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Supporting a Future Evaluation of the Seattle Youth Violence Prevention Initiative (SYVPI)

10/24/2014

Seattle Office of City Auditor

REPORT SUMMARY

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At the request of the Seattle City Council, the Office of City Auditor contracted with the evaluation firm, MEF Associates, to conduct an evaluability assessment of the Seattle Youth Violence Prevention Initiative (SYVPI) to determine whether it is ready for an evaluation of its effectiveness. The report from MEF identified some strengths of SYVPI but concluded that due to a number of issues with the design and implementation of SYVPI, a rigorous evaluation of the effectiveness of SYVPI from 2009 through present is not possible. The report outlines a series of steps that SYVPI could take to get ready for an evaluation at some point in the future.

In addition, our office has outlined five specific things that the Executive and City Council could do to support a future evaluation of SYVPI:

1. Ensure that SYVPI has clear goals,
2. Support a youth violence needs assessment,
3. Monitor progress of the SYVPI risk assessment tool,
4. Ensure that SYVPI has an adequate data system, and
5. Require SYVPI management to report regularly to the Executive and City Council on its evaluation readiness.

Office of City Auditor Mission Statement

Our Mission:

To help the City of Seattle achieve honest, efficient management and full accountability throughout City government. We serve the public interest by providing the City Council, Mayor and City department heads with accurate information, unbiased analysis, and objective recommendations on how best to use public resources in support of the well-being of Seattle residents.

Background:

Seattle voters established our office by a 1991 amendment to the City Charter. The office is an independent department within the legislative branch of City government. The City Auditor reports to the City Council and an audit committee, and has a four-year term to ensure her/his independence in deciding what work the office should perform and reporting the results of this work. The Office of City Auditor conducts performance audits and non-audit projects covering City of Seattle programs, departments, grantees, and contracts. The City Auditor's goal is to ensure that the City of Seattle is run as effectively and efficiently as possible in compliance with applicable laws and regulations.

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The office's work is performed in accordance with the Government Auditing Standards issued by the Comptroller General of the United States. These standards provide guidelines for audit planning, fieldwork, quality control systems, staff training, and reporting of results. In addition, the standards require that external auditors periodically review our office's policies, procedures, and activities to ensure that we adhere to these professional standards.

Supporting a Future Evaluation of the Seattle Youth Violence Prevention Initiative (SYVPI)

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City of Seattle
Office of City Auditor

MEMORANDUM

Date: October 24, 2014

To: Honorable Ed Murray, Mayor
City Councilmembers

From: David G. Jones, City Auditor

RE: Supporting a Future Evaluation of the Seattle Youth Violence Prevention Initiative (SYVPI)

In October 2013, at the request of the City Council, the Office of City Auditor contracted with the evaluation firm, MEF Associates, to conduct an evaluability assessment of the Seattle Youth Violence Prevention Initiative (SYVPI). SYVPI was established in 2009 to reduce youth violence in the city of Seattle. The budget for SYVPI has grown from \$3.26 million in 2010 to \$5.63 million in 2014, and \$5.7 million requested for 2015. In addition, the Seattle Police Department has budget authority for four School Emphasis Officers and a Sergeant that support SYVPI. The purpose of the evaluability assessment was to determine whether SYVPI was ready for a rigorous evaluation, and if so, what evaluation strategy would be best suited to determine the effectiveness of SYVPI.

The report from MEF (attached) concluded that due to a number of issues with the design and implementation of SYVPI, a rigorous evaluation of SYVPI's effectiveness from 2009 through present is not possible. The report outlines a series of steps that SYVPI could take to get ready for an evaluation at some point in the future.

The MEF report identifies innovations and strengths of SYVPI including some program components that are based in research evidence¹, a culturally relevant approach to service-delivery, and dedicated program staff. We concur with these observations of SYVPI's strengths. In particular, we have found the SYVPI staff and contractors to be wholly committed to improving the lives of the Seattle youth they serve and the communities in which they live.

The challenges to evaluation presented in the MEF report are not meant as a critique. Rather, they should serve as a starting point for course correction that will allow SYVPI to better understand the impact its efforts are having on reducing youth violence in Seattle.

¹ Mentoring and Aggression Replacement Training (ART) are program models that have strong research evidence that show that they meet their intended outcomes. SYVPI utilizes Mentoring and ART for some of the youth they serve. However, evaluations have not been conducted yet to determine SYVPI's fidelity to these proven-effective program models.

Evaluation will also help the broader community understand the impact of SYVPI, it will help the City better respond to the changing dynamics of youth violence, and it will help keep the efforts sustained over time. However, evaluating a program as complex as SYVPI with its many stakeholders and service providers will be a formidable task. The Executive's attached response to the MEF report indicates that SYVPI plans to address the evaluation planning steps outlined by MEF. However, SYVPI cannot be expected to ready itself for a rigorous evaluation without significant support from the Executive and City Council.

Below, we have outlined five specific things that the Executive and City Council could do to support a future evaluation of SYVPI:

1. Ensure that SYVPI has clear goals,
2. Support a youth violence needs assessment,
3. Monitor progress of the SYVPI risk assessment tool,
4. Ensure that SYVPI has an adequate data system, and
5. Require SYVPI management to report regularly on its evaluation readiness.

1. Ensure that SYVPI has clear goals.

The most important thing that the City could do to promote an evaluation of SYVPI would be to ensure that the Initiative has clear, consistent, meaningful goals.

The MEF report found "a divergent understanding about (SYVPI) goals across stakeholders" and "no common understanding about the ultimate change desired." The lack of clear and consistent goals for any program causes operational challenges and renders impossible any evaluation effort. The original goals for SYVPI of a 50 percent reduction in suspensions and expulsions from selected middle schools due to violence-related incidents, and a 50 percent reduction in juvenile court referrals for violence, have proven problematic in their relevance and use for SYVPI.

In contrast, clear, consistent, and meaningful goals will help SYVPI to better align its service delivery, measure its results, and help the broader community to strengthen its understanding and support of the Initiative. The goals of SYVPI are important public policy, and, as such, will be best developed with leadership from the Executive and City Council.

2. Support a youth violence needs assessment.

A citywide youth violence assessment will provide SYVPI with the necessary baseline for measuring subsequent changes in youth violence. It will also help the City identify the most prevalent youth violence problems, emerging trends, and gaps in existing services.

The MEF report found that among SYVPI staff and stakeholders there was not a "consistent definition of what constitutes youth violence or the magnitude of the problem." "Furthermore, it

was not clear the extent to which SYVPI systematically monitors data on the incidence of youth violence as a means to ensuring that programming is responsive to current trends.” The report recommends that SYVPI conduct a needs assessment to determine the magnitude of the youth violence problem in Seattle, the size of the SYVPI target population, and the existing services available.

Many other communities have conducted similar types of needs assessments. Both the City of Tacoma and King County have recently completed community needs assessments of gang violence using a model developed by the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention.² While specific to gang violence, many of the elements of this model could be adapted for a community assessment of youth violence.

This type of assessment³ would help the City understand important aspects of the youth violence problem in Seattle including:

- What are the most prevalent types of violent crimes committed by youth?
- How does youth violence in Seattle vary by gender, age, and neighborhood?
- To what extent is youth violence perpetrated by gang-involved youth?
- What services are currently offered for these youth, and what are the service gaps?

While it will yield important information for SYVPI, a youth violence needs assessment will be a significant undertaking that will require access to data from multiple agencies (police, courts, schools, etc.) as well as input from numerous service providers and stakeholders. Support from the Executive and Council will be essential to the successful completion of such an assessment.

² Tacoma’s assessment can be found at

<http://cms.cityoftacoma.org/hrhs/GangProject/2011TacomaGangAssessmentFINAL.pdf>

Links to assessments from Durham County, Fairbanks, Houston, and Pittsburgh can be found here:

<http://www.cityoftacoma.org/cms/One.aspx?portalId=169&pageId=5742>

The Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention’s guide for conducting a community gang assessment can be found at <https://www.nationalgangcenter.gov/Content/Documents/Assessment-Guide/Assessment-Guide.pdf>

³ Some assessment work is already underway. First, a preliminary analysis of youth violence trends conducted by the Office of City Auditor indicated that juvenile domestic violence was one of the most prevalent person-crimes for which youth had been arrested between 2008-13. To further study this issue, the City has entered into a technical assistance agreement with the U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, to analyze the scope and magnitude of this issue and offer guidance on the best way to address it. A core team including City, County, and State officials, as well as research partners and an extended team of service providers and community representatives is also engaged in the effort. Second, the Office of City Auditor and the Seattle Police Department have engaged two leading national researchers on gangs to compile City and County data to better understand the nature and extent of the City’s gang problem, including the extent of involvement among youth and young adults.

3. Monitor progress of the SYVPI risk assessment tool.

A valid client risk assessment survey tool⁴ is the cornerstone of any future evaluation of SYVPI. The client risk assessment tool developed by SYVPI in 2012 has undergone significant redesign, and the validation process is at least 18 months behind the schedule that had been outlined in January 2013 for the City Council. The City should take steps to ensure that the process for finalizing and validating the risk assessment tool stays on track.

In 2012, SYVPI worked with University of Washington (UW) researchers to develop a risk assessment survey tool to be administered to youth entering SYVPI. The tool was intended to collect information about the youth's propensity for violence upon entering SYVPI and to monitor how those risk factors change for the youth as he/she progresses through the program.

The SYVPI client risk assessment tool is essential for helping to ensure that SYVPI is serving youth at highest risk for violence and for measuring its effectiveness in serving those youth. In January 2013, at the request of the City Council, the UW research team outlined in a letter their scope and timeline for completing the validation of the risk assessment tool. A preliminary validation of the tool to ensure that the survey questions were measuring the intended risk factors was scheduled to be completed by August 2013. The full validation, including an analysis of how accurately the tool predicts future arrests and court adjudications, was scheduled to be completed by December 2014.

However, after conducting quality assurance interviews with nearly 30 SYVPI staff, the UW researchers found that while the majority of users recognized the value of using a tool to measure progress of the youth, they also found that the existing tool was being used inconsistently, it was considered unhelpful for case planning, and the purpose of the tool was unclear. Subsequently, by January 2014, the UW researchers began to redesign the risk assessment tool and plan to continue the redesign process through December 2014. They have been working closely with SYVPI staff to develop instructional materials for the use of the tool. Consequently, however, the validation process that had been described in the January 2013 letter shared with the City Council has not yet begun.

It is important for the risk assessment tool to be carefully designed and validated. SYVPI should provide a revised timeline and projected additional budget requirement for the validation of the risk assessment tool. And we recommend that the City Council and Executive establish a plan for tracking the progress of this effort.

⁴ Risk assessments are instruments used in fields including mental health and juvenile justice that help determine the level of risk for a certain behavior (e.g., youth violence, recidivism, etc.). Risk assessments help an agency target more intensive efforts at higher-risk individuals; they are often used to develop a case management and intervention plan for a client; and they are used to monitor the individual's progress in reducing risk factors and strengthening protective factors. An excellent example of a scientifically-validated risk assessment is the Washington State Juvenile Court Assessment <http://www.wsipp.wa.gov/ReportFile/873>.

4. Ensure that SYVPI has an adequate data system.

A fundamental prerequisite to an evaluation is that SYVPI must be able to collect and produce complete and accurate information on program participants. The City should ensure that the corrective efforts currently underway adequately resolve the issues with SYVPI's problematic data system.

The research teams from MEF and from the UW have both identified significant problems with the SYVPI client tracking database. These problems include inconsistent use of the database by SYVPI staff, inaccurate data, users' difficulties with obtaining access to troubleshooting and support, and limited reporting capabilities.

A new version of the database is scheduled for implementation later this year. SYVPI should report to the Executive and the City Council on whether this revised version is expected to address all of the problems identified with data collection, or if additional improvements will be required. Issues to be addressed should include consistent use of the database, data accuracy, system reporting, system reliability, and system support.

5. Require SYVPI management to report regularly on its evaluation readiness.

Regular written reports from SYVPI will help the Executive and City Council ensure that SYVPI's evaluation readiness efforts stay on track.

It can be complicated and time-consuming to prepare for and conduct a rigorous program evaluation. The MEF report provides guidance on some of the things that SYVPI can do to get ready for a future impact evaluation. The Executive's attached response to the MEF report indicates that SYVPI plans to address the evaluation planning steps outlined by MEF. Additional resources for evaluation planning are available through the City's research partners, the federal government, or the Office of City Auditor. SYVPI can use these resources to develop a detailed plan for evaluation readiness. SYVPI should report regularly to the Executive and City Council on the status of these evaluation readiness efforts.

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City of Seattle
City Budget Office

MEMORANDUM

DATE: October 13, 2014

TO: David Jones

FROM: Ben Noble 

RE: Executive Response to the Evaluability Assessment Report from MEF Associates

Thank you for the opportunity to review and provide a response to the draft Evaluability Assessment submitted by MEF Associates. We look forward to working with the recommendations and have briefly outlined our planned process below. Based on MEF's recommendations, we anticipate that SYVPI will use its 2015 funding dedicated to evaluation to work closely with its research partners (e.g., George Mason University's Center for Evidence Based Crime Policy (GMU), UW Division of Behavioral Health and Justice Policy) to address the evaluation planning steps in the MEF report and listed below:

- 1. Clearly identify target population and evaluate community need based on available data.** SYVPI will use a multi-pronged approach to further refine the target population served. First, SYVPI will work with GMU and SPD to conduct a community assessment that includes recent data on violent crime and gang activity to enhance our understanding of the youth violence issue in Seattle. Second, we will use the SYVPI Risk Assessment tool to assess the risk levels of youth currently in the Initiative and examine the presenting risk factors in our population. Finally, we will compare our current population with youth crime data to identify gaps and ways we need to refine the target population.
- 2. Develop a coherent logic model that directly aligns with overarching initiative goals.** SYVPI will review and revise our current logic model to address misalignment between strategies and goals. To this end, SYVPI will move from the current community level goals to goals specific to individual youth such that they align with how the SYVPI theory of change is expected to impact youth behavior. Through this process, working with its research partners, SYVPI will identify appropriate goals to measure its impact on youth violent activity and offending.
- 3. Identify feasible evaluation methods.** SYVPI will develop an evaluation proposal that:
 - a) Is based on an updated, coherent logic model and revised goals
 - b) Takes a comprehensive approach to assess impact on individual participant behavior, changes in risk and protective factors correlated to violent offending, and impact on other elements in the SYVPI theory of change.
 - c) Can provide regular outcome updates to ensure SYVPI activities are on track and allow for timely course correction.

d) Takes into consideration the three research questions posed by the MEF report.

4. Identify an appropriate comparison group.

As part of our evaluation proposal, we will include an appropriate comparison group, to the extent that it is feasible and does not deny services to youth in need or otherwise compromise SYVPI's commitment to serve eligible youth within our service capacity.

5. Develop robust data collection and methods.

SYVPI will review its current case management and data collection system and make changes as needed. This may require changes to the existing provider contract which expires in 2015 or changing providers which would require issuing a Request For Proposals. Additionally, SYVPI's research partners from the UW Division of Public Behavioral Health and Justice Policy will continue to assess the accuracy of the data being collected in the current data system.

SYVPI will also incorporate additional performance measures such as the Youth Program Quality Assessment (YPQA) imbedding evidence-based practices in appropriate SYVPI investment areas (e.g., recreation services, Community Matching Grant and Network-managed youth development projects).

It should be noted that SYVPI has included in its 2015 budget, two Strategic Advisor positions:

- 1) A Strategic Advisor 1 position to provide quality assurance and technical assistance to SYVPI Risk Assessment tool users and their supervisors. This will help ensure consistent application of the tool and support evaluation efforts for which the risk assessment data will be a critical component.
- 2) A one-year Strategic Advisor 2 position to focus on implementation of the recommendations and conduct the hands on work required. It is anticipated that this person will work on the community needs assessment, assessing the data collection system and feasible evaluation methods and update the logic model among other tasks.

SYVPI will develop a more detailed workplan with a schedule of dates and a cost estimate over the next few weeks. This memo should provide you with the overall direction we plan to take. Please feel free to contact me with any questions or concerns.

Additionally, I have attached a marked-up copy of the MEF report with specific comments and suggested edits. We would like the opportunity to discuss the document specifics with MEF Associates to clarify and provide context for the suggestions.

cc: Catherine Cornwall
Robert Feldstein
Michael Fong
Virginia Gleason
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Mariko Lockhart
Forrest Longman
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Seattle Youth Violence Prevention Initiative – Evaluability Assessment

Final Report

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October 7, 2014

Contract Number: OCA 2014-04



MEF Associates conducted this evaluability assessment of the Seattle Youth Violence Prevention Initiative under a contract with the Office of City Auditor, City of Seattle (Contract Number: OCA 2014-04). Any findings or conclusions in this document do not necessarily represent the official positions or policies of the Office of City Auditor.

For more information about MEF Associates and our work, see our website: <http://mefassociates.com/>



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Overview

The Seattle Youth Violence Prevention Initiative (SYVPI) was established in 2009 to reduce youth violence in the city of Seattle. The initiative was created in response to a series of youth homicides in Seattle. SYVPI is a neighborhood-based approach. Neighborhood Networks run by community-based organizations serve as hubs in each of the three SYVPI neighborhoods. The Networks enroll youth at risk of perpetrating or being victims of violence, connecting them to a variety of services, and providing ongoing engagement with a goal of reducing and preventing youth violence.

In order to assess the extent to which the current initiative could be evaluated, between October 2013 and June 2014, our team of five researchers conducted interviews with 47 practitioners, staff, and administrators implementing SYVPI. We also reviewed relevant materials, reports, and contracts related to the program. The findings we present in this report represent an opportunity to critically investigate the design of SYVPI and the services it provides as it matures and to explore the extent to which researchers could conduct a rigorous program evaluation of the initiative at a future date.

Program Strengths

There are several clear areas of strength that emerged during our conversations with SYVPI staff and in reviewing initiative materials:

- **Evidence-based program components.** Research suggests that some of the program components included in SYVPI can contribute to the reduction and prevention of youth violence, such as mentoring and aggression replacement training.
- **Dedicated program staff.** Throughout our work it was clear that SYVPI program staff and managers are thoroughly committed to the youth they serve. During our interviews, we heard program staff, practitioners and administrators express a great deal of compassion and commitment for the program youth and to the goal of reducing youth violence in Seattle.
- **Culturally relevant approach.** We found that SYVPI administrators and program partners have made a concerted effort to identify community-based, culturally-relevant programming specific to the needs of each of the three network sites.

Evaluation Challenges

The model as currently implemented lacks critical features that would allow for rigorous evaluation of the initiative as one complete program.¹ We identified several key challenges associated with the design and implementation of the program model. Many challenges stem from a lack of specificity and consistency in the program design and implementation. They are exacerbated by a weak data collection infrastructure.

- **Lack of description and measurement of problem.** The initiative's original design lacked a data-driven approach to defining the nature and extent of the youth violence problem in the targeted communities.
- **Vague and expansive entry criteria.** The initiative has struggled to implement a clearly defined set of criteria for entry into SYVPI and continues to adjust and refine these criteria.

¹ By rigorous evaluation, we mean a study with an experimental design or with a viable comparison group to estimate impacts while controlling for observable differences between the treatment and control group.

