

# RAISING YOUTH VOICES

Designing A Social-Norm Campaign

The University of Louisville (UofL) Youth  
Violence Prevention Research Center (YVPRC)

YOUTH VIOLENCE

YV  
PC

PREVENTION CENTERS

**“We really want youth to become social agents of change in their community.”**

— **Dr. Billie Castle**

Postdoctoral Research Fellow

The University of Louisville Youth Violence Prevention Research Center (YVPRC) is focused on changing social norms about youth violence in West Louisville, KY. This area experiences many challenges that increase the risk for youth violence, including limited employment opportunities, economic disadvantage, and residential instability.

Established in 2015 with support from CDC, the YVPRC partners with community organizations to implement a community-wide social norms campaign called “Pride, Peace, Prevention.” The campaign cultivates positive racial identity and inspires leadership and community engagement to promote youth violence prevention.

## SHIFTING THE NARRATIVE

One of the YVPRC’s goals is for youth to understand how social systems and organizational structures create the conditions that contribute to violence in their community. First, they help youth recognize that they are not bound to these social norms—that violence is not the answer to resolve conflict. **Then, they empower youth to change these norms—and eventually be part of the transformative change needed in their communities.**

The goal of the campaign is to provide knowledge about Black history and shift the dominant narratives of what it means to be Black in the United States. The campaign promotes cultural/racial **pride** and strives for a nonviolent **peaceful** community to **prevent** youth violence. The YVPRC recognizes the need to shift community dialogue to address the root causes of youth violence (such as patterns of inequity, economic disparities, and discrimination) in a meaningful way.



Centers for Disease  
Control and Prevention  
National Center for Injury  
Prevention and Control

**“Our campaign reframes the definition of youth violence to go beyond youth behavior. It focuses attention on recognizing and addressing how social structures and institutions prevent some people from reaching their full potential, particularly youth of color.”**

**— Dr. Monica Wendel**

Principal Investigator

## LAUNCHING “PRIDE, PEACE, PREVENTION”

The YVPRC engages local youth through their “Louisville Youth Voices against Violence” Fellows program. The Fellows contribute expertise and share in the decision-making and ownership of the social norms campaign. They play a leading role in crafting messages and imagery related to Black history and cultural pride. They engage in community conversations to start shifting dominant narratives about Black youth that have fostered beliefs and norms that promote and condone violence.

Prior to designing the campaign, Fellows also participated in learning sessions, researched African-American and world history, and furthered their understanding of how historical policies and practices have influenced Black communities.

The YVPRC’s approach to engage youth as subject experts in their own community is a distinguishing feature of the project that contributes to its success, and serves as a model for other communities working to reduce violence. The Fellows’ lived experiences permeate the campaign and further violence prevention discussions with a truly authentic voice.

The campaign launched in Spring 2017 and uses social media, TV and radio ads, bus shelter signs, and billboards. The first wave of the campaign depicts Fellows recreating images of Black leaders who changed history.

The YVPRC evaluates social media platforms to ensure messages are reaching youth where they are and creates meaningful partnerships to enhance the campaign and inspire community engagement across a variety of business, non-profit, and public sectors.

**“I am trying to reach out and pull others through the door. I want to open their eyes to understand their identity and be proud of who they are.”**

**— Elijah Thomas**

Louisville Youth Violence Voices Fellow



## ASSESSING THE CAMPAIGN'S IMPACT

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To assess the impact of the campaign, UofL YVPRC and its partners evaluate the impact of the campaign on community norms and youth violence in West Louisville, KY relative to a city not receiving the campaign, East Nashville, TN. YVPRC measures individual- and community-level outcomes using the following qualitative and quantitative data:



Surveys, interviews, and focus groups to examine West Louisville's history and values, social norms, attitudes toward violence, self-reported violence, and exposure to the social norming campaign,



Administrative data from emergency departments, schools, and police to evaluate the impact of the campaign on youth violence in the community



Cost- effectiveness of developing a social norming campaign to reduce incidents of violence among youth.

The long term goal of the project is to design, test, and provide an innovative, evidence-based strategy that communities across the country can replicate to prevent youth violence. The focus of the YVPRC is to build the capacity of local youth and the community to address structural inequities, which put some groups more at risk for violence than others. Addressing these inequities cannot be accomplished through this campaign alone, but will serve as the catalyst for action across the community. Evidence of its success will appear over time—as social norms that contribute to violence are intentionally shifted, dominant storylines about youth are dismantled, and new narratives about pride, peace, and prevention are elevated.

**“Change is incremental. It doesn’t happen overnight. We are at least looking into what can be done and formulating action strategies.”**

— **Elijah Thomas**

Louisville Youth Violence Voices Fellow

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## WANT TO LEARN MORE?

Visit The University of Louisville Youth Violence Prevention Center (UofL YVPC) [louisville.edu/sphis/departments/yvprc](http://louisville.edu/sphis/departments/yvprc) and [pridepeaceprevention.org](http://pridepeaceprevention.org)

Visit CDC's Youth Violence Prevention Center: [cdc.gov/violenceprevention/YVPC/](http://cdc.gov/violenceprevention/YVPC/)

