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FIVE MESSAGES: STEVENSON INSPIRES 2013 SUMMIT

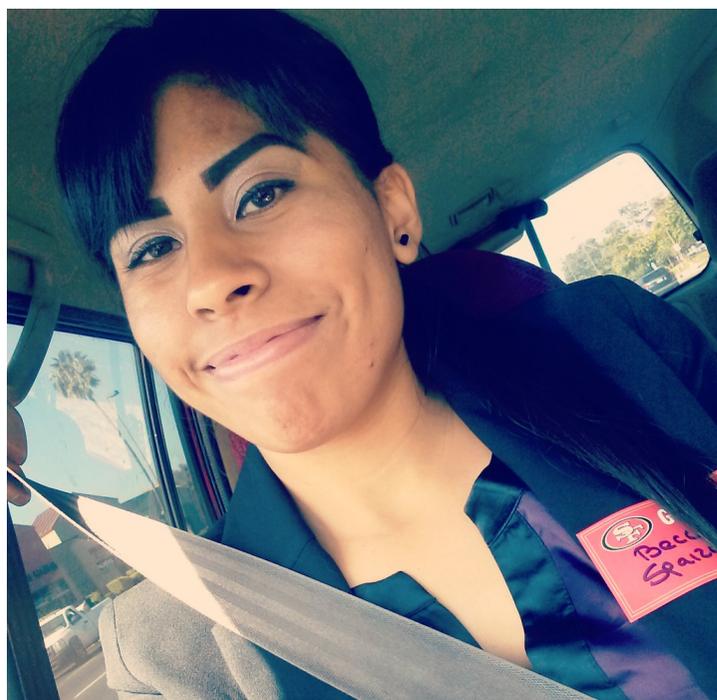
"That's going to make you tired, tired, tired," Ms. Rosa Parks once said to Bryan Stevenson, Founder and Executive Director of the Equal Justice Initiative (EJI). Her words were more than just recognition of the magnitude of the work Mr. Stevenson and EJI do—they were encouragement to continue the important effort of confronting class and racial biases in the criminal justice system, despite the cuts and bruises the fight would yield. Along with Ms. Parks' words, Johnnie Carr's rejoinder in that conversation, "That's why you've got to be brave, brave, brave," is a message to all National Forum on Youth Violence Prevention cities to continue an exhausting, challenging, and worthy struggle.

At day's end on September 26, 2013, participants at the Forum's Third Annual Summit on Preventing Youth Violence returned to the main ballroom for the final plenary session. Waiting for them was an inspirational, motivating speaker who, in the words of Robert Listenbee, Administrator of the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, "has spent his career on the front line of social change." Mr. Stevenson took the stage to provide participants with five messages that are essential for bringing about change in youth violence prevention.

Through personal anecdotes, critical insights into policy, and acknowledgment of the historical legacy and biases that have left youth at risk for violence throughout their lives, Mr. Stevenson offered encouragement and a way forward for Summit attendees. "It's extremely exciting to see the kind of work, to hear the kind of conversations, that we're hearing," he said, giving a nod to the success that Summit participants are achieving, through work they're doing with "energy and commitment and enthusiasm."

Mr. Stevenson's five messages—identity matters, the need for proximity, changing the narrative, remaining hopeful, and the willingness to be uncomfortable—exemplify the actions and attitudes of Forum cities as they work to prevent youth violence and create healthier spaces for young people. With each message, he delivered powerful stories, describing people he had met, children he had represented, and encouragement he received along the way.

MORE THAN A SECOND CHANCE AN INTERVIEW WITH REBECCA ESPARZA



Rebecca Esparza, co-lead, Youth Voice Initiative

Can you tell me what your school and home life was like growing up?

I witnessed a lot of violence because my parents were always fighting. I never understood what they were arguing about, but it was [constantly] the same thing. I remember taking my sisters [aside] because things would get really bad. They would cry to me but I didn't know what to do. My parents would try to apologize later, but [their fighting] was so consistent that as time passed, I kind of got used to it.

The last incident was when my mom finally left us. They woke me up in the middle of the night because my dad wanted me to witness her leaving us for good. I have such a vivid memory of that [night] ... it's always in the back of my mind. I didn't understand why she would want to separate our family.

From then on, I was just so hurt and kept a lot of feelings inside. My dad had to raise [us] girls on his own and there were always different people coming in and out of our lives. Throughout my childhood, my mother was in and out of jail, making promises that she would change and we would be happy again. My dad ended up marrying someone [else]. That's when my whole life changed completely.