- **Inconsistent risk assessment and matching of youth to SYVPI services.** We did not observe clear and consistent initiative policies and procedures for assessing youths' level of risk for engaging in violence or for deciding how to assign admitted youth to services or programs. The resultant inconsistencies at intake present challenges to evaluating SYVPI success at reducing youth violence.ⁱⁱ
- **Limited tracking of youth across providers.** SYVPI's current infrastructure for data collection and tracking youth limits the ability of Network staff to communicate with other providers about the status of individual youth in real time.
- **Varying and poorly-defined approaches to client exits.** We found that the Networks have struggled to define and consistently apply exit criteria in their work with SYVPI youth.
- **Misalignment between service mix and logic model.** SYVPI lacks a clearly articulated theory of change that links program components to overarching initiative goals.
- **Lack of data systems to track outcomes and ensure adherence to initiative-wide standards.** SYVPI has experienced substantial issues with its data systems. Any rigorous SYVPI evaluation would require substantial improvements to data collection.

Our work suggests that, despite the intended function of the Networks – to coordinate services, components, and local resources – we observed a lack of communication across Networks and a lack of a unified infrastructure that is consistently applied to all Networks and providers. This limits SYVPI's ability to function as a singular initiative as opposed to serving as a provider of discrete services.

Evaluation Recommendations

Due to the challenges in identifying a viable comparison group, varying definitions of program eligibility, and inconsistent data collection, we do not recommend a retrospective evaluation of SYVPI. Instead, we identify a series of steps that the initiative could take that would allow for a rigorous evaluation of future SYVPI implementation.

1. Clearly identify target population and evaluate community need based on available data
2. Develop a coherent logic model that directly aligns with overarching initiative goals
3. Identify feasible evaluation methods
4. Identify an appropriate comparison group
5. Develop robust data collection and methods

With such a complex model and so many stakeholders, it can often be difficult to make decisive and informed decisions regarding changes in design and implementation. Our hope is that a more data-driven, systematic approach to service delivery will help ensure that program decisions are as responsive as possible to the needs of the communities it serves. Simultaneously, better tracking and data can support both ongoing program management as well as a more rigorous evaluation of the initiative's impact.

ⁱⁱ SYVPI is currently working with researchers from the University of Washington's Division of Public Behavioral Health Policy and Justice Policy to finalize, validate, and implement a revised risk assessment tool based on input from a working group of SYVPI providers. At the time of our field work this process was still ongoing.

I. Introduction

The Seattle Youth Violence Prevention Initiative (SYVPI) was established in 2009 to reduce youth violence in the city. The initiative was created in response to a series of youth homicides in Seattle. SYVPI is a neighborhood-based approach. Neighborhood Networks run by community-based organizations serve as hubs in each of the three SYVPI neighborhoods: the Central District, Southwest Seattle, and Southeast Seattle. The Networks enroll youth at risk of perpetrating or being victims of violence, connecting them to a variety of services, and providing ongoing engagement with a goal of reducing and preventing youth violence.

A. Project Background

In 2012, in response to City Council questions regarding SYVPI's program design and the ability of practitioners or researchers to measure the program impact on youth violence in Seattle, the Office of City Auditor (OCA) conducted a review of the initiative and the program's theoretical design (also called logic model throughout this report). The OCA's review focused primarily on the initial design of the intervention and the degree to which the core service components aligned with SYVPI's stated goals. Based on this program review, in 2013 the OCA released a report that identified concerns regarding the soundness of the initiative's logic model.¹ In particular the OCA's review questioned the extent to which core program components of the initiative were grounded in an evidence-based model and whether or not the initiative as a whole had the ability to influence key program outcomes.

Additionally, the OCA expressed concern with the initiative's focus on reductions in juvenile court referrals and reductions in suspensions and expulsions from school. These concerns addressed both the initiative goals themselves as well as the degree to which the initiative services were expected to influence these goals. For example, the OCA noted that use of aggregate suspension and expulsion rates in the three neighborhood areas as indicators of initiative success has limitations as the rates of suspension and expulsion are heavily influenced by exogenous factors outside the control of the initiative such as school or district policy.

The OCA work suggested the need to revisit both the appropriateness of the overall initiative goals as well as the way that core components of the initiative support these goals. The OCA recommended conducting an evaluability assessment of SYVPI.

The OCA entered into a contract with MEF Associates and its partners in October 2013 to conduct the recommended evaluability assessment of SYVPI. Between October 2013 and June 2014, our team of five researchers conducted interviews with 47 practitioners, staff, and administrators implementing SYVPI. We also reviewed relevant materials, reports, and contracts related to the program. It is important to note that we were not tasked with evaluating the program services or the extent to which SYVPI has reached its outcome goals. Instead, the findings we present in this report represent an opportunity to critically investigate the design of SYVPI and the services it provides as it matures and to explore the extent to which researchers could conduct a rigorous program evaluation of the initiative at a future date.

B. Summary of Key Findings

SYVPI represents a concerted effort on the part of the City of Seattle to develop and deliver an innovative approach to preventing youth violence. The result of this effort is a complex, multi-faceted program model that has evolved substantially since its inception. What began as an experimental implementation – as SYVPI administrators have referred to it – of a new service delivery model has now evolved into a well-established program.

SYVPI's Neighborhood Network model was designed by City of Seattle staff, including information-gathering on other models from around the country, with input from community members, to be a comprehensive community-based system to serve youth. Neighborhood Networks – working as a backbone support – were intended to coordinate local resources and existing services and to implement various prevention programs in the three targeted neighborhoods. Through this improved coordination, SYVPI architects anticipated that the Neighborhood Network structure would provide benefits beyond those provided by the then existing collection of service providers operating more or less independently. As described by SYVPI staff and administrators, the goal was to create a more unified and coordinated service delivery model with the aim of reducing youth violence in three neighborhoods in the City of Seattle.

Based on our work, there are several clear areas of strength that emerged during our conversations with SYVPI staff and in reviewing initiative materials:

- **Evidence-based program components.** Research suggests that some of the program components included in SYVPI can contribute to the reduction and prevention of youth violence, such as mentoring and aggression replacement training.
- **Dedicated program staff.** During our interviews, we heard program staff, practitioners, and administrators express a great deal of compassion and commitment for the program youth and to the goal of reducing youth violence in Seattle.
- **Culturally relevant approach.** We found that SYVPI administrators and program partners have made a concerted effort to identify community-based, culturally relevant programming and staff specific to the needs of each of the three network sites.

Despite the support for SYVPI that we observed, we find that the model as currently implemented lacks critical features that would allow for rigorous evaluation of the Initiative as one complete program.ⁱⁱⁱ We summarize the challenges we observed below, providing more detailed explanations in *Section V*.

- **Lack of description and measurement of problem.** SYVPI was designed as an immediate response to a series of youth-related violent acts occurring in a period of months in 2008 in Seattle. It was intended to be a localized response tailored to the needs of individual communities. However, the initiative's original design lacked a data-driven approach to defining the nature and extent of the youth violence problem in the targeted

ⁱⁱⁱ By rigorous evaluation, we mean a study with an experimental design or with a viable comparison group to estimate impacts while controlling for observable differences between the treatment and control group.

communities. A review of data measuring youth-related violence (e.g., Seattle Police Department records on homicides, assaults, robberies involving children 17 and under as perpetrators or victims) could have helped establish clear initiative goals and improved implementation.

- **Vague and expansive entry criteria.** The initiative has struggled to implement a clearly defined set of criteria for entry into SYVPI and continues to adjust and refine these criteria. It was unclear from our interviews what risk levels the initiative targets, and the broad definition of key entry criteria appears to inhibit SYVPI's ability to target youth and match them to the most appropriate services, based on their risk level.
- **Inconsistent risk assessment and matching of youth to SYVPI services.** We did not observe clear and consistent initiative policies and procedures for assessing youths' level of risk for engaging in violence or for deciding how to assign admitted youth to services or programs. The resultant inconsistencies at intake present challenges to evaluating SYVPI success at reducing youth violence.^{iv}
- **Limited tracking of youth across providers.** There are many different service experiences a youth could have in SYVPI and no systematic way in which youth are referred toward particular services. Understanding the patterns of service receipt across clients is critical to evaluating the SYVPI model. However, this is hindered due to limited requirement of staff to use data systems intended to track youth across providers. Implementation quality suffers when staff do not update case status frequently. These difficulties are exacerbated because they limit the ability of Network staff to consistently communicate with other providers about the status of individual youth in real time.
- **Varying and poorly defined approaches to client exits.** We found that the Networks have struggled to define and consistently apply exit criteria in their work with SYVPI youth. While our work suggests that the primary concern is a lack of consistently applied criteria for exit from the initiative, difficulties with the SYVPI database likely aggravate this problem.
- **Misalignment between service mix and logic model.** Assessing the extent to which a program model produces desired outcomes requires clearly described links among program goals, program design, and program services, and the program model must be implemented consistently. We found that SYVPI lacks a clearly articulated theory of change that links program components to overarching initiative goals. Across our interviews, administrators, staff, and practitioners were unable to articulate consistently why and how the elements of SYVPI work together to prevent youth violence.
- **Lack of data systems to track outcomes and ensure adherence to initiative-wide standards.** SYVPI has experienced substantial issues with its data systems. These include concerns regarding the reliability of the system and limited staff use of available database features. We observed limited data collection regarding key initiative benchmarks, substantially limiting the feasibility of measuring program success. Additionally, the current tracking systems do not generate necessary data to support monitoring of adherence to the program model (e.g., historical data of participant status

^{iv} SYVPI is currently working with researchers from the University of Washington's Division of Public Behavioral Health Policy and Justice Policy to finalize, validate, and implement a revised risk assessment tool based on input from a working group of SYVPI providers. At the time of our field work this process was still ongoing.

are overwritten). Any rigorous SYVPI evaluation would require substantial improvements to data collection.

Our work suggests that, despite the intended function of the Networks – to coordinate services, components, and local resources – we observed a lack of communication across Networks and a lack of a unified infrastructure that is consistently applied to all Networks and providers. This limits SYVPI’s ability to function as a singular initiative as opposed to serving as a provider of discrete services.

Clearly individual program components can be evaluated, yet taken as a whole, the lack of consistency, adherence to initiative-wide standards, and cohesion makes it extremely difficult to conduct an evaluation of the overarching initiative.

C. Structure of this Report

In this report we describe the SYVPI model, our understanding of the theory of change (as described by administrators, staff, practitioners, and in program materials), the current state of implementation, and the implications of these findings for potential evaluation options. We see this evaluability assessment as an opportunity to help chart a path forward for SYVPI as it continues to mature.

The first step in conducting an evaluability assessment is to identify a formal program design or model and then to determine whether the program design or model is sound. A program design should outline goals and objectives and their relationship to program activities. The goals and objectives should be measurable and achievable while the activities should relate to the goals in a way that it is realistic to expect change in the target outcomes.²

Once the program design has been identified and shown to describe a sound model, the next step in an evaluability assessment is to determine whether the program serves the population for whom it was designed and whether the program activities are being implemented as designed. A strong linkage between the target population and program services allows for an evaluation to attribute outcomes to the program itself. If there is a disconnect between the program as planned and the program as implemented, an evaluation cannot assess the program itself, as the logic behind the relationship between the activities and goals is no longer valid.³

The ultimate goal of this evaluability assessment is to inform the OCA and the City Council in their future decision-making regarding the best options for understanding the impact of SYVPI on youth violence in the city. In addition, our research aims to identify the strengths of SYVPI while providing constructive feedback to support any necessary program improvements.

The report includes the following sections:

- **Section II** describes our research methods;
- **Section III** provides a discussion of relevant research on community-based approaches to youth violence prevention;
- **Section IV** describes the design and implementation of SYVPI;

- **Section V** discusses implementation challenges and implications for the evaluation of SYVPI;
- **Section VI** presents options for evaluation of SYVPI; and
- **Section VII** concludes the report, summarizing our key findings.

II. Methods

Our assessment of SYVPI focuses on our understanding of the initiative's theory of change, the alignment of program implementation to design, and implications for evaluation options. We document program design and program implementation, relying primarily on qualitative research methods.

We conducted 35 semi-structured interviews with 47 individuals, comprised of management-level and program staff, as well as current and former city staff involved in the design and early implementation of the initiative. Current program staff we interviewed included supervisory and line staff from all three Neighborhood Networks, four case management providers, one Aggression Replacement Training (ART) provider, street outreach staff, three youth employment agencies, staff from the Department of Parks and Recreation, one mentoring provider, and two Community Matching Grant recipients.^v While we did not speak with all SYVPI providers, we worked with SYVPI management to identify a group of respondents who could provide us with the broadest spectrum of opinions and experiences regarding SYVPI and its implementation.

We conducted interviews both individually and in a group setting. For each interview we followed a general topic outline, developing tailored protocols for specific respondents. We focused on our interviewees' beliefs regarding program goals as well as asking them to describe service delivery, client flow, data collection and tracking efforts, and their assessments of the overarching initiative. Interviews with program staff were generally about an hour in length while interviews with management staff lasted between 90 minutes and two hours. In synthesizing our findings from the interviews, we grouped similar sentiments together to generate a list of main themes. Our summaries and characterizations of input from interviewees is representative of statements received from those interviewed, unless stated otherwise.

In addition to interviews, we reviewed and analyzed SYVPI program materials to identify key themes of the logic model and implementation at different points of the initiative. This included documents SYVPI submitted to City Council, research conducted by SYVPI in the planning period of the initiative, SYVPI contracts with service vendors, and forms that Networks and providers use in serving SYVPI youth.

Finally, we explored how SYVPI uses its database to track clients. During interviews we asked SYVPI staff how they use the database and the degree to which it has supported implementation. Additionally, the database administrator provided a walkthrough of the functions of the database and the available and most-used reports. He also provided us with a data dictionary of the database.

^v We did not speak directly with School Emphasis Officers (SEO). Instead we relied on notes provided by Dr. Charlotte Gill, of George Mason University, who is conducting work parallel to ours for the OCA, which focuses specifically on the SEO program.

III. Relevant Research on Youth Violence Prevention

In this section we discuss research from peer-reviewed publications that is relevant to understanding the goals and implementation of community-wide youth violence prevention. Using peer-reviewed articles and systematic review reports, we provide an overview of comprehensive community-based approaches including the benefits and challenges associated with implementing and evaluating them. Moreover, we highlight important elements such as clear ongoing communication, multi-sector collaboration, and the use of evidence-based programs that need to be in place for comprehensive prevention efforts to be successful. We also outline core prevention principles that should be considered in developing and designing preventive efforts. These principles provide useful guidelines in assessing the appropriateness and impact of prevention programming.

We find that the initiative model contains components consistent with best practices found in the research literature on reducing youth violence, increasing prosocial behavior, and supporting community empowerment. Such practices include engaging community members to identify their needs and goals, and, for the most part, the model includes relevant program components targeted at youth violence prevention.

A. Comprehensive community-based approaches

In the early 1990s, community-based approaches regained momentum as a means to address social, educational, economic, physical, and cultural needs of people.⁴ These community-based approaches emphasized building community capacity both at the community and individual levels. During this time, Comprehensive Community Initiatives (CCI) emerged as prime examples of multifaceted and coordinated approaches to address community needs, including youth development, health promotion, delinquency and substance use prevention, and gang reduction.^{5,6} CCIs seek to integrate, collaborate, and coordinate across multiple sectors, providing flexibility, accountability, and availability in the provision of services.⁷ With an emphasis on community participation and the provision of a wide variety of services, coalitions became a popular vehicle to identify community needs and develop solutions for community issues.⁸ Community coalitions, formed by a group of community members representing various sectors, work together to achieve shared goals.

These comprehensive community-based strategies are appealing and empowering to communities; however, the evidence of effectiveness is still incomplete.^{9,10,11,12} For example, communities faced with high rates of gun violence and homicide have sought to address these problems by forming coalitions and using local knowledge,¹³ but simply forming and funding a coalition to bring multiple sectors together does not guarantee successful prevention outcomes.^{14,15,16}

A recent article on collective impact approach suggests that multiple sectors in a given community need to strategically collaborate to achieve a bigger impact than the sum of its parts working separately.¹⁷ They suggested five conditions for success: a common agenda, a shared measurement system, mutually reinforcing activities, continuous communications, and a backbone support.¹⁸ A backbone support is a lead organization that supports and manages all collective impact activities that address a common social problem, and a shared agenda (e.g.,

vision, goal) for change. Then, diverse stakeholders must build trust through continued communication, facilitate mutually reinforcing activities on which to collaborate, and bring specialized knowledge. Finally, it is important to have a shared measurement system to consistently evaluate change.

Several challenges exist in these community-based approaches. Community members continue to implement programs that are not evidence-based.¹⁹ Despite the expanding knowledge in prevention science, research is not being disseminated and translated into practice.²⁰ It is important for communities to implement evidence-based programs. Well-intentioned efforts such as the Drug Abuse Resistance Education program and the Cambridge-Somerville study²¹ did greater harm than good to those who received the intervention.

Furthermore, community-based approaches have complex goals and processes that are difficult to measure and determine success.²² With multiple stakeholders and program components, it is difficult to identify which components made a difference.²³

Finally, given the local nature of the design and implementation, the evaluation plans made prior to implementation may not fit the evolved program at the end of implementation.²⁴ In order for comprehensive community-based approaches to be effective, community leaders, agencies, schools, and community members at large need to collaborate with clear goals and objectives and participate in strategic planning, and monitor, progress, and evaluate outcomes.^{25,26,27}

B. Principles of violence prevention initiatives

In this section we discuss key principles of prevention-focused interventions identified in the research literature. Highlighting these principles provides useful context for interpreting our findings regarding SYVPI design, implementation, and evaluability.

Theory-driven. Theory provides a scientific justification of a preventive intervention. A clear theory of change specified in advance must outline the causal processes and the chain of effects for the desired outcomes. Etiological theories identify what causes the target problem such as risk and protective factors. Intervention theories provide a basis for the best methods for changing these risk and protective factors.²⁸

Target precursors to problem behaviors. Risk factors must be addressed before they stabilize as predictors of dysfunction.²⁹ In prevention, identifying developmentally appropriate risk factors and targeting them at the developmentally appropriate time is important. In the last thirty years, prevention research has provided a great deal of evidence for effective youth prevention efforts using the public health model.^{30,31,32,33} As disease and illness are prevented by reducing risk and increasing protective factors, behaviors such as violence, delinquency, and substance use can also be prevented when risk and protective factors are identified and specifically targeted by interventions.^{34,35,36} Risk and protective factors for youth violence are well established.^{37,38,39} Identified risks for violence include: risk-taking, victimization, drug-selling, early initiation of violence, exposure to violence, academic failure, gang membership, and presence of neighborhood adults involved in crime.^{40,41,42,43,44,45,46,47} On the other hand, prosocial peers, school engagement, social support, positive relationships, family connections, prosocial skills, and community involvement function as protective factors.^{48,49,50,51,52}

Target high risk. Prevention programs should target those at highest risk.^{53,54} Conventional programming in schools may not reach or be effective for high-risk individuals. Comprehensive preventive efforts that include multiple components can effectively target those with multiple risk factors across different social and ecological domains.

Opportunities for positive relationships. Effective prevention programs provide opportunities for youth to build positive relationships in different ecological domains.⁵⁵ Studies also suggest that supportive relationships are especially meaningful for those who have witnessed or been victimized by violence.⁵⁶ Therefore, services and activities that build positive social relationships through prosocial engagement play an important role in preventing and reducing violence among high-risk youth. For example, Big Brothers and Big Sisters of America, one of SYVPI's selected mentoring programs, is listed as a promising program on the Blueprints violence prevention website; it has shown to be effective in reducing aggressive behavior (i.e., hitting others) and truancy and increasing academic competency.⁵⁷

Socio-culturally relevant. Beyond simply translating program manuals into different languages, prevention programs should be socially and culturally appropriate.⁵⁸ This includes understanding the cultural and normative context of the community within which the prevention program is being implemented.

