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*Youth Involvement in
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Prevention*

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Youth Engagement Makes a Difference in Addressing Community Violence

Della M. Hughes, Susan P. Curnan

Concerns about the increasing involvement of many adolescents in high-risk behaviors have prompted a search for strategies and approaches that can guide youth away from unhealthy and unsafe practices and engage them in becoming productive members of society. This search has revealed many uncertainties in understanding how teenagers negotiate critical transitions, such as from school to work and from child to parent, the formation of self-identity, and the selection of life options. In situations in which communities must struggle with the problems of poverty, crime, drugs and other negative influences, some youth are able to connect with social and economic networks that can help them become successful and productive adults. Others never gain access to or turn away from such networks.

—Youth Development and Neighborhood Influences: Challenges & Opportunities[1]

Violent injury and homicide are critical and rising public health issues affecting not only the physical and emotional health of our nation's young people but also the quality of life in communities across the country. It is important to identify and implement effective strategies to save lives, prevent injuries, and improve community life.

Our approach to community and youth development views youth as resources and agents of change, rather than as a collection of problems in

need of prevention. This issue of *CYD Journal* builds on current efforts that mobilize and engage youth, as well as other promising initiatives in the community violence prevention and Community Youth Development fields.

We define youth participation as a process of engaging young people in developing knowledge and transferring it to others. This process includes efforts by young people to organize their own research and community mobilization projects, by adults to involve youth in evaluating institutions and agencies, and by youth and adults in intergenerational partnerships to prevent all types of violence by and against youth. These initiatives are increasing in communities nationwide, but remain relatively undeveloped as a field of practice or subject of study; hence, more knowledge will contribute to their scope and quality.

As we planned this issue of the Journal, we generated several questions to guide our search for knowledge and practice to shape this emerging field:

- Why is youth engagement in community youth violence prevention important, and for whom? What are the benefits to young people and to the communities of which they are part? How do we know this?

- What are some specific examples of youth participation in participatory research and evaluation regarding community violence prevention? What are the lessons learned and future directions? How do we know this?

- What are the particular perspectives of youth development, violence prevention, community mobilization, and participatory research including evaluation, and what is the common vision among them?

- What specific strategies will strengthen youth participation in community youth violence prevention research and practice?

The youth violence phenomenon, as Becker notes (see the article on Project BRAVE, page 39), contains many social determinants, including "relationships among individuals and between groups (e.g., adults and youth) in the community; the physical environment in the community (e.g., abandoned housing and vacant lots, street lighting); and policy at the local, state, and national level (e.g., curfew laws, education policy, and gun control)." Further, it is critical to mention that the juvenile crime rate increases three-fold between the hours of 3:00 and 6:00 p.m. on school days.

Other experts believe that decreased funding for anti-gang initiatives,

due to recent declines in the overall crime rate, provided the right conditions for gang activity to rise again. Other factors contributing to the recent spike in gang violence include more "at-risk" youth, gang members from the early 1990s being released from prison back into communities, reduced police resources for preventing neighborhood crime, and many young people not being able to find jobs.

The reality is that a new generation of teenagers appears every five years. Consequently, when communities stop paying attention to young people, crime rebounds. Perhaps more importantly, for so many young people, the human context is about the need to survive. As Lateefah Simon puts it (see the interview on page 29):

> *There's an increase in handguns and larger arms—semi-automatics—but young people are not necessarily killing because of drugs and money. There is desperation, anxiety among a lot of the young men of color who find themselves still on the streets. Hopelessness thrusts you towards centering your life about "my respect, my respect," because you have very little of it . . . When that respect is challenged, you don't fight. If you try to fight somebody the old-fashioned way they may kill you. They may have a handgun. It's not just "I'm gonna take this young man out because he disrespected me." You have to be the aggressor. Get them before they can get you . . .*

At the same time, law enforcement and public policy makers are taking action to prevent youth violence. Examples follow:

- The FBI has made combating street gangs its top criminal priority.

- Efforts have been made to increase the severity of the consequences for initial gang activity and actions taken to silence witnesses.

- Massachusetts is considering legislation to create a witness protection program and establish partnerships between law enforcement agencies and anti-violence organizations.

- Boston is trying to prevent youth violence by closing the city parks at 11 p.m., expanding youth programs, and using a camera surveillance system to monitor activity in the city's "hot spots."

- In Durham, NC, the gang resistance unit increased its number of officers from seven to twenty in the past year, and in late 2004

Durham introduced an anti-gun effort aimed at thwarting gang violence.

- Northern Virginia, which includes many of the suburbs surrounding the Washington, D.C. area, created the Northern Virginia Regional Task Force in June 2004 to address youth violence.

- In his 2005 State of the Union Address, President Bush unveiled a three-year, $150 million program to fund faith-based organizations to offer mentoring services to gang members.

These efforts range from reactive band-aids to more sustained interventions—but none deliberately focus on the need to engage young people and address developmental issues and fundamental community conditions. Clearly, there is much cause for concern and a need for effective strategies to address community violence. Our approach explores youth engagement and science-based youth development strategies to address violence.

