

## Testimony of Michael B. Greene, Ph.D., Rutgers School of Criminal Justice

“People don’t like to be nobodies these days; they like to be somebody or try to be somebody” a former gang member.

Two decades ago, Robert Martinson and his colleagues, based on 231 studies on offender rehabilitation, dramatically declared that “Nothing Works.” Today, evidence-based programs and polices, as well as best practices, are widely available.

### The Two Approaches to Evidence-Based Programs

- 1. Brand Name, Rigorously Evaluated, Programs, Practices, and Policies:** Evidence-supported programs include: intervention programs for youth who have exhibited chronic and serious anti-social behavior, early prevention programs, and universal prevention programs for school-aged children and youth.
- 2. Program Elements of Effectiveness:** Examines new or existing programs and rates programs on specific elements that have been established through meta-analyses as common among effective programs. This approach can be used for continuous quality improvement for locally developed violence prevention programs.

**Going Forward: Six Overarching Concerns and Best Practice Remedies** that fuel anti-social and violent behavior, must be directly and forcefully supplement and be incorporated into existing stand-alone programs and policies.

- 1. High Exposure to Violence and Related Forms of Trauma:** Identification, awareness, and treatment of complex trauma (best practices and evidence-based programs are available, as is training for first responders).
- 2. Oppressed, marginalized, Overwhelmed Caretakers:** Family support is critically important.
- 3. Unforgivably high of high school dropout rates in our urban centers:** Our first priority needs to be the creating of caring school cultures and early identification of academic failure.
- 4. Low Collective Efficacy:** Weak social bonds, social cohesion, and informal social control among neighbors. Promising evidence collective efficacy can be enhanced through community organizing efforts.
- 5. Systemic Racism:** Despite continuously decreasing rates of juvenile crime and violence, racial disparities persist. The McArthur Foundation’s has supported evidence-based reform practices to reduce rates of arrest, detention, and incarceration; with corresponding evidence that these practices can reduce such disparities.
- 6. Extreme Economic Immobility, Concentrated Neighborhood Poverty, and High Rates of Unemployment:** Economic training and opportunities require multi-sector innovations.

### Overarching Best Practices and Core Values

- 1. Positive Youth Development (PYD):** Focus on youth capacities instead of deficits:
  - A. The 8 Cs:** Competence, Confidence, Connection, Character, Caring/Compassion, Contribution, Cooperation, and Commitment.
  - B. Incorporate and Infuse Core PYD Values and Activities into Programs and Policies**
    - a. Young people prosper in the context of caring, non-judgmental, and respectful peer and adult relationships.
    - b. In order to function optimally, young people need to feel psychologically and physically safe.
    - c. Activities and programs should be built upon the strengths, interests, competencies of the youth they serve.
    - d. Provide youth with active leadership roles in planning, creating, and implementing policies and activities.
    - e. Engage youth in identifying, analyzing, and responding to social and economic inequities and injustices in their neighborhoods and schools and provide the guidance to do so.
- 2. Community Youth-Led Organizing:** This form of engaging youth people as leaders in the change process compliments and enhances positive youth development, promotes collective efficacy, and has effected change in discipline policies in school, policing practices, environment protections, job opportunities, immigrant rights, civil rights, changes in juvenile justice practice and policies.
  - A. The true experts in the Lives of Marginalized Youth are the Marginalized young people.** We cannot and should not waste this expertise. These youth typically have been viewed as problematic at best and super-predators at worse. We must engage them as expert partners to reduce violence and enhance healthy development.
  - B. Youth learn best and are most motivated to engage in healthy and productive activities if they are provided with authentic opportunities to voice and pursue their views and ideas.** We need to learn that we can learn from these young people. Multiple opportunities for expression include photovoice, theater, poetry, mural projects, and, of course direct community organizing efforts. The engagement, however, cannot be what we typically see as adult determined community service projects like cleaning up parts and streets.
  - C. As it no stands, most of these young people never get to even think and feel, as Marlon Brando famously said in On the Waterfront, “I coulda been a contender.”** Sadly, many of these young people see violence as the only way to achieve status or juice, the only way to get attention, and, importantly, as a means to be somebody.
  - D. We need to give marginalized young people opportunities to identify neighborhood problems, to help figure out what would improve their neighborhoods, and to train them in their rights and how to organize to remedy the neighborhood problems they identify.**