Plan for implementation and evaluation. Ensuring implementation fidelity is an important element for successful prevention.^{59,60,61} Implementation fidelity refers to the delivery of interventions as intended by the program developer⁶² and includes adherence to the program components and contents, dosage (i.e., frequency, number, and length of sessions delivered), quality of delivery, and participant responsiveness.⁶³

IV. Describing the Design and Implementation of SYVPI

Assessing evaluation readiness and opportunities for rigorous evaluation of SYVPI requires a clear articulation of the program model and initiative goals. This section lays the groundwork for subsequent discussions regarding the state of the program model, challenges associated with the current model, and the implications for evaluability.

Based on our review of program documents and interviews with management, supervisors, and staff, we conclude that SYVPI's most important innovation in addressing the formal goals was developing the community-based Network hubs. The hubs are intended to sit at the center of the web of support for youth engaged in violence and at risk for violence in the Central District, Southwest Seattle, and Southeast Seattle. Many of the stakeholders with whom we spoke described expectations for this framework to lead to community empowerment, geographically-based and accessible services, and an ability to engage a wider range of at-risk youth. The long-term objectives of the model are for communities to feel safer and for violence involving youth as the perpetrators and victims to decrease. We focus discussion in this section on the Network hub model and how other program characteristics relate.

SYVPI includes eight different components in addition to the Neighborhood Network hub. These include:

- Case management
- Street outreach
- Aggression Replacement Training (ART)
- Employment and training
- Community Matching Grants
- Mentoring
- School Emphasis Officers (SEOs)
- Parks and Recreation^{vi}

The traditional method of entry into SYVPI is for youth to be referred to the Neighborhood Networks for intake, enrollment, and referrals to the appropriate service providers based on the youth's characteristics and presenting issues. The Networks are expected to engage youth who they do not directly refer to street outreach and case management through Network-managed youth development programs, Community Matching Grants, and Parks' recreation programs. Networks also refer youth to mentoring, ART, employment, and out-of-network services as needed. Networks are also responsible for exiting youth from SYVPI. Youth who have been exited can return to the initiative at a later point if they still fit the eligibility criteria.

^{vi} On June 23, 2014, SYVPI released a request for proposals for agencies providing recreation services to youth. This RFP could potentially be for services to replace those currently provided through the Department of Parks and Recreation.

In the following sections, we describe formal program goals and the extent to which staff perceptions and SYVPI contracting practices align with these goals. Next, we describe the target population and the SYVPI eligibility criteria. We then summarize the initiative's referral structure. Finally, we provide important details about each service component and briefly describe the SYVPI's database.

A. SYVPI Goals

Below we describe our understanding of the core goals of SYVPI. We summarize the formal stated goals of the initiative, we discuss the performance measures that structure the contracts each SYVPI provider has with the city, and we summarize how key SYVPI staff characterize their understanding of the goals of the initiative.

1. Formal Goals

The initial goals of SYVPI were identified by the Mayor's Office and the City Council and sought to reduce the incidence of youth violence in Seattle. To motivate these efforts, they established the following two core goals for the initiative:

- 50 percent reduction in suspensions and expulsions from selected middle schools due to violence-related incidents
- 50 percent reduction in juvenile court referrals for violence

These goals have remained the same since the initiative's inception, and SYVPI includes these goals in the initiative description on all their contracts. However, in 2012, the initiative added the interim goal of 10 percent annual reductions in the two goal areas.⁶⁴

Subsequently in 2013 an additional set of goals were added to the original set. In 2013, SYVPI leadership worked with a researcher from the University of Washington (UW) to create a logic model that would incorporate individual level outcomes in addition to the established long-term community level outcomes. This logic model outlines short-term, intermediate, and long-term goals for each component of SYVPI (except Parks and Recreation and Community Matching Grants), as well as the overarching goal of reducing violence committed by youth against other youth in Seattle. The UW logic model identifies the following goals for the initiative:

- Reduce violent offending and recidivism among youth involved with law enforcement and the courts
- Reduce violent offending among youth with no history of criminal justice system involvement but who present risk factors for violence
- Reduce risk of retaliatory violence among youth who are victims of violence or their associates

2. SYVPI Contracts

Beyond the overarching goals of reductions in suspensions and expulsions and juvenile court referrals, SYVPI contracts with each program component to provide a specific type of service. The SYVPI contracts with each provider identify further program specific goals that each service

provider is required to meet on a regular basis. The contracts have three types of individual-level goals, those connected to: (1) enrollment numbers and retention, (2) reaching Individual Service Plan goals, and (3) engagement in activities. Eighty percent of contracted amounts are base pay, with the remaining 20 percent based on performance.

We summarize the contracts for each SYVPI component in *Appendix A*.

Staff from SYVPI management, Community Matching Grants, Networks, and Parks indicated that a key function of SYVPI was to consistently engage youth during unstructured time as a means of increasing protective factors and decreasing risk factors. The current contracts reflect the desire to achieve this goal, as they include pay points for developing, enrolling, and continuously engaging youth in positive, prosocial activities.

All contracts include performance pay contingent on enrolling certain numbers of youth. Retention is measured through contract goals that tie payments to completing a certain percentage of a service (e.g., ART, employment) or to completing risk assessments of youth after varying numbers of months of services. Some performance measures in the contracts explicitly aim to help youth identify goals for themselves and provide assistance in meeting those goals by making the development of an Individual Service Plan a pay point (e.g., case management, employment).

3. SYVPI Staff Perspectives

At the community level, management described SYVPI as a means to community empowerment – a way to foster increased awareness of and input into the youth services within a given neighborhood or community. Management staff emphasized that by giving community members a greater voice in the design and implementation of services, it would increase the accessibility of these services for higher-risk youth and that, for those initiative-served youth, the services would be better aligned with their needs.

SYVPI management indicated that before SYVPI, there was no geographically based service delivery system. The prior model thus was insufficiently responsive to the needs of the community; the initiative was intended to identify the needs of the three communities and tailor a locally provided service delivery system to meet those needs. Through improved diagnoses of and response to community needs, SYVPI management see SYVPI as a means to increase safety and perceptions of safety in the community.

Essential to increasing safety and perceptions of safety, as noted by staff, is the development of trust among community members and SYVPI staff themselves. Neighborhood Network staff expressed that a goal of SYVPI is for the Networks to be seen as a strong local resource that can connect community members to services and opportunities. Network staff explained that gaining the trust of youth and community members and managing how they are perceived in the community is an important aspect of the work they do.

Most providers with whom we spoke also noted that increased school performance in addition to attendance were key desired goals, though there are no contract pay points tied to increasing the

academic performance or attendance of enrolled youth with the exception of three employment providers.

B. Target Population

SYVPI targets youth between the ages of 12 and 17 who live or go to school in the Central District, Southeast Seattle, or Southwest Seattle. An overview of the initiative developed at its inception asserted that these three neighborhoods were chosen by the Mayor's office because these were areas where indicators of future violent behaviors, such as discipline rates in schools, were highest. In addition, the overview noted that shootings and juvenile violent crime rates were highest in these areas of the city.⁶⁵ City staff involved in the design of the initiative also stated that youth violence affected these areas most.

Although the original 2009 Ordinance establishing SYVPI describes the target population of SYVPI as youth "at the highest risk of perpetuating, or becoming victims of, violence," management staff have explained that SYVPI is intended to serve youth at an array of risk levels and not just the highest-risk youth.⁶⁶

In addition to geographic-focused and age-based eligibility requirements, at its inception, youth needed to meet at least one of the following four criteria to enroll in SYVPI:

1. Have been convicted multiple times and released from supervision or is under minimal supervision and is at risk to re-offend
2. Have been arrested for crimes that do not meet the juvenile detention intake criteria and was released
3. Are middle school students at risk of chronic truancy (absent nine or more days per semester) or multiple suspensions due to violent behavior
4. Are victims of violence and their friends and associates may be at risk of retaliation

The city workgroup responsible for determining the target population chose to define the population based on individual-level risk factors. SYVPI selected the first three categories listed above in order to focus on youth who have already engaged in violent behavior or are engaged in persistent antisocial behavior. The city workgroup involved in the design decided that the high recidivism rate for many juvenile offenders up to eighteen months after release was an indication of a service gap for this population that needed to be addressed. They also found that youth who receive multiple suspensions from school or have missed more than ten percent of school days were associated with higher rates of dropping out of school and becoming court-involved due to truancy petitions. The workgroup also identified youth who had been committed to detention one or more times as an additional priority population.⁶⁷

An Appendix to Council Ordinance 122967 outlines the original logic behind the fourth criterion. It notes that, "there is evidence that youth who observe frequent violence, or who operate in communities where violence is an accepted norm, are at a higher risk to engage in violence themselves." As such, SYVPI can provide services to victims of violence and their friends and relatives in order to prevent them from continuing the cycle of violence through retaliation.⁶⁸

In September of 2012, SYVPI leadership replaced the fourth criterion – youth who were victims of violence and may be at risk for retaliating – with one specifically focused on gang-involved youth. The initiative made this decision because the number of youth who fit the previous fourth criterion exceeded SYVPI capacity.⁶⁹ As the fourth criterion had defined eligibility very broadly and allows for a high level of subjectivity, there was a concern among Council, management, and staff that it allowed SYVPI to enroll too many low-risk youth. The original budget proposed SYVPI would serve 800 youth annually; in 2012, enrollments were close to 1,600, and a disproportionate number of youth enrolled met only the previous fourth criterion (52 percent).⁷⁰

C. Referral Structure

The SYVPI design includes a multi-faceted approach to recruitment intended to facilitate referrals from an array of sources. By situating the initiative within the community with the Neighborhood Networks as the hub, initiative designers hoped to make services more easily accessible to eligible youth.

SYVPI intended to recruit youth through outreach to schools, youth service providers, and community groups. In addition, the Seattle Police Department (SPD), the courts/juvenile rehabilitation authorities, faith communities, individual families, and SYVPI’s own street outreach team could identify appropriate youth.^{vii} These referrals are sent to one of the three Neighborhood Network hubs for intake and enrollment into the initiative. At each Neighborhood Network, intake and referral specialists determine the youth’s suitability for initiative services.

The program design also allows for direct referral to a SYVPI service provider (e.g., case management), where the staff will screen for eligibility and fill out the referral form to send to the Neighborhood Network for intake and enrollment. In these “nontraditional referral” cases, the service provider may receive a referral back from the Network to begin providing services to that youth.⁷¹ Under this design, the Network still retains final discretion as to whether or not to enroll the youth into SYVPI and to which services to refer the youth. Service providers are still expected to fill out the referral form and have the youth meet with a Network intake and referral specialist and receive a formal referral to the agency through the SYVPI database.^{viii}

Schools within each of the three Neighborhood Networks have been a key referral partner for SYVPI. Network and case management staff noted that over the course of the initiative, the Networks and providers have developed relationships with local schools. This includes teachers, school administrators, and counselors, but also the School Emphasis Officers (SEOs), who work at three middle schools and one K-8 school. The Networks also conduct outreach to local organizations that serve youth and families. Since the initiative’s inception the Networks have

^{vii} The recruitment activities are described on the SYVPI website: <http://safeyouthseattle.org/>

^{viii} Due to over-enrollment in 2012, SYVPI limited the number of nontraditional referrals, where youth are referred directly to a SYVPI service provider and the provider sends the referral to the Network for enrollment. Increased funding in 2013 allowed for these nontraditional referrals to resume on a limited basis, though it is still not the preferred method of enrollment for almost all components.

been working to increase SYVPI's visibility and promote the Networks as a place where the community can make referrals.

SYVPI partner agencies provide another key source of referrals. Through existing relationships in the community, partners (e.g., case management providers) identify and refer potentially eligible youth to SYVPI. The Neighborhood Networks report they are able to draw on the trust and reputation of these partner agencies to solidify the role of SYVPI. For example, one case management agency has connections with a counseling agency, and has referred youth to SYVPI through this connection.

SYVPI aims to make its services attractive to youths, many of whom may have been disconnected from previous service delivery models within the city. Methods include generating peer referrals as well as emphasizing certain components of the initiative that have been historically popular among youth. These recruitment activities create multiple entry points into the initiative that are potentially accessible to community-identified youth.

SYVPI also structures its service mix to offer a set of services that are appealing to youth as a means to attract youth, begin initial engagement, and build personal relationships and trust with them so that they will be more likely to enroll in other needed SYVPI services. One major draw of SYVPI enrollment for youth and families is the opportunity to connect with youth employment services. All staff recognize that employment is used as a recruitment mechanism as well as an incentive to keep enrolled youth engaged in services. However, Network staff indicated that this can create challenges, as referrals are sometimes made to SYVPI in order for youth to be enrolled in employment although they do not present any risk factors. Networks do turn away youth who they deem inappropriate for the initiative, though the time spent screening these youth out may represent a burden on intake and referral specialists.

D. Types of Services Available and Core Program Components

In this section we provide brief descriptions of the core program components of SYVPI. *Appendix B* provides a more detailed description and assessment of each program component and the SYVPI management structure. This includes discussions of the concerns and challenges of implementation as well as the differences between the design and current implementation of each component.

- **Neighborhood Networks.** Neighborhood Networks are responsible for conducting the intake and enrollment of youth into the initiative, assessing youth risk factors and needs, keeping youth engaged in the initiative, coordinating contact with those who may have become disengaged, and exiting youth who are no longer appropriate for the initiative. In addition, they act as brokers of SYVPI services. They are tasked with coordinating services and efforts to work with specific youth across the SYVPI providers and schools, creating connections with local resources offering services for youth, and providing services in the community to quickly meet youth needs. Neighborhood Networks are also charged with engaging and mobilizing local community members to address youth violence, advocate for youth, provide input into SYVPI policies and strategic planning, manage youth development and mini-community grant projects, and assist in the

coordination of larger Community Matching Grant projects, among other duties. There is one Network within each of the three targeted SYVPI neighborhoods.

- **Case Management.** Case management agencies are responsible for intensive service coordination and assisting youth and families in navigating service systems in order to access resources they may not know how to access on their own. Along with Networks, they also conduct assessments of youth risk factors and create Individual Service Plans (ISP) of goals the youth hopes to achieve. Case managers identify youth needs and refer them to the appropriate services whether within or outside the initiative.
- **Street Outreach.** The street outreach component of SYVPI is intended to provide ongoing support to the harder-to-reach youth enrolled in SYVPI. Street outreach workers are expected to go into the community and build relationships with youth and their families. They serve both a recruitment role as well as providing ongoing support to youth who may be less comfortable engaging with the more typical service delivery approach of the initiative.
- **Aggression Replacement Training.** SYVPI offers Aggression Replacement Training (ART), an evidence-based best practice targeting youth (ages 12 to 17) with anger issues.⁷² Its aim is to reduce aggression by teaching youth how to understand and replace aggression and antisocial behavior with positive alternatives.
- **Employment and Training.** Employment providers are responsible for enrolling youth into the program, providing job readiness training, developing appropriate subsidized jobs and paid trainings for them, placing youth, and monitoring their participation and the relationship with the employer. To participate in this component, SYVPI youth must be at least 14 years of age.
- **Community Matching Grant.** The Community Matching Grants are a source of youth development programming coordinated through the Networks and operated by local, community organizations. SYVPI uses Community Matching Grants in attempt to focus community building efforts on youth by developing projects that are based in youth development, youth leadership, and youth engagement principles.
- **Mentoring.** Big Brothers Big Sisters of Puget Sound (BBBSPS) and the Clergy Community Children Youth Coalition (4C Coalition) provide SYVPI mentoring. It is intended to match SYVPI youth with positive adult role models who commit to regularly spending time with their youth mentee for at least one year in order to help youth build the behaviors and attitudes to succeed academically in school, stay away from violence, and make positive life decisions. In 2014, the 4C Coalition and Urban Family are also providing group mentoring.
- **Parks and Recreation.** SYVPI contracts with the Seattle Department of Parks and Recreation to provide recreation services to SYVPI youth. This includes providing Extended Hours Programs in all three neighborhoods and creating partnerships with community, non-profit, interagency, and private agencies to provide programming to engage SYVPI youth outside of school hours.
- **School Emphasis Officers.** The School Emphasis Officer (SEO) program places school emphasis police officers in three middle schools and one K-8 school to serve students on an as-needed basis. The SEO program is funded through by the Seattle Police Department and the memorandum of agreement is between the Seattle Police Department and Seattle Public Schools, not SYVPI.

- **SYVPI Management.** SYVPI is administered by the Office for Education (OFE), located in the city's Department of Neighborhoods. SYVPI has a Director who oversees management of the initiative. She works closely with the Director and Deputy Director of OFE.

In addition to the various program components, a core feature of the SYVPI model is a case management and data system. SYVPI tracks participants using a customized version of Safe Harbors, King County's Web-based Homeless Management Information System (MIS). Both use the software vendor Adsystem to manage the program and provide technical assistance. SYVPI has a contract with an external database manager to administer the database on a day-to-day basis and pull reports.

Interviews with program staff and the database administrator suggest that the database is used inconsistently. Conversations with staff indicated that most agencies are either maintaining paper files or using their own agencies' MIS and use the SYVPI database only to the extent required by the initiative. We consistently heard from SYVPI management and partners that the database is difficult to use. In addition, past database issues that caused data loss made the providers distrustful of using the database.

V. Evaluation Challenges

In this section we describe challenges associated with the implementation of SYVPI and the implications for future evaluation. This section should not be read as a critique of program implementation or of the work of SYVPI practitioners, staff, and administrators. Instead it is an analysis of the complicated design of the program model and the extent to which SYVPI's community-level goals are connected to the program activities. In order to examine the evaluability of SYVPI we focus on the relationship between the stated problem of youth violence and the initiative design to attempt to mitigate or reduce the violence. In particular, we examine how youth enter the initiative and are directed through the various initiative programs and services, and we identify concerns regarding the degree to which services available through SYVPI are directly aligned with key initiative goals.

Our overarching finding is that the program model driving SYVPI's program implementation: (1) lacks a clear explanation that theoretically links the initiative design and its various components to the desired outcomes, (2) has been unsubstantiated with empirical evidence that clearly defines and measures the problem it seeks to address, and (3) lacks an infrastructure of policies, procedures, and mechanisms that promote a systematic and holistic approach, one that includes a systematized referral, intake, and assessment process, matching of clients with appropriate services, and an exit procedure.

In addition, we find that the inconsistent approach to tracking and monitoring initiative enrollments is a major impediment to evaluating the effectiveness of the current process. The lack of a clear tracking system inhibits the initiative's ability to accurately assess whether it is meeting goals related to the enrollment of the target population and whether it is responsive to community needs.^{ix}

To illustrate these limitations, below we outline key challenges we have identified that impact the ability to conduct a rigorous evaluation of SYVPI.

A. Lack of Description and Measurement of Problem

Throughout our work, we noted a lack of precision in defining the problem of youth violence in the city. While the catalyst for the creation of SYVPI (i.e., youth homicides) and the primary outcome measures both offer hints as to how the initiative defines youth violence, our review of SYVPI program materials and conversations with SYVPI staff did not yield a consistent definition of what constitutes youth violence or the magnitude of the problem. The initial City Council bill authorizing SYVPI included an extensive list of offenses that would be included in measuring the initiative's success at reaching the goal of a 50 percent reduction in court referrals

^{ix} Example of issues with the tracking system include that staff do not update the case status enough to allow other providers working with the youth to know their status in real time. In addition, the database does not keep historical data for many of its fields.

for juvenile crimes against persons committed by youth.^x However, we did not observe a consistent effort to link specific SYVPI programming to these offenses or incidents.⁷³ This has implications both for the degree to which the initiative is targeting the correct population as well as the degree to which the service delivery mix is appropriately mapped to the needs of this population.