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In working on this issue of CYD Journal *we delved deeper into what is and is not known about youth participation in community violence prevention. We have been impressed by the contributors' insights and their work—in difficult, often life-threatening situations. It is worth noting that the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention have provided exceptional leadership in advancing the art of practice in this area by linking research centers with community efforts across the country through their Academic Centers on Excellence in Youth Violence Prevention. We salute this commitment to creating safe, just, and prosperous communities and valuing young people as agents of change.*

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1. Chalk, R., Phillips, Deborah A., and the National Research Council (eds.) (1996). *Youth Development & Neighborhood Influences: Challenges & Opportunities,* National Academies Press.

Youth Involvement in Violence Prevention

Joan S. Hoffman, Ph.D., *Centers for Disease Control and Prevention*

Young people across the country, in partnership with adults in their communities or by themselves, are organizing to promote violence prevention and to meet the needs of other youth where services are not available. Violence takes many forms: It is defined as "the intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, against oneself, another person, or a community that either results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, maldevelopment, or deprivation" (Krug et al., 2002). It is among the leading causes of death, injury, and disability for young people, who disproportionately suffer the consequences as witnesses, as victims, and as perpetrators.

It is a fairly recent phenomenon that youth have become acknowledged leaders in violence prevention. In the late 1970s and 1980s the public health model—with a focus on prevention, intervention, and treatment—began to be systematically applied to a range of youth problems, including violence. Research and practice yielded a wealth of information on the risk factors and causes of youth violence, and its prevention, offering a new approach—compared to existing reactive models where attention and resources were largely focused on the medical treatment of injured victims and the apprehension and incarceration of violent offenders. A public health approach brought emphasis and commitment to identifying policies and programs to prevent youth violence. The idea of primary prevention—reaching young people earlier, before violence occurs—helped move violence prevention curricula and services into schools, often down into the middle and elementary grades, and into community-based organizations. It also led to a greater acceptance that youth violence is preventable among health and other youth-serving community professionals and the general public (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2001). Deriving from a

tradition of collaboration among a broad spectrum of scientific disciplines, organizations, and communities to solve the problem of violence, the model legitimized much of the non-academic focused work in the youth field.

In the 1980s and early- to mid-1990s, program planners and administrators began to articulate the need for broader outcomes for youth programs, calling for preparing young people to develop their cognitive, social, moral, civic, vocational, cultural, and physical well-being (Pittman et al., 1991). Positive youth development researchers and practitioners emphasized the growth and development of competence, confidence, connection, character, and caring during childhood and adolescence and how these characteristics contributed to individual well-being and positive adulthood (Lerner et al., 2005). A range of services, supports, and opportunities were increasingly recognized as the core of violence and other prevention and development strategies, such as the provision of basic services (e.g., health care, housing, and transportation); the availability of caring and pro-social adults; and opportunities to earn a living, learn, explore, and contribute. Most approaches in the field emphasized either positive development over risk reduction, or risk reduction over positive development, with very few programs engaging youth as active participants as a deliberate methodology (Eccles and Gootman, 2002).

The 1990s brought increased attention to youth engagement, aided by research on adolescent development and emphasizing the centrality of youth participation in helping steer young people away from violence and other problem behaviors, increasing their skills, and preparing them for lifelong civic engagement (Carroll et al., 1999; Sheehan et al., 1999; O'Donnell et al., 1999; Eccles and Gootman, 2002). The difficulty in attracting and retaining young people 12 and older, particularly in low-income communities, showed the need for changes in the way youth organizations delivered services (Carnegie Council, 1992). The need to solicit the views of youth—to listen and act upon youth suggestions—was incorporated into the first youth-led violence prevention efforts established in the early- to mid-1990s (Becker et al., 2004; Hoffman, 2004). Researchers identified the varied paths for youth civic engagement: counseling, peer groups, mentoring, policy/consultation, community coalition involvement, and youth organizing/activism—as well as three overarching qualities that were vital to the success of these approaches: youth ownership, adult-youth partnerships, and facilitative policies and structures (Camino and Zeldin 2002).

We have learned much about the prevention of violence, youth development, and community change in the last three decades. This edition of *CYD Journal* describes some of the innovative strategies employed by young people, ages 10–29, to address the myriad forms of violence in their lives.

It includes examples of work carried out by the National Academic Centers of Excellence on Youth Violence Prevention Program (ACE-YV) funded in 2000 by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Department of Health and Human Services, to foster joint efforts between university researchers and communities to address the problem of youth violence. The ACE-YV program seeks to build the interdisciplinary research capacity and infrastructure necessary to support the development and widespread application of effective youth violence interventions, foster collaboration between academic researchers and communities, and equip communities to address the problem of youth violence. Their emerging efforts, as well as the other featured youth-adult violence prevention partnerships, are illustrative examples on how young people can be involved in violence prevention research, evaluation, training, community mobilization, policy development, and dissemination. Continued efforts are urgently needed so that practitioners, policymakers, and researchers of all ages can fully participate—with youth and adult residents—in advancing the health and peaceful development of their communities.

