 2007. This reflects an increase of 84.6% in the number of gang related murders. During the same period (2008), 103 shooting incidents were recorded countrywide. A total of 77 of these were recorded in Belize City with approximately 90% believed to be gang related. This represents a 6.2 % increase. Of this total, 45 occurred in Belize City with 38 occurring on the Southside and 7 on the North side. Of the 45 murders that occurred in the city, 24 or 53.3% were believed to be gang related.

According to the Commanding Officer of the Gang Suppression Unit (GSU), Senior Supt Mark Vidal (2011), the main motive for these murders and shootings are **to settle previous misunderstandings and to protect established drug distribution networks** between street gangs in the city. Accordingly, and more disturbingly, the CO of the GSU confirmed that the organized gangs in Belize have started to aggressively recruit very young children into the gangs, as young as 12 years old. "This is a strategic move on behalf of the gang leaders. They groom and train the new and young recruits to carry out hits now. The rational is that juveniles will get a "break", in terms of jail time and institutionalization." Moreover he added that at the young age of 12-15, these children are also easier to manipulate (2011).

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28   UNICEF, 2010 .
29   Gang Suppression Unit (Belize Police Department); 2010.

Box 1: Why are gang leaders recruiting 12-15 year olds to join gangs?

- A young boy would not be suspected by the Police, which decrease the likelihood that he would be caught. The police see the youth as "nobody" and not capable of doing the crime.

- Young boys are easily manipulated and influenced.

- Fear and intimidation: if they do not do it, then they will be "dealt" with.

- Ego and Pride of young boys: they want to feel "big" and a part of the community; they want to be valued.

- Shorter jail time for juveniles; they become hardened criminals after jail time.

Source: Information provided by participants of the focus groups held
at the Wagner's Youth Facility, Belize Central Prison (2011).

Youth Victims of Violence in Belize

A total of 1,850 children and adolescents participated in a national survey for a report on the impact of crime and violence on children in Belize. The survey showed that over 37% of boys and 43% of girls felt unsafe on the streets; 8% of boys and 2% of girls reported having been stabbed. Overall, 25% of the boys and 30% of the girls reported exposure to some form of crime or violence. In addition, over a quarter of the students reported that their greatest fear in the community including schools is crime. The fear of crime was highest in Belize District (61.9%) followed by Cayo District (43.7%).[30]

Additionally, in 2009, Dr. Bernard Bulwer from the Karl Heusner Memorial Hospital (KMHM) stated that, *"The cost of crime is not just the incalculable loss of life for the victims and their families... It's not just the five-, or ten-, or twenty- or forty-thousand dollars of your taxes that goes into emergency medi-*

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30   Rosberg M, (2005).

cal care, surgical care, nursing care, medications, medical equipment, and hospitalization (for each gunshot victim) at the KHMH—it's the incalculable loss of life, and the near resignation of us as a people to this seemingly never-ending tragedy. Belize had 95 murders in 2009; the KHMH recorded 91 other gunshot victims who showed up alive at the emergency department."[31]

A majority of those victims were between the ages of 15 and 29 years. Over one-third (36%) of victims arrived dead. Those who were alive had received life-threatening wounds thus requiring surgery. Gunshot victims, due to the nature of the wounds inflicted by the shotgun,typically require immediate attention from an emergency team comprised of medical officers, specialists and nurses.

The official BPD statistics showed that more than half the murder victims in 2010 were under the age of 30, and the most frequent victims of gun violence in 2010 were ages 22 to 30. Further, several children also lost their lives violently during that year 2010. There were 9 murder victims who were ages 16 and under. Another 27 were ages 17 to 21. Nearly 9 out of 10 of these murder victims were males. Interestingly, there was an unprecedented number of female homicide victims in 2010, with a total of 17 females falling victim to gun violence. These murder victims ranged from ages 8-56.

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31   RESTORE Belize: Strategic Plan (2011-2015).

PROGRAMMATIC RESPONSES OF THE STATE AND NON-STATE ACTORS

With so many burning national issues affecting youth, public safety, national security and economic development, the government of Belize, has instituted and adopted a number of plans, polices, programs and other interventions geared towards fortifying the social structure in general, and more specifically a better quality of life for Belizean youths and families. Many of these State level interventions, developed over the last 5-10 years, are centered on socio-economic fortification in the areas of: *Education, Employment, Restorative Justice, Inmate Rehabilitation and Reinsertion, Protection, Conflict Resolution, Criminal and Juvenile Justice Reform, Health and Well-being, Recreation and Participation.*

The State has created and developed several institutions based on programmatic initiatives that could contribute to minimizing risk factors that contribute to youth involvement in crime and violence: **Conflict Resolution, Mediation, Protection, Youth Empowerment and Participation.** The main goal of these interventions is to enhance the quality of life for all Belizeans, particularly those living in communities that are more susceptible to crime and violence. Furthermore, these initiatives seek to provide more social services that foster the development and empowerment of young people in the Belizean

society. TBetween the main programs that are having a positive impact, the following are important to note:

Youth for the Future - YFF: The primary mandate of this initiative is to build the capacity of programs and organizations that provide services to youth. It also puts attention on building partnerships among organizations for joint projects in youth development. It was established in 2002, under the theme "Tomorrow Starts Today". The program envisages creating environments where the youth population can develop positive outlooks and look constructively at the future. There are several related programs and services that have been developed along these lines, including: (i) a Youth Governance Unit, (ii) An Enterprise/Job Creation Unit, (iii) A Violence Reduction/ HIV/AIDS Unit, (iv) Two Positive Enhancement Training Institution, (v) The National Youth Cadet Service Corps. (vi) The National 4-H & Youth Development Centre, and (vii) a Resource/Training Center .

Conscious Youth Development Program - CYDP: The Conscious Youth Development Program (CYDP) is a government entity introduced as part of the government's programmatic effort to assist in the reduction of gangs, crime and violence. The CYDP is mandated to conduct field research, resolve conflicts within communities, create opportunities for fast employment recognition (OFFER), carry out social impact programs, conduct assessments, and facilitate weekend programs for employed youths .

National Youth Cadet Core: Is a 10-month residential programme for young men between the ages of 13-18 years who are exposed to and partake in high-risk behaviors that increase their likelihood to pursue crime and violence. This programme, located at Mile 21 on the Western Highway, has the capacity to serve an intake of 75 young men. The programme is divided into three phases: i) Behavior Modification Phase – character building through discipline , ii) Academic Phase –building communication skills, iii) Vocational Phase – introduction to marketable skill training, apprenticeship and job placement.

National 4H Foundation: Is a Youth Development Program filled with educational, exciting and fun-filled activities. The 4-H's means "Head, Heart, Hands and Health". The National 4-H & Youth Development Centre is committed to equip Belizean youth with marketable skills that will support and sustain their efforts to become productive citizens. The program, located in Belmopan City has a national focus with opportunities for young men and women between the ages of 14-19 years who are not enrolled in school. The duration of the program is for 10 months. The program has the capacity to serve 50 students.

Through their main objectives they have been able to develop a positive attitude towards agriculture/vocational education as a gainful means of employment, establish personal development and life skill training to students, establish 4-H satellite clubs throughout the country, secure job placements and/or entrepreneurial skills, support re-entry into the formal education system, conduct outreach programs and provide technical support to farmers.

Gwen Lizzarraga School of Continuing Education Program: This program is a part of the initiative of the Ministry of Education and Youth. The objective is to provide opportunities for residence from urban communities to go back to school and receive a high school equivalency certificate. The Government also provides a substantial amount of scholarships for the certificate program to youths who are identified as "at risk" or vulnerable to violence, and single mothers who are raising children in violent neighborhoods. The program started in 2011 and the enrollment has been steadily increasing.

Community Policing Unit (Belize Police Department): This special unit was created to enhance and improve Community Relations and Law Enforcement through proactive policing. Special programs instituted by this Unit include: (i) G.R.E.A.T Program (Gang Resistance Education and Training), (ii) Zone Beat Liaison Officers (ZBLO) (iii) Police Crime Prevention Education

Program (PEPEP), (iv) Belize Police Department Youth Cadet Corp, (v) Social Resource Officer Program (S.R.O).

Decreasing crime and violence, criminal justice system reform, improve public safety

The Government also has a number of intiatives that have been established to reduce crime and violence in the country, to decrease public fear and anxiety about the safety of Belize's citizenry and to empower the Criminal Justice system to efficiently address the issues and challenges surrounding crime and violence. These initiatives include:

The Ministry of Police and Public Safety and the Ministry of National Security, **Defense and Immigration:** These two ministers were created in 2009. [32]

Crime Control Council (CCC): The Crime Control Council was created in 2008 as a response to the ongoing crime and violence problem that is plaguing the country. The Chairman of the

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32 The government transformed the former Ministry of National Security and Defense into two separate ministries responsible for issues relating to public safety and national security. The mandate of the newly created Ministry of Police and Public Safetyto manage and administer to the Police Department, to deal with issues of public secrurity, and to address the growing fear and concerns surrounding the increases in crime and violence in the country. While the second Ministry to emerge is focused on national security, defense and Immigration.