During our interviews, SYVPI staff, both at the management and line level, continually reiterated the importance of SYVPI services in reducing the risk factors for violence among enrolled youth. However, the absence of a clear definition of the youth violence problem as part of the initiative makes it difficult to develop precise outcome measures that represent strong indicators of success in addressing the issue of youth violence. Furthermore, it was not clear the extent to which SYVPI systematically monitors data on the incidence of youth violence as a means to ensuring that programming is responsive to current trends.

B. Vague and Expansive Entry Criteria

SYVPI explicitly targets youth aged 12 to 17 who live or go to school in the Central District, Southeast Seattle, and Southwest Seattle. While these parameters have not changed since the initial design of the initiative, the details of eligibility criteria have changed over the course of the initiative, and the characteristics of the youth that SYVPI serves have evolved. However, the criteria continue to be expansive enough to allow for youth of a wide array of risk levels and characteristics to be enrolled, and the initiative has struggled to develop and implement a clearly defined set of criteria for entry into SYVPI and continues to adjust and refine these criteria. This allows initiative staff substantial discretion in who is enrolled into SYVPI.

We found that SYVPI targets several risk factors for violence but does not identify where in the prevention spectrum – primary, secondary, or tertiary – its target population fits.^{xi} Different strategies must be used to differentially target these groups,⁷⁴ but SYVPI does not distinguish the individuals they target and service. The target population was chosen without a data-driven approach to identify how many youth in the city are at each level of risk and enrolled youth are not matched with the appropriate tier of prevention services based on their risk factors. It was unclear from our interviews what risk levels the initiative is targeting, particularly due to the lack of a formalized risk assessment tool.

The broad definition of eligibility among youth at risk of retaliation negated the screening function of the eligibility requirements and allowed more youth to be eligible than SYVPI was equipped to serve. In September 2012 SYVPI leadership changed the risk factor criteria to replace youth who “are victims of violence and their friends and associates may be at risk of

^x Examples of offenses include assault, domestic violence, telephone harassment and reckless endangerment. Similarly, the program materials include a list of incidence types that result in school disciplinary actions, including reasons such as arson, robbery, and arranging fights.

^{xi} **Primary prevention** is generally universally implemented and targets those who are not exhibiting any problems. Based on the prevention principle, it would be easiest to prevent problem behaviors among those who have not stabilized into risk factors. **Secondary prevention** selectively targets those who are exhibiting multiple risk behaviors. **Tertiary prevention** targets indicated populations who are already stabilized into violent or delinquent behaviors.

retaliation” to “are gang-involved.” In addition, due to capacity limitations Networks were only allowed to have 350 youth enrolled in each neighborhood in 2012.^{xii}

C. Inconsistent Risk Assessment and Matching of Youth to SYVPI Services

We did not observe that Networks use any systematic process for assessing youths’ level of risk for engaging in violence or for matching youth to appropriate services offered by the initiative based on level of risk.

Risk assessment involves using a formal tool to predict youths’ level of risk for offending or engaging in delinquent activity based on their individual characteristics. These tools can help providers make “decisions about youths’ placement and supervision...creating intervention plans that will reduce their level of risk.”⁷⁵ In contrast to this approach, conversations with Network staff suggested that they base their decisions regarding the set of needs and appropriate services for each youth on their intuition or local knowledge.

Our fieldwork suggested substantial variation in the service delivery approach taken by each of the three Neighborhood Networks. Some youth would be identified for employment programs, others referred to out-of-network providers for mental health or chemical dependence without a consistent tool guiding the referral decision across Networks. At this point the Networks would begin to broker services on behalf of the youth. The assessment and related referral schema vary by Network, and our interviews did not suggest that there is a consistent set of available and similar placement options once a youth’s needs were diagnosed across the three Neighborhood Networks.

Similarly, we observed different approaches in making decisions regarding the service mix for individual youth at each of the three Networks, though there are some common themes. Higher-risk youth who need connections to out-of-network services (e.g., chemical dependency counseling, mental health counseling, housing issues) or who need assistance with school issues, are court-involved, or have family issues, are generally sent to case management. However, we also heard that a youth may be referred directly to an out-of-network service if the Neighborhood Network offers those services in-house or if they have strong connections to a particular provider. Higher-risk youth who are gang-involved, coming out of juvenile detention, aggressive, chronically truant, or are not receptive to regular programming are generally sent to street outreach. One Network tends to send youth who are sent to street outreach to case management as well, though the other Networks do not consistently take this approach.

The youth characteristics and presenting risk factors that indicate a good referral to case management or street outreach are not systematized across the initiative and are determined by individual staff discretion. This has been a source of frustration for case managers and street outreach workers, and staff mentioned that discussions on how to better delineate roles have been occurring for some time among SYVPI stakeholders. The intake and referral specialists fill out a risk assessment for youth, but only for those who are not going to case management and street outreach. As such, the risk assessment does not typically inform the decision to refer a

^{xii} The limit was increased in the following year to 500 per Network due to increases in funding and capacity.

youth to these components. Intake and referral specialists generally indicated that they believe the referral form and motivational interviewing provides them with sufficient information to make a good decision about where to send youth, and though the current risk assessment tool does include a way to calculate a youth's risk level, our conversations suggested that staff do not regularly use it.

Youth who are not sent to case management or street outreach receive a form of case management from Network staff. In conversations with staff we heard that these are typically lower-risk youth, although sometimes the Networks take on case management responsibilities for higher-risk youth who have stabilized following exit from case management and/or street outreach. In the case of these youth, the Networks often keep them enrolled in the initiative so that the youth can engage in youth development programming. However, some Network-managed youth are those who are hesitant to enter into case management or street outreach and need engagement with the Network until they are comfortable transitioning into these other services; staff indicated this was not a large proportion of the Network-managed youth.

There are limited reliable data that allow for characterization of the risk profile of SYVPI-enrolled youth. Inconsistent and limited use of the current risk assessment tool, which has not been validated, makes it more difficult for staff to consistently and accurately map services to a youth's individual risk profile.

This is also problematic because, regardless of what the overall initiative sets as a target population, we observed varying foci among the service components. Community Matching Grants, for example, focus on activities related to youth development goals, generally for lower-risk youth thus using the same programming approach for SYVPI youth. Many case management agencies focus on specific subsets of the SYVPI population (e.g., female-identified youth, youth with school-related issues). Street outreach focuses on gang involvement and perpetration of violence. While having service components focusing on different target population/goals for each component is not inherently problematic, it necessitates clear articulation of overall program goals and target population, as well as mechanisms to assess the appropriateness of different services based on individual youth characteristics.

D. Limited Tracking of Youth Across Providers

There are many different service experiences a youth could have in SYVPI and no systematic way in which youth are referred toward particular services. As such, an evaluation examining the treatment and experiences of clients would be difficult to design. Though the Networks ultimately control the flow of youth into SYVPI, there are also multiple other points where youth may be introduced to the initiative. How youth enter the initiative and what services they receive are determined largely by the individual discretion of Network staff. Understanding the patterns of service receipt across clients is critical to evaluating the SYVPI model. However, this is hindered by the fact that even if staff meet contractual obligations, the level of staff usage of data systems is insufficient to support a good understanding of service receipt.

It is unclear how Networks systematically track progress of individual youth. Network staff may not see or hear from youth in case management for months, and our understanding is that use of the case notes field on the database is rare. Youth who are Network-managed are meant to be

engaged in activities as assigned by the Network, and thus may be easier to track, but youth are not assigned to specific Network staff to have their progress followed. Network staff mentioned that they periodically go through lists of youth who have not been in any program for some time and attempt to make contact with them when they want youth to attend their info sessions about upcoming programs and opportunities.

In recent years, SYVPI leadership has been increasingly attentive to the way in which youth move through the initiative and where bottlenecks emerge. Leadership has worked to structure provider contracts in such a way that increases the probability that youth are referred to the various SYVPI components and do not languish on the SYVPI caseload without being actively engaged in any services.^{xiii}

However, the extent to which youth enrolled are receiving multiple services or a single service is unclear as SYVPI staff do not consistently track this through database reports. The services in which youth are enrolled can and are examined on an individual basis, but staff are not pulling systematic reports that capture how many services youth are receiving for program implementation or reporting purposes. In addition to the lack of tracking through the database, youth are not assigned to a particular Network staff person's caseload; thus it is currently not possible for the Networks to systematically track the progress, level of engagement, and service receipt of individual youth. While Network staff can access this information for a youth of interest, we saw no indication of mechanisms to ensure that staff are routinely checking on the status of the youth with whom they are working. Moreover, as discussed in the next section, SYVPI currently has no systematic method of exiting youth, which has implications for program capacity.

E. Varying and poorly defined approaches to Client Exits

Our fieldwork suggests that there are few clear indicators used to assess when a client should be exited from the initiative. The Networks have struggled to define and consistently apply exit criteria in their work with SYVPI youth. The database captures exits by service providers so that Networks are able to access reports on youth who are no longer enrolled in a component and either need to be exited from SYVPI or engaged in a new activity. However, at the time of our interviews, the database was not notifying service providers when a youth needed to be exited, such as in the case of time-limited services like case management.

Conversations with staff suggested that exits from the initiative have been an ongoing point of discussion among management and the Networks. Youth who move out of the service area, are unable to be contacted or engaged after multiple attempts, or are going to be incarcerated for a long time are exited. Otherwise, the Networks use their judgment in determining when a youth is ready to be exited. There are no clear criteria to determine when youth no longer have a risk level that requires SYVPI services. It is only with the ongoing development of the new risk assessment tool that staff will have systematic criteria for positive exits. The new risk assessment

^{xiii} A recent update to the SYVPI database gives case managers the capacity to refer youth to other components in the initiative without needing to go through the Networks, but this is on a limited basis and only to ART, Parks, Street Outreach, and Mentoring. Case managers cannot directly refer youth employment or Community Matching Grants.

tool includes a self-report youth check-in list of questions about school, relationships, criminal history, drug use, family, and attitudes that determine whether a youth is not at a high enough risk level to be in the initiative. Once the new tool is fully implemented, Networks will exit these youth based on these criteria – the database has been modified to capture youth exited for this reason. Youth who fit the criteria for enrollment at a later time may re-enroll in SYVPI if necessary.

F. Misalignment between Service Mix and Logic Model

We found that SYVPI lacks a clearly articulated theory of change that links program components to overarching initiative goals. Across our interviews, administrators, staff, and practitioners were unable to articulate consistently why and how the elements of SYVPI work together to prevent youth violence.

Our fieldwork raises concerns regarding the appropriateness of the various programmatic components included in SYVPI. While we heard from SYVPI management and staff that the goals of the initiative included a reduction of community-level youth violence, the services provided through SYVPI center more on the personal development of individual youth. The service mix offered through SYVPI does not offer one cohesive model of programing that focuses on, for example, decreasing suspensions and expulsions or decreasing community-level violence. As told to us by multiple staff and practitioners, the host of services included in SYVPI was pieced together because most had already existed in some form within the communities identified at the time of the development of SYVPI, or the programs already had city funding via other types of programs (e.g., Seattle Team for Youth). And, thus many of the programs were included under the umbrella of SYVPI services due to convenience. While the inclusion of existing services is a common genesis for community initiatives, we found that the lack of monitoring of the services results in limited ability to adapt and modify the service delivery mix to meet the needs of the initiative. For example, we heard from multiple staff that a family component would be a useful addition and was considered at the design phase of the initiative but not included in the final proposed service mix.

VI. Directions for Future Evaluation

In this section we describe what we see as the most important goals for evaluation of SYVPI and the foundational work necessary to implement an evaluation framework that supports these goals. The lack of clarity regarding links among the initiative logic model, program implementation, and stated outcomes presents significant challenges for evaluation, as does the limited reliability of program data collected to date. As such we do not recommend a retrospective evaluation of SYVPI that attempts to examine the impact it has had up until this point. Instead, we suggest concrete steps SYVPI could take to implement a more coherent evaluation framework that would support rigorous evaluation of the initiative moving forward.

Earlier sections of this report highlight the challenges to evaluating SYVPI. Many of these challenges can be attributed in part to growing pains of a new and innovative initiative. Implementing the organizational changes embodied in the Neighborhood Network structure takes time to adequately develop as the numerous partners learn how best to work together to address youth violence in the community. Based on the findings described in this report, we share many of the concerns raised by the OCA and the City Council in earlier reviews of SYVPI, specifically with respect to the limits in conducting a rigorous impact evaluation based on historical data.

Understanding program impacts requires reliable data against which to compare change. An evaluation can incorporate data in a variety of forms, but program staff and evaluators need to develop these data carefully to avoid significantly over or understating program benefits. Unfortunately, given current SYVPI implementation and data collection, we see no direct path to developing the baseline or comparison group data necessary for comprehensive and rigorous impact estimates of initiative activities to date.^{xiv}

At best, a retrospective evaluation – one that would examine the first five years of the initiative implementation – might lead to reasonable estimates of impacts for specific initiative services for a subgroup of participants (e.g., as in the ongoing SEO process evaluation). While potentially valuable, findings from these more focused evaluations would not address initiative impacts overall because of the wide variety of services provided, or the impacts of the Network hub structure, which we see as one of the initiative’s most prominent innovations. We considered several approaches for a retrospective evaluation, but due to the challenges in identifying a viable comparison group, varying definitions of program eligibility, and inconsistent data collection, we do not recommend these approaches. *Appendix C* provides more detailed assessment of the various retrospective evaluation options and the associated challenges.

Below we focus on opportunities for rigorous impact evaluation in the future and do not further directly address process or impact evaluation of the formative period of SYVPI. With planned implementation of a new risk assessment tool, data collection system, and more consistent service delivery, we see more opportunity for rigorous evaluation in the future. More

^{xiv} Work being conducted by faculty at the University of Washington’s Division of Public Behavioral Health Policy and Justice Policy to design, validate, and implement the new risk assessment tool represents a step in the right direction. However, this effort was still ongoing at point at which our interviews concluded.

immediately, SYVPI needs to complete foundational evaluation planning work to realize this opportunity.

A. SYVPI evaluation goals

Program evaluation can and should serve many purposes, from short-term reporting to support program improvement, to long-term impact evaluation that helps to quantify program benefits and communicate program value externally. The most important evaluation questions will vary across system stakeholders. The City Council and the general public require information about program impacts to determine whether funding SYVPI constitutes the best use of scarce taxpayer resources allocated to the initiative. Initiative staff need short-term outcome data to evaluate the performance of Neighborhood Network organizations and their network of providers. Providers benefit similarly from short-term outcome data that support process improvements and spread of local best practices across Networks. Longer-term impact evaluation helps to communicate program successes locally and externally (e.g., to other communities, to researchers).

In our experience, service providers generally recognize the need for evaluation data to, at a minimum, support program improvement. But high-quality evaluation requires a significant investment of time and other resources. Thus, in a budget-constrained environment, evaluation planners must develop a clear, prioritized list of evaluation goals as a first step in evaluation planning. The genesis of this evaluability assessment indicates a high-priority need to develop evaluation findings that communicate initiative strengths and weaknesses and the extent to which the initiative meets the goals stated to the City Council and other stakeholders.

To that end, future SYVPI evaluation could, in theory, measure initiative impacts (i.e., the benefits provided by the initiative) at any or all of a number of levels:

1. **Community-level impacts** (e.g., citywide reduction in youth homicide). Evaluating community-level impacts provides the most holistic lens on the benefits of complex, multipronged programs like SYVPI. Evaluations of collective impact efforts focus on community-level measures (e.g., homicide rates, arrest rates for violent offenses, community sense of safety).
2. **Impacts of the Neighborhood Network structure.** SYVPI's Network structure comprises one of the initiative's most salient innovations and may provide benefits through several channels (e.g., the extent to which the structure improves the reach of Seattle's youth violence prevention resources to underserved populations, the extent to which participant outcomes improve due to better service coordination, improved service delivery due to better-targeted referrals).
3. **Impacts of SYVPI components on participant outcomes** (e.g., case management). While many services provided to SYVPI participants existed prior to SYVPI, understanding the benefits of the initiative still requires evidence that the funded components add enough value to justify funding, and SYVPI managers need this information to evaluate the alignment of the current service mix with initiative goals.

Evaluating outcomes at the first, most aggregated level aligns with stated SYVPI goals (e.g., reduction in juvenile court referrals for violence). This high-level evaluation would provide an understanding about SYVPI that extends beyond the collection of impacts of individual program components to an assessment of the additional benefits provided by SYVPI as a coordinating entity that gathers stakeholder input, builds community support for and knowledge of SYVPI programs, and convenes the Neighborhood Networks to coordinate services across numerous providers.

However, ongoing concern among initiative partners about the appropriateness of the specific goals, some of which we share, and a lack of consensus about appropriate replacements, will limit SYVPI's ability to evaluate community-level impacts, at least in the short-term. We find that the current structure and implementation lack key features of successful collective impact initiatives (e.g., divergent understanding about initiative goals across stakeholders, no common understanding about the ultimate change desired, limited community involvement).

Evaluating component-specific impacts on participant outcomes can provide valuable information to stakeholders at every level of the initiative. The OCA's ongoing reviews of street outreach and the School Emphasis Officer program seek to identify initiative impacts at this more disaggregated level. However, it is important to note that implementing a rigorous evaluation even for a single, well-defined service requires a significant resource commitment and, even if successfully executed, would fall short of identifying the value added by SYVPI's innovative Network structure.

Given concerns raised regarding fidelity of individual components and the importance of adhering to evidence-based approaches, we recommend continuing to pursue component-specific evaluations opportunistically as funding possibilities arise. However, SYVPI should focus core evaluation activities to better understand the effectiveness of the Neighborhood Network structure. SYVPI should require partner agencies to provide as much evidence as possible on effectiveness of their services, whether through rigorous local evaluation or evidence of fidelity to recognized best practices. At a minimum, provider contracts should require providers to submit outcome data for relevant outcomes identified in the logic model (e.g., employment outcomes for employment and training, measures of gang involvement for the SEO component). In combination with consistent referral processes and collected baseline data about all SYVPI participants, initiative managers can reasonably assess the alignment of the available service mix with initiative goals.

Potential Research Questions for Future Evaluation

Our stakeholder interviews suggested several specific research questions that, in combination, would address the important potential benefits of SYVPI and the Network structure beyond simply expanding capacity of Seattle's youth violence prevention programming through increased spending:

1. To what extent does SYVPI allow providers to reach at-risk populations better than the collection of SYVPI-funded partners acting more or less independently, as in the past?

2. To what extent does SYVPI allow providers to better serve participating youth due to a more consistent and comprehensive referral process?
3. To what extent does SYVPI produce better outcomes because participating youth receive more comprehensive and coordinated set of services than they would otherwise receive in the absence of SYVPI?

Well-defined evaluation questions should drive program evaluation planning and implementation, and we recommend building an SYVPI evaluation plan around the three questions above to focus evaluation on the value added specifically by the SYVPI model as the initiative continues to implement more consistent processes for referrals, service delivery, and data collection across Network hubs and service providers.

These questions directly address the primary innovations of the SYVPI model and theory of change. The foundational evaluation work described below will support evaluation of these questions as well as strengthen SYVPI data collection for the purpose of program improvement. Additional evaluation of program components as opportunities arise, and evaluating community-level impacts as the program continues to mature, will solidify conclusions about the benefits of SYVPI funding.

B. Evaluation planning

Ideally, evaluation planning would coincide with or even precede implementation of a new service delivery model. Evaluation planning that coincides with program implementation can help to clarify program goals, of particular importance for initiatives that involve numerous partner agencies, and can help to identify and resolve potential weaknesses in the planned model.