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Youth Participation
as Social Justice

Barry Checkoway, *University of Michigan*

Youth participation is a process of involving young people in the institu-
tions and decisions that affect their lives. It includes initiatives that
emphasize educational reform, neighborhood improvement, and other
issues; that involve populations distinguished by class, race, gender, and
other characteristics; and that operate in rural areas, small towns, suburbs,
and neighborhoods of large cities. It is found in developing areas and indus-
trial nations worldwide.

As expressions of participation, young people are mobilizing resources
around issues; organizing groups for social action; planning programs at the
local level; and advocating their interests in public agencies. They are rais-
ing consciousness and educating others about their common concerns, and
providing services of their own choosing. No single strategy characterizes all
approaches to practice.

These initiatives have the potential to produce outcomes at multiple lev-
els. Studies show that youth participation has the potential to increase indi-
vidual involvement, and build organizational capacity. It can strengthen per-
sonal confidence, contribute to civic competencies, and serve as a source of
leadership development. Although the benefits are not well established by a
great deal of systematic research, there is enough knowledge to substantiate
its benefits.

These initiatives can strengthen social justice in the ways that improve
conditions for all people while emphasizing resources and opportunities for
those lacking in both, and expanding the mechanisms of representation and

accountability of traditionally excluded people in the institutions that affect them. They have the potential to address poverty and racism as factors in society, and to reduce disparities between rich and poor.

Youth participation is about the real influence of young people in institutions and decisions, not about their passive presence as human subjects or service recipients. Although studies often assess activities in terms of their scope—such as their number, frequency, and duration—quality is the most significant measure of youth participation. Just because a number of young people attend a number of meetings and speak a number of times, is no measure of their effect on outcomes. Quality participation shows some effect on outcomes, including its effect on community change.

Youth participation is growing, and can be expected to grow even more in the years ahead. Several private foundations have increased funding for community organizations and civic agencies; national associations have expanded their support for local initiatives; and intermediary organizations have broadened their training and technical assistance. Recent conferences and publications have increased awareness among popular and professional audiences, and there is talk of a "youth participation movement" in the making.

The articles in this issue suggest that community youth violence prevention is catching up with the youth participation movement. The authors draw upon experiences in various locations—from San Diego to Flint—and document efforts by adults to involve young people in writing stories about violent episodes, taking pictures in neighborhoods, assessing victim services, forming youth councils, and participating in other activities that differ from the more prevalent punitive approaches to addressing violence.

The articles also document efforts that share some similarities with other forms of youth participation. For example, they are consistent with the view of "youth as resources" and contrast with the image of "youth as problems" that permeates the popular media, social science, and professional practice. This pervasive view assumes that young people are "troubled or troubling" members of society who are too often neglected, abused, or victimized by poverty, racism, or other forces beyond their control.

Indeed, news media too often portray young people as perpetrators of crime, drug takers, school dropouts, or other problems of society. Social scientists reinforce this view with studies of poor housing, broken families, and worsening social conditions that result in violence and other phenomena that require intervention. Professional practitioners adopt this view of young people and seek to "save," "protect," and "defend" them. They attend schools whose curricula construct youth as problems and prepare workers to treat their deficits or manage them through the "adolescent pathology system."

In contrast, however, the present articles assume that young people can address causes and prevent violence rather than merely treating its symptoms. Rather than criminalizing young people or sending them to jail, these initiatives build on their strengths by enabling them to take positive actions in community-based organizations, neighborhood centers, school groups, and other institutions in which they are viewed as resources rather than as problems.

More knowledge of youth participation in community youth violence prevention as a subject of study will contribute to its quality as a field of practice. We know that community participation has several strategies—such as organizing, advocacy, education, and services—whose activities have effects at multiple levels, and thus welcome studies like these that offer new ideas for applying them to youth violence.

Such studies, however, are only a start; and while the authors in this edition describe a number of promising activities, they say little about their actual effects in violence prevention. Writing stories and taking pictures are different from sending people to jail, to be sure, but do they prevent problems and change environments? Adopting standards of practice sounds promising, but what difference do they these standards make? They might make a difference, but then again they might not, and if not, then by what measure can it be said that they do?

If activities like those discussed in this volume do have a measurable effect, then they might indeed strengthen social justice in a system known more for its punishment of young people victimized by poverty and racism than for its proactive steps to prevent the violence. However, if they have no measurable effect—and if instead they absorb youth in activities that enable adults to reduce their efforts to address complex social problems—they might actually function as a diversion from responsibility and as an unjust form of blaming the victim.

These articles are a start, and the Centers for Disease Control should be congratulated for supporting their publication. But they are only a start, and should be read with this in mind.

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Youth as Change Agents in Distressed Immigrant Communities

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Our feature article explores how youth promotores (community health workers), in partnership with adults and Latino Health Access staff, have applied Paulo Freire's methods of reflective action to move from learned helplessness to hope in one low-income Latino community.