Council is renowned, legal attorney Mr. Michael Young. Members of the council include representatives across various sectors of the society including: education, church, private sector, civil society, members of the Bar Association and others. The objectives of the Crime Control Council include: to monitor the crime situation in the country on a continuous basis; to plan, develop and coordinate comprehensive crime prevention programs and strategies; to promote employability and job placement of unemployed youth; to liaise with a broad spectrum of community-based and social-service organizations to develop a coordinated team-approach to reducing gang violence, the effects of substance abuse, and other criminal activities; to solicit contributions and donations from the business sector and other donor agencies to fund constructive programs for reducing crime; and to make recommendations to the Prime Minister for strengthening or reforming the law.

Gang Suppression Unit: The Gang Suppression Unit (GSU) formerly known as the Anti-Gang Unit was reformed and reorganized as a part of the Government's response to the growing gang problems plaguing Belize City. The GSU falls under the portfolio of the newly created Ministry of Police and Public Safety.

The GSU has the mission to combat gang related crime through the intertwining of intelligence, investigation and operations. It is designed to ensure that while combating gang violence and crime, it is motivated by a regard for human dignity, upholding the Constitution and enforcing the rule of law so as to reduce crime, reduce the fear of crime and to restore public confidence. The general objectives of the GSU are to dismantle gang structures, as well as to assist in bringing individual gang members who have committed offences to justice.

Between the specific objectives they have are: (i) gathering information on major gangs and their leaders including those at the Belize Central Prison; ii) conducting investigation of criminal gangs thereby amassing evidence for prosecutorial purposes; iii) conducting criminal gang analysis through tactical, operational and strategic methods; and IV) conducting operations against determined targets.

RESTORE Belize Program: Launched in June of 2010, the RESTORE Belize Programme is a crime prevention initiative, which operates directly out of the Office of the Prime Minister. The mission of RESTORE Belize is *"to make Belize a safe, vibrant home for residents through inclusive, multi-sectorial, and citizen-centered action."*

This Programme functions primarily as a coordinating agency that pulls together all government agencies to address the complex array of institutional, social and economic issues that have given rise to the high levels of violent crime in Belize.

A Programme Coordination Unit is responsible for coordinating and implementing actions identified by the Steering Committee and the Operational Sub-committees. It also monitors the progress and impact of their actions. The majority of the actions are executed by existing government, non-governmental or private agencies. The Programme Coordination Unit also assists in the coordination of plans and resources, the identification and securing of new resources, and the facilitation of public-private partnerships. Their Strategic Plan is based on three (3) major developmental pillars: Human Development, Economic Development, and Security/Governance.

Community Action for Public Safety (CAPS BL-L1014): The CAPS Project is part of the Ministry of Human Development and Social Transformation strategic plan; it is specifically geared towards reducing the incidence of crime and violence in Belize City by: (i) improving the government's capacity to coordinate and articulate strategic, comprehensive, interagency policies and actions to prevent violence; and (ii) promoting community mobilization and social cohesion with initiatives focused on social inclusion in order to assist the youth and families at-risk.

The project is divided into two (2) main components: the first is the strengthening of the National Public Safety and Governance efforts, and second to carry out the community action that includes the community Mobilization and the Community Violence Prevention Services. Regarding the later, to the project promotes and implements comprehensive strategies, specifically targeting vulnerable and youth at-risk, as well as juvenile offenders and their families, to address the different factors that increase the risks of crime and victimization. This component allows for the promotion and implementation of comprehensive strategies, specifically targeted to vulnerable and youth at-risk, as well as juvenile offenders and their families. Ultimately, this project has the potential to address the different factors that increase the risks of crime and victimization. This includes among others, activities for: (a) conflict resolution and school violence prevention; (b) school leveling and retention; (c) early detection of abuse and risks associated with substance abuse; (d) counseling and health improvement initiatives; (e) occupational education, training and support for productive activities; (f) job placement and employment through the strategic fostering of partnerships with the private sector; and (g) promotion of peaceful coexistence through extra-curricular activities (personal, recreational, sports and cultural development); and (h) strengthened community policing.

National Crime Trends Observatory (NCTO) Project: This project is a multi-year project coordinated by the Department of Public Security (DPS) of the Organization of American States

(OAS) and is instituted under the auspices of the Ministry of Police and Public Safety in Belize. It is focused on the creation of a Belize crime observatory with the primary purpose of strengthening the information systems, the analysis of crime and violence data, and the improvement of public security in the region. Primary aims of the Project are to promote the creation and operation of National Observatories in the Caribbean and to improve the quality and quantity of crime data collection in the Caribbean region.

CARICOM Anti-Gang Pilot Project: This Project is supported by the CARICOM Secretariat, the Ministry of Police and Public Safety, the Belize Police Department, the Community Policing Unit and the Ministry of Education and Youth. This program was launched in October 2011. The objective is to reduce youth gangs and gang violence within Belize City. The goal is to strengthen the capacity of youth and community members to design and implement programs to address gang formation and gang violence among and against youths. The project also seeks to increase livelihood opportunities and employability for economically and socially marginalized youth.

The most recent of phase of this project commenced with a three-day consultation involving stakeholders from the community who are involved in youth empowerment and violence prevention. The primary objectives of the consultations included: identifying immediate training needs in the areas of gang formation and violence prevention, and identifying schools and communities for intense prevention education programs.

Rehabilitation, reinsertion and restorative justice

Some of the State programs anjd projects are geared towards reformation within the criminal and Juvenile justice mechansims through the *rehabilitation* and *reinsertion* of troubled/institutionalized youthback into the society. Ultimately, the goal is to decrease recidivism and to deter individuals from returning to a life of crime and violence once released from prison. Simultaneously, the quality of life must be improved for those vulnerable within the Belizean society. One example of such initiatives is the **Ashcroft Rehabilitation Center (ARC).** This institution, located within the walls of the Belize Central Prison, addresses addiction among inmates. The addictions range from alcohol, drugs, emotional disorders and criminal and addictive thinking which lead individuals along destructive paths causing them to forget basic human values, priorities, and principles in life. While at ARC, each individual goes through a 120-day intensive therapy, which helps the individual to understand and come to terms with the various aspects of recovery.

NON-STATE PROGRAMMATIC IN-TERVENTIONS: PROGRAMS AND PROJECTS

The role of the Government, as the central authority and policy makers in Belize, is undoubtedly important in advancing meaningful progression towards preventing and reducing youth involvement in violence in Belize. However, many non-state actors including those from the Civil Society and the non-governmental sector have had a direct impact on the development and implementation of programs, projects and social initiatives geared toward youth development, empowerment and education, as well as criminal and justice reform. Outlined below are examples of non-state interventions geared towards violence and crime prevention in Belize.

- **Belize Red Cross: Restorative Justice Project:** This project was developed with the support of UNFPA and Solettere to address the issue of youth violence in Belize. It is geared towards providing Belizean youths with a strong set of skills to become true youth leaders and create positive changes within their communities through a peer-to-peer system. This project includes training Red Cross Youth Leaders from across Belize in restorative justice practices through a 4-day workshop. The intention is to train youth leaders so they in turn can bring similar trainings to their own communities,

thus expanding the understanding and skill base of restorative justice. They also create awareness of restorative justice practices throughout Belize, while partnering with other community organizations to develop a strong network of resources for youths

- **Belize Crime Stoppers:** Crime Stoppers is a program designed to reduce crime by partnering with the community, the media, the local police and other law enforcement agencies. The media reports the crime, the community identifies the criminal(s) who have committed the crime and provides information to Crime Stoppers anonymously, and the police acts upon the information provided by arresting and charging the criminals. When the criminals are arrested, they are effectively removed from the community hence reducing crime in the area. Crime can only be combated when everyone gets involved.

- **UNITED Belize Pilot Project:** This initiative comprises of at-risk youths and youths that have been through the criminal justice system. Most of them are well known offenders in the system, but are ready to seek employment in order to turn their lives around. The project is based on the principles of restorative justice and is aimed towards restoring the relationship between youth offenders and the community. By providing these

youths with employment, it is hoped that it would deter them from getting involved in crime and violence. Accordingly, these youths will be helping to beautify the city, by restoring and repairing targeted Belize City streets. The project is directed by a non-profit organization.

With regards to coordination between state actors and civil society initiatives, there is some coordination going on between some institutions especially through the coordination of Restore Belize Unite. Even as these advances improve the situation, duplication of efforts in this area is being addressed to improve both efficiency and effectiveness. This is largely happening because many of governmental agencies have committed to pool together their scarce resources (human, financial and technical) in an effort to advance change in the lives of Belizean Youth.

These programmatic responses (both state and non-state) and its impact on violence prevention are varied but are simply not enough to adequately address the multifarious needs, challenges and problems affecting youth in Belize today. To move towards a more preventive focus, an expansion of programs throughout the country will be needed, not only in the urban centers. The need to improve the mechanisms for a better coordination between state and non-state actors is also necessary to optimize impact. Another factor that could be improved is the lack of common and usable official data, noting much of the data collected does not have coherence noting the lack of a common framework. The information collected also doesn´t take into consideration the need to have indicators displayed by sex, age and territorial district. Overall, given the very grim reality that the statistical evidence reveals regarding the increase in crime and violence involving youth, it is highly important that monitoring and evaluation of the various State and Non-State interventions (past, present and future) become a priority in the country. These monitoring efforts should be done through state institutions, with coordinated support from civil society organizations.