However, community-recognized need for change drives program implementation, and in our experience, as with SYVPI, rigorous program evaluation frequently happens significantly later, if at all, and often only in response to questions about effectiveness from program funders. The resultant evaluation of incomplete historical data is less conclusive than that possible from a more intentionally planned evaluation. Due to weaknesses in SYVPI data collection to date and the misalignment of the logic model goals with the implementation practices, this type of retrospective evaluation is especially problematic and unlikely to lead to useful conclusions about the initiative as a whole. Instead, the process we describe below focuses on forward looking evaluation. Although these steps build on each other, evaluation planning is an iterative process and the evaluation plan should evolve with program operations.

Necessary evaluation planning steps for SYVPI include the following:

1. Clearly identify target population and evaluate community need based on available data
2. Develop a coherent logic model that directly aligns with overarching initiative goals
3. Identify feasible evaluation methods
4. Identify an appropriate comparison group

5. Develop robust data collection and methods

We address each of these steps below.

1. Clearly identify target population and evaluate community needs

SYVPI partners need to decide where on the risk spectrum to focus, based on data about community needs. SYVPI has a defined set of eligibility criteria – youth aged 12-17 meeting certain criteria, such as gang involvement. At the same time, SYVPI partners offer services that benefit youth along a spectrum of risk and our interviews suggested ongoing disagreement about where on this risk spectrum SYVPI should focus. After validation, and with consistent application across the initiative, the updated risk assessment tool will help anchor this debate in quantitative risk assessment data and allow a practical evaluation of whether the risk profile of SYVPI youth served by each provider and the portfolio of SYVPI providers is appropriate to initiative goals.

Beyond the youth homicides that served as catalysts for the development of the initiative, we found minimal evidence that SYVPI implementation was based on a quantitative assessment of community needs. However, without some form of needs assessment, it is difficult to determine: (1) the extent to which SYVPI programming addresses existing gaps or (2) the extent to which available services could impact community-level indicators. We therefore recommend that, after more clearly defining the target population, the initiative conduct a needs assessment. Such an assessment would characterize community need for services that could reduce risk factors and increase protective factors for youth violence among the target population. In addition, it would document the extent to which currently available services meet these needs. This would support the identification of gaps in the existing service network that SYVPI would seek to fill.

The completed needs assessment should quantify the size of the target population, the types of services required to address the risk factors and outcomes identified as relevant to the SYVPI program model, as well as Seattle's existing portfolio of service providers that focus on youth violence. Given agreed upon goals, this needs assessment would inform program staff about the extent to which planned service availability could plausibly produce results needed to meet initiative goals. For example, if the anticipated number of SYVPI participants falls far short of the number of youth referred to the courts in a year, even a very successful implementation is unlikely to significantly affect court referral rates, at least over the short term. A similar conclusion holds if the size of the target population (e.g., gang-involved youth) greatly exceeds SYVPI capacity. Thus, the needs assessment may suggest a need to revise goals, outcome measures, or service mix (e.g., to incorporate services more likely to influence the desired outcome).

The National Gang Center provides a detailed guide to community assessment of gang activity;⁷⁶ in earlier memos, the OCA identified other communities that had conducted gang-related needs assessments. SYVPI extends beyond gang prevention, and needs assessment details would necessarily differ from these examples, but the general approaches described by NGC Gang Center would apply. Short of a formal needs assessment, SYVPI could better quantify the size of the target population and should, at a minimum, suggest whether the current referral processes produce enough potential SYVPI participants with the desired risk profile to meet initiative

goals, as well as identify the existence of significant unmet demand. Understanding these issues is critical to evaluating SYVPI structure and potential for success.

2. Develop a coherent logic model

SYVPI must articulate a logic model that clearly outlines the pathway between program activities, outcomes, and ultimately, desired goals. The most recent SYVPI logic model provided to us represents an improvement over earlier drafts, but still lacks the clarity necessary to serve as the basis for a rigorous evaluation. Most importantly, the logic model should identify a theory of action that clearly illustrates the links between program activities and short- and longer-term outcomes. We note that SYVPI goals need not align exactly with preexisting goals of SYVPI service providers, but they should not diverge significantly and, where they diverge, SYVPI should ensure that the outcomes of SYVPI-funded services do align with SYVPI goals.

Earlier OCA and SYVPI documents highlight these issues.^{77,78} Rather than restate the details, we simply note that the SYVPI logic model remains a work in progress and must be solidified concurrently with any additional evaluation planning.

3. Identify feasible evaluation methods

The logic model should embed a well-defined description of SYVPI's theory of action, program goals, target population, and program design. This logic model will help to determine the best options for rigorous impact evaluation. In this section we describe evaluation methods that the initiative should implement to answer the key research questions about SYVPI's impact.

A program evaluation would seek to identify the extent to which SYVPI services improve outcomes relative to an alternative state of the world where SYVPI services did not exist. This alternate state of the world does not exist, and the ability to draw conclusions about impacts depends on the ability to identify a set of outcomes that approximate this state of the world as closely as possible. Randomized controlled trials (RCTs) serve as the industry "gold standard" in this regard. In an RCT, the treatment group, randomly selected from a pool of potentially eligible youth would receive SYVPI services and a control group, the remainder of the pool, would not. The randomization process provides two groups that, on average, should differ only in the services received. In evaluations of social service provision, RCT feasibility often relies on the fact that the need for services significantly exceeds supply, and programs can implement randomization at intake or through a lottery without restricting services.

While possible in theory, implementing a quality RCT to evaluate the Network-focused research questions described above would at a minimum require SYVPI to clearly define a consistent target population across Networks; ensure consistent reporting by Networks and providers using the updated SYVPI database; and validate the new risk assessment tool. For this reason, at least in the short term, evaluation efforts should focus on less rigorous methods. The research questions suggested above provide a starting point for developing a research methodology. Below, we restate these questions and identify feasible evaluation methods given our current understanding of initiative operations.

Question 1. To what extent does SYVPI allow providers to reach at-risk and underserved populations better than the collection of SYVPI-funded partners acting more or less independently, as in the past?

This question presupposes a well-defined target population, data collection tools that reliably capture relevant participant characteristics, and some understanding about potential unmet need within the defined service areas, possibly including an inventory of service providers with similar goals but not currently associated with SYVPI. The evaluation would identify the extent to which SYVPI, through the Network structure, served a greater share of the target population than would otherwise have been possible.

With the evaluation framework in place, the initiative could also reasonably set performance targets related to the number of participants with specific, pre-defined risk profiles served by each Network and by extension, associated service providers. This would represent an improvement over current contracting practices. Assuming service providers have a positive impact on outcomes, findings that SYVPI improves the reach of Seattle’s violence prevention programs would suggest positive program impacts on the community’s capacity to provide valuable services to underserved populations.

Question 2: To what extent does SYVPI allow providers to better serve participating youth due to a more consistent and comprehensive referral process?

Question 3: To what extent does SYVPI produce better outcomes because participating youth receive more comprehensive and coordinated set of services than they would otherwise receive in the absence of SYVPI?

The two remaining questions address referral, intake, and outcomes, and require similar evaluation methods. They address different potential benefits of the SYVPI structure and answers to each might suggest different approaches to improving SYVPI. However, the initiative would need to develop more and better quantitative data to determine whether an evaluation could provide distinct answers. Ultimately, from the participant perspective, it does not matter whether outcomes improve because of an improved referral process or through better service coordination after intake.

The “ideal” participant risk profile will vary across service providers, and youth may benefit from receiving a variety of services. The Network structure should provide better referrals (i.e., better matching youth needs to provider services) and better connect youth to a comprehensive set of services. The new risk assessment tool, once validated, would provide a means for assessing youth-to-provider matching. Provider implementation of the same tool for non-SYVPI youth or other means of collecting similar data would allow a direct comparison of referral quality for SYVPI referrals and for referrals from traditional sources. We document the complexity and variability of the current referral processes above, although this does not necessarily undermine the method we recommend.

The risk assessment tool could also provide short-term outcome data with which SYVPI could compare outcomes across SYVPI providers and potentially outcomes for SYVPI youth to those of observationally similar youth not involved directly with SYVPI (e.g., by comparing youths’

risk profiles over specific periods of time). Such comparisons require that providers capture similar observational data about all participants and reasonable similarity of the participant groups (e.g., non-SYVPI youth served by an SYVPI provider who have similar observed characteristics). Sufficient data could permit quasi-experimental research designs that provide evidence of program effects less rigorous than that from an RCT, but that would nonetheless support strategic planning by SYVPI and Council decision making.

SYVPI should also collect individual data about outcomes of practical interest and linked directly to stated goals. For example, current SYVPI goals identify school disciplinary actions and court referrals, not a change in risk profile. If SYVPI can arrange the necessary data sharing agreements, evaluation of program impacts on these outcomes could proceed as described above. These data sharing agreements could also provide robust comparison groups for SYVPI youth. For example, analysis of student-level school data would allow evaluators to identify youth who, on the basis of academic (e.g., standardized test scores) and social indicators (e.g., free or reduced price lunch eligibility; attendance) resembles that of SYVPI participants. Tracking outcomes for this group could help to better understand SYVPI impacts.

Process Evaluation

In addition to impact evaluation, SYVPI should develop and implement an ongoing process evaluation. The associated activities will provide SYVPI with data about implementation fidelity, emerging program challenges (e.g., inconsistent referral processes) and best practices, and other aspects of program operation. Findings from this work will aid in program improvement and also serve as a record of SYVPI implementation to inform Council about the results of SYVPI investment and serve as a blueprint for other communities seeking to implement successful aspects of SYVPI. Network forums and other ongoing collaboration can, if documented, provide some of this information. But explicit process evaluation by independent evaluators adds critical credibility and objectivity to evaluation findings.

Process evaluation activities would resemble in many respects the work completed for this evaluability assessment (e.g., document review, focus groups, interviews with stakeholders). But, as a nominally communitywide endeavor, SYVPI's process evaluation should expand beyond entities with a direct involvement in SYVPI to explicitly include the perspectives of youth, parents, the business community, and youth-focused community organizations that do not receive SYVPI funding. Addressing community-level challenges requires buy-in from this broader range of stakeholders. Formally soliciting feedback about SYVPI from all of these groups on a regular basis could help resolve lingering ambiguities in the program model (e.g., to clearly define a target population risk profile), plan for long-term evaluation, and help the program evolve to address changing community needs.

4. Identify an appropriate comparison group

SYVPI will need to identify a viable comparison group for an impact evaluation. However, before committing to a specific research design, we strongly recommend that the initiative pursue the data collection improvements described in the subsequent section and a more formal evaluation planning process as outlined above. With more consistently defined goals, procedures,

and data collection, we see two potential methods for identifying comparison groups, depending on how data are collected, and for whom.

Random assignment

If the initiative can identify significantly more SYVPI-eligible youths than funding would allow to be served, the initiative could use a lottery to randomly assign individuals to a Neighborhood Network. The comparison group would consist of eligible individuals not selected in the lottery. Through this random assignment design, the evaluation would produce rigorous impact estimates as long as the initiative can collect service receipt and outcomes of interest for both SYVPI participants and the comparison group. We did not observe circumstances that would suggest a random assignment design is appropriate, including program maturity, excess demand, and the political will to systematically deny services to a randomly selected pool of otherwise eligible individuals.

Non-random matching

If the initiative has the funding and provider capacity to serve most youth identified as eligible, the initiative would have to select comparison groups on the basis of observable, or measured, individual characteristics, likely using quasi-experimental methods such as the propensity-score matching methods identified earlier.

For in-school youth, evaluators could develop a comparison group of other SPS students (either within the SYVPI service area or in other comparable neighborhoods). At a minimum, the matching procedure would include basic demographics (e.g., age, race, ethnicity, language of origin), program status indicators (e.g., free or reduced price lunch eligibility, special education status), past attendance, past disciplinary actions, and academics (e.g., grade level, performance on state standardized tests, GPA). To the extent possible, characteristics used for the matching should include data about involvement with the criminal justice system as well.

For youth eligible due to past involvement with the criminal justice system, the matching procedure would rely primarily on criminal justice data (e.g., type and timing of prior involvement), augmented with school administrative records to the extent possible. Alternatively, and potentially more resource intensive, if the initiative can administer the risk assessment tool to a comparable group of non-SYVPI youth (e.g., other similar youth involved with an SYVPI provider but not receiving services through SYVPI), we would recommend considering risk assessment data as a key factor in identifying the comparison group.

Because individuals in the comparison groups just described may have no involvement at all with SYVPI partners, feasibility hinges on the ability of the initiative to access outcome data for participants and non-participants alike, limiting the potential outcome measures. For example, it is unlikely that the initiative would have risk assessment data for individuals in the comparison group. Instead, the outcome measures would likely come from administrative data available for both groups (e.g., school or criminal justice data). In assessing feasibility, the initiative also needs to consider the likelihood that individuals in the comparison group might seek SYVPI services in the future because individuals in this group would ideally have a similar risk profile to that of participants.

5. Develop robust data collection methods

Any evaluation of SYVPI will require the development of robust data collection methods. Even the relatively modest evaluation agenda outlined above requires that SYVPI data collection improve considerably over past practices. Stakeholder interviews and discussion with the SYVPI database administrator indicated a lack of consistent and comprehensive data entry. We understand that the new version of the database, developed with provider feedback and scheduled for implementation this year, addresses many flaws in the old system. In reviewing the entry and reporting tools, we find a system that, if used faithfully, should provide reliable evaluation data. Similarly, the new risk assessment tool seeks to address ambiguities and usability challenges presented by the first version. Prior to implementation, however, we cannot say whether the new tools will yield the desired outcomes.

In this context, we recommend that SYVPI seek to ensure that the new systems produce valid and reliable data by:

1. **Continuing to validate the risk assessment tool.** As a critical component of any rigorous evaluation strategy, SYVPI must understand the extent to which the risk assessment measures characteristics relevant to initiative goals (e.g., to know whether a reduction in measured risk translates into a meaningful change in participant outcomes). Validation is a critical precondition to evaluation based on risk assessment data. Even with an ideal implementation, the variety of services and provider-specific service models does not suggest any other method for collecting common baseline and outcome data about participants.
2. **As soon as feasible, analyzing data collected in the new database to ensure completeness and accuracy.** As the only common platform for data collection, evaluation efforts will not succeed in quantifying program benefits, especially to Council, if SYVPI cannot collect reasonably complete and accurate participant data.
3. **Ensuring that SYVPI contracts incentivize providers to submit accurate and complete data about participant characteristics, risk assessments, services provided, and outcomes.** Simply put, well-intentioned service providers invariably have numerous competing demands, and by default, prioritize activities required by their funders.

VII. Conclusion

Our fieldwork and review of SYVPI materials revealed an innovative effort to address the issue of youth violence in three Seattle communities. Throughout our work it was clear that SYVPI program staff and managers are thoroughly committed to the youth that they serve. Staff often work long hours and regularly make themselves available to youth at all hours of the day. Moreover, the way in which they discuss their work and the youth they serve reveals an abiding commitment to improving the lives of both individual youth and the broader communities in which they live.

Just as we were encouraged by the passion with which SYVPI stakeholders approach the initiative, our work suggests that much of the approach of SYVPI is consistent with best practices identified in the literature. SYVPI's activities focus on increasing school engagement and providing youth with opportunities to connect with prosocial peers and adults in the community. In doing so, SYVPI creates a platform for prosocial community norms and beliefs. In addition to its broader strategy, individual components, when implemented with fidelity, also align well with broader SYVPI goals related to youth violence prevention. Moreover, by virtue of being community-managed, SYVPI knows and represents the social and cultural backgrounds of the youth it serves.

This report presents a wide array of critiques of the design and implementation of the SYVPI program model. While we drew many of these conclusions based on conversations with program staff and review of SYVPI materials, most of our observations were echoed by a significant share of the various SYVPI stakeholders with whom we spoke. This reflects a broader theme of introspection within the initiative. Given the complexity of the service delivery model, our conversations suggest that SYVPI leadership has been purposeful in soliciting input from all stakeholders and attempting to make course corrections to improve service delivery. Indeed, the evolution of the model and its program goals can be largely attributed to this purposeful approach.

Despite these strengths, we identified several key challenges associated with the design and implementation of the program model. Many challenges stem from a lack of specificity and consistency in the program design and implementation. They are exacerbated by a weak data collection infrastructure, which limits both the evaluability of the initiative as well as the tools available to support program management in assuring fidelity to the program model.

The initiative has struggled since its inception to adequately implement a data collection regime that could support either evaluation or implementation. While evaluation is clearly inhibited by the poor data quality, the more immediate problem with this deficiency is the way in which it inhibits implementation. The current data system does not allow staff and managers to communicate effectively regarding the status of individual youth and the services they receive. Given the complexity of the initiative, a strong data system could dramatically improve service coordination and monitoring of fidelity to the program model. Similarly, the lack of consistent risk assessment, both during intake and once youth have begun receiving services, limits providers' ability to effectively provide youth the most appropriate services.

In this report we outline steps in the evaluation planning process that could support a rigorous evaluation of SYVPI. These steps begin with clarifying the goals of the initiative. A data-driven approach to defining the nature of the youth violence problem in Seattle is an integral first step in the process. This would support better identification of the specific target population of the initiative as well as the broader community need. With a clear assessment of the problem, the initiative will be better-equipped to implement a mix of services that is optimally responsive to these needs.

We conclude that, before moving forward with a rigorous evaluation, SYVPI must refine its logic model to ensure that the services provided and the initiative goals are more directly responsive to the specifics of the youth violence problem. Concurrently, the initiative must continue to improve its data collection and ensure consistent implementation of a risk assessment tool. With such a complex model and so many stakeholders, it can often be difficult to make decisive and informed decisions regarding changes in design and implementation. Our hope is that a more data-driven, systematic approach to service delivery will help ensure that program decisions are as responsive as possible to the needs of the communities it serves. Simultaneously, better tracking and data can support both ongoing program management as well as a more rigorous evaluation of the initiative's impact.

Appendix A: Contract Performance Pay Measures by SYVPI Component

Component	Contract Performance Pay Measure
Neighborhood Network	30 new youth risk assessed
	10 six month risk assessments (RAs)
	22 twelve month, 15 eighteen month RAs
	10 successful exits, 15 exit RAs
	50 youth in Youth Development Projects (YDP), 60 youth in mini Community Matching Grants
	160 completed employment referrals (varies slightly by Network depending on slots available by neighborhood)
	90% of the YDP participants completing the evaluation survey
Case Management	Number of signed Individual Service Plans (ISP = new enrollments)
	Number of signed Disclosure of Information forms (includes new enrollments as well as carry overs)
	Number of signed FERPA forms (to allow release of information from Seattle Public Schools)
	Number of ISP goals achieved
Employment	Number of youth enrolled with ISP
	Number of youth completing 80% of program and not dropping out of program
	Number of youth with a positive evaluation from supervisor regarding working relationships
	King County Superior Court: three out-of-school youth re-enrolling in education
	School district #1, Southwest Youth and Family Services (SWYFS): number of youth earning educational credit
ART	Number of youth enrolled
	Number of youth completing certain homework assignments
	Number of youth completing at least 70% of classes
Mentoring	Number of youth matches a year
	Number of youth matches lasting certain number milestone months (3, 6, 12, 18)
Parks and Recreation	Number of SYVPI youth completing programs, increasing attendance, maintaining participation, in academic programs, and participating “without trespass”
Street Outreach	Number of high-risk youth contacted, engaged within each network
	Number of new youth risk assessed
	Organize Community Violence Prevention events (1 per Network)
	Number of Major Event safety planning and staffing documents submitted to Office for Education (OFE) for Torchlight
	Critical Incident Response to 100% of Seattle Police Department notices of violent incidents of youth or gang members in Network
	Number of RAs done for youth engaged in Street Outreach for 6 months
	Number of RAs done for youth engaged in Street Outreach for 12 months
	Number of RAs for youth upon exit from Street Outreach services

Appendix B: Service Mix Available and Core Program Components

SYVPI includes eight different components through contracts or interdepartmental MOUs in addition to the Neighborhood Network hub. These include:

- Case management
- Street outreach
- Aggression Replacement Training (ART)
- Employment and training
- Community Matching Grants
- Mentoring
- School Emphasis Officers (SEOs) – no MOU or contract
- Parks and Recreation

The interdepartmental team tasked with planning SYVPI conducted research on best practices for at-risk youth and identified intensive case management, mentorship, anger management training, and street outreach as types of services that have been shown to be successful with helping troubled youth.⁷⁹ In addition, they studied other cities with youth violence prevention initiatives and identified promising practices such as extended-hour youth centers and creating opportunities for youth to spend time in positive ways in safe environments.