Background

Latino Health Access (LHA) is a community-based organization dedicated to improving the health and well-being of recent immigrant families in Santa Ana, California. LHA relies almost exclusively on promotores, or community health workers, to address a wide range of public health problems. Established in 1993, LHA conducts the majority of its work in the "92701" zip code, which has a population of 61,363 residents, 92 percent of whom are Latino, 60 percent of whom are foreign born, and 90 percent of whom are under age 45 (U.S. Census, 2000). The median household income is $33,728, with an average of 4.5 persons per family.

Overcrowding is a serious problem in the area with as many as three families sharing a one-bedroom apartment, and others resorting to renting garages and even closets to serve as sleeping spaces. A Rockefeller Institute study of urban hardship ranked Santa Ana as the hardest city in the nation to live in, when compared to the other 54 largest cities in the U.S. (Montiel et al., 2004). While the area comprises only 21.5 percent of the Santa Ana Police Department's south coast division, it generated more than 40 percent of all police reports in the city in 2003 and accounted for 56 percent of all juvenile crime reported in the city (Santa Ana Police Department, 2003). The area has few after-school opportunities for youth, and no childcare or community centers. Young children play unsupervised in the streets, older siblings are frequently the primary caregivers for their younger siblings, and school drop-out and teen pregnancy rates are high.

A Climate of Hope

Recently, LHA became aware of the challenges youth face in the community. In 1995, with start-up funding from the California Wellness Foundation, LHA established the Children and Youth Initiative. The goal of the program is to improve child and adolescent well-being and reduce risk factors for violence, school drop-out, and other health risk behaviors.

The youth-driven intervention is based on Brazilian educator Paulo Freire's methods of reflective action (Freire, 1970). These methods can help organizations join with groups that are socially and economically marginalized and without political voice, ultimately helping residents to create a climate of hope and overcome limits, rather than seeing their life situations as "dense, impenetrable, and enveloping" (Freire, 1970).

In Freire's model, assistants—in this case the youth promotores—go into the community with the intervening organization, collect data to describe life in that area, and report back to the larger group. These reports stimulate dialogue about the reality of living situations in the area. In this stage, called "decoding," each person presents and shares his or her findings and

feelings about these observations. Through a series of discussions, they arrive at themes concerning situations that limit the residents. Themes for the youth program included alcoholism and related violence, poor pedestrian safety, lack of neighborhood beauty, problems with intergenerational family communication, and lack of positive activities for youth.

> Themes for the youth program included alcoholism and related violence, poor pedestrian safety, lack of neighborhood beauty, problems with intergenerational family communication, and lack of positive activities for youth.

Questions are posed about why these situations and conditions exist. Through this process, people deepen their reflections and generate other questions.

YOUTH PROMOTORES: CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

Youth promotores—who are considered "community leaders"—face a number of special challenges.

First, there are the unique circumstances of their own lives. Most come from high-risk environments. All live in low-income or extremely low-income families. Many have experienced violence or, at the very least, disruption of family ties during immigration. Some come from families struggling with alcohol dependency and domestic violence. Most come from families where their parents' ability to provide support and supervision is affected by the long working hours necessary to make ends meet. Most of the parents have a hard time advocating for their children within U.S. institutions such as the school system because of limited language and cultural fluency. The youth promotores need support in dealing with these and other stressors in their daily life.

In addition, the youth face the challenge of having been identified as a "leader," a label that sometimes sets them apart from their communities. Adult staff leaders must both recognize and address these challenges. The LHA program provides this support to youth in two ways: through weekly meetings with a social worker and monthly meetings with a psychologist, herself an immigrant from Latin America; and by building a culture of trust and mutual support among the youth. Through this process, youth learn that staff—including the director—are available to them anytime they need help, whether after hours, on weekends, or during holidays.

Freire recommends the participation of a psychologist or sociologist in the process to help the group note the components of the themes as they emerge and develop skill-building and educational sessions around the themes. This process counters the view that nothing can be changed, and interjects hope. More discussion follows, during which the group identifies feasible actions, and then takes those actions, testing the residents' ability to successfully create change and giving the group the energy it needs to take yet another action.

The LHA Youth Promotor Program

From 1995 to 2000, LHA recruited, hired, and trained 12 high-risk youth, ages 13 to 19, to work as youth promotores within their communities. These youth promotores worked in-depth with approximately 120 additional youth, using youth councils as the organizing structure. Through their activities, youth promotores and the youth council members reached an additional 2,000 community members, 20 percent of whom were adults.

Recruiting and training promotores. Youth were recruited to the program through a three-phase process that began by the identification of "natural communities" within the 92701 area. Residents were asked to define their neighborhood or community—in general, the two- to three-block area around their home, or the building complex where they live. LHA selected four of these natural communities as intervention sites based on perceived need and residents' receptiveness.

