



CITIZENS CRIME COMMISSION  
OF NEW YORK CITY

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**Crime Commission Contact:** Rich Stein (914) 384-9680 and [rich@pythiapublic.com](mailto:rich@pythiapublic.com)

**NYU Contact:** Rachel Harrison, 212-998-6797 and [rachel.harrison@nyu.edu](mailto:rachel.harrison@nyu.edu)

## **Report: NYC Program Addresses Online Violence Epidemic, Gets Real Results**

*The Crime Commission's "E-Responder" Pilot Study  
with NYU's Steinhardt School Shows Digital Intervention Can  
Prevent Virtual and Real-World Altercations Between Youth*

*97% of Online Interventions Led to Positive Outcomes;  
Program to Expand Citywide in New York*

**New York City** - Increasingly, real-world violence follows fights started online, where social media amplifies and accelerates conflict. At least 240 shootings and 24 murders began as virtual fights in New York City alone, and more than 700 youth have been indicted using evidence from their social media pages.

Through the ongoing work with NYC Cure Violence sites, the Citizens Crime Commission of New York City identified this emerging trend and created the concept of E-Responder, an innovative program that is addressing this growing epidemic head-on by de-escalating conflicts on social media before it turns into real-world violence.

To create an evidence-based approach, the Crime Commission partnered with NYU's Steinhardt School of Culture, Education, and Development, allowing for an intervention that was both relevant for youths real life context and utilized the best evidence possible.

E-Responder launched last year; during the pilot phase, the Crime Commission trained 26 anti-violence professionals to track, identify, and de-escalate potentially dangerous conflicts online at five sites across the city.

Nearly all interventions performed by E-Responders -- 97 percent -- resulted in positive outcomes. This includes the de-escalation of conflict or building necessary emotional management skills. About 60 percent of all interruptions resulted in feelings of empowerment to change one's behavior; and about 40 percent resulted in the de-escalation of conflict.

The program will now expand to 18 sites across New York City, the Crime Commission announced today.

"More and more, virtual conflicts on social media escalate into physical violence--and the problem is now an epidemic. We need to address this problem now, and we need to address it head-on," said **Richard Aborn, President of the Citizens Crime Commission of New York City**. "E-Responder is an innovative, state-of-the-art approach to addressing this troubling trend. By employing proven intervention strategies, we have shown that we can reach youth before online arguments move from the Internet to the street. The results of this study demonstrate that E-Responder should be implemented on a larger scale."

"The E-Responder program represents an incredibly effective alliance between research and contextually anchored intervention," said **Shabnam Javdani, principal investigator for E-Responder and assistant professor of applied psychology at NYU Steinhardt**. "To develop it, we used information from basic psychological science - for instance, on empathy and acceptance - as well as innovative applications targeting youth's inherent leadership potential. We wanted to create a model through which youth were at the forefront of advancing social media driven solutions."

During the pilot, 154 instances of risky online behavior were identified among youth who were an average of 17 years old. Sites that received proper E-Responder training reported 145 (or 94 percent) of these instances, illustrating that trained responders were better able to recognize risky social media behavior. The site that reported the least instances of risky social media behavior -- nine -- received no training.

More than half of the instances reported were identified as "high" or "medium" risk behaviors - such as threats of violence or pictures with guns - highlighting the seriousness of youth's social media behavior. Researchers also noted there were a significant amount of youth expressing grief and emotional stress through social media. As emotional distress can turn into anger or retaliation, a violence interrupter's ability to identify these emotions on social media can help to change behavior online before it turns violent.

E-Responder then used a three-pronged approach: targeting risky online behaviors, promoting youths' healthy online engagement, and building life skills. In order to interrupt violence, trained anti-violence professionals used an "interruption toolkit" to identify and assess risky posts and determine how to respond. Interventions include de-escalation strategies; working with youth to identify and understand the emotions they are feeling and finding ways to more appropriately express them; empathy building; and flagging posts for removal by the social media platform.

E-Responder also works to promote healthy online engagement through a 12-week youth leadership program, which encourages positive digital citizenship by building on youths' strengths. The program engages youth in twice-weekly sessions that address digital citizenship, emotion and expression, passions and interests, leadership, and digital activism. The program emphasizes mindfulness and emotion regulation skills, as well as critical thinking about sociopolitical contexts.

Citizens Crime Commission of New York City, Inc., 335 Madison Avenue, 9<sup>th</sup> Floor, New York, NY 10017  
p: 212.608.4700 • f: 212.350.2701 • e: [info@nycrimecommission.org](mailto:info@nycrimecommission.org)  
[www.nycrimecommission.org](http://www.nycrimecommission.org)

The E-Responder pilot took place at four New York City Cure Violence sites - an existing initiative to reduce violence using a public health model - and a Brooklyn high school. Participating groups praised the program.

"E-Responder allows us to de-escalate conflicts between high-risk youth virtually, something that is needed in all of our communities," said **Shanduke McPhatter, Executive Director of the Cure Violence site Gangstas Making Astronomical Community Changes Inc.**, one of the E-Responder pilot sites. "Gun-violence, and violence generally, is something that is rapidly growing on social media and easily turns into in-person violence. Having the ability to deter violent acts ahead of time online, just as we do in the streets, is the best way to decreasing negative and potentially harmful incidents between youth in our communities."

"Release the Grip absolutely loves the E-Responder Program," said **Christopher Garcia, Program Manager of Cure Violence site Release the Grip**, which is another participant in the E-Responder pilot. "E-Responder sheds a new and in-depth perspective on violence and equips us with greater tools in looking deeper into what participants endorse or share on social media. Though we are still in the preliminary stages of launching E-Responder, we can already see this program leading to positive outcomes."

E-Responder is the first of several tools being developed by the Crime Commission's Predictive Prevention Lab (PPL), an incubation lab that uses a multi-disciplinary approach and the latest technology to create data-driven crime prevention solutions.

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#### About the Citizens Crime Commission of New York City

The Citizens Crime Commission of New York City is a leading nonpartisan nonprofit organization with multidisciplinary expertise that works to improve public safety through innovation. For more information on the Citizens Crime Commission of New York City, please visit our website: [www.nycrimecommission.org](http://www.nycrimecommission.org)

#### About the Steinhardt School of Culture, Education, and Human Development (@nyusteinhardt)

Located in the heart of Greenwich Village, NYU's Steinhardt School of Culture, Education, and Human Development prepares students for careers in the arts, education, health, media, and psychology. Since its founding in 1890, the Steinhardt School's mission has been to expand human capacity through public service, global collaboration, research, scholarship, and practice. To learn more about NYU Steinhardt, visit [steinhardt.nyu.edu](http://steinhardt.nyu.edu).