The set of services provided through SYVPI have generally remained the same from the beginning of the initiative and there was no mechanism articulated in the program design for altering the service mix.

Below we describe each of the major components of the initiative. We begin by discussing the design of the service delivery model and our understanding of its goals. We note the short-term, intermediate, and longer-term outcomes identified in the logic model prepared by University of Washington researchers for the initiative in 2013.⁸⁰ Following this discussion, we provide our observations regarding the current implementation. We then discuss the overall management structure of SYVPI. We conclude with a description of the SYVPI database.

1. Neighborhood Network

With one located in each of the three targeted neighborhoods, the Neighborhood Networks act as the entry point into the initiative and have primary responsibility for connecting youth to the various services provided through SYVPI.

Design

The Networks are community-based organizations with varied missions. In the Central District, Therapeutic Health Services operates as the Neighborhood Network. The agency's mission is to rehabilitate individuals affected by alcohol or drug dependence and/or mental illness. A majority of THS's clients are adults.^{xv} The Rainier Vista Boys and Girls Club of King County has the contract to serve as the Southeast Area Network. This site is a youth service agency focused on meeting the needs of young people ages five to eighteen; it provides programming, teen

^{xv} THS's agency mission is described on its website: <http://ths-wa.org/about-ths/our-history/>

outreach, meals, homework assistance, and a safe place for youth to congregate with friends.^{xvi} In Southwest Seattle, Southwest Youth and Family Services (SWYFS) operates as the Network. The mission of SWYFS is to promote healthy family functioning, early childhood learning, student academic success, and youth development.^{xvii}

Conversations with SYVPI management as well as many of the city staff involved in the design and early implementation of the initiative indicated that a key feature of the Network design was to be embedded locally in the three neighborhoods as a way to facilitate community access to services and make it easier to navigate the resources that exist. This was meant to be a departure from previous service delivery structures where services were centrally coordinated and less embedded within individual neighborhoods and communities.

The Networks are the service hubs for SYVPI in each neighborhood. They are responsible for conducting the intake and enrollment of youth into the initiative, assessing youth risk factors and needs, keeping youth engaged in the initiative, coordinating contact with those who may have become disengaged, and exiting youth who are no longer appropriate for the initiative. In addition, they act as brokers of SYVPI services. They are tasked with coordinating services and efforts to work with specific youth across the SYVPI providers and schools, creating connections with local resources offering services for youth, and providing services in the community to quickly meet youth needs.

The 2013 logic model produced by SYVPI in collaboration with the University of Washington identifies five outcomes for which the Networks are responsible, one short-term outcome, and four intermediate outcomes. The primary short-term outcome in the logic model is the **number of youth appropriately referred and using SYVPI services**. The intermediate outcomes include the **number of youth continuing with services, working towards goals and not involved in violence at six, twelve, fifteen, and eighteen months**.⁸¹

There are several innovative features incorporated into the model of SYVPI and the role of the Networks. First, the Networks were geographically located in each of the three identified communities. The overview of SYVPI that the Mayor's office released in 2008 indicated that the communities included in SYVPI were chosen because they were areas where indicators of future violent behaviors and shootings and juvenile violent crime rates were highest.⁸² However, other than this initial determination, we found limited indication that the city or the initiative has revisited the appropriateness of these communities and the corresponding geographic boundaries as highest priorities for youth violence prevention in the city.^{xviii}

An important defining feature of the SYVPI model is the focus of the **community-based Network hubs**. This framework stands in contrast to the typical city-based models that tend to have a more centralized and bureaucratic structure where clients access services via a staff

^{xvi} Rainier Vista's mission is described on its website:

<http://positiveplace.org/locations/rainiervista/aboutus/Pages/mission.aspx>

^{xvii} SWYFS's mission is described on its website: <http://www.swyfs.org/about-us/mission/>

^{xviii} In 2013, SYVPI submitted a Budget Issue Paper outlining the costs of adding a North Seattle Network noting the potential benefit to youth and families in that community. However, the BIP does not cite any data to justify the addition of the Network, and this recommendation was not approved.

member working in the appropriate city departments. The assumption motivating the design was that the placement of the Networks in the communities would facilitate easier access for both staff to contact youth and for the youth to engage in programming. Further, the location of the Networks would provide easier access for community involvement and input on programming and services.

Secondly, the framework ambitiously aimed to alter the traditional model of service-delivery from a case manager system (a staff member who may or may not be familiar to the youth's local community, or even located within the youth's neighborhood) to a **community-based system**, one that was responsive to the specific problems and issues confronting youth and communities in each neighborhood. The objective was to allow for a set of staff who were familiar with the specific youth in the community, as well as the local context of violence, and the racial, ethnic and social culture of the youth and their families to individualize their interactions, assessments and delivery of services to their clients. In order to be responsive to this aim, the city provided funds to increase access to the host of programs and services provided through SYVPI. The aim was to generate a change in organizational culture, whereby services would be delivered to youth based on staff's local knowledge. Practitioners could identify the needs of the youth and broker for appropriate services among the multitude of programs involved to meet their clients' needs.

Third, the structure of the Neighborhood Networks was designed to **empower the staff and practitioners within each community** to serve as a primary decision maker regarding the referral and processing of youth, determining appropriate services, and ensuring that those services were received.

And fourth, the prevention aim of the initiative included the participation of a wide range of youth participants: **the target population included youth engaged in violence and also youth at-risk for violence**. Thus, in order to reach several types of youth in terms of their relationship to violence (e.g., engaged in, at risk for involvement, witnesses or victims of), program enrollment worked to capture friendship and peer networks. As long as youth met the minimum requirements for program enrollment, they were not turned away, particularly if they had a connection to a youth already enrolled in the program.

The staff and administrators of SYVPI coherently articulated what we realized to be a non-stated assumption driving their logic model – that, through this community-level empowerment and individual-level youth engagement, communities would feel safer, and violence that involved youth as the perpetrators and victims will decrease. In different ways each person interviewed described the work of SYVPI and the Neighborhood Networks to be threefold:

- (1) Empower communities by developing an accessible referral-based system for youth in need of services and by providing a menu of programs and services for youth located within local neighborhoods,
- (2) Develop a caring and relevant support hub of adults within each of the three communities for youth which will help them navigate and access the menu of programs and services, and

(3) Facilitate fiscal resources that allow for youth to enter programming and services specific to their needs and desires, which would provide for future employment, and educational and social development (by increasing the number of prosocial contacts).

As Implemented

The Neighborhood Networks serve as the main hub of the initiative. They are responsible for coordinating services among multiple partners and working directly with youth to arrange the appropriate mix of services. Staff within the Networks have the dual role of coordinator and case manager, describing themselves as being at the center of the “web of support” provided to each youth in SYVPI. Their responsibilities include:

- Recruitment
- Screening, intake, and enrollment
- Individual youth risk assessment
- Determining appropriate services
- Referrals to SYVPI services/agencies
- Accountability for SYVPI agencies
- Resource outreach
- Youth engagement

As the formal entry point, Networks are the gatekeepers into the initiative. Youth cannot enter the initiative without the intake and referral specialists entering them into the initiative’s database. The Networks screen youth to confirm eligibility and assess which service components are most appropriate for youth. Our conversations with Network staff and other SYVPI providers suggested that the Network staff exercise substantial discretion in fulfilling this role. Network staff base their decisions on the information on the referral form, conversations with youth, and sometimes conversations with the referral source; they generally do not employ any systematic tools to support decision making regarding the most appropriate mix of services for a given youth.

Network staff conduct individual youth risk assessments at enrollment unless the youth is referred into case management or street outreach. There have been several versions of the risk assessment tool since the beginning of the initiative. The tool that staff were using at the time we conducted interviews includes items pertaining to a youths’ academic status, friendships, romantic relationships, employment history, criminal background, substance use, family issues, and mental health. Depending on what the youth report, a risk factor score can be calculated, but we heard from Network staff that they do not necessarily calculate these scores and the results of the assessment are not systematically used to match youth to particular services. Staff explained they do not read through the items, but talk with the youth about their lives until they have a good picture of how to fill out the form.^{xix}

In addition to their responsibilities regarding intake and referrals, the Networks also provide ongoing monitoring of services provided in other SYVPI components. Network staff described

^{xix} Several Network staff indicated they rely on Motivational Interviewing techniques during these conversations

one of their roles as making sure that the youth are participating in components to which they have been referred. The Networks aim to serve as a resource for youth who are struggling to engage with a given service provider. For example, if a youth assigned to case management is struggling to secure an appointment with the provider, the Networks are able to intervene to speed up the process.

As of 2014, SYVPI expanded contractually required duties of the Neighborhood Networks to include convening and coordinating the SYVPI Network intervention teams. This added responsibility is meant to facilitate information sharing, communication, and collaboration among the array of providers serving the highest-risk SYVPI youth. This approach is modeled after the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention's (OJJDP) Comprehensive Gang Model, and involves personnel from different fields who share information, develop individual case management plans for the highest-risk and gang-involved youth, identify and eliminate barriers that might keep youth from accessing needed services, and hold youth and each other accountable. The Neighborhood Networks are required to convene teams twice per month for 90 minutes. At these meetings the team will screen and review recent referrals, create a case management plan for two to three new clients, review the case plans for several existing clients, and discuss crisis situations, gang dynamics, and safety issues.⁸³

The Networks also often help facilitate information sessions and outreach to youth by individual providers. This is most pronounced in recent approaches to the employment component of the initiative. Several years ago, the Networks began conducting information sessions for youth who have expressed interest in employment. The Networks host the meeting and invite the employment providers to talk to the youth about their services, and they provide an opportunity for case managers to meet with youth. Network staff have taken this approach to allow youth to understand the array of options available and to help youth begin building relationships with employment providers that might be a good fit.

Along with their role in working directly with youth and coordinating the other SYVPI-funded services, Network staff conduct outreach to community organizations and service providers outside of the SYVPI Network. This includes potential resources for youth such as summer camp opportunities as well as potential referral sources such as mental health providers. SYVPI management and the Networks see this outreach as a means to facilitate connections with small, community-based organizations who may serve as valuable resources to SYVPI-enrolled youth but who lack the larger infrastructure and reach often necessary to increase awareness within the community. For example, staff at one SYVPI agency noted that before SYVPI, they did not have a resource to which they could refer youth with higher risk issues such as chemical dependency.

In some cases, primarily when Network staff deem a youth lower risk, the Networks do not refer youth to either case management or street outreach. Each Network has a least one staff person, either a program coordinator or a youth engagement coordinator, who works with "Network-managed" youth to coordinate programs and services for Network youth.^{xx} These youth may still be referred to the other components (e.g., employment, mentoring). However, their primary interaction is with the Networks who are responsible for consistently engaging them in positive,

^{xx} The Networks created these positions in 2013 to work with this subset of youth.

prosocial programming as a way to increase protective factors. This programming is offered by the Networks themselves (youth development program performance goals were added to more recent Network contracts), as well as through the Community Matching Grants and Parks and Recreation. As with our observations regarding the subjectivity with which Network staff made decisions regarding referrals to various SYVPI components, our conversations with the Networks did not reveal a consistent set of criteria that suggested a youth should remain “Network-managed” as opposed to being referred to case management or street outreach.

Through our conversations with SYVPI leadership, Network staff, and staff from the other components, it became clear to us that a relatively small number of staff at the Networks have a diverse array of responsibilities that are integral to the successful operation of SYVPI. This approach places a substantial burden on Network staff, especially the Network Coordinators, and makes any staff turnover especially disruptive. Moreover, the substantial autonomy with which the Networks operate results in marked variation in the three Networks’ service delivery models.

The SYVPI model and theory of change as described to the research team by staff, practitioners, and administrators rests on the concept of developing a “network of care” or “web of support” for youth labeled as high risk for violence in three Seattle neighborhoods. The establishment of three community-based Networks was an attempt to localize and enhance services for youth at risk of violence in these communities. Thus, initiative staff and administrators viewed the program as one in which individual service components would impact individual outcomes by increasing protective factors, teaching youth life skills for employment, anger management, and community building. The initiative staff and administrators also viewed the various program components as generating a collective change, one that instigated community empowerment, and improved upon the city’s previous models for serving youth. As such, we heard characterizations of the initiative as both directly affecting youth on the individual level and also affecting the three neighborhoods at the community level.

2. Case Management

There are six case management agencies contracted to provide services to SYVPI youth, three of which are located in the Central District, and three of which are located in Southwest Seattle. One case management agency located in Southeast Seattle has a memorandum of understanding to provide case management services to SYVPI youth though it receives no SYVPI funding.

Design

The SYVPI design places a premium on being able to provide community-based case management services for eligible youth. During our interviews respondents emphasized that this model is a departure from the city’s previous case management infrastructure, in which agencies had very wide geographic areas they served.

Case management agencies are responsible for intensive service coordination and assisting youth and families in navigating service systems in order to access resources they may not know how to access on their own. Along with Networks, they also conduct assessments of youth risk factors and create Individual Service Plans (ISP) of goals the youth hopes to achieve. Case managers identify youth needs and refer them to the appropriate services whether within or outside the

initiative. These services can include education support, prosocial programming in areas such as recreation, music, dance, sports, and life skills, substance abuse treatment, mental health counseling, and housing resources. They are also responsible for assisting youth and their families with navigating the school, court, and social service systems to access resources and advocating on behalf of the youth and their families. Case managers must maintain regular contact with the youth on their caseload, although depending on the needs of the youth, the frequency of contact can vary highly. They are expected to track and keep records of all youth progress with documents such as court records, probation personnel verification, school records, pay stubs, treatment provider verification, and youth or family self-report.

Case management services are meant to be time-limited in order for staff to provide services to many youth – SYVPI policy is that youth should not be kept on the caseload for longer than 18 months without good cause. Network staff mentioned that many case-managed youth develop strong relationships with their case managers and tend to not want to stop meeting, even when they no longer require service coordination and navigation, but there are limited slots and many youth who need case management. Youth who are not in a stable situation and still require intensive services at 18 months may stay on longer with a case manager.

The logic model developed in 2013 by SYVPI with the University of Washington identifies the following intermediate/long-term outcomes for case management: **reduction of criminal involvement/behavior, increase in school success, increase in involvement in prosocial activities, improved employability skills, increase in engagement in treatment** (e.g., substance abuse, mental health, family counseling), **improved housing stability**, and **improved family functioning**.

As Implemented

Much of the structure of case management in SYVPI is a result of the funding structure that existed before the creation of the initiative. Before SYVPI, the Seattle Team for Youth program was the primary way in which the City's Department of Human Services (HSD) contracted with case management providers to meet the needs of at-risk youth in the city. While many of the case management providers under SYVPI had contracts through Seattle Team for Youth, SYVPI has changed the way in which clients come onto their caseloads. However, conversations with multiple case management agencies suggest that the target populations that these agencies serve and the general approach to service delivery have remained similar.

Conversations with case management agencies and SYVPI leadership indicated that the case management agencies in SYVPI are a mix of those that have a primarily geographic focus and those that tailor their services to youth with certain individual-level characteristics. For example, one case management agency explicitly serves youth who identify as female, regardless of where they live, whereas another agency tends to serve a more diverse group of youth, all of whom live within a specific neighborhood. To some degree, the target population served by each case management agency is also driven by the set of existing community partners a given agency has (e.g., some case managers have especially strong relationships with local middle schools).

The Networks see case management in SYVPI as a system of intensive case coordination and navigators of resource systems, connecting youth and families to services they may not

understand how to access on their own. Case managers work individually with youth to help them develop plans to achieve the goals the youth have chosen and outlined on their Individual Service Plans. These services and goals often revolve around issues related to school, family, juvenile justice, and drug and alcohol issues. This may mean helping a youth to re-enroll in school or to find a GED program, go through job readiness training, or fill out and file paperwork for a Social Security card. Many case managers work not only with the youth but also with their families. Networks try to connect youth with case managers based on the barriers they may be facing or on youth characteristics such as gender or language; language can be particularly important to match for some youth whose parents may be immigrants who do not speak English. In these cases, the case managers' role as navigators of systems is highly important, as the families may not be able to assist the youth in obtaining access to resources due to cultural or language barriers. In addition, case management providers serve as the primary conduit for youth who need assistance with issues that cannot be resolved by the suite of SYVPI providers (e.g., drug and alcohol abuse, housing assistance, mental health counseling, legal assistance).^{xxi}

The approach to service delivery varies by provider, and Networks are attentive to these approaches in making referrals. For example, some case managers have especially strong relationships with local schools, and Network staff will often refer youth whose primary barriers are school-related to these individuals. For those youth with substantial criminal justice involvement, Networks may refer them to case managers who are especially adept at assisting youth in navigating the court and probation systems.

SYVPI's policy is that youth may remain in the case management component for up to 18 months at one time. If there are extenuating circumstances, a youth may be on the caseload for a longer period, but there are a limited number of case managers and case management slots in SYVPI. However, a youth who is exited out of case management may come back at a later time if they are still enrolled in SYVPI.

Our conversations with various SYVPI staff suggested that, for those youth who are not "Network-managed," their case manager is typically their primary point of contact in the initiative and the catalyst for any additional services that youth may receive.

3. Street Outreach

The YMCA of Greater Seattle has run SYVPI's street outreach team since 2011. Previously both the Central Area Network and street outreach were run through the Urban League of Metropolitan Seattle. Street outreach is implemented by the Alive and Free program of YMCA, which focuses on changing beliefs that promote violence among those involved in the juvenile justice system. Alive and Free provides classes and workshops to youth in schools, community centers, detention centers, and faith-based organizations.

Design

^{xxi} As of 2014, case managers are also able to refer youth on their caseload to some SYVPI services (mentoring, Parks, and ART) without needing to go through the Networks though this is still not a preferred mechanism for referrals to SYVPI services.

The street outreach team is tasked with recruiting the highest-risk youth into SYVPI. Fully staffed, each Network is meant to have two dedicated street outreach workers. Street outreach workers are expected to go into the community and build relationships with youth and their families. They serve both a recruitment role as well as providing ongoing support to youth who may be less comfortable engaging with the more typical service delivery approach of the initiative. Street outreach workers must have the ability to forge meaningful relationships with high-risk youth while also helping these youth and their families navigate the array of institutions with which they interact (e.g., courts, schools, supportive service providers).

The design of the street outreach approach was also intended to allow Networks to refer youth with whom they are working who are involved in gangs or the criminal justice system. The outreach workers carry youth on caseloads and do one-on-one intensive work with each individual youth. In particular, workers assist youth with school and housing-related issues and are trained to help youth solve interpersonal conflicts. In addition, if a youth is not engaging in the services to which they have been referred or in the initiative as a whole, the street outreach workers will contact them and reengage them in programs. Outreach workers are expected to be available to youth at all times of the day and week and link disconnected youth to safe havens. They are also expected to provide early intervention during crises and are trained and expected to de-escalate violent situations of youth in or from the SYVPI service areas. This can involve preventing or reducing potentially violent arguments between youth gang members and helping them resolve conflicts.