Next, LHA staff and adult promotores conducted initial outreach in each of the four communities. They knocked on doors in the targeted neighborhoods, introduced the program, and extended invitations to social gatherings. During this process residents and agency staff became "co-investigators" in researching their community.

Once youth leaders are identified and enrolled as promotores, they receive comprehensive training in leadership, needs and resource assessment, data collection and analysis, problem solving, and communication skills. A critical part of this training is for youth to build skills in self-care and self-management.

Conducting community outreach and establishing youth councils. Once established, the youth promotor teams are assigned to work either in the communities where they live or in surrounding areas. The decision is based on three factors: their comfort level working in their own neighborhoods, their ages (older youth promotores are paired with younger ones), and their gender (boys are paired with girls).

Lorena, one of the youth promotores, identified alcohol abuse as a "theme" in her community after observing broken bottles lying around the building complex, hearing several parents mention concerns about public drinking, and talking with one of her friends about his parents' problems with alcohol in his home. Lorena discussed the theme of alcohol with the other youth promotores and found that they too saw this as a serious problem in their community.

Applying the hope-energy-action model, Lorena and the other youth promotores collected data, using whatever methods and indicators they believed best conveyed the reality they were observing. They counted alcohol outlets in their neighborhood and compared this data to counts taken in wealthier surrounding communities. They also took photographs of children walking past men who were gathered outside bars and drinking, and of local convenience store refrigerators filled with alcohol yet containing very little milk.

[Youth promotores] counted alcohol outlets in their neighborhood and compared this data to counts taken in wealthier surrounding communities. They also took photographs of . . . local convenience store refrigerators filled with alcohol yet containing very little milk.

Armed with their photos and an overhead projector, Lorena and her team reported their findings to neighborhood youth and adults. During their presentation, the team reflected on the data they collected and shared their impressions with the larger audience. Some reflections were deeply disturbing. For example, when a youth was taking photos of a liquor store refrigerator, the owner chased the youth out and yelled, "Go back to your own country!" In another example, Lorena interviewed youth in her high school, asking whether they had ever tried alcohol. She observed that the boys who responded, "No," seemed ashamed and embarrassed about not having tried alcohol. Although these outcomes sometimes left the youth shaken, it also made them even more determined to address the issue of alcohol abuse in their communities.

Lorena and her team invited other youth and adults to discuss these outcomes and reflections and to take action. Using the agency as a bridge to resources and decision makers, the youth council successfully designed informational campaigns, mobilized the community, and defeated two liquor licenses.

Initially, the youth and adult programs were separate. However, it became clear that adults were needed to help the youth do outreach. Now all major outreach and events are conducted with an adult promotor present. In fact, the pairing of youth and adult promotores was so successful that adult promotores and the youth decided to jointly plan and implement a four-week, interactive alcohol campaign, which took place in the streets of the four neighborhoods (see the sidebar "Lorena's Story" for more about the campaign). Adult and youth promotor teams are supported during regular meetings by a social worker and psychologist.

Hope-energy-action. The cornerstone of the youth promotores' training, and of the intervention program itself, is the hope-energy-action project. Based on Freire's recommendations, youth promotores are taught to look and listen for "themes" in the communities they are assigned to. This occurs during casual conversations with youth and parents in the community, during home visits, at door-to-door surveys, and in community meetings.

> It does not matter whether residents are working to reduce youth violence, increase park space, or prevent the approval of more liquor licenses in their neighborhoods. It is important, however, that participants understand the process of change and how action really does make a difference.

Once the youth promotores identify a theme, they first bring the theme to the other promotores for discussion and confirmation. Next, the staff train youth promotores on the basic principles of data collection. Finally, youth collect data to confirm the accuracy and importance of the community-generated theme. After collecting data, youth report their findings back to their communities. The presentations help the youth develop leadership and problem solving skills, and promote involvement by youth and adults in the larger community. In turn, this helps to build the support the youth need to carry out their hope-energy-action projects, and to both build and strengthen ties between youth and adults.

Next, the youth promotores repeat the process of theme generation, data collection, and reporting back to their youth councils. Promotores and councils design and implement a "hope-energy-action" project that addresses the identified problems.

Reflection. After completing a hope-energy-action project, the youth promotores and their youth councils learn to evaluate the project impact by asking, "What happened as a result of the project?" In addition to collect-

ing data to assess impact, the youth are guided through a series of questions designed to help them reflect on and gain a deeper understanding of the actions taken as well as the intended and unintended consequences of the actions. Using the energy generated by the (usually) successful actions, natural next steps are planned, or new themes are tackled. When Freire's process of reflection and action is successfully implemented, hope is generated, and energy to tackle new projects is high.

From a Freirian perspective, and for LHA, the objective of the action does not matter. Residents might work to reduce youth violence, increase park space, prevent the approval of more liquor licenses in their neighborhoods, or improve their community in other ways. What is most important is that participants understand the process of change and how action really does make a difference.

