

# Community meetings, poll, expert advice basis of project

Detroit Free Press 11:39 p.m. EST November 19, 2016



(Photo: Regina H. Boone, Detroit Free Press)

*This is one in a series of stories on efforts to improve children's lives. The Free Press spent a year talking to children across Detroit about how they live and what issues they see as most important. Safe neighborhoods, schools, job opportunities, teen pregnancy and help for young parents were among key issues raised. Based on these conversations, as well as community meetings and a poll, the Free Press looked at efforts both local and around the country. This project was done with a \$75,000 grant from the Solutions Journalism Network, a New York-based nonprofit that partners with newsrooms around the country to do projects that focus on solutions to social issues.*

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journalist Courtney E. Martin.

Solutions Journalism partners with newsrooms around the country to do projects that focus on solutions to social issues and provide funding for select projects.

The Free Press launched this project last fall by holding 11 community meetings. Six were with school-age youths and five were with parents — about people in all. The community meetings were led by Beverly Weathington, program coordinator for the Healthier Urban Families Outreach Program at Wayne State University's Merrill Palmer Skillman Institute. They were hosted by several community organizations that helped to randomly recruit the participants: Matrix Human Services, the Neighborhood Service Organization, the CHASS (Community Health and Social Services) Center, Palmer Pa activists and City Covenant Church in Detroit.

In the community meetings, the Free Press asked young participants to describe what it is like for them to grow up in Detroit. Their concerns ranged from safety on the streets to bullying in school, and from the quality of education they are receiving to opportunities to experience life beyond their neighborhoods. Those concerns were mirrored by their parents, many of whom grew up in Detroit and remembered a childhood that seemed much safer.

Among key issues raised by parents and children: that improving life for the city's children is a community responsibility, that the quality of education has to improve, that children need to feel safe, that children need opportunities to thrive outside of school and learn skills to help them grow. Most of all, they need mentors.

Participants also talked about the need to fix "broken homes" and "broken people" and that a child's quality of life is affected by what happens inside the home. They talked about too many teens having too many young people not equipped with the skills to raise them.

Based on these conversations, the



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conducted a wider poll of 400 people in the community. The poll helped narrow which issues to examine. Some of the programs profiled in the series have long histories and strong success metrics. Others exist in the city or around the state on a small scale, but could be expanded. Some show controversial, out-of-the-box approaches to reducing violence. They are meant to spark a conversation, not impose a solution.

The organizations that helped identify evidence-based programs include Child Trends, a Bethesda, Md.-based nonprofit that is a national leader in research focused exclusively on improving the lives of children, youths and their families, and the Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University, whose mission is to drive research-based innovation that helps children in adversity.

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