The only outcome for street outreach defined in the UW logic model is a **decrease in the number of risk factors for violence among youth on the street outreach caseload.**

As Implemented

The street outreach component of SYVPI is intended to provide ongoing support to the harder-to-reach youth enrolled in SYVPI. In contrast to the more traditional case management model, street outreach workers engage youth in a variety of settings (e.g., street corners, schools, their homes, at community events). While not formally case managers, our interviews suggested that street outreach workers often play a similar role for the youth on their caseload. As such, we observed that there is often a lack of clear distinction between the roles that street outreach workers play and those of case managers.

Turnover is fairly common among street outreach workers and maintaining staff has been an issue, in part due to the extensive demands of the roles they are expected to play. At the time of our interviews street outreach had several positions vacant, both at the worker level as well as the Director position.^{xxii} When fully staffed, SYVPI's goal is to have two street outreach workers assigned to each Neighborhood Network. Even when fully staffed, we heard concerns regarding the capacity of street outreach to meet the needs of SYVPI youth. In particular, we heard in several interviews that there is a need for more street outreach workers who speak the array of languages spoken by SYVPI youth, in particular Southeast Asian and East African languages.

^{xxii} At the time of our field work the Director was on a leave of absence.

This is especially important given the role street outreach workers often play in interacting with the parents of youth, who may have limited English proficiency.

Street outreach workers are expected to be visible presences in the communities and neighborhoods they serve, identifying and building relationships with high-risk youth involved in gangs, violence, and the juvenile justice system. In this capacity, they can serve as an important referral source into SYVPI, targeting those youth who are both highest risk and least likely to otherwise engage with the initiative. Simultaneously, the workers are expected to maintain ongoing relationships with the youth on their caseloads. The Networks often refer youth to street outreach if they are hesitant to engage in any other SYVPI services (e.g., case management, youth development programming). Each worker carries between fifteen and twenty youth on their caseload and is expected to keep weekly case notes on each youth.^{xxiii}

Street outreach workers have additional responsibilities beyond working with the individual youth on their caseloads. They are also expected to be responsive to community-level events. Their contract stipulates they respond to 100 percent of Seattle Police Department notifications of violent incidents involving youth or gang members not only that occurs within the SYVPI boundaries, but also those that occur elsewhere that involve youth from any of the three Networks. The workers also participate in major event and post-incident event safety planning and coordination for community-wide events with potential for youth violence, such as the Torchlight Parade.

It was not clear, based on our interviews, how the caseload targets for street outreach were set. In particular, staff expressed concerns that these targets may be high if workers are carrying a caseload of especially high-risk youth. Interviewees expressed added concerns regarding staff capacity given the additional responsibilities workers have aside from direct casework (e.g., serving as mediators, engaging with older youth who are not eligible for the initiative, responding to critical incidents in the community).

Defining the characteristics of youth labeled as “high-risk” or who are appropriate for street outreach has been an ongoing conversation SYVPI officials have had with the SYVPI partners from the beginning of the initiative. Some staff suggested that street outreach was the most suitable component for youth who were more difficult to serve through other SYVPI services. This included those with mental health and substance abuse issues or school discipline issues. Others felt that narrower criteria would be more appropriate, focusing on the highest-risk youth (especially those who are court involved) who would not otherwise willingly engage with the initiative.

The lack of clarity regarding the target population for street outreach appears to have created confusion among Network and service provider staff between the role of a street outreach worker and a case manager. In some cases, youth are assigned to both a case manager and a street outreach worker. In these instances, the street outreach worker is able to address a youth’s most urgent needs (e.g., clothing, assistance in de-escalating personal conflicts, meeting probation requirements) while the case manager can support longer-term goals (e.g., getting re-enrolled in

^{xxiii} These case notes are not consistently entered into the SYVPI database.

school, addressing mental health needs). However, this distinction is not always clear, even when youth are enrolled in both components. We heard from many non-street outreach staff that a role of street outreach is to help locate those youth who have fallen out of touch with the initiative, though street outreach staff countered that simply locating such youth, absent more substantive relationship building, should fall outside their responsibilities.

4. Aggression Replacement Training

Aggression Replacement Training (ART) is an evidence-based best practice targeting youth (ages 12 to 17) with anger issues.⁸⁴

Design

City staff designing the initiative and the City Council chose to include ART in SYVPI because of the rigorous research supporting its effectiveness in teaching anger management and prosocial skills to youth with antisocial behavior, lack of moral reasoning, or violent behavior.⁸⁵ Furthermore, SYVPI's logic model with the UW articulates additional goals for ART of **improvements in school attendance** and **reductions in aggression**. Research suggests ART is a good fit for youth with a history of serious aggression and antisocial behavior.⁸⁶ SYVPI offers ART as a 10-week, 30-hour program (three one-hour sessions per week) administered by certified facilitators to groups of eight to 12 youth. Its aim is to reduce aggression by teaching youth how to understand and replace aggression and antisocial behavior with positive alternatives. It focuses on anger control, skill-streaming behavior (learning through role playing), and moral reasoning (discussion groups).

As Implemented

Policymakers pushed to include Aggression Replacement Training in SYVPI because they wanted it to include components that are evidence based. However, information we obtained from our interviews of SYVPI stakeholders suggested that the initiative is facing ongoing difficulty in achieving the necessary level of fidelity with ART given the setting in which it is implemented in SYVPI. We found confusion regarding appropriate criteria for referring youth to ART, and staff expressed concerns about their ability to maintain the attendance levels necessary to ensure fidelity. Despite these concerns, many staff, especially case managers working with youth who are required to complete behavior modification programs to re-enroll in school, voiced appreciation for the availability of ART services.

Southwest Youth and Family Services (SWYFS) runs ART cohorts for SYVPI three to four times a year. The youth enrolled in the classes have often been referred by school staff who have concerns regarding the youths' aggressive behavior, lack of respect for authority, or poor peer relationships. Formerly, recruitment was centered on high school age youth, but Networks and the ART coordinator determined that ART was more appropriate for younger youth, and now they target middle school youth.

The characteristics of the SYVPI youth enrolled in ART align with those for whom research suggests ART is most appropriate. However, the circumstances under which SYVPI delivers ART differ from the ART models previously evaluated. In particular, research on ART has

focused on delivery in residential facilities.⁸⁷ This difference has implications for level of dosage and program attrition.⁸⁸ While SYVPI provides youth with financial incentives to participate in ART, the voluntary structure as an after school program has resulted in difficulties for the ART facilitators in securing the level of engagement achieved in the evidence-based implementation where all youth attend all sessions. The difficulty in securing attendance is further evidenced by the performance measure SWYFS must reach to secure the performance-based funding in their contract; the SYVPI contract for ART only requires that youth complete 70 percent of the total class hours.

In response to low retention rates, SYVPI has taken steps to alter the implementation of ART. Initially, SWYFS offered ART in community centers, but attrition was very high, so the agency used relationships with local schools to secure space to deliver it on campuses. SWYFS found that, by making it easier for youth to get to the classes, attendance improved. To further reduce barriers to attendance, at the time of our interviews, ART staff were working with schools to offer ART as an elective class during the school day, which they expect will increase retention.^{xxiv} In addition, staff noted that the provision of cash incentives – 50 dollars at week five, 100 dollars at week 10 – and occasional gift cards has improved attendance.

In addition, ART is not available to all youth who may need it in SYVPI. Since the beginning of SYVPI, there has only been one provider of ART. While SWYFS coordinates with schools and community centers to provide the class in different locations, only one class is run at a time, and the Southeast neighborhood is not served at all because two schools in their area offer ART. However, it was unclear whether these ART programs communicate completion rates to SYVPI and whether those data are entered into the SYVPI database. The ART class groups are often created by the school where the class will be run; that particular school's faculty and staff will send the ART provider a list of youth who are in need of ART in advance of the session start. If the list includes youth who are not already enrolled in the initiative, they are sent to the Network to go through the eligibility check and intake so they may be referred to ART.^{xxv}

Despite challenges associated with current implementation, we heard from multiple providers that ART was a valuable component that helped address unmet needs of SYVPI youth.

5. Employment and Training

SYVPI holds an interdepartmental agreement with the Human Services Department's (HSD) Seattle Youth Employment Program (SYEP) who in turn holds contracts with several community-based agencies to obtain youth employment services. SYEP is the largest provider, aiming to serve roughly 100 SYVPI youth, followed by YMCA of Greater Seattle and the King County Superior Court, which each aim to serve 40 youth annually. In addition, Powerful Voices, Youth Venture, and SWYFS, are also responsible for providing SYVPI employment services year-round and through summer projects for youth enrolled in school.

^{xxiv} The downside to this approach is that it limits attendance to students currently enrolled in the school.

^{xxv} Staff reported that generally, those who are identified as in need of ART also meet the SYVPI eligibility criteria.

Employment providers are responsible for enrolling youth into the program, providing job readiness training, developing appropriate subsidized jobs and paid trainings for them, placing youth, and monitoring their participation and the relationship with the employer. To participate in this component, SYVPI youth must be at least 14 years of age.

Design

The employment and training component of SYVPI is intended to reduce youth involvement in criminal activity and gangs. In response to a City Council budget information request, SYVPI cited research on employment-based education programs that had positive effects on youths' social functioning and were correlated with lower rates of arrest and criminal activity. The SYVPI employment component includes internship development, pre-employment training, job-readiness training, subsidized employment or paid apprenticeships, and group projects. The programs also included a variety of support services such as bus passes, work clothing, and equipment. The design of SYVPI suggests that, along with employment services, youth in SYVPI must also receive other services such as case management, ART, and mentoring in order to achieve desired outcomes.⁸⁹ The SYVPI 2013 logic model with UW outlines three desired outcomes of the employment and training component: (1) **develop work readiness and/or job training skills**; (2) **develop positive career goals and pathways**; and (3) **help youth return to school/earn a GED**.

As Implemented

Almost universally in our interviews we heard that youth employment is a powerful incentive for participation in SYVPI. Staff consistently indicated that the potential of a summer job was an effective means for engaging harder-to-reach youth who may not have otherwise considered participating in SYVPI. Moreover, many staff believed that SYVPI represents an important mechanism for increasing access to the city's youth employment programs to a more diverse and potentially higher-risk group of youth.

Despite near unanimous support for the inclusion of employment in the initiative, we heard from many providers that implementation of the youth employment component in the context of SYVPI is operationally difficult and time-consuming for initiative providers, particularly the Networks. While this is likely also an issue in the broader implementation of the initiative, the youth employment coordinating role that the Networks take on may hinder their ability to meet their numerous other SYVPI responsibilities. In addition, our conversations with the Networks and case managers did not suggest that there is a coherent strategy for how to translate participation in employment into meaningful SYVPI engagement in other ways.

Networks utilize the youth employment opportunities as a way to incentivize enrollment and youths' continued engagement with SYVPI services. Staff indicated that many youth and their families find the possibility of employment to be a motivating incentive for participation. However, implementing the employment program is logistically burdensome and time-consuming. The Networks are the only SYVPI entity that can make a referral to employment. They have primary responsibility for assisting youth in filling out the extensive paperwork required to participate, though case managers also often assist youth in preparing the necessary paperwork. The Networks begin offering information sessions for summer employment in

January, as it can take months to prepare a youth's paperwork appropriately. The Networks go through the completed applications from each interested youth and may work with SYEP to place the individual.

The employment providers deliver their services in a variety of ways. SYEP provides employment services to SYVPI youth in the form of job preparedness training, job placement, payroll, and employment-based case management. SYEP focuses on jobs in areas aligned with youths' future academic interests or jobs that prepare youth for competitiveness in the labor market (e.g., opportunities in the public sector, clerical, health fields, and skilled trades). Powerful Voices focuses on individuals identifying as female and includes a social justice activism component into all of its job preparedness trainings and employment positions. The King County Superior Court is contracted to serve SYVPI youth through its Education and Employment Training (EET) Program and only serves youth who are on probation. The EET staff generate almost all of their own referrals and then send these youth to be enrolled into SYVPI in order to receive EET services with SYVPI funding.^{xxvi} EET places specific emphasis on a job readiness training that addresses the job search process for individuals with a criminal history (e.g., how to discuss a conviction with prospective employers).

While the initial motivation for including youth employment in SYVPI was to directly reduce the criminal involvement of youth enrolled in this component, this rationale was largely absent in the conversations with the staff we interviewed. Rather, most staff with whom we spoke emphasized that the primary added value of the employment component is to incentivize broader youth engagement in the initiative as well as to expose youth to potential career pathways or education options. Both Networks and employment service agencies see employment as a service for SYVPI youth who have stabilized (those who have resolved a primary barrier such as chemical dependency), though these individuals may still be higher-risk youth. Taken in this light, the information we collected during our conversations suggests that youth employment plays an important role in SYVPI. However, it was unclear whether staff were using objective criteria to determine the suitability of youth for different employment options and the extent to which participation in the youth employment component fits into the broader plan for addressing a youth's risk factors.

6. Community Matching Grant

SYVPI seeks to supplement existing programming and youth engagement opportunities by funding local, community organizations to run youth development projects that serve youth referred by the Networks. The Seattle Neighborhood Group (SNG) serves as the fiscal manager for SYVPI's Community Matching Grants, which provide project funding up to \$25,000 per project. All projects are required to have a community match that equals at least one-half of the SYVPI funding request, and this match may include volunteer labor, donated supplies, meeting space, professional services, and/or cash. These projects must be run by Seattle-located neighborhood groups, community organizations, or grassroots organizations that are significantly

^{xxvi} EET is unique in SYVPI in that staff reported almost all SYVPI youth served are from non-traditional referrals (i.e., youth the court is already working with who are eligible for employment programs). In addition to the requirement that youth are court involved, EET will only serve youth who are stabilized (e.g., they have resolved a primary barrier such as chemical dependency) but remain moderate to high risk.

composed of people who live and/or work in Central, Southeast, or Southwest Seattle. SNG enters into a Memorandum of Agreement with the organization or group and acts as the fiscal agent for all organizations.

Design

SYVPI explains that the Community Matching Grant is a way to focus community building efforts on youth by developing projects that are based in youth development, youth leadership, and youth engagement principles.⁹⁰

The projects must be appropriate for the SYVPI target population; for example, one project funded in 2013 taught youth the process of creating a book from start to finish. This project included workshops and field trips related to creative writing, editing, public speaking, and marketing. SYVPI and the Networks encourage grantees to develop programming targeting the needs of specific subsets of the SYVPI population. For example, one project that was selected for funding in 2013 focused on girls between the ages of 12 and 17, while another focused on youth who are underperforming in reading and math. Organizations applying for funding through the Community Matching Grant must include in their proposal an explanation of how their project will provide youth with five of the “Search Institute’s 40 Developmental Assets.” This is a set of skills, experiences, relationships and behaviors that research conducted by the Search Institute has shown to allow youth ages 12 to 18 to develop successfully to adulthood. These include external assets such as family support, safety, and positive peer influence, and internal assets such as school engagement, responsibility, and self-esteem.⁹¹ The SYVPI logic model created in partnership with UW does not include outcome measures for the Community Matching Grants.

As Implemented

The Community Matching Grants are a source of youth development programming coordinated through the Networks. SYVPI also sees them as a means to foster community investment in this population. Based on our field work it appeared that the Community Matching Grants are an additive service, largely disconnected from rest of the initiative.

We heard from some SYVPI staff that the Community Matching Grant grantees should provide youth with prosocial activities that allow them to express their creativity, have positive experiences with peers, and build employment and life skills. Our conversations with organizations that have run Community Matching Grant projects indicated that they see themselves as a resource for youth development programming to fill in the unstructured time of youth outside of school to and provide youth opportunities to learn about themselves and the world around them. Community Matching Grant providers do not have much contact with the other SYVPI components other than the Networks, which handle recruitment of youth into Community Matching Grant-funded projects and any issues with the youth that may arise.

Networks are responsible for coordinating the Community Matching Grants and recruiting youth into the approved projects; only Networks can enroll a youth in a Community Matching Grant. Generally, a project can only receive referrals through one Network and all youth who participate must be in SYVPI or be enrolled into SYVPI before the start of the project. The

projects must be time-limited and run during the summer and/or fall. The Network coordinator must sign off on the project, before it is submitted to the SYVPI Director. The organizations/groups must submit detailed budgets showing all commitments to match donations, as well as project descriptions including how the project will provide five of the Search Institute's 40 Developmental Assets to youth participants. The proposals are ranked by a panel composed of Network representatives, SYVPI-enrolled youth, community members, contracted staff, and SYVPI staff.

The Community Matching Grants also offer youth a financial incentive, contingent on the organization's evaluation of the youth's attendance, participation, and engagement in the project. Thus, the Community Matching Grant can also operate as an incentive for participation in SYVPI, similar to the employment component, with the added benefit that the Community Matching Grant can accept youth who are under 14 years of age, or who do not have the appropriate documentation to participate in the employment component. The Community Matching Grant organizations noted that the incentive was important, as they believe that without it, they would not have had as many participating youth.

In addition to creating opportunities for SYVPI youth, SYVPI staff suggested that a goal of the Community Matching Grants is to support small community organizations or individual community members who want to cultivate the necessary skills to run programs for youth and learn how to apply for funding. However, some of the Community Matching Grants that serve the highest number of youth are organizations or businesses that already run these programs outside of SYVPI. Staff from these organizations noted that the Community Matching Grant projects targeted a higher-risk population than they normally serve. It may be the case that the Community Matching Grants run by smaller organizations (the smallest Community Matching Grants in 2013 served eight to 10 youth) take advantage of this opportunity to learn how to fund and run youth programs in the community.

7. Mentoring

SYVPI mentoring is provided by Big Brothers Big Sisters of Puget Sound (BBBSPS) and the Clergy Community Children Youth Coalition (4C Coalition). Both provide one-on-one mentoring. In SYVPI, BBBSPS focuses on providing mentoring services to middle school youth, while the 4C Coalition focuses on providing services to court-involved youth. In addition, the 4C Coalition and Urban Family began providing group mentoring in 2014.

Design

The mentoring component of SYVPI is intended to match SYVPI youth with positive adult role models who commit to regularly spending time with their youth mentee for at least one year. This relationship is meant to help youth build the behaviors and attitudes to succeed academically in school, stay away from violence, and make positive life decisions. In its justification for inclusion of mentoring in SYVPI, the initiative cited research, including evaluations of Big Brothers Big Sisters that have demonstrated a positive effect of mentoring on reducing youth aggression with peers and adults, violence, truancy, substance use, and recidivism.⁹² The 2013 logic model created by SYVPI and UW also identifies the

intermediate/long-term goals of **increasing monthly school attendance** and **decreasing monthly disciplinary actions for SYVPI youth**.

As Implemented

Like ART, the mentoring component was originally included in SYVPI based on evidence that it can be an effective practice for reducing risk factors associated with youth violence and increasing protective factors. Conversations with mentoring staff indicated that they see SYVPI as a means to expand their service delivery to previously underserved populations. Additionally, they felt that there was a benefit to the youth engaged in mentoring to have access to a broader array of supportive services through the other SYVPI components.