EVALUATION OF THE YOUTH PROMOTOR PROGRAM

Imoyeshe, an evaluation team hired by The California Wellness Foundation, conducted a formal evaluation of the impact of the youth promotor program on social networks in the community. The results follow:

- The number of people who participated in an activity to change something about their neighborhood more than doubled over baseline (42 percent, p<.01).

- Youth reported receiving more parental assistance with homework (p<.05) and indicated that parents had visited their school more often than at baseline (p<.05).

- Youth reported an increase in believing in the importance of serving as leaders at school or in the community (p<.01).

- Seven times more adults and five times more youth participated in an activity to reduce alcohol consumption in their neighborhoods. Specifically, teens successfully mobilized peers and adults to block two conditional use permits in a neighborhood that is already saturated with alcohol outlets and that suffers from high rates of alcohol related problems.

- All 12 of the youth promotores have completed some community college. All but two are expected to graduate in the next two years and transfer to state universities.

Challenges, Lessons Learned, and Implications for Practice

Agencies wishing to implement this model may want to consider the following ten principles of practice that LHA believes are critical to success.

1. *Offer a mechanism to enhance participation.* People will participate, share assets, and work to improve the community, if a mechanism exists for them to do so. Hope- energy-action projects create this mechanism.

2. *Build on the skills of community members.* Harnessing a community's skills and talents, LHA believes, is the secret to transforming that community. The promotores are trained to notice and ask about community members' assets, talents, and skills and to help create opportunities for those talents to be utilized so that community members can achieve their dreams and hopes. Much time is spent helping staff and community members see beyond the dominant culture's deficit view of immigrant communities, and to notice and build on what is right.

3. *Model agency management and intervention methods.* The management of LHA models the program's methods and philosophy. Using the same principles taught to the youth, the agency director and staff use Freirian theories and empowerment approaches in all activities. Weekly training and support sessions with all staff are key to making this happen. The culture of empowerment created within the agency and staff is then communicated to the youth.

4. *Teach the benefits of reciprocity.* LHA's partnerships with the community are based on a philosophy of mutual respect and mutual contribution. Underserved communities are very resourceful. People have something to give and feel better when they can give it. Contributions such as offering their living room for a meeting space, bringing food to a gathering, or making decorations for a fiesta allow people to maintain dignity and build ongoing relationships based on respect.

5. *Understand the value of compensation versus volunteerism.* Youth and adults are hired and paid for the work they do. Children are compensated using a point system they can redeem for school supplies and other things they need and want. When professionals earning salaries ask residents in distressed communities to volunteer, it further underscores the daily inequities faced by these community members.

6. *View youth programs in the context of broader intervention efforts.* The youth receive considerable support from a full team of professionals and lay community members. This is critical because community members view programs holistically, not categorically, as funders often do. Issues such as housing and violence, access to food and health, and family communication and academic success are all linked.

7. *Allow youth to be in charge.* The hope-energy-action projects are conceptualized and developed by youth, who are perceived as the experts. LHA is seen as the support entity.

8. *Ensure long-term participation.* Change takes time; building community trust takes time. "Hit and run" programs erode community trust. Staying long enough to see true change, which can take several years, requires both staying the course and being flexible as the community identifies other pressing issues. Learn to celebrate small successes and milestones along the way.

9. *Funding the program is a long-term commitment.* In the past, foundations primarily funded new programs, which limits an organization's ability to stay with one project long enough to see change. However, some foundations are beginning to recognize the need to fund the operations of agencies or ongoing programs. Moreover, the hope-energy-action approach, in which content is less important than process, can allow an agency to view the community comprehensively and change content focus without losing the integrity of a program. This can help to sustain a program over the long term and reduce agency tendencies to change direction in response to funders' "hot topics" (e.g., youth engagement and violence prevention in the recent past, and obesity currently).

10. *Help low-income communities move from learned helplessness to hope and action.* Learned helplessness is a major barrier to change for youth and adults in low-income communities, especially in immigrant communities. Many immigrants arrive in the United States after enduring much hardship and with great idealism and hope, only to endure exploitation by landlords, employers, and others after arrival. The effect can be particularly severe for the youth who are often alienated from parents because of long work schedules and varying rates of acculturation. Many service programs mistakenly reinforce helplessness and hopelessness by "doing for or to" rather than "with" the community and youth.

Creating small opportunities for positive change, which youth and adults can drive, allows them to experience success in changing their lives and their communities, thereby building hope and paving the way to ongoing positive action in the community.

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An Interview with Lateefah Simon

The Transformative Power of Community Youth Development

Sarah Raskin, *Centers for Disease Control*

Lateefah Simon, the youngest woman to ever win a prestigious MacArthur Fellowship (also known as the "Genius" award), is an energetic example of the transformative power of youth development. A high school dropout and former petty thief who used to hide her boyfriends' drugs and weapons in her backpack, Lateefah rose from participating, unenthusiastically, in one youth development program to passionately leading San Francisco's Center for Young Women's Development, whose mission is to "to provide gender-specific, peer-based opportunities for high-risk, low-, and no-income young women to build healthier lives and healthier communities." As executive director, Lateefah more than quadrupled the Center's budget and expanded the Center's violence prevention work to include rights education for California juvenile offenders and San Francisco firearm policy reform. The Ford Foundation, Ms. Foundation, and Oprah Winfrey have lauded her. Lateefah is a self-taught practitioner, activist, and social analyst who influences practitioners, funders, and policymakers at local, national, and international levels. In fall, 2005, she begins undergraduate studies at the University of California – Berkeley, so that she can remain active in Bay Area violence prevention and youth development communities. CDC Fellow Sarah Raskin caught up with Lateefah in early February 2005. Ever the multitasker, Lateefah prepared her daughter's breakfast as they spoke.