Public Policy Proposals

Public Policy Proposals

PRINCIPLES FOR DEVELOPING PUBLIC POLICY PROPOSALS

Objectives of the Youth-Involved Violence Prevention Policy:

- To guide decision-making with regards to the development and implementation of programs, projects and interventions (at the national level) to reduce youth involvement in violence, both as victims and perpetrators in Belize.

- To promote the integral development of the Belizean adolescents and youths as well as the development of a culture of peace in order to prevent the youth from any involvement with violence.

- To promote the rehabilitation and integration of those within the youth population that are in conflict with the law, using principles of restorative justice in order to reduce the recidivism of violent issues.

Beneficiaries of the Policy:

This Policy will focus on the youth population, ages 14 to 29 years. The policy focuses on youths yet to be involved in violence, youths who are at risk of being involved, and youths who have already been involved in violence. The purpose is to eliminate or at least significantly reduce involvement in violence by all Belizean youth.

Special Approaches:

The development of this policy proposal was done within a framework centered on youths as victims and perpetrators of violence, with special considerations to gender equity, human rights, restorative justice principles, culture and diversity factor. Dialogue was promoted throughout the process to ensure participation and ownedership was woven into each aspect of the policy formation and building peace.

These special approaches should also be used to guide the implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the policy proposal, and should be regarded as a contextual framework for understanding the complex issues, factors, correlates and proposed solutions relating to youth-involved violence in Belize.

- **Gender Equity Perspective:** promotes gender equality and empowerment on equal opportunities for all young people, and draws clear distinctions and demonstrates inter-relationships among the concepts of gender parity, gender equity, and gender balance. In addition to drawing out the nuances between equity and equality, the framework reinforces other key concerns such as access, quality, continuity, relevance, and learning outcomes.

- **Human Rights Approach:** promotes respect for and the exercise of the full force of the integral rights of the young people as citizens of Belize. Ensuring the fostering of conditions for active participation and youth empowerment, especially the right to non-violence and peaceful coexistence among youth.

- **Generational Perspective:** considers the young people as specific individuals with skills, needs and interests. It involves considerations that are appropriate according to age groups, and their own characteristics, abilities, needs and interests.

- **Ethnic Diversity and Multiculturalism:** refers to the interplay between different ethnicities and cultures, without including relations of superiority or power. Fundamentally, this approach seeks to promote inclu-

sivity, coexistent, and mutual enrichment in order to achieve greater equity.

- **Restorative Justice:** Promotes the ideal that we are all interconnected in order to encourage offenders to understand and take responsibility for harm done to themselves and the community. It encourages dialogue while allowing for individual and societal healing.

VIOLENCE PREVENTION PROPOSALS

Strategies for Primary Prevention:

The risk factors that highly correlate to youth involvement in violence are direct consequences of socio-economic and political intuitional processes, principles and policies that go beyond the scope of this document. This proposal is focused on reducing the prevalence of those risk factors, and most importantly the negative impact/implications associated with them.

The primary prevention proposals are aimed to promote the development of a wholesome Belizean society, community and family environment that can foster positive developmental attributes among Belizean youths (civic pride, self-esteem, physical and mental health, ingenuity and creativity, participation, recreation, family cohesiveness). These are positive factors that are

known to prevent youths from developing negative or violent attitudes and behaviors, as well as, decrease the likelihood of youths becoming victims of violence.

These primary preventions proposals are centered on the following priority areas and focus: a) promoting family cohesiveness, b) increasing access to education, c) preparing youth for employment, d) providing healthcare , e) creating opportunities for inclusion, participation and recreation, f) celebrating culture and diversity, and g) strengthening community.

The implementation of these strategies will fall into the realm of various social, political and economic institutions on a national level, including but not limited to the following institutions: the Office of the Prime Minister (RESTORE Belize, Conscious Youth Development Program), the Ministry of Economic Development, the Ministry of Education and Youth, the Ministry of Human Development and Social Transformation, the Ministry of Health, the National Institute of Culture and History (NICH), private sector and the business community, civil society, trade unions, all national educational institutions, and those Multilateral Agencies (UNICEF, PAHO, OAS, UNDEF etc.) relevant to the formation and adoption of these policies.

STRATEGIES:

1   *Improve the accessibility to formal education for Belizean children and youths.*

The most important recommendation provided by all those who participated in the consultation process was to increase access to education. It is established that without a good education, young people in the Belizean society will be limited in their quest to attain success. Social mobility, self-sustainability, individual growth and the ability to contribute meaningfully to society requires each citizen of Belize to have access to quality education. Essentially, all Belizeans have the right to a good education. It is listed in the Constitution and in the Convention for the Rights of a Child (CRC). However, not all Belizean children have access to a good education and as such, their ability to attain gainful employment as adults and to enjoy commodious living is undermined very early in their lives. Education is synonymous with self-sustainability and independence. Unfortunately, many parents and guardians in Belize simply cannot afford to send their children to school because of the financial cost attached to the formal education system (books, fees, supplies, uniforms). Elementary school is generally manageable, but secondary and tertiary education is often inaccessible. In

fact, according to the Ministry of Education and Youth, only **two of five** high school age children are enrolled in high school In Belize (2010).

OBJECTIVE:

To expand access to formal education (primary, secondary and tertiary education) to all Belizean children and adolescents, regardless of their socio-economic status. The government is responsible for empowering its human polity, or more specifically to encapcitate Belizean youth with the tools necessary to develop a positive mindset, which will enable them to contribute towards a better self, family, community and the future of Belize. This cannot be achieved without education.

ACTIONS:

a) Extend the mandatory school age from 14 years to 16 years old. All Belizean youths through the age of 16 must be in school.

b) Government offering more subsidies to schools in "at risk "or highly vulnerable communities such as Port Loyola, Collet, Lake Independence, Queen Square and Mesopatamia consituencies, and extending coverage for all four years of high school.

c) Provide more scholarship opportunities (books, fees and uniforms) within the primary school education level for children with greater economic needs.

d) Establish a partnership between the Ministry of Human Development and Social Transformation (MHD) and the Ministry of Education and Youth (MOE) to go into homes within vulnerable communities to conduct needs assessments and assist with food assistance and enrolling children in schools at the primary education level.

e) Develop more student assistant/work scholarship programs at the secondary and tertiary education levels.

f) Empower youths and families to advocate for national level policy and program changes for their communities.

2 Strengthen the education system to include alternative careers options and to develop courses for youths with diverse talents.

The formal education system in Belize is predominantly managed by the Churches (Catholic, Methodist, Baptist etc.). However, the Church administration of the education institutions in Belize has been widely criticized for years by the public and specifically those from the productive sectors because of outdated and irrelevant curricula. The main concerns are centered on the questionable relevancy, diversity, application and dimensionality of the school curriculum at all educational levels (primary, secondary and tertiary). Simply put, the critics believe that the educational system needs to be reformed on a national level to take into account the changing needs, the wide array of learning capacities, the expanding number of career interests, and the new and emerging talents of students that should not be overlooked. In addition to the justifications above, , the growing needs and changing socio-economic structure of the society and the world at large must also be taken into consideration. The world is changing, people are changing, students and children are changing, and therefore the education system must evolve to fit those changes.

It is important to note the richness of the youthful society, whose many talents and personal skills identify this demographic group. However, the education system does not adequately incorporate courses that cater to the development of students who are gifted in the alternative skills that could open up or increase existing markets. The Arts (music, dance, creative writing, painting and performing) is a good example. There are so few schools, at any level in the country, that offer degrees and/or academic concentrations in the Creative Arts. Another question and concern relates to the inclusion of students who are interested in technical vocation careers such as: mechanical engineering, plumbing, home construction, electrical engineering. There needs to be a way to cater to these types of students and their needs for vocational skills. The University of Belize, which is the only university in the country, does not offer any advanced level degrees in Technical Vocation. On a whole, it is important for any country to have an education system that appeals to the various interest, talents and needs of the children that it serves. If students do not feel comfortable in their school environment, or if they feel that their personal interests do not fit into the education context that they are in, they can easily justify dropping out, inevitably leading to many such students getting involved in drugs and/or criminal activities.

The more schools are able to keep children interested and motivated, the less likely they will want to drop out of school and turn to alternative problematic ways of satisfying their interests.

OBJECTIVE:

To promote the inclusion of alternative forms of curricula (content, lesson modules, teaching techniques/tools, and learning styles) to promote a more motivating system based upon a variety of talents and interests.

ACTIONS:

a) Expand the secondary and tertiary educational curricula to include extra-curricular activities (ECAs) - (Creative Arts, Cultural Studies, music etc.) as well as curricular activities (courses as associated with: technical professions, engineering and vocational degrees).

b) Create national schools for the creative arts (music, dance, creative writing, design, painting, and drawing, etc.).

c) Incorporate within the primary and secondary school curriculum subjects to sensitize children and adolescents about violence prevention, resolution of conflicts, gender equity, the negative effects of drugs and alcohol, as well as the negative effects of involvement in violence and crime.

d) Include basic entrepreneurship and business management courses to complement ITVET programs.

e) Consistently train and empower teachers in areas of pedagogy for children with special cognitive development needs and learning styles. Teachers must be made aware of the importance of creative inclusive environments in the classrooms and schools.

3   Provide professional counseling services for students and their families within all primary and secondary schools in the country.