BBBSPS utilizes the Big Brothers Big Sisters of America model of mentoring, which has been rigorously evaluated and shown to be effective for youth aged 10 to 16, predominantly from low-income, minority, single-parent households.⁹³ Following the national model, potential mentors are screened through a personal interview and home visit by a Big Brothers Big Sisters case manager, and a criminal background and reference check are completed. The youth's preferences (e.g., religion, sexual orientation, language), as well as demeanor, interests and geographic proximity are taken into account when setting up a match. The youth and parent meet the potential mentor to approve the match. Mentors and youth meet three to four times a month and are paired for a minimum of one year. The activities that mentor-mentee matches engage in and the areas mentors focus on (academic achievement, avoiding risky behavior, and social-emotional health) also align with the model. Anecdotally, staff indicated it is rare for a match to not work out. The most common reason for a match to not work out is because the youth moves out of the area. However, an issue we heard about during our interviews was the length of time it takes for youth to be matched to a mentor, especially for male youth, as there are fewer men who volunteer to be mentors. This has been noted as an issue for many mentoring programs including Big Brothers Big Sisters.⁹⁴

One main departure SYVPI takes from the evidence-based Big Brothers Big Sisters model is that the national model requires the youth's parent or guardian to apply for their child to be matched with a mentor, while SYVPI referrals are handled through the Network, and youth are referred to mentoring when the referral source and/or intake and referral specialist believe mentoring is appropriate. Once the agency receives a referral, mentoring staff uses the family contact information from the SYVPI database to call the family and obtain consent from the parent/guardian, as they are required to participate in a bimonthly phone call. As it is not the parents seeking the service for their child, this referral process results in some mentoring case managers being unable to get in contact with the youth or the youth's family, a required step of the matching process. Staff from one mentoring provider estimated that about seven out of every ten referrals from the Network will not develop into an enrollment either due to not being able to reach the youth or guardian, or due to the youth or guardian declining services. This is problematic because the mentoring contracts include a pay point based on the number of successful matches; the agency needs a much higher number of referrals of youth who need mentoring in order to meet this performance goal. However, this referral process also has a positive aspect, as it allows youth whose families may not have sought out mentoring otherwise, to access this service.

While the characteristics and challenges of the SYVPI youth and BBBS's general client population are similar, the SYVPI youth tend to have higher risk factors and can be harder to reach. BBBS prioritizes SYVPI youth due to their higher risk levels. However, SYVPI youth with the highest risk factors are generally not sent to mentoring, at least not until they have been involved in other components and their lives have stabilized. While mentors undergo training, they may not be well-equipped to handle some of the larger issues the youth are facing because BBBS does not tend to serve these higher risk youth.

The 4C Coalition follows the Juvenile Rehabilitation Administration mentor model, which is similar to the Big Brothers Big Sisters model. The differences with Big Brother Big Sisters are that 4C Coalition mentors are expected to meet with their youth once a week, and the 4C Coalition also partners with SYVPI staff from the Seattle Department of Parks and Recreation to provide structured events and activities for the mentors, youth, and families. In addition, the 4C Coalition explicitly attempts to increase the number of African American male mentors dedicated to mentor the disproportionate number of African American boys involved in the juvenile justice system.

8. Parks and Recreation

SYVPI holds an interdepartmental agreement with the Seattle Department of Parks and Recreation to provide recreation services to SYVPI youth. This includes providing Extended Hours Programs in all three neighborhoods and creating partnerships with community, non-profit, interagency and private agencies to provide programming to engage SYVPI youth outside of school hours. The programming should be in the areas of arts, health and fitness, academics, athletics, civic engagement, environment, and recreation. Parks is also expected to engage youth to participate in creating their own culturally and contextually relevant programs that increase protective factors and reduce risky behaviors.^{xxvii}

Design

The inclusion of Parks programming in SYVPI is based on the theory that encouraging prosocial bonding with community social institutions increases positive social control, and that it will reduce opportunities for offending as unsupervised socializing on the streets is reduced.⁹⁵ Parks is also intended to be a referral source into the initiative for eligible youth who access Parks services. The logic model created by UW and SYVPI does not include outcome measures for the Parks component.

As Implemented

Parks sees their role as providing place-based services to youth where they are located (i.e., live, work, and play). They provide programming outside of school hours as well as outside of normal recreation hours through the Extended Hours Program. For SYVPI, the department provides facilities, employment and job readiness training, civic engagement and leadership programs,

^{xxvii} On June 23, 2014, SYVPI released a request for proposals for agencies providing recreation services to youth. This RFP could potentially be for services to replace those currently provided through the Department of Parks and Recreation.

health and fitness programs, and social recreation programs. While the department provides this programming to SYVPI youth in their three SYVPI-designated neighborhoods, these services largely align with the broader youth programming it provides throughout the city. The department saw its participation in SYVPI as a means to further engage previously unserved youth into its programs, or to connect high-risk youth who are loosely engaged with Parks to more services. However, conversations with staff suggested that the SYVPI youth accessing these programs are primarily historic Parks users.

Our fieldwork suggested that there is not a high level of coordination of this component with the other components of SYVPI, and there have been operational difficulties associated with running joint programs between Parks and SYVPI. Some of this disconnect is a function of differences in target populations. Parks aims to service youth across the risk spectrum, while SYVPI has a narrower target population. While Parks staff indicated that they expanded programming to serve SYVPI youth (especially in the areas of family inclusiveness, employment, and service learning), only a subset of the youth engaging in this programming are enrolled in SYVPI, limiting the ability of Parks to draw on its SYVPI funding to support these activities.

9. School Emphasis Officers

The School Emphasis Officer (SEO) program places school emphasis police officers in three middle schools and one K-8 school to serve students on an as-needed basis. The Seattle Police Department selected the schools based on a review of school discipline data.^{xxviii} The SEO program is funded by the Seattle Police Department and the memorandum of agreement is between the Seattle Police Department and Seattle Public Schools, not SYVPI.

Design

The School Emphasis Officer program was intended to create a system of collaboration among schools, officers, and community-based organizations in order for each party to be more effective in delivering services. The SEOs would focus on conflict resolution or truancy among select students, but also be available to serve the broader school community. Over the course of the initiative, SYVPI management came to see an additional desired outcome of the SEO program, to be an opportunity to change youth and community perceptions of the police and thus create improved police-community relations and change youth attitudes to violence and relationships. It would build relationships and trust with the community through a model of community engagement. The logic model created in partnership between SYVPI and UW also identifies the intermediate/long-term goals of **reduced gang involvement, reduced middle school youth referrals to SYVPI, and de-escalation of conflict in middle schools** where SEOs are assigned as outcomes of the SEO program.

From the point of design in 2009, SYVPI planners anticipated that officers would need to be integrated into the school staff and work in collaboration with the principal. In particular, they expected the school staff to refer at-risk students to SEOs who would then refer the students to

^{xxviii} This is based on notes from interviews conducted by Dr. Charlotte Gill. We do not have additional information on the data used to make this determination.

the Networks. The SEOs are expected to have regular meetings with the Networks and Network service providers, as well as regular meetings with school staff and administrators at the school district. The Seattle Police Department's Director of Community Relations would oversee the SEO program and select the officers based on cultural competence, experience with the positive youth development framework, leadership and conflict resolution skills, and an understanding of local resources and community issues.

The officers' duties were to be focused on two activities: prevention and intervention. Prevention activities include setting up workshops and classroom programs to address issues such as gang prevention and conflict resolution and providing priority students the opportunity to develop a positive relationship with an adult. Intervention activities include crisis intervention, social service referrals, and serving youth who have been identified as truant, at risk of committing crimes, and those who may be ready to leave a gang. SEOs are not to spend much time on enforcement activities.⁹⁶

As Implemented

The Seattle Police Department developed the SEO program to create a system of collaboration between schools, police officers, and community-based organizations, and build relationships between the police and community. The SEOs see their role as facilitators of resources for youth. They purposefully try to avoid taking on an enforcement role, including not wearing full police uniforms in the schools as a means of differentiating themselves from other officers. Similarly, SEOs do not have an active enforcement role in the school setting. The program is intended to change perceptions of the police that the youth and their families may have, such as by emphasizing the community safety role that police provide. All SEOs are from communities of color that are representative of the demographics of the local area of the three middle schools and one K-8 school they serve. All officers receive cultural competency training and offer culturally specific programming.

SEOs are an important referral partner of SYVPI. They are at the schools daily, interacting with students in classrooms, during lunch, and after school. They build relationships with youth and identify those who may meet eligibility for the initiative. SEOs assess youth needs, offer mentoring, and refer them to the Networks. They conduct home visits and meet with the youth's family and get approval from the parents to refer their child to SYVPI. Networks rely heavily on information from the referrer in determining what services the individual needs, and the SEOs frequently are in the position of providing this information for the youth they refer. The SYVPI service they most frequently recommend is case management, but they also often suggest mentoring.

SYVPI management reports that SYVPI and the SEO program have a relationship of collaboration and coordination. While SPD does not receive any funding through SYVPI, the department sees the goals of the SEO program as aligned with overall goals of SYVPI and the SEOs are the schools' main connection to the initiative. In addition to their role as a referral source to SYVPI, SEOs will follow up with youth ensure they are accessing the services to which they have been assigned. SEOs meet regularly with Network staff to consult around the care plans for specific youth. They drop in informally at the Networks to follow up on youth they have referred and exchange information. Eventually SYVPI expects to formalize these meetings

through the Intervention Teams (see *Appendix B.1 Neighborhood Networks*). SEOs also meet with SYVPI providers to follow up about particular youth.

While SEOs focus on at-risk youth and SYVPI-enrolled youth, they also provide services to the broader school community. As specified in the model, they focus on prevention and intervention and not enforcement. They are not involved in the discipline process and have not participated in any school searches. If a crime occurs in school, the SEO will call in other officers unless there are lives in immediate danger. As one of the aims of the program is to develop trust and relationship with youth and the community, SEOs do not want to jeopardize the trust that has been established. They play a role in the mediation process following incidents. The day-to-day tasks of the SEOs depend on the principal of each school and the personal interests of the SEOs themselves. Outside of school, the officers also help staff the Late Night program at community centers where many of the students they see during the day may frequent. They are there to ensure youth get home safely as well as to facilitate activities.

10. SYVPI Management

SYVPI is managed largely by the Office for Education (OFE) and the Human Services Department (HSD). However, the desire for SYVPI to be a community-led initiative has also shaped the management structure of the initiative.

Design

As designed, SYVPI is administered by OFE, located in the city's Department of Neighborhoods. SYVPI has a Director who oversees management of the initiative. She works closely with the Director and Deputy Director of OFE.

As indicated in previous sections, direct services provided under SYVPI are delivered through contracts or cooperative agreements with city departments:

- OFE administers the contracts for the Neighborhood Networks, street outreach, and the Seattle Neighborhood Group who in turn manages the Community Matching Grants. The Seattle Neighborhood Group manages the projects, serves as the fiscal agent, and establishes memoranda of agreement with each grantee.
- HSD and OFE have a memorandum of agreement for HSD to assume direct responsibility for managing and achieving targets in case management, mentoring, ART, and youth employment. HSD administers the contracts for these components.
- OFE and Parks have a memorandum of agreement, which includes funding for the provision of recreation services by Parks.
- School Emphasis Officer services are not a contracted component of SYVPI and are funded by SPD. OFE and SPD have a memorandum of agreement to allow the sharing of some SPD data on SYVPI youth with OFE.

As Implemented

The SYVPI Director and her staff of three communicate regularly with the Network Coordinators and their staff. Similarly, the Director facilitates regular standing meetings between

the Networks and each of the components (e.g., monthly whole team meetings, quarterly management meetings, executive director meetings, and Network Coordination meetings).

Despite the oversight role of the SYVPI Director, the Network Coordinators do not directly report to her; instead, they report to management in their respective organizations. This was a purposeful decision on the part of the city to ensure that SYVPI remained a community-led endeavor, which granted each Network the autonomy to develop a service delivery model attuned to the needs of the youth in its community and the individual contracted organization.

The SYVPI Director's role includes facilitating staff communications and collaboration around service delivery and implementation, approving the use of SYVPI funds, and promoting the initiative in the community. In addition, the Director is able to shape the course of the initiative through the structuring and monitoring of provider contracts. Many of the changes to provider contracts noted in previous sections were initiated by the Director.

SYVPI's diffusion of responsibility from centrally managed city services to coordination by the Neighborhood Networks necessitates a great deal of resources to develop relationships and communication within and across Networks and providers. This work rested particularly with the initiative director. This "web of support," as described, required a great deal of trust among communities, providers, and youth in the work of the Neighborhood Networks as well as individual service providers. This trust was necessary in order for individual providers to direct youth with whom they had formed relationships with through various SYVPI programs and to facilitate each client's successful navigation across the multiple systems embedded within the initiative.

11. Participant Tracking and Data Systems

SYVPI tracks participants using a customized version of Safe Harbors, King County's Web-based Homeless Management Information System (MIS). Both use the software vendor Adsystem to manage the program and provide technical assistance. SYVPI has a contract with an external database manager to run the database on a day-to-day basis and pull reports. The database manager also conducts some spot-checks for data quality, but there is no systematic verification that data has been entered correctly or completely. The database manager estimates that there are 60 to 70 users.

Interviews with program staff and the database administrator suggest that the database is used inconsistently. For example, while multiple components create Individual Service Plans (ISPs) for youth, only youth employment staff fills out the ISP responses in the database. There is also a case notes screen, which no SYVPI provider uses. Conversations with staff indicated that most agencies are either maintaining paper files or using their own agencies' MIS and use the SYVPI database only to the extent required by the initiative. We consistently heard from SYVPI management and partners that the database is difficult to use. In addition, past database issues that caused data loss made the providers distrustful of using the database.

Of the SYVPI partners, the Neighborhood Networks have the highest level of permission to use certain database functions, either through system checks or because the Network has made it clear that other agencies should not edit certain information. The Networks are the only entities

who enter youth into the initiative via the database intake screen and eligibility screen. The database does not have a logic check to prevent entry of youth who do not meet the risk factor criteria. It is not possible to tell from the database whether the youth came to the initiative through a traditional or non-traditional referral, except to note cases where the referrer and the service the youth was subsequently referred to, are the same.

The Networks also use the referral screen to create referrals of youth to providers inside and outside of SYVPI; creating a referral in the database sends an email to the SYVPI provider staff person with the referral. The provider must accept the referral or deny it and provide a reason. Aside from Networks, only case managers can make referrals to SYVPI services, and only to ART, mentoring, Street Outreach, and Parks. Parks staff are able to make referrals into Parks programming. These exceptions were made in 2014.

Once referred to an agency, staff enter youth information in the program entry screen. Although none of the fields are required, some of the information are tied to pay points and are thus more likely to be completed. Fields in the database are regularly overwritten so that they show the most updated information, and thus most fields do not show historical information. For example, if a youth entered the initiative with unstable housing and a case manager assisted them to obtain housing, the housing status field would only reflect the current housing situation. However, the responses to each of the risk assessments, which are to be conducted at regular intervals (at entry, six, twelve, and eighteen months, and exit), are accessible through the database.

Among the screens, the service provided screen and the agency assessment screen are used the most. Providers enter whether youth have met various milestones on the service provided screens. The agency assessment screen is where providers enter information from the risk assessments – the database risk assessment mimics the questions on the paper-based risk assessment. SYVPI plans to add a feature on this screen where the answers to required fields would determine whether a youth is no longer at a risk level appropriate for the initiative and should be exited.

Providers can exit a youth out of their own component, though they must provide a reason for the exit from a dropdown menu. Even if a youth reaches the maximum amount of time at a time-limited service such as case management, there is no database notification for providers to exit youth. Only Networks may exit a youth from the initiative but only after the youth is exited from all components. Networks must also provide a reason for the exit from a dropdown menu. Once a youth is exited out of a program or the initiative, the record is archived and cannot be edited. The database manager is the only person who can reinstate a youth if they are accidentally exited. If a youth exits out of a program (like case management) and then later needs the program again, a new record for that program is created. The previous case management session is not editable.

Reports

Adsystem's contract includes the creation of a limited number of management reports. These reports are updated annually and each agency can only pull its own report. The database manager estimates that about 70 percent of the management reports are billing reports. In May 2014, SYVPI began requiring that the reports providers submit to do their billing to HSD come from the SYVPI database. Previously, providers could data reports pulled from their own MIS. OFE

also has been requiring components to submit reports using the SYVPI system, first starting with the Networks, then street outreach.

Most staff use ad hoc reports for program management. Although the database allows agency staff to create ad hoc reports, most find it too difficult to do so and instead make a request to the database manager to create the report. Staff can only pull ad hoc reports for the reports they have requested, created themselves, or have had assigned to them. Most providers only use about five reports.

Appendix C: Retrospective Evaluation Approaches and Challenges

In the body of the report we recommend that the City not pursue a retrospective evaluation of SYVPI. In this section we expand on our rationale, discussing the approaches that we considered for a retrospective evaluation and the associated challenges.

One promising approach to retrospective evaluation would involve matching SYVPI participants to school, court, and police administrative records to identify suspensions, expulsions, and criminal justice system involvement of participants before, during, and after SYVPI participation. In addition, the evaluation would require access to data about observationally similar and potentially SYVPI-eligible individuals who are enrolled in school or involved in the criminal justice system. For example, non-SYVPI participants enrolled in the same schools at the same times, and with academic and socioeconomic characteristics similar to those of participants. A comparison of post-participation outcomes for participants and for non-participants during a similar time period could provide evidence about SYVPI impacts. However, we see critical barriers to using this approach for a retrospective evaluation of SYVPI.

Most importantly, the subjectivity of the eligibility criteria creates significant challenges to identifying otherwise similar and potentially eligible youth. Using ineligible youth as a comparison group makes little sense in this context, and could lead to misleading conclusions.^{xxix} Furthermore, changes in the criteria and referral processes over time make it difficult to establish the similarity, or quantify the differences, in the populations from which participants come at different points in time (e.g., participants in more recent years may be more likely to have been gang-involved).

Finally, reliable impact estimates rely on a coherent, quantitative definition of program participation. As noted earlier, we did not find evidence of consistent participation data. Specifically, the ambiguous and varying definition of program exit and inconsistent central reporting about specific services provided would create significant difficulties in quantitatively defining program participation.

A comparison group comprised of individuals deemed eligible but denied services due to capacity constraints provides one method for addressing these issues to some extent, and findings might suggest the impact of SYVPI enrollment, even if data prevent a detailed understanding of why outcomes improved. However, we found no evidence that SYVPI would be able to identify a large number of such individuals.^{xxx}

Another technique known as propensity score matching (PSM) can help to overcome some of these difficulties. In PSM, evaluators construct a comparison group of non-participants using statistical techniques to “match” participants and non-participants using a potentially large number of observable data elements (e.g., age, history of school discipline, academic achievement). Because the four eligibility criteria differ considerably (e.g., having multiple

^{xxix} A quantitative eligibility threshold can allow estimation of program impacts by comparing outcomes for eligible individuals to those identified as ineligible. Where feasible, these so-called regression discontinuity designs provide impact estimates by, in essence, comparing outcomes for individuals just above the threshold and eligible to those just below the threshold.

^{xxx} Instead, SYVPI has in the past adjusted eligibility criteria to align funding, capacity, and need.

convictions versus middle school students at risk of truancy), we would anticipate requiring sub-analyses for the various target populations defined by each criterion.

While feasible in principle, we do not recommend this approach for a standalone retrospective evaluation. The significant variation in referral processes, eligibility determination, service delivery, and inconsistent reporting could, in combination result in misleading conclusions due in part to the important limitation that quasi-experimental analyses such as PSM cannot control for individual characteristics for which no comprehensive data exist. For example, in evaluating an individual's risk profiles, specialists likely consider many factors not routinely recorded in administrative databases for the target population at large (e.g., family difficulties). If SYVPI serves individuals at higher risks of future violence, the PSM analysis could lead to the spurious conclusion that SYVPI "doesn't work" simply because a higher-risk population is being compared to a lower-risk population.

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