As I got older, I started to [tire] of the lies and tried to find an escape. At age 13, I began associating with gangs. I felt they understood what was happening in my life because they were going through the same thing or even worse. This led to committing my first crime and being on probation. My dad found out one day I had been cited for burglary and we started arguing at dinner. Things got out of hand and he started choking me in front of the entire family. I have never been so traumatized. That's when I thought everything was my fault. I started running away from home, and school went down the drain. I kept committing more crimes, which led to getting expelled from middle school. By the time I [made it] to high school, I got expelled for assault with battery on a rival gang member. I ended up at a continuation school and found I fit in because everyone was on probation, gang affiliated, or living in an unstable household.

Things just got worse at home. I was incarcerated at 15 for assault and battery. A few months later, I [was] locked up a second time for carjacking, assault with a deadly weapon, and six robberies. I spent 8 months in a juvenile facility. I remember writing my family, telling them the same things my mom would tell me. I kind of understood where she was [coming] from but wanted to be nothing like her. I had to change but didn't know how. When I got out, I went back to the same environment and people.

Who and what programs helped change your path?

Speaking about identity, Mr. Stevenson fondly recalled his grandmother's words to him as a child, imploring him to love his mother, always do the right thing (even if it proved exceedingly difficult), and never drink. Laughingly, he related it was a talk all of his siblings and cousins heard, but marked it as a moment that helped define his identity. He spoke to the importance of empowering youth to find their identities and making the effort to relate to them. "There is power in identity," he said. "When we create relationships that are rooted in identity, that are meaningful to those people, we can change the world."

With proximity, Mr. Stevenson gave the audience a heartbreaking lesson on the need to get close to problems in order to help solve them. Representing a child in custody awaiting trial as an adult after killing a man who had hurt his mother, Mr. Stevenson said the young boy would not speak until he put his arm around the child. The youth then collapsed into tears and told him of the horrors he had experienced in jail. "Who is responsible for this?" asked Mr. Stevenson. "We are. We've allowed our anger and our ignorance and our fear to do unbelievably traumatizing things to children. Proximity will teach us something about how we need to change."

To effect true change, Mr. Stevenson emphasized the need to alter long-held narratives. Speaking against theories from three and four decades ago created without evidence, Mr. Stevenson acknowledged the need to change how people view youth and violence. Instead of the "superpredator" label that removed a child's humanity and victimization, he urged people to think of these children as *supervictims*. They are "children who have been failed by everybody." Erasing such a destructive narrative and drafting a new one that accounts for circumstances and compassion could truly advance the Forum's work.

Believing we can do what hasn't been done before was a key message of Mr. Stevenson's presentation. By stretching imaginations and bursting boundaries that are held too firmly, hope can drive extraordinary change. Mr. Stevenson said we need to learn "how to stomp our feet, how to create a rhythm that vibrates, so people who have no voice now can be heard, and can be seen as beautiful and caring."

His final message was the willingness to be uncomfortable. "We set our brains for that—because if we don't, we get turned around." In disrupting decades of violence, intervening in communities, and confronting families, Summit participants and their peers place themselves in uncomfortable situations without fail. But by acknowledging and embracing that discomfort, they are displaying the strength to help improve situations.

Mr. Stevenson's presentation ended in thunderous applause, capping off a day that established important themes, issued challenges, and provided support as Forum cities continue their work in addressing youth violence. Theron Pride, Senior Advisor at the Office of Justice Programs, closed the day with a short but perfect summation: "Enough said."

NEWS

Fresh Lifelines for Youth (FLY) changed my life completely. I wouldn't be where I am today if it weren't for [their] positive support. They matched me with a mentor who truly cared about me and proved it by visiting every week while I was incarcerated. She never judged me and was always eager to help. They also provided a law education program while I was [in juvenile detention], which taught me my rights and the consequences of my actions. Their Leadership program gave me the opportunity to give back to my community and have fun sober with youth who were just like me. They brought out the real me and [turned] me into a Peer Leader, where I found my true happiness. [While] volunteering, I've been able to mentor youth who are going through the same thing I did as a kid—and sometimes still do. Many of them look up to me and ask for advice. FLY takes us on fun [trips] to San Francisco, zip-lining in Santa Cruz, and deep sea fishing at Half Moon Bay. We also [participate in] many community service events, such as feeding the homeless, speaking to middle school kids, and water restoration projects.

What is the Youth Voice Initiative?

The Youth Voice Initiative's purpose is to ensure dialogue between youth and officials. It started with the National Forum on Youth Violence Prevention because they felt they needed a youth perspective on this topic. Our goal is to create a youth task force and utilize media to [build] awareness. We are working on our first live talk show with multimedia partners at CreaTV. Youth will [handle] all aspects, from hosting to editing, running the cameras and lights, and producing the show. Our job is to create six talk shows and three public service announcements.