The physical, emotional and mental health of youths directly relate to their involvement in violence (as victims and perpetrators). In today's society, Belizean youths across the nation are battling a myriad of personal problems and challenges (family issues, domestic violence, abuse, loss of love ones, economic strife etc.). These challenges can lead to deficiencies in their physical and psychological health (anger, insecurity, fear, stress, depression, grief, neglect, abandonment, substance abuse, anemia and malnutrition,). Young people often turn to members of their immediate community (teachers, health workers, social workers etc.) or their peers (friends and neighbors) to obtain the support that the need to cope with the challenges that they experience on a daily basis. However, many young people do not have the confidence, access, or ability to reach out to others for the assistance and guidance needed to help them cope

with their personal problems. As a result, their thoughts and behaviors continue to turn negative. In the focus groups sessions at the Wagner's Youth Facility (WYF), the Princess Royal Youth Hostel and the Conscious Youth Development Program (CYDP), many of the youth participants emphasized that they can get so overwhelmed and stressed with life challenges that they feel helpless and hopeless. They consistently shared that they simply need somewhere to go where they can talk to someone about challenges in their life.

- *"We need guidance; we need someone to just listen to us. We need a place where we can vent our frustrations and channel or pain in a positive right way. If we do not have such a place or person, we will have to find other means and ways to deal with our problems, which often times are negative (drugs, sex, gang involvement, fighting, even murder."*

OBJECTIVE:

To promote the sensitization and preparation of people working directly with children, adolescents, and youth. Greater capacity is needed in understanding how to listen to troubled youth and how to counsel them about their feelings and frustrations in a positive and more proactive way. This strategy also looks to expand access to existing support services or create more institutional mechanisms for in-school youths and their families. This added support will provide additional avenues for those who need help in dealing with personal and interpersonal problems that directly affect their mental and physical health.

ACTIONS:

a) Counseling must be integrated as a service to students and their families within all primary and secondary schools and especially within communities that are most vulnerable to crime and violence.

b) All teachers and education administrators at the primary and secondary educational levels should receive some basic level of training and awareness in "at risk" behaviors. This will help them to better identify those children at risk of becoming involved in crime and violence as well as those who are battling with emotional and/or mental health problems making them more susceptible to becoming violent.

c) Social work/counseling students at the tertiary level should be required to conduct counseling services for one semester in primary schools as a part of their degree requirement.

d) Developmental courses that deal with real life situations, such as: abuse, grief, substance abuse, depression, and anxiety, should be integrated into the primary school and secondary school curricula.

4   *Create artistic spaces within the community, where young people can creatively express their unique culture, talents and identities.*

As they make their transition from child to adult, adolescents and youths need positive spaces and avenues to express and celebrate their unique identity, culture, ideas and talents. This is essential for their personal development, specifically their emotional and psychological well-being. When young people are "pigeon-holed", limited, stereotyped, marginalized or suppressed by mainstream society in any way or form, they often act out or rebel negatively. Youths and adolescents need spaces where they can channel any negative thoughts, attitudes and behaviors into positive ones.

- *"Currently, it is very difficult to be a young person in the Belizean society. We are all labeled as bad, not good for anything, a waste of time and non-productive and all the bad things you can think of. The good ones are suffering for the bad ones, and we are overall given a hard time to everyone from our parents, teachers and the politicians. It is tough being young right now. . Another young person noted that, "We are not given a chance to show the good things about ourselves, and we have so much positive things to offer".* (Youth Leaders Workshop, 2011)

Public perception tends to correlate crime and violence with the youth. As a result, the positive aspects of being young have been overshadowed by the negative sentiments and feelings that surround the current crime and violence phenomena in Belize. This strategic objective promotes the creation of opportunities for young people to showcase their positive attributes.

OBJECTIVE:

The objective of this preventative strategy is to give youth the opportunity to show the community, as well as other youths, that they are talented, special and unique.

ACTIONS:

a) Establish institutional frameworks (art classes added to curricula, more scholarships for creative arts educators, extra-curricular activities centered on the arts, government subsidiaries for instruments and art equipment) for the development of sustainable creative arts programs in all primary and secondary schools.

b) Create community art centers with structured programs focusing on cultivating the talents of young people who are in and out of school (music, poetry, drama studio, dance studio, painting, drawing, and singing).

c) Tie in community creative arts programs with entrepreneurship by enabling youths in those programs to sell their products (art work, musical pieces, etc) or provide their services to local programs and events (signing, dancing, drama performances).

d) Develop a national program or project that focuses on creating youth-friendly spaces (competitions, training workshops, community beatufication projects, creation of community dance and musical bands) in the communities that are most vulnerable to crime and violence (urban Belize City and Cayo).

5   *Provide more spaces for family recreation, integration, learning and bonding within communities that are vulnerable to youth involvement in violence and crime.*

The Belizean families are the foundation of their communities. Strong cohesive families help to build strong, cohesive communities. The breakdown of family units is a serious social issue in Belize, particularly in urban centers such as Belize City, and as such, many people believe that this social problem is partly responsible for the extensive involvement of youth in crime and violence. The youths themselves emphasized this sentiment in focus group discussions, "Family is important; family provide the guidance and love that a young person needs to grow and keep positive; without family and support, youths are destined to make a lot of bad decisions" (Focus Group session d, 2011).

Unfortunately, the family institution has been neglected by the society for many years and in many ways. Spaces are very limited, that can adequately assist families in addressing everyday problems and challenges. The resources (human, technical, financial) that are needed to provide these services are scarce, while the demands are overwhelming (coping with economic hardships, teenage pregnancies, juvenile delinquency, crime and violence in the community etc.). The State needs to invest in the family institution, recognizing the diversity of support needed for families that are different, including mono-parental families, etc.

OBJECTIVE:

To create opportunities for a diversity of families, who are most vulnerable to crime and violence, to access the necessary support and services needed for their protection. Additionally, to sus-

tain the values and principles that are necessary to promote family values for their children and their community development.

ACTIONS:

a) Create community-level support programs for single parents that will provide them with skills and guidance to foster a wholesome home environment for themselves and their children. These programs should promote positive family values (open communication, sharing, fun and play, spirituality, healthy eating and living, discipline and respect for each other etc.).

b) Develop family-oriented activities within the communities that are centered on improving psychosocial development processes within the family unit (sporting competitions, talent shows, cultural fairs, etc.).

c) Develop partnerships with umbrella civil society networks to design multi-sectorial advocacy movement targeted at increasing investment in essential social services that focus on fortifying families and youths throughout the country.

d) Create multipurpose community centers, in places where such centers do not exist, which can be used for family recreational purposes, public meetings and education resources (library, computer lab, study halls.

6 *Promote more positive images and stories in the media to avoid youth stigmatization.*

The media plays a very important role in keeping the country informed about the news and events that are happening around the country and in the world. In addition, the media is also a source of entertainment and educational information for the masses. By extension, the media also contributes to shaping popular culture by promoting certain images, lifestyles and social constructs through various images and sounds (music, television, documentaries etc.). The consultation process revealed that many of the participants (civil society representatives, government officials, and youth leaders) are not happy with the way in which young people are often portrayed by the media. Accordingly, the participants during the consultations pointed out that the media does not do enough to promote and highlight positive aspects of youth and youth culture in Belize.

"The media needs to become more creative in the ways they choose to entertain and inform the youth population in Belize." **(Civil Society Workshop, 2011).**

"The media needs to be held accountable for the way in which they tend to over sensationalized news stories, particularly those involving violence and crime , as well as, for the way in which they "celebrate" and to a certain extent, praise the notoriety of certain criminals and gang leaders."(Youth Leaders Workshop 2011).

There are very limited local television/radio programs that serve to educate, inform and highlight issues affecting young people. While at the same time there is a desperate need for more television or radio programs to empower young people and to promote positive values rather than perpetuate images of societal ills such as violence, crime, promiscuity, drugs, gangs and guns.

OBJECTIVE

This strategy aims to encourage the media to contribute in reshaping the way the society view the youths of Belize-their value, their role and connection to the country. All media houses should promote positive youth development programs and highlight interesting aspects of youth culture (fashion, music, art, and dance) in Belize.

ACTIONS:

a) Train and sensitize media personnel and administrators about the importance and value of responsible media in shaping the development of the youths specifically and the country in general.

b) Review and modify the media policy to include protection for the rights of children and youth (not exposing the names and pictures of youth under 18 yrs who are involved in crime and violence)

c) Establish strict sanctions for breach of media regulations

d) Provide cautionary disclaimers during news telecasts that include graphic images (dead bodies, decomposed bodies etc.).

e) Increase monitoring and enforcement of the media regulations regarding censorship of sounds and music played on the radio.

7   Promote legislative reform which considers the generational rights of youth in all the laws and legislative initiatives in order that the rights of children and youth in Belize are respected.

Are the laws of Belize actually working to adequately protect its children and youths and to penalize those who neglect their responsibility

to provide for their care and well-being? This was a question brought forward by the participants of the Validation Meeting (October, 2011). The general concern was whether the legislative framework, which was created to ensure the protection of the rights of children and youths in Belize, is actually working in the best interest of the Belizean youths.

> "*Right now as it is, the parents and guardians of children and youth in Belize are not adequately fulfilling their role as care givers and are directly contributing to the problem of youth involvement in violence because of their neglect, abuse and mistreatment of their children, yet it seems that the Belizean youths are the ones are constantly criminalized, institutionalized and victimized. But what about the parents and guardians who are not doing what they are supposed to do and who are dumping their responsibilities as parents and guardians on the State?"*

The laws of Belize need to be reviewed, analyzed and standardized so that the rights and protection of the Belizean youth are balanced, fair and equitable.