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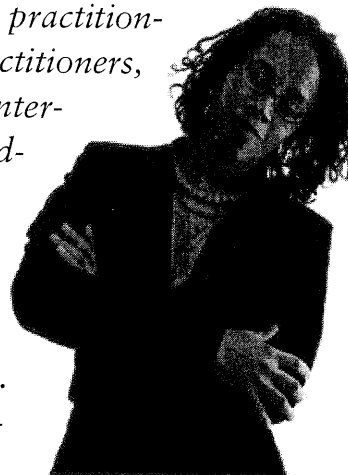
How does your experience exemplify youth participation in community violence prevention?

I came to youth work in 1993 – 94, when I was 16-ish. I had left high school because I worked at Taco Bell full time. It wasn't a glamorous job but many of the young people from my neighborhood either worked full time or they hustled—they sold drugs—because a lot of our parents were on drugs or in prison. School didn't seem like an option.

Huckleberry Youth Programs recruited me for a group for girls at risk of violent behavior. I felt that I was too smart and I'd been through too much to sit in circles, talking about museums, art, HIV, pregnancy, and the men we picked. I had boyfriends who sold crack; I carried their guns in my backpack so they wouldn't get in trouble. But I found myself loving the group. And we—San Francisco's most hard-core girls—took ownership of it.

The Center for Young Women's Development opened around that time and there were street outreach jobs for girls who were parenting themselves or who were involved in the juvenile justice system. I was on probation for habitual shoplifting—I was the best there was until I got caught [*laughs*]. It all really fit. I applied, I became a street outreach worker, and I never left.

Can you talk about your evolution in the work, having gone from participating in one program to leading another?

I grew up in this place [The Center for Young Women's Development]. Rachel [Pfeffer, the founder] designed the organization about youth, social services, and other existing paradigms. She believed that their premises failed young people—that although some of them pushed young people to lead, there wasn't a really strong "for and by" model. She wanted to develop an organization where young women who had been pushed aside by pretty much everyone, who make people uncomfortable—sex workers, girls who sell crack, the Lateefahs of the world—could lead.

I interviewed with ten young women who were very different ethnically, culturally. I walked out praying that I was going to get that job, not because of the $8.50 an hour, but because I really wanted to be with this community: girls who seemed like they really loved and forgave each other.

There was no other place that would respect my experience, my intelligence. If you could analyze why something needed to happen, it was done. Rachel's push was, "Analyze it, articulate it, and then let's do it. We're not an organization where you just get what you want. We have to build it with

thought." So I was pushed and I was pushed. I went back to school when I could work half time and make the same amount of money I had made working full-time at Taco Bell. I took advantage of every opportunity. We stayed after hours to learn how to use the computer. I had drive, not to be the next executive director, but to be really serious about outreach.

When Rachel decided to transition out of the organization, I didn't think about that position. We were doing great street outreach with very young sex workers and drug users, and I just loved the work. I wanted to help with the executive director search. Young people are held down if the organization that claims to be building their power doesn't articulate that possibilities are limitless. But the Center was a place where we challenged everything, including our own abilities. Rachel challenged me to lead the search process, to see what I found out about myself in this process. I was reading resumes of really amazing, educated women and thinking, "I could do that job." It's important to have theory but this was a really hard organization to run and I felt like you had to be here to know how to do it. I became co-interim director.

We started doing political education inside juvenile hall, which was a huge win because a lot of us were either just off probation or we weren't older [than the people who we were educating]. I became executive director formally in 1998. I've been challenged. Young women push me every single day. I'm seeing a whole new breed of young women who are impacted by street violence in a way that I've never seen before—and we've been on the street forever. In San Francisco gun violence has tripled, especially among young African-American men. The Center is a beacon for young women who have children by dead men. I went to about 17 funerals last year. And it's . . . well, it's intense.

I am leaving the Center because I've done all that I can do there. People argue with me about that, but the organization has to walk its talk. Its leadership must make space so that a young woman can push herself and develop and leave, especially someone who has talent and skills. A 23-year-old

> Young women push me every single day. I'm seeing a whole new breed of young women who are impacted by street violence in a way that I've never seen before—and we've been on the street forever.

Latina who's been here for eight years will run the Center. I'm so excited, so happy. And I'm going to Berkeley in the fall!

Congratulations!