What other youth-focused programs are you involved in?

Besides FLY's Leadership and Speech Committee programs, I'm also part of the Opportunity Youth Partnership Leadership Council.

At the Summit in September, you said "I witnessed acts of violence growing up ... I participated in acts of violence. I didn't know how to cope in an unstable environment." What more do you think after-school programs and young people who have lived through similar situations can do to prevent this from happening?

I would say offering leadership training programs where youth have the opportunity to find their skills, [be matched] with a mentor, and [get informed] about the law. Also, understanding why youth do what they do, but giving them a second chance to change. Inform them there are so many

Reports

National Academies Release Commercial Sexual Exploitation and Trafficking Report

Institute of Medicine, 2013

Efforts to prevent, identify, and respond to commercial sexual exploitation and sex trafficking are largely undersupported, inefficient, uncoordinated, and unevaluated. "[Confronting Commercial Sexual Exploitation and Sex Trafficking of Minors in the United States](#)" examines approaches to address commercial sexual exploitation and sex trafficking, identifying causes and consequences for victims and offenders.

Recommendations to prevent, identify, and respond to these crimes are highlighted.

National Academies Releases Report on Child Abuse and Neglect

National Academies, 2013

Commissioned by the Department of Health and Human Services' Administration for Children, Youth and Families, "[New Directions in Child Abuse and Neglect Research](#)" looks at studies on the extent, causes, and consequences of child abuse and neglect, as well as the effectiveness of intervention programs. The report provides recommendations for establishing a coordinated national infrastructure to support future research on child abuse and neglect.

OJJDP Bulletin Examines Intersection Between Delinquency and Victimization

Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, 2013

The Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention released "[Children's Exposure to Violence and the Intersection Between Delinquency and Victimization](#)," the fifth publication in a series on the National Survey of Children's Exposure to Violence, which gathered data on incidence and prevalence of children's exposure to violence across all ages, settings, and time frames. Findings on the link between delinquency and victimization among 10- to 17-year-olds in the study have implications for adolescent development and intervention practitioners.

News

OJJDP Awards \$8 Million in Grants to Reduce Youth Violence

The Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention announced more than \$8 million in Community-Based Violence Prevention [program awards](#) to six U.S. sites. Grants will support the sites as they replicate proven programs to reduce gun and gang violence. Grant recipients include Camden, New Jersey; East Baton Rouge, Louisiana; Kansas City, Missouri; Newport News, Virginia; Syracuse, New York; and the Maryland Governor's Office of Crime Control and Prevention.

\$1.2 Million in DOJ Grants Support Philadelphia Youth

Philadelphia received [two grants](#) totaling more than \$1.2 million from the Department of Justice to support programs and services that benefit city youth. As part of the National Forum on Youth

opportunities and resources out there—that they can be someone, and lead them to it. Having consistent support is the best one can do. Never give up on a youth. [He/she] might need more than just a second chance.

Was the Summit helpful for you in other ways? What did you learn or take away from the 2-day meeting? Will you keep in touch with those you met for the first time?

[The Summit] was helpful because it showed me there are many organizations that truly care about the at-risk/juvenile population. [I also saw] I'm not the only one who struggles. There are many youth around the country who go through the same thing or worse than [I did] growing up, but we are all able to overcome our obstacles. I enjoyed the lunch they had for the youth because I got to know their stories on a more personal level and network with other organizations. I will definitely keep in touch with each person I encountered.

What would you change about the Summit? What would you like to see at next year's meeting?

I would honestly like to see more youth and have [them] share their stories. I felt I needed to share so much more, but there wasn't enough time. I wanted everybody to really understand where I came from, why I did the things I did, and how and why I changed.

What would you tell another 18-year-old female who was attempting to move ahead in life but dealing with past involvement in crime, violence, or drugs?

Not to let what people say or do faze you. Continuing to worry about yourself and everyone who tries to bring you down or lead you in the wrong direction is irrelevant. Changing takes time, and it's not going to happen in a day—it might take a few months [and even] years. I encounter my past even today. Just because I've changed, not everyone around me has. I still have to watch my surroundings and try to avoid conflict as much as possible. Honestly, working in the community gains credibility. I know if I ever come into a situation on the streets, I will be okay because of all the support I have.

UPDATES

The Third Annual Summit on Preventing Youth Violence centered on promoting and enhancing youth violence prevention strategies,

Violence Prevention, the City of Philadelphia received \$235,073 to support technical assistance for Positive Behavioral Intervention Supports in schools with high suspension and violent incident rates. The Philadelphia Children's Alliance will receive \$1,059,910 to enhance Children's Advocacy Centers and Multidisciplinary Abuse Teams in nine Northeast states.