OBJECTIVE:

To promote legislative reform and the effective monitoring of legislative initiatives in order that the rights of children and youth in Belize are respected. Laws affecting youth shouldbe in the best interest of all youth, and should emphasize the important role of the parents and guardians in developing the Belizean children and youth to become positive, productive members in their communities.

ACTIONS:

a) Promote a more comprehensive assessment and review of the laws of Belize, including all statutes, conventions and regulations that guide the juvenile justice system.

b) Promote the reform of the laws to ensure a rights-based, gender-balanced approach, which also eliminates incongruent provisions, contradictions and archaic resolutions that do not serve to ensure maximum protection of the rights of children and youth in the country.

c) Revise the laws and regulations that guide the juvenile justice system of Belize (law enforcement courts, rehabilitation, social services, etc.) to include

the principles of: *decriminalization, de-institutionalization and decentralization,* which are aimed at decreasing negative stigmatization of the Belizean youth and increasing rehabilitation and community-oriented approaches.

SECONDARY PREVENTION

Secondary violence prevention focuses attention on vulnerable groups who are at risk but have not been institutionalized nor come into contact with the criminal justice system. Specifically, secondary prevention includes programs that attend to homeless adolescents and young adults, youth with addictions, victims of sexual and physical abuse, youths living in highly violent communities, etc. This level also includes programming for gang-involved youth or those involved in other violent groups (eg. sporting groups). The intent of secondary prevention is to promote opportunities for cultural exposure and community exchange programs for youths living in vulnerable communities or highly violent neighborhoods, leading them away from their involvement in violence and crime.

These strategies are aimed towards deterring youths who are most exposed to those risk factors commonly associated with youth involvement in violence (living in violent neighborhoods, out of school, unemployed, unskilled, abusing drugs and alcohol, etc.), and those youths who have expressed violent thoughts and behaviors. The secondary strategies are therefore centered on minimizing the negative effects that predispose youth to become involved in violence, and to maximize positive attributes to cope and address those issues. Priority areas for secondary prevention include: employment opportunities, vocational training, continued education, improved police/community relations, and improved social services.

The primary actors responsible for implementing these programs include, but are not limited to: the Ministry of Education and Youth (MOE); the Youth for the Future Secretariart(YFF), the Ministry of Police and Public Safety, the Ministry of Health, the Conscious Youth Development Programme (CYDP), the RESTORE Belize Program, civil society organizations, the business community, and school administrators.

STRATEGIES:

8   *Create affordable continuing education programs for "at risk" youths to obtain a high-school equivalency certificate or General Education Degree (GED) Program.*

At the top of the list of all the recommendations provided by the focus groups participants for institutionalized youths in the Belize district and "at risk" youths from the CYDP program was the resounding, *"I want to go back to school"* po-

sition. Most of the participants in these focus groups are high school dropouts and mostly cited economic reasons for their inability to finish school. If young people are not in school and are not working or doing anything constructive with their time, it is very likely they will be lured into illicit activities that are abundant in their neighborhoods (substance abuse, gang involvement etc.).

OBJECTIVE:

To create access to and extend the opportunities for youths who are out of school to obtain a high-school diploma, which sets the foundation for higher education, better paying jobs and self-sustainability.

ACTIONS:

a) Conduct a socio-metric study to identify youths who have dropped out of school or are chronic truants, but are interested in continuing their education. Once these youths have been identified, they can be matched to individual donors or organizations from the private sector, which would then provide scholarships tied to specific outputs (good grades, community service, volunteerism, clean criminal record, etc) .

b) Expand existing continuing education programs to include all communities in Belize City that have at least one high school in the area.

9 *Create employment opportunities and training for youths to increase their entrepreneurship capacity and wealth-creation skills.*

A lack of education, unemployment and crime all have a close, almost symbiotic relationship with each other. Without an opportunity to earn an honest living to provide for their basic necessities, how can young people survive in Belize? Money is essential for life and survival in Belize. If Belizean youths are not afforded legitimate opportunities to earn an income themay see no other alternative than to turn to illegitimate means to get what they need (selling drugs, stealing, prostitution etc.). Many can agree that a simple solution to address the issue of youth involved violence is to give youths something to do, simply put, let them work. But the current precarious economic situation, with its low productivity and high unemploymenthave left youth unhappy and demotivated. It is particularly difficult to find jobs and employment opportunities for people in general, let alone unskilled youths without a diploma or primary school certificate.

OBJECTIVES:

To create more opportunities for young people to obtain a legitimate income by preparing them

with some of the basics skills needed for employment.

ACTIONS:

a) Provide training workshops and certificate programs in entrepreneurship for at- risk youths who demonstrate business-related and entrepreneurial interests/talents.

b) Create tax breaks for local businesses who provide employment opportunities for at-risk youths or youths who are a part of rehabilitation programs and violence prevention initiatives (CYDP, YFF, Southside Poverty Alleviation Project)

c) Provide opportunities for apprenticeship programs in vulnerable communities (working in libraries, schools, kitchens, churches, cleaning parks and playgrounds, coordinating summer camps) for at risk youths who demonstrate leadership qualities, are committed to being law-abiding, and are ready to be positive examples in their community.

d) Increase collaboration between the private sector, civil society and government to create sustainable job creation programs for skilled youths who live in high risk and violence vulnerable neighborhoods.

e) Implement "take a youth to work" programs centered on exposing "at risk" youths to the values, principles and professional ethics of the work force (public and private sectors). This can also provide opportunities to create mentorship links between professionals and at-risk youth (see below).

f) Create more opportunities for on-line employment training and on-online jobs for young people.

g) Provide financial support for young entrepreneurs in violent neighborhoods (cooks, caterers, babysitters, barbers, beauticians, mechanics etc.) to expand their business, build capital, provide better services and extend employment opportunities to other residents.

10 _Promote mentorship, community leadership and positive role model programs in communities vulnerable to violence and crime._

Guidance, love, support, brotherhood/sisterhood, someone to relate to, a father figure, a place to belong; these are some of the common factors listed by institutionalized youth explaining why they decided to join a criminal gang. The reality is clear: adolescents and youths in the Belizean society are looking for love, support and

guidance in the wrong places. When a young person comes from a home, family and neighborhood that are filled with more negatives than positives, it becomes very difficult for that individual to think and behave positively. As one youth stated during the focus group sessions at the Wagner's Youth Facility, "How can I do good when I come from bad? Good comes from good; bad comes from bad. In my neighborhood there is nothing good."(August, 2011)

In order to grow and develop into responsible, mature, law-abiding adults, adolescents and youths need to be provided with essentials such as a nurturing home environment, love and affection, guidance, places for recreation, basic food and nutrition, clothes and shelter, platforms for expression a sense of belonging. Unfortunately, many of the Belizean youths today are lacking access to those essential development components. They cannot get what they need from their families, nor from their neighborhoods. Their larger community and society have failed to adequately provide the proper guidance and protection for them.

The time is now to begin to nurture, and care for the youths of the country. Instead of labeling, suppressing and ostracizing them, the community and its members should embrace them, communicate with them, teach them, guide them, provide a helping hand and show them that they are loved and valued.

- *"Loving our children and our youths does not cost us anything." (2011). This strategy is aimed at building the strength of the community to develop and foster a healthier social environment for all Belizean youth. (The director of the Youth Hostel, Mrs. Glenda Mae Martinez).*

OBJECTIVE:

To promote mentorship, community leadership and positive role model programs in communities, -focusing on youths that are most vulnerable. To build the strength of the community to develop and foster a healthier social environment for all Belizean youth.

ACTIONS:

a) Implement more community based after-school programs that involve tutoring, mentoring and development of life skills in vulnerable communities.

b) Increase platforms where motivational speakers can dialogue with vulnerable youths and provide guidance and direction towards living a wholesome, productive life amidst the challenges that face them every day (poverty, inequity, violence, crime, and lack of parental support).

c) Formulate public education campaigns and utilize the media (advertising, consultations, and lectures) to familiarize "vulnerable" youths with the various services and programs available to assist them.

d) Create incentives (school credits, leadership awards etc.) to promote positive mentorship programs within schools in communities that are vulnerable to crime and violence. Utilize volunteers from neighborhood youth groups or students in tertiary level education institutions to visit schools often and participate in after-school or extra curriculum activities.

e) Provide more programs and workshops that foster the development of leadership qualities (community leadership, self-esteem, self-motivation, healthy living, etc.) among youths who are vulnerable to violence.

f) Provide more opportunities to celebrate, recognize and reward at-risk youths who are contributing positively to their community (volunteering, finishing school, keeping out of gangs, involved in sports and creative arts, helping others in the neighborhood, young entrepreneurs etc.).

g) Create youth support groups for victims of crime and violence in neighborhoods that are especially prone to violence and attach these support groups to the school or churches.

11 *Create programs to facilitate better youth and police relations in the violent communities.*

The relationship between youth and the police particularly in urban centers of the country is devastatingly impaired. The youths do not trust the police and the police often view and approach the youths, particularly those from violent communities, as the "enemy". When asked about the role that the Police Department plays in controlling the crime and violence on the streets of Belize, the general sentiment provided by the youths during the consultations process was that the police were either corrupt or easily corrupted and therefore cannot be trusted to protect citizens and enforce the law justly.

