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CDC funds search for answers to violence

By Robert Moran
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There are no quick and easy answers to the city's crisis of youth violence, so a group of academics and doctors led by Children's Hospital of Philadelphia is taking a long-term approach to violence prevention that they hope can lead to lifesaving programs.

"The trick is to make something practical and sustainable happen and that's no small challenge," said Joel Fein, 43, a pediatric emergency physician at Children's and director of the newly formed Philadelphia Collaborative Violence Prevention Center.

With \$4.2 million in federal funding over five years, the center this month entered into a cooperative agreement with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to develop a "centerpiece" project and pilot projects that will be based in West and Southwest Philadelphia.

The center, which includes the University of Pennsylvania and Temple and Drexel Universities, will spend the next year researching possible programs to implement.

One of the team members is John A. Rich, a Drexel professor who just won a \$500,000 MacArthur Foundation "genius" grant. Rich is the chair of Drexel's department of health management and policy.

While still early in the process, some of the framework is clear. For the purpose of violence prevention, the target population will be in the 10-to-14 age group, Fein said.

"After age 14, kids are declaring what path they are taking," said Fein, who serves as principal investigator for the center.

The center will work as part of a growing network of research programs affiliated with the CDC seeking responses to youth violence.

"They bring in a lot of experience and a lot of knowledge of prior programs and research," Fein said of the CDC.

Fein and his fellow investigators will look at programs around the country, but will ultimately craft one they believe will work here.

"What works in Detroit may not work in West Philadelphia," Fein said.

The centerpiece project will be led by Stephen Leff, a psychologist at Children's.

Last week, Leff unveiled an effort in which he and other researchers worked with African American inner-city girls to develop cartoons that help third- and fourth-grade girls better understand and resolve conflicts with peers. The work was published in the October issue of *Child Development*.

The cartoons are a measuring tool "to identify children who might benefit from intervention," Leff said.

Therese Richmond, cofounder of the Firearm and Injury Center at Penn, will oversee a pilot project that examines "how contextual factors such as stress and their environment impact the lives of children in West and Southwest Philadelphia," Fein said.

Ultimately, Fein said the goal of the center is to develop programs that can sustain themselves.

"It's not us necessarily doing this," he said. "Ideally, it should be run in the community, by the community, for the community."
