

NATIONAL

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gang unit supervisor Lt. Ron Wilson, to have juvenile probation officers ride along on police patrols at some point.

In all of this, critics say, grassroots programs like Youth 180 have taken a backseat in a top-down bureaucracy that's already months late and will do nothing more than what the city was already doing — in some cases, less — with little input from the community or young people on the activities, programs and jobs they say they want.

"When I was a child, I spent my time at the Parks Department," says Yvonne Newsom, an aide to Councilmember Richard McIver and the mother of a teenage daughter, both of whom voiced concerns at a June 25 town hall meeting held by council members. "The parks had programs where they took us camping; they signed us up for arts and crafts, they taught us swimming."

"All that was free," she says, "so while we've spent money putting people in prison — we always have money to send these kids to jail — we've cut back all types of programs for recreation and now we're asking what are we supposed to do?"

More police, detractors say, is not the answer: The racial profiling and unjustified stops, searches and verbal abuse that many African American teens say they have experienced, including ones in Ladd's group, make them wary of officers.

"Putting police officers in schools is just suppression," says Liz Ali, who founded the Mothers Outreach Movement after her son, 18-year-old Perry Henderson, was shot and killed at a party last year. "(It's) not dealing with the solution, it's not giving the youth what they need." Mentoring, she says, to change their lives.

The initiative will pay for 100 mentors. And its director, Mariko Lockhart, who joined the Office of Education in April, says the school officers will play a similar role by building relationships with students and identifying those who might need more attention. "I would hate to call that suppression," Lockhart says.

Through the Parks Department, the initiative is also paying for three community centers and the Rainier Vista Boys & Girls Club to offer extra programming and stay open even later summer hours — most of the night — to give teens a place to go. Lockhart, who formerly ran a New Jersey nonprofit focused on dropout prevention, says the program has also funded about 220 of the summer jobs that were offered this

year through the Human Services Department's Youth Employment Program.

But for every gain, there's been a loss — and a delay.

Mayor Greg Nickels asked members of Youth 180 to stand beside him when he announced the initiative last September at the Central District's Garfield Teen Life Center. But in the back and forth between the mayor and City Council, which took until April to finalize the plan, months went by while the city worked out which department was going to do what, says Ladd, delaying the \$25,000 grants that Youth 180 and two other groups had been awarded by the Department of Neighborhoods.

The three were originally awarded \$20,000 each last year under what had been the Central District & Rainier Beach Youth Initiative, which the Department of Neighborhoods started in 2007. Where that initiative funded 22 community projects last year, only three remain: Youth 180, another mentoring program run by the Black-on-Black Crime Prevention Coalition and Game Recognize Game, a program run by a Central District group called Umoja Fest that explores various jobs within the sports industry as models for success.

Five more programs have just gotten Neighborhood grants of \$15,000 or less, Lockhart says, with about five more awards to come, for a total of about 13 youth programs compared with last year's 22.

The Central District's lead agency, the Urban League of Metropolitan Seattle, has already hired three full-time and three part-time outreach workers to talk to teens and their families. But where there were 19 case managers under an old city consortium of programs called the Seattle Team for Youth, the new initiative will pay for 11, with higher average caseloads of 25 teens compared with 15 before, city documents show.

But the city's already had case management and late-night summer programs, Ali says, and they don't pull in the kids who are killing each other. She's also worried there's no programming at all for young adults 18 to 24.

"My son was 18 when he was killed," Ali says. "What about the 18-year-old? Where does he go? What program does he have?"

For 18-year-old Albert Pool, it's a new job that he's just started as a childcare specialist at the Rainier Vista Boys & Girls Club, which is leading a consortium of programs that will serve as the initiative's lead agency in Rainier Valley.

Pool was 12 when he saw a close family friend gunned down in the street in an

argument. That same year, he lost two family members in an accident and a shooting — tragedies, he says, that have helped shape his fierceness and passion. He's now working to finish high school and says he doesn't see much value in what the mayor is doing.

"I honestly feel they're going about it the wrong way. They're going through a lot of corporate, from-the-outside-looking-in type stuff," Pool says. "It's never going to work, because the people that they're trying to affect are just going to be like, 'they haven't been through what we have, they don't know what they're talking about' — because they don't."

"Instead of talking down and making everybody in the situation look so negative and so hopeless and pitiful," he says, "they need to realize that the main power of change lies with the people" — who are only going to change, Pool says, when they're ready.