- *"The police are a part of the problem; they work for the criminal gangs; they facilitate the rivalry and violence on the streets by providing the guns and ammunition. You cannot rely on the police to ensure safety. This is the reason no one wants to go to the police when anything happens. People prefer to take matters into their own hands."*(Wagner's Youth Facility Focus Group; 2011).

Furthermore, some youths stated that the police department is *simply not competent* enough nor equipped to handle the violence in Belize City. "The police are not ready for the gangs out here. The gangs have more power because they have more and better weapons and they have the support of people in the communities. The gangs are getting bigger and smarter and the police cannot keep up...I think that some of the police are afraid of certain gangs, and so the big gangs will always get away with their crimes."

Clearly the perceptions of youth with regards to the Police Department and its ability to adequately address the issue of crime and violence in Belize is not a very positive one. This negative perception itself is an obstacle that hinders the youths and police in building a cooperative, mutually amicable relationship.

The view of the Police Department, particularly the Community Policing Unit is that the relationship between urban city youths and themselves is gradually improving and they do have examples of positive police/community relations in certain neighborhoods. The Yabra community is one example where the police department and the residents, particularly the youths, enjoy an amicable and cordial relationship especially since this is the neighborhood where the Police Department Community Unit is located and where community oriented activities facilitated by the BPD are evident. It is important that these kinds of police/community programs continue and expand throughout the urban centers in Belize City and Cayo, so as to maximize positive cooperation between the police, the community and the youths. A strong community-police relationship can go a very long way in preventing violence and crime in any society.

OBJECTIVE:

To develop and expand community policing activities focusing on improved community relations with the police, and including confidence-building programs that can help to address the problem of youth/police distrust.

ACTIONS:

a) The Community Policing Department continue to create spaces at the community level (attached to schools, churches and/or community centers) for mediation and non-custodial emergency interventions between rival youth groups (sporting teams, school groups, street gangs, etc) who demonstrate violent attitudes and behaviors.

b) Train community youths from violence-prone communities to become mediation officers attached to the Police Department or Conscious Youth Development Program for immediate intervention activ-

ities (mediation, counseling, and mentoring) between persons or groups that demonstrate violent attitudes and behaviors.

c) Bi-weekly community meetings and workshops facilitated by the Community Policing Unit and volunteer youth officers in vulnerable neighborhoods. These meetings can target at-risk youths who are most susceptible to involvement in violence. Topics for dialogue will include relevant issues affecting youths in the community such as: drugs, violence, crime, gang involvement, dealing with peer pressure, laws and regulations, leadership and community, dealing with violence in the community, dealing with family problems, etc.

d) Develop neighborhood programs and projects aimed at reducing the negative effects of violence and crime in the neighborhood and increasing community cohesiveness and youth participation in positive activities. This should be done through a coordinated planning and implementation process between the Police Department and the community.

e) Develop early detection systems, which are aimed at identifying youths who demonstrate violent attitudes and behaviors. These systems will be designed and implemented through a collaborative effort between the Police Department and the community. Youths identified as potential risks will be referred and placed into programs such as the CYDP, 4H Program, Youth Cadet Program or YFF programs.

12 *Promote opportunities for cultural exposure and community exchange programs between youths from rural and urban communities.*

Research has shown that adolescents and youths who are socialized within rural communities tend to develop less violent and antisocial attitudes and behaviors than youths who live in urban settings[33]. Furthermore, youths from rural areas are also conditioned by their social milieu to value and work towards developing integral life skills (hard work, loyalty to family; commitment to education, prudence). These life skills and behavioral patterns enable rural youths to reach a higher level of self-sustainability, independence and responsibility over their lives earlier than those youths who live in urban settings.

If at-risk youths who live in violent urban neighbors are provided with an opportunity to temporary relocate from their precarious social settings to a more peaceful, tranquil social structure, the benefits can be significant. Sometimes a change of environment and exposure to diverse lifestyles can greatly influence the way in

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[33]   Gayle, Mortis, Vasquez & Mossiah (2011).

which young people interpret the world and the role they play in it. Value for life, family, work, education, food, health, nature, faith, and community spirit is inculcated in the lives of children from birth.

A youth who is born into a *culture of violence* is socialized differently than youths who are not. The values and normative system within that *culture of violence* is not always conducive to a healthy developmental trajectory for adolescents and youths.

OBJECTIVE

To create opportunities to expose youths who are vulnerable to involvement in violence to alternative lifestyles than those of their own social context.

ACTIONS

a) Create programs that would enable youths from urban neighborhoods to relocate, live and work temporarily (during summer breaks, Easter breaks, etc) in rural communities with volunteer families. (Toledo District, Corozal District).

b) Support youth organizations providing educational trips to rural areas such as Mayan communities in Toledo or sugar cane communities in Corozal.

c) Develop a peer support system where at-risk youths from urban communities can communicate, interact and share their life experiences with peers from rural areas through different mediums such as: email, written mail, pictures, journaling, creative arts, and personal visits. This program can be attached to neighborhood schools in vulnerable neighborhoods.

13 **Reconstruct the violent urban milieu in Belize City and Benque Viejo del Carmen into safe zones, which are conducive to self-development and reinforcing positive community and self-development values.**

Following the structural ethos of the Broken Windows Theory, the RESTORE Belize strategic plan has proposed the transformation of certain parts of urban Belize City into safe zones. This initiative will seek to enhance the social environment particularly in violent neighborhoods by providing physical change to those communities. Activities will include better streets and drainage, clean parks and play grounds, painted buildings, more lighting, and the addition of more plants and trees. By extension, the program seeks to enhance safety into those communities by introducing projects, programs and services geared towards both individual and community development with emphasis on integration. All Belizean youths deserve to live and grow in an environment that fosters their individual devel-

opment and well-being. Safe, positive neighborhoods will help to change the attitudes and behaviors of young people who are struggling to do the right thing in a world where doing wrong is so prevalent.

In some of the most affected neighborhoods of Belize City, those considered at the "epicenter of violence", the many different faces of poverty and destitution are blatantly visible. The plight of these urban centers is reflected in the drugs, gangs, gun violence, noise pollution, dilapidated homes, barred stores and buildings, inadequate infrastructure, poor lighting, overgrown yards and parks, garbage, graffiti, vagabonds and neglected animals prowling the streets. Transforming these communities into cleaner environments with, organized safe zones, will help to transform the lives of its residents The community facelift will not only produce a cleaner more welcoming environment but will also serve to lift the spirits of the community members.

OBJECTIVE:

To carry out community improvements, creating safer zones which reinforcie positive community and self-development values.

ACTIONS:

a) Create community beautification and upgradng projects and programs, where community members can become involved in transforming their own social setting into more attractive and safer zones (planting flowers and trees, cleaning up parks and playgrounds, painting buildings, fixing broken down homes, keeping the streets clean, organizing neighborhood watch groups, etc.), while at the same time earning a small salary and building bonds within the community.

b) Develop a housing development project in the violent neighborhoods in Belize City that would enable low income residents to improve their living conditions. Initiatives to support could include: getting rid of the slums and the shanty homes, removing the London bridges, and addressing all hazardous areas that put the general health and well-being of the people at risk.

c) Improve the general infrastructure within violent communities in Belize City (Collet, Lake Independence, Port Loyola, Queen Square, Mesopatamia) by providing better streets, drainage, lightning and housing infrastructure.

TERTIARY PREVENTION STRATEGIES

Tertiary violence prevention involves a focus on the rehabilitation of young people who are in conflict with the law, the restoration of lives who have been harmed by youth perpetrated violence, and the prevention of repeating offenses among those youths. Some examples of tertiary level violence prevention include: community-based substance abuse rehabilitation programs, post-institutionalized counseling, restitution programs, restorative justice programs etc.

Youths who are institutionalized or who have been in contact with the criminal justice system at some point (arrested, detained, remanded, institutionalized) need very unique and specialized programs geared towards rebuilding and redirecting their lives along a positive and self-empowering path. Tertiary level prevention strategies are aimed towards helping those youths to re-focus and start over the path towards a more productive and wholesome future. This is often a very challenging and difficult task, since institutionalization comes with a great many negative, hard to curb consequences for youths. These consequences include: loss of self-esteem, shame, anger, bitterness, aggression and rage, and mental health problems.

The primary goal is to breakdown these youths and provide means and ways they can rebuild themselves positively. These youth need a chance to start over with a better attitude, better health, better perceptions of themselves and society and with better life goals. The priority areas for tertiary level violence prevention include decriminalization, legislative reform, restorative justice, restitution, community cooperation, family support, and education.

The actors and institutions that are tasked with the implementation of tertiary level violence prevention strategies include, but are not limited to: the Ministry of Police and Public Safety, the Ministry of Human Development and Social Transformation, the Ministry of Housing, the Ministry of Public Works, the Belize Central Prison, KOLBE Foundation, RESTORE Belize Program, civil society and churches, the private sector and the business community.

STRATEGIES:

14 Strengthen rehabilitation programs and structures for adolescents and youths both within and external to the juvenile justice system.

True transformation and authentic rehabilitation is dependent on the efficacy of the systems, structures, processes, programs and people that are instituted to deal with adolescents and youths who come into contact with the law. From arrest to release, the approach that the ju-

venile justice and/or criminal justice system uses to rehabilitate adolescents and youths must be solid, holistic, fair, balance, tough and rights-based.