\$20.5 Million Transformation of Dorchester's Quincy Corridor

A substantial grant will launch a [massive revitalization of Dorchester's Quincy Corridor](#) in Boston. The city was one of five in the United States to receive Implementation Grants awarded under the Housing and Urban Development's Choice Neighborhoods Initiative. Also awarded to Chicago, New Orleans, San Francisco, and Seattle, funding will be used to transform distressed neighborhoods into communities with affordable housing, safe streets, and access to quality educational opportunities.

OJJDP Administrator Discusses Juvenile Justice Reform Efforts in NPR Interview

Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) Administrator Robert L. Listenbee [discussed OJJDP's priorities](#) with *National Public Radio*, emphasizing the need to support research and programs that promote youth safety and well-being. Mr. Listenbee spoke about the adoption of a trauma-informed approach for treating children exposed to violence and a developmental approach to juvenile justice.

Hartnell College Student Wants to Give Salinas Youth a Voice in Fighting Violence

For 4 years, 21-year-old Hartnell College student Fernanda Ocana has worked to change Salinas' history of street violence. "I love my community," she said to [The Herald News](#), and spoke about how she could improve it. Ms. Ocana attended the Third Annual Summit on Preventing Youth Violence in September, representing Salinas on a panel that addressed how young people's community and city involvement can improve widespread violence.

Other Resources

Youth Speak Out: Approaching Difficult Subjects Through Creativity

In a [National Clearinghouse on Families & Youth podcast](#), Tiara Bennett talks about the *Choices We Make*, a film she wrote about teen pregnancy, and how creative projects in general can help young people have difficult conversations.

Bullying Prevention Training Center

These [research-based resources](#) were created to help lead bullying prevention efforts in local communities.

U.S. Department of Education Releases Fact Sheet on Teen Dating Violence

[Teen Dating Violence—A Fact Sheet for Schools](#) outlines the extent of the problem, with nationwide statistics on dating violence and sexual assault. There are many steps students and schools can take to reduce such violence, including educating their community about prevention and identification; developing locally tailored, appropriate responses to address teen dating violence; and providing effective support to traumatized youth.

Public Health and Public Safety Collaborations Are Key to

incorporating knowledge about trauma exposure, and highlighting tools and resources to sustain the Forum's work. All materials from the Summit are now available, including the [agenda](#), [videos](#), [PowerPoint presentations](#), and [speaker biographies](#).

ANNOUNCEMENTS & UPCOMING EVENTS

Training Opportunities

National Mentoring Summit

The [2014 National Mentoring Summit](#) will be held January 30–31, 2014, in Arlington, Virginia. Hosted by MENTOR: The National Mentoring Partnership, in collaboration with the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, Corporation for National and Community Service, Harvard School of Public Health, and United Way Worldwide, this event will focus on evidence-based mentoring practices that support academic achievement and positive social behavior. Workshops will highlight innovative program models, emerging research, and professional development.

Funding Opportunities

Grant Announcement

The Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention has [awarded](#) \$400,000 to the American Institutes for Research and National Crittenton Foundation in support of the National Girls Institute (NGI). NGI works to reduce the number of girls in the juvenile justice system and improve treatment of girls in detention, with standards of care, access to resources, and training and technical assistance for professionals.

Preventing Youth Gang Membership

Published by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and National Institute of Justice, [Changing Course: Preventing Gang Membership](#) aims to help communities end the detrimental effects of gangs on kids, families, neighborhoods, and society. To achieve a significant and lasting reduction in youth gang activity, it's crucial to prevent young people from joining gangs in the first place. According to the book, there are at least four reasons to focus on principles of prevention:

1. Much of what we know about preventing gang membership is drawn from research in other prevention fields, such as juvenile delinquency and violence prevention.
2. Joining a gang is a complex process that involves both individual volition and social influences; therefore, it is difficult to imagine that a single "recipe" for preventing gang membership would be effective for all at-risk youth across the array of social contexts.
3. Our focus on prevention principles better equips us to confront specific public health and public safety issues linked to gang membership: interpersonal violence, truancy and school dropout, alcohol and substance abuse, and a host of related crime and health challenges.
4. By emphasizing principles, we seek to move the public discourse beyond an overly simplistic notion of gangs and gang problems—in an effort to cultivate an understanding of the complex array of social patterns and individual behaviors that are encountered under the rubric of "gangs."

Contact Us

Send questions or feedback about the newsletter to NFYVP@dsgonline.com or [subscribe](#).

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