And if they're not ready to leave the friends they have in gangs — the people they think of and rely on as family — it isn't going to happen to make some corporate type happy, he says.

"Gangs don't necessarily need to be criminalized. They don't need to be locked up," says Moni Tep, a staff member with Communities Against Rape and Abuse who spoke June 2 at a City Hall forum that Lockhart participated in on youth violence. "So much money is being put in every single year for these gang preventions, but we're not really at the root, we're not really talking about what's going on."

"It's not just about reaching out and saying I'm going to help you here [or] give you this," says Tep, who lost two friends to gun violence last year. "It's about if nobody else loves you, then I'm going to love you because you're a human being."

In all the coalescing and coordinating of services, "There will be adults who will say, 'I love you,'" Lockhart says. "I think that absolutely goes to the core of it — it's really about 'Does someone care about me?'"

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— MONI TEP
 COMMUNITIES AGAINST RAPE AND ABUSE

Chicago youths find their voice

Group works to show the potential cast to the streets

BY BEN COOK
 STREET NEWS SERVICE

CHICAGO, ILL. —

Homeless youth gather once a month at Chicago's Lakeview Broadway Youth Center to share their stories with vocolo.org, a non-profit radio station compiling their experiences to make this invisible population's struggles known.

"There's an unfortunate saying in the media: 'If it bleeds, it leads,'" said Anne Holcomb, organizer of the homeless-youth activism group HELLO, to a room of 24 youths, referring to the tendency of bad news to grab more headlines than good news. For the past five years she's led HELLO (Homeless Experts Living Life's Obstacles), and in the face of severe budget cuts she wants people to know that "we bleed. We have blood in our veins. Crap happens out on the street. Life is hard, and we need the government and the public to pay more attention."

HELLO is the longest continuously organized homeless youths activism group

in the country; some of the older youths in the group have been with it almost since the beginning. It's also at the mercy of Chicago's lean 2009 social-services budget.

The point of HELLO is to educate the public, policy makers, and the media about the needs of homeless youths; to give the young adults in the group opportunities to become active citizens, to gain self-esteem and self-mastery, to respond to social and policy issues that impact them, to be heard and to learn life skills.

Co-sponsored by The Night Ministry and The Chicago Coalition for the Homeless, a total of 123 youth ages 14 to 25 participated actively in the HELLO during the last fiscal year (2008). Weekly Tuesday meeting attendance averages around 15-30 youth. Beth Cunningham, a lawyer with the Chicago Coalition, also provides essential support and professional resources. Holcomb, formerly a homeless youths herself, discussed why she formed the

A homeless youth catches some sleep on the train in Chicago.

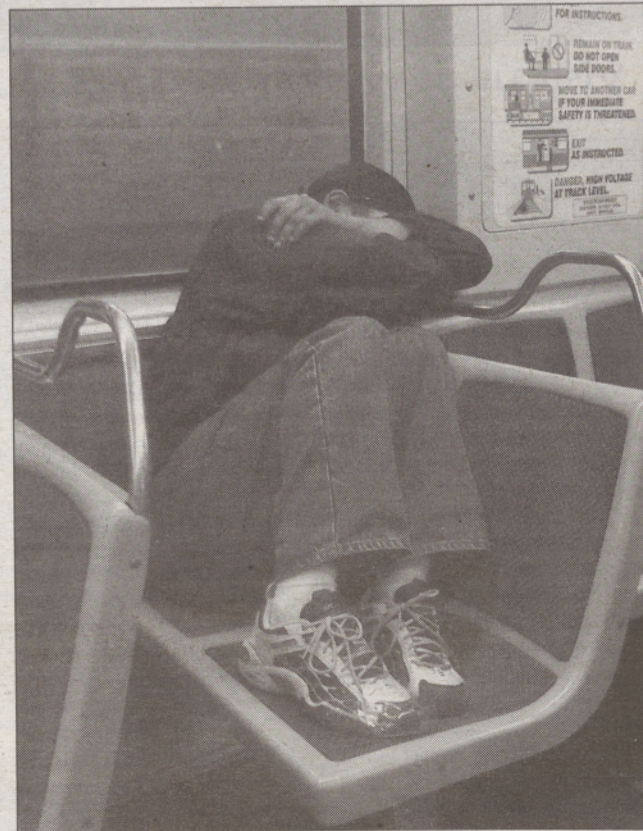


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