The three primary institutions that are responsible for the rehabilitation of adolescents and youths who come in contact with the law are the Princess Royal Youth Hostel, the Wagner's Youth Facility and the Belize Central Prison. Each of these institutions utilizes a holistic, faith-based approach to rehabilitate, restructure and transform the lives of those who violate the law. Some of the structural rehabilitation programs include: treatment for substance abuse, anger management, life skills training, vocational training, creative arts programs, and faith-based activities, athleticism, and formal education programs.

However, these institutions are operating with very limited resources (technical, financial, human) and yet, they are expected to transform the lives of affected, deeply troubled youths. So while there may be many positive rehabilitation programs within these institutions, often times there are concerns about their actual impact. The general point of view is that the recidivism rate among youth who are perpetrators of violence is high (Belize Police Department, 2011) and crime and violence involving youth is spinning out of control. It brings to question whether there is a problem within the criminal justice system and its capacity to rehabilitate adolescents and youths?

Effective support for existing programs and their expansion is crucial and must come from the government and the private sector if it is to be sustained. The youths who violate the law need to have an opportunity to transform their behavioral patterns, attitudes, and values. It is only then that the cycle of violence and crime will begin to reduce. Without these efforts, the momentum will continue to grow towards greater deterioration of community and higher levels of violence and crime.

OBJECTIVE:

To strength the institutional capabilities of the rehabilitation programs and the institutions that give integral and holistic rehabilitation services to adolescents and youths (both within and external to the juvenile justice system).

ACTIONS:

a) Provide trained psychologists, psychiatrist and counselors as permanent staff in all correctional facilities and institutions.

b) Train correctional officers in adolescent psychology, restorative justice principles, gender equity, relations and human rights..

c) Restructure juvenile justice system to include rehabilitation programs that are specific to the offence committed (property crimes versus violent crimes).

d) Design a comprehensive rehabilitation framework package that utilizes the resources of all stakeholders involved, including:

- Private sector and business community: funding rehab programs, employment, apprenticeship

- Educational sector: skills training, volunteering, mentorship, scholarships

- Health sector: provide treatment for substance abuse treatment; mental health problems, communicable diseases; HIV and AIDS and other sexual transmitted diseases.

- Social Services sector: after-care treatment; monitoring; restorative justice

e) Expand and enhance the adult continuing education programs within the Belize Central Prison and Wagner's Youth Facility.

f) Provide substance abuse treatment and mental health treatment for adolescents and youths in all institutions.

g) Increase literacy and numeracy programs within correctional institutions.

h) Provide training in agriculture and farming for youths within the Wagner's Youth Facility and Princess Royal Youth Hostel.

15 _Create employment programs for youths who are released from correctional and rehabilitation institutions._

Most youths who come out of an institution have very little financial and familial support to help them get back on their feet. Without the economic resources to face the new realities (food, school, etc), then how can they be expected to live as law-abiding citizens? All human beings need four essential necessities to survive: food, water, shelter and clothing. For many of the youths who go through the juvenile/criminal justice system, these necessities are hard to come by when they are released. This situation creates a vicious circle where the possibilities that they turn to a life of violence or see that route as the only possible way to maintan their life outside of the corrective institutions.

OBJECTIVE:

To prepare institutionalized youths with the capacity to live and work peacefully and legally once they are released from state institutions. In parallel, ensure there are services available to help place them in jobs as well as to help them to restore their relationship with the community.

ACTIONS:

a) Create a 6-month apprenticeship program for youths to develop employment skills and learn a trade after institutionalization.

b) Develop scholarship programs designed to assist youths released from prison to further their education while also having work.

c) Enable youths to do volunteer work in the community, while receiving a weekly stipend for food and basic living expenses upon exiting the institutions.

d) Expand the UNITE program by offering tax breaks to business organizations who provide funding for these types of program to continue.

16 *Fortify and renew the after-care and transitional programs for youths who violate the law.*

The transitional period between incarceration and institutionalization and freedom into society is critical, particularly in the case of first time offenders and adolescents who experienced psychological and emotional challenges while going through the rehabilitation process. Accordingly, it is even more perplexing for youths to make an adjustment back into their family structure and communities after rehabilitation. For many the very same risk factors, problems and challenges that contributed to their deviant and violent behaviors will still be in place when they return home.

Institutional rehabilitation is only part of the process for true restoration of an individual to occur. In fact, the after-care and transitional process outside of the institution can be considered equally, if not more important to the rehabilitation process within those facilities. Unfortunately, in Belize, the after-care treatment infrastructure is perhaps the weakest element of the rehabilitation process within the criminal/juvenile justice system. The services are not adequately funded, limiting services and leading to uncoordinated, inefficient and unorganized programs. Greater focus is needed to ensure after-care and transitional efforts are integrated into the overall rehabilitation strategy.

For many, the decision whether or not to break the law or abide by it directly depends on the success of the transitional period from prison to society.

OBJECTIVE:

To fortify those existing support structures set in place to help adolescents and youths to psychologically and emotionally adjust to life after institutionalization.

ACTIONS:

a) Establish and develop new youth friendly support systems and services for adolescents and youths who went through the juvenile justice system. These services could include: individual/family counseling, employment training, apprenticeship programs, food stipends, health care support, continuing education programs, mentorship programs, substance abuse support groups, etc.

b) Strengthen and modify the after-care services that already exist to include principles of restorative justice and life skills development.

c) Introduce a 4-6-month mentorship program in all rehabilitation institutions. Utilize volunteers from the public and private sectors or tertiary level education institutions to become mentors for the recently released.

d) Build a boarding school for youths released from correctional institutions, who are committed to education and would not like to return to their violent social settings and communities.

e) Formulate gender specific guidance-based after-care support groups, facilitated by counselors or youth volunteers and funded by the private sector or civil society organizations.

f) Strengthen monitoring and evaluation structures for youths on probation, parole and those newly released from rehabilitation facilities.

g) Develop a case-tracking database for adolescents and youths who are first time offenders. This tracking database will be used to store important information about the rehabilitation and transitional process/experience of each youth who is are classified as " first time offenders".

h) Develop a referral system to place youths who possess certain vocational or employable skills (mechanics, plumbers, cooks, farmers, and creative artists)

and fit them in organizations that have a need for their services and skills and are willing to provide a "second chance" to youths who have been through the criminal justice system.

17 Promotion of restorative justice into the organizational framework of the criminal/juvenile justice system.

The attitude and perceptions taken towards the criminal youths is both grim and harsh. Belizeans on a whole feel like prisoners held captive by the violence involving youth in the country. Conversely, the attitudes that the Belizean youth has toward their community, authority and society are apathetic, resulting in little interest to engage. The relationship between the community and those youth involved in violence needs to be restored if the violence in these communities is going to subside.

Restorative justice emphasizes repairing the harm caused or revealed by criminal behavior. It is best accomplished through cooperative processes that include all stakeholders. Practices and programs reflecting restorative purposes will respond to crime and violence through various means, including: (i) Identifying and taking steps to repair harm, (ii) Involving all stakeholders, and (iii) transforming the traditional relationship between communities and their governments in responding to crime.

Some of the programs and outcomes typically identified with restorative justice include: victim-offender mediation; conferencing; victim assistance; ex-offender assistance, restitution, and community service.

OBJECTIVE:

To promote the main principals of the restorative justice into the relations between the youths as well as between the justice and security operators in order to integrate the community and the juvenile justice system of Belize through peaceful relations.

ACTIONS:

a) Create a systematic and structured restorative justice framework within juvenile justice system of Belize,

b) Promote courses on restorative justice between the judicial system members as well as other justice and security operators to sensitize them with the main principles and methodologies.

c) Provide platforms for dialogue, information sharing, training and planning regarding the institution of principles of restorative justice for all stakeholders (juvenile justice personnel, at-risk

youths, community members, victims of violent crimes, policy makers.)

d) Invest in fortifying the Community Rehabilitation Department (training, equipment, and mobilization), which is the primary agency used to institute principles of restorative justice in the juvenile system.

IMPLEMENTATION, MONITORING AND EVALUATION

The implementation of public policies requires an effective system of monitoring and evaluation as well as action plans for each government institution. The definition of indicators that consider the values and special approaches should be considered. Special attention should be given to the gender equity as well as the restorative justice approach. Since this proposals is the first policy to treat this matter, a list is enclosed identifying the main institutions that should be charged to implement this policy.

These institutions will have the task to develop actions plans drawing from this policy paper and developing an adequate monitoring and evaluation system for the success and sustainability of this policy. The Government of Belize, which is the policy-making body of the country, should adopt these recommendations and integrate them into all relevant national public policies in Belize (regulations, programs, projects, national budget etc.). Several of the major national level governmental interventions (programs, polices, and strategies) regarding youth involved violence in the country are facilitated, coordinated and executed by those agencies and organizations listed below. Hence, it would be logical for these key stakeholders to take up the implementation, monitoring and evaluation processes of the violence prevention policy proposals.

Finally, the monitoring and evaluation of policy implementation receives a more legitimate impact when civil society is involved. Their access to and engagement in the communities allows for effective follow up in measuring the advances of the policies. This also creates appropriation and sustainability.

