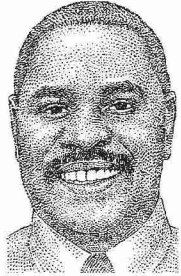


## ADRIAN WALKER Working for youths



Labor unions may be a lot of things, but they definitely are not normally social service agencies.

SEIU Local 1199 is poised to become an exception to that.

This weekend, the union, in conjunction with the city's Public Health Commission, will announce an antiviolence program aimed at teens and young adults in the city's most violent neighborhoods.

Many of the members of Service Employees International Union Local 1199 work at Boston Medical Center, where they hold front-row seats on city violence. In many cases, they live in the city as well.

Under the new program, youths from 14 neighborhoods will participate in workshops at the union's Dorchester headquarters, making music, art, and videos. The product of the workshops will then form the basis for a multimedia campaign to urge young people to turn away from violence.

"It's not just that they will be speaking to a key demographic," said one union official. "It's the creative element that we hope will make it unique."

"Who knows how to talk to youth better than other youth?" asked Veronica Turner, a vice president of the local, which represents healthcare workers. "The idea of trying to send out positive messages to youth was not a tough sell for our members."

The Public Health Commission has been busy for years trying to find ways to combat violence. Its efforts have included conducting door-to-door surveys to help residents connect with city services, as well as establishing peace councils in communities touched by violence.

The search for new ideas couldn't come too soon. While the level of hom-

icides in the city is relatively stable, no one would suggest that the crime problem has gone away. The old solution of recruiting clergy to police the streets began losing effectiveness a long time ago. So new approaches are welcome.

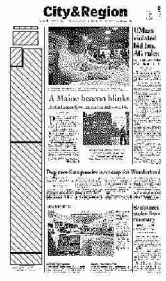
SEIU 1199 has been involved in causes outside of labor negotiations for years, most notably as a voice in the fight for universal healthcare. But lobbying lawmakers is one thing. What it plans to do now is a lot more hands-on.

The collaboration between the city and the union arose almost spontaneously. The Public Health Commission approached the union about some antiviolence programs it was planning. The issue struck a nerve with union members, Turner said, because so many had been touched, at least professionally, by crime in the city.

"That's the easy piece, donating the money," she said. More difficult will be keeping members involved in working with the hundreds of youths she hopes will eventually participate. The program will formally be announced Sunday at Franklin Park by Mayor Thomas M. Menino and Dr. Barbara Ferrer, the director of the Public Health Commission.

The notion that crime is a public health issue is almost a cliché, and how effective the program will be is anyone's guess. But given the way young people are bombarded with messages that glamorize violence, a counteroffensive sounds promising.

And frankly, any group willing to put up time and money in the battle against crime is to be commended. Often, it seems that concern about street violence is mostly limited to those directly affected by it. The members of Local 1199 who would like to stem violence before it presents itself in the emergency room at the BMC are performing a public service. The so-called Boston Miracle of the 1990s is debated to this day, right down to whether the crime drop of that era was ultimately driven by changes in demographics. But almost everyone agrees that it yielded one lasting lesson — that policing alone isn't enough to make neighborhoods safe. It also takes community involvement.



The union is betting that young people, with the right support and guidance, have something meaningful to say to their peers, which sounds like a valid thesis. It won't be the solution, but it just might be part of one.

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