The table below provides the main organizations and stakeholders that are key for the implementation, monitoring and evaluation of this policy proposal:

Table 5: List of Actors

STATE ACTORS	NON-STATE
Ministry of Education, Youth & Sports	Belize Family Life Association
Ministry of Human Development & Social Transformation	WIN- Belize
Ministry of National Security	Society for the Promotion of Education, Advocacy and Research (SPEAR)
Ministry of Health (HECOPAB)	Belize Chamber of Commerce
Ministry of National Security	The Media
Ministry of Housing	Civil Society (Church, NGO's, Private Sector
Municipal Government (City, Town, Village Councils)	Community Youth Groups and Social Clubs
Council for Crime Control	Kolbe Foundation
RESTORE Belize	Crime Stoppers
Conscious Youth Development Program	UNITE Belize Project
Youth Cadet Core	
National 4H Foundation	
National Committee for Families and Children	
Belize Police Department	
Department of Human Services	
Department of Corrections	

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<u>APPENDICES</u>

1) PROCESS OF POLICY DEVELOPMENT IN BELIZE:

Exploratory and Preparatory Phase

During the exploratory and prepartory phase of the process, the project and policy process was introduce to key stakeholders, particularly from the government and the criminal justice system in Belize. These interviews and the orientation process helped to set the tone for mutural understand, cooperation and coordination between Interpeace and the important actos and stakeholders for the development of the violence prevention policy proposal in Belize. This stage involved field visists and interviews with more than more than 15 individuals from various agencies and government organizations, including the Belize Central Prison, KOLBE Foundation, Wagner's Youth Facility, Princess Royal Youth Hostel, Ashcroft Rehabilitation Center, Youth for the Future Secretariat, Community Rehabilitation Department, Ministry of Human Devleopment and Social Transformation, Ministry of Education and Youth, the Ministry of Police and Public Safety, RESTORE Belize, CYDP and the Yabra Community Policing Center.

Dialogue and Consultation

"Dialogue is the main tool for establishing peace in a non-violent way; this is essentially the guiding philosophy of Interpeace." (Aguilar, I. 2o11). This policy proposal was developed by utilizing participatory methodologies centered on dialogue as a tool for generating action directed towards social developmental. Over a period of four months (August-November, 2011), direct consultation with the key actors and stakeholders, including youth who are institutionalized within the Wagner's Youth Facility and the Princess Royal Youth Hostel, yielded various perspectives, insights, recommendations, propositions and experiences relating to youth involved violence prevention.

All the violence prevention proposals listed in this document is a product of the dialogue that took place within the contexts of interviews, focus group sessions, field visits, and workshops involving Belizeans representing civil society organizations, government, criminal justice and juvenile justice system, the media, community leaders, youth organizations and professional experts.

Perhaps the most signficant contribution to the dialogue process came from those who are considered the primary beneficiars of the policy proposal: the Belizean youth. Undoubteldy, the perspective of the Belizean youth is highly represented in this document.   The were a total of five (5) focus group sessions involving approximately (54) youths from Belize (male and female), ages 15-24yrs; these youths were idendified as most "at risk" for involvement in violence, including institutionalized youths; high-school drop outs, members of youth gangs (male and female), youths who were convicted for involvement in violent crimes, and youths who are residents of volatile and highly violent neighborhoods. The focus groups took place at these (3)three instutitions:

- Conscious Youth Development Program
- Wagner's Youth Facility
- Princess Royal Youth Hostel

 Also included in the consultation process were interviews with representatives from the criminal and juvenile justice system, as well as, (3) dialogue workshops involving approximately 67 participants representing with local community youth organizations, civil society and the private sector, governmental personnel, and the media.

 Socialization and Validation

The socialization and validation of the draft policy proposal document was reviewed by representatives from all three sectors: government, civil soceity and youth, all of whom were involved in the consulation process and contributed to the formulation of the policy proposals.

2) LIST OF PARTICIPATING INSITUTIONS, ORGANIZATIONS AND PEOPLE:

Interviews, Field Visits & Professional Input
- Hon. Douglas Singh: **Ministry of Police and Public Safety**
- Mr. David Leacock: CEO, **Ministry of Education and Youth**
- Ms. Judity Alpuche: CEO, **Ministry of Human Development and Social Transformation**
- Ms. Starla Acosta: Director, **Communitry Rehabilitation Department**
- Mr. Douglas Hyde: Program Coordinator; **Community Policing Center**
- Ms. Glenda Mae- Martinez: Chief Supervisior, **Princess Royal Youth Hostel**
- Mr. Abdul Nunez: Supervisor, **Wagner's Youth Facility**
- Mr. Juan Vega: Director, **Ashcroft Rehabilitation Center**
- Ms. Marydelene Vasquez: Director, **RESTORE Belize**
- Ms. Christine Smith: Director, **Youth for the Future Secretariat**

Workshop 1: Civil Society Sector: August 31, 2011
- Sheldon Samuels: Ministry of Education and Youth: Adult Continuing Education Unit
- Lewis Reynolds: Belize Chamber of Commerce and Industry
- Jherillee Palacio: CARE Belize
- Marilyn Young: Belize Girl Guides Association
- Arthur Usher: Belize Family Life Association
- Nancy Lo: Belize Red Cross Society
- Evlyn Landaverry: Belize Red Cross Society
- Erika Goldson: UNFPA
- Melanie Price: Global Parish/ Youth Voices
- Evan Tate: Consultant: National Youth Policy

Workshop 2: Youth Organizations and Youth Leaders: September 1, 2011
- Leigh Ann Greenfield: Youth Enhancement Services
- Christine Staine: Youth Enhancement Services
- Elvira Pinelo: National 4H Youth Development Center
- Briheda Haylock: RADICAL Youth Group
- Mykal Welch: Youth Advocacy Movement
- Macory Neal: Youth Advocacy Movement

- Kyron Bennet: Youth Advocacy Movement
- Sarah McGaughey: International Year of the Youth Committee
- James Ruiz: International Year of the Youth Committee
- Crystal Dacoff: Youth for the Future
- Kori Banks: Youth for the Future
- Cashman Munnings: Conscious **Youth Development Programme**

Workshop 3: Government, Criminal Justice System and Media Representatives: October 4th, 2011
- Lisa Green; Anglican Diocese
- Erika Goldson: UNFPA
- Kenroy Smith: Conscious Youth Development Program
- Emerson Baptist: Conscious Youth Development Program
- Marlon Allen: Belize Police Department
- Esner Vellos: National Drug and Alcohol Abuse Council; Ministry of Health
- Courtney Gillett: Teacher
- Fredy Cantiallano: Belize Central Prison
- Joseph Card: Youth for the Future Secretariat: Ministry of Education and Youth
- Evan Tate: Consultant: National Youth Policy
- Mario Chavarria: Toledo Development Corporation
- Andre Price: TOLCA
- Monique Nardi: Pan American Health Association
- Stacy Smith: Gang Suppression Unit; Belize Police Department
- Diana Hall: Police Department
- Nancy Lo: Belize Red Cross Society
- Giselle Fonseca: Belize Red Cross Society
- Evlyn Landaverry: Belize Red Cross Society
- Kelly Raimer: Belize Red Cross/Peace Corps
- Kanisha Hall: Belize Red Cross Society
- Paulette Wade: **UNICEF**
- Raphael Martinez: Ministry of Police and Public Safety
- William Swan: National Youth Cadet: Ministry of Education and Youth
- Fitzroy Yearwood: Police Press Officer

- Sarah McGaughey: National Committee for Families and Children
- James Ruiz: National Committee for Families and Children
- Melissa Meralda: Princess Royal Youth Hostel
- Abdul Nunez: Wagner's Youth Facility/ Kolbe Foundation
- Starla Acosta: Community Rehabilitation Department: Ministry of Human Development and Social Transformation
- Nelma Mortis: RESTORE Belize

Validation Meeting: Tuesday, December 6th, 2011
- Stacy Smith: Gang Suppression Unit; Belize Police Department
- Elvira Pinelo: National 4H Youth Development Center
- Sheree Richards:Society for the Promotion of Education, Advocacy and Research (SPEAR)
- Lewis Reynolds: Belize Chamber of Commerce and Industry
- Diane Finnegan: Apprentice and Community Service Program: Ministry of Education and Youth.
- Sheena Gentle: Women Issues Network (Belize)
- Maureen Williams: Community Rehabilitation Department: Ministry of Human Development and Social Transformation
- Joseph Card: Youth for the Future Secretariat: Ministry of Education and Youth
- Douglas Hyde: Belize **Police Department: Community Policing Unit.**

Focus Group Participants:

Conscious Youth Development Program

- Cashman Munnings
- Joshua Anderson
- Tamera Mcfoy
- Lorna Garnett
- Kenyon McCauley
- Victor Pratt
- Myrick Gladden

- David Arnold
- Rachael Wallace
- Shane Herrera
- Special Mention to the Participants at Wagners Youth Facility & the Princess Royal Hostel (Names were not provided)

Herewithin is the resulting proposal for a public policy of youth-associated violence prevention for Belize. The policy proposed considers a timeframe of 10 years, from 2012 to 2022. This document is a tool to guide the efforts of those State officials and members of civil society who work towards the prevention of violence associated with youth; it meets Belize youths' aspirations of a peaceful and harmonious coexistence. We believe that to have a country without violence it is necessary to invest in the human development of its population.