It's so cool. My goal has always been to go to college. We've pushed about 40 young women from the streets into academia in the last six years. I needed to do that. I want to study young people raised in the '80s. It was a hard decade for people in urban and in really poor rural settings: the drug war, that administration, the de-funding of social services, this whole net being crumbled from housing to food stamps. So when Berkeley called I had to take it seriously.

Some external folks are uncomfortable with the change. That's exactly why I'm leaving. They're uncomfortable because they're used looking to that one long-term leader to be the spokesperson for the work. But our work is bottom-up. The young woman who walks into the door, who's a "drop in," is the best spokesperson: What opportunities are accessible to her? Does she feel safe? Can she grow there? Are her needs met? Or are we directing her to where her needs will be met?

Some external people are receiving your "nontraditional" style exceptionally well. The John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation awarded you a Fellowship that is commonly known as a "genius" grant . . .

It's been a really humbling experience. I remember the work before the awards, and it hasn't changed. Internally. Girls on the streets are still poor, still getting abused by boyfriends, still in cages [in juvenile hall]. I'm blessed to have these amazing opportunities and awards. It feels so good and at the same time it feels really weird and contradictory. I struggle with that. How do you get awarded for something that's supposed to be done? I mean I'm not giving anything back [*laughs*].

In the last year we've brought an intergenerational circle around us like a belt of wisdom that we can tap from. I've learned from those elders that you take these blessings that have been given to you and you spread whatever your gospel is.

> When you walk in the door [of the Center]—regardless of how many times you have failed because somebody has created this stupid definition of failure—you have succeeded. You walked in the door and you want to be in a community that supports you unconditionally.

Being a leader inside is way more important than outside. Women who lead the Center help validate the brilliance in young women who have been told by everyone else that they have far to go. We say, "You

have everything you need in you right now. Transformation is a lifelong process and, wow, you're still here. You're still alive." The door inside our office is green, so we use that as a metaphor. When you walk in the green door—regardless of how many times you have failed because somebody has created this stupid definition of failure—you have succeeded. You walked in the green door and you want to be in a community that supports you unconditionally. *Unconditionally.*

For someone who's disruptive or chronically absent, we may say, "Look, this isn't working for you. You may want to take a break and figure out when to come back. What's going to make you feel safe in a community where you're being challenged by other women who look like you or who've been through the same experiences, and not people who you can run game on?" Because we're used to running game on a case manager and probation programs—it's the way you survive.

I enjoy that piece of leadership, creating a different way of working for young women. Even the way that we talk about working *for* instead of *with* [young people]. It may not be the only model or the best model but it's amazing what happens, seeing young women from the California Youth Authority who are in for intense charges—violence, drug trafficking—go deep in this work. We process around our healing, our development, and our relationships with our parents. Part of being a good practitioner is having dealt with your own stuff.

Having worked in this field for a decade, can you tell me about what you perceive to be the state of violence in the lives of youth today?

My friend Shawn [Richard], who founded Brothers Against Guns after hi brother was killed in 1995, and I stay up late sometimes on the phone talk ing about this—what makes young people, who grew up not even a gener ation behind us, still trigger happy? In the '80s and '90s a lot of the violenc was around the new economy of crack cocaine, which presented a nexus o street violence, of handgun violence. Now, in San Francisco, crack cocain is still there but it's capping itself and the violence around petty street dru dealing is capping.

What I see now is an offshoot from that. There's an increase in handgun and larger arms—semi-automatics—but young people are not necessaril killing because of drugs and money. There is desperation, anxiety among lot of the young men of color who find themselves still on the street Hopelessness thrusts you towards centering your life about "my respect, m respect," because you have very little of it. It's analogous to slaves who pe petrated domestic violence—they would work all day and be kicked in th

back, and then they would come home and beat their wives. These young men are grabbing this notion of respect so hard. It's so important to them because it's all that they have. They protect that with all of their life.

When that respect is challenged, you don't fight. If you try to fight somebody the old-fashioned way they may kill you. They may have a handgun. It's not just "I'm 'gonna take this young man out because he disrespected me." You have to be the aggressor. Get them before they can get you—at a club, on the street corner, in the classroom, on the MUNI bus, at a stoplight. We also see fear and anxiety with a lot of these young men.

You know, one day I called Geoffrey Canada [author of *Fist, Stick, Knife, Gun*]. I needed to know why a young person could kill another person and turn around before the body hits the ground and go to school. He said, "Lateefah, no one asks 'why' and 'how' from that deep place. This generation has seen the gun in every aspect of their lives. From a spiritual context to a street context and everywhere in between. Violence has permeated their being."

It's everything, from the normality of owning a gun to going to funerals. If you have more power in executing someone than you do in any other part of your life, you will use that. Life and death is a very different experience, even for me. I've become accustomed to going to funerals and to saying goodbye to very young men. I don't get tremendously surprised or hurt. Of course I get sad when someone's been shot because it is almost the same thing that my mom talks about, growing up in Jim Crow South. When some black kid had cancer and he wasn't going to get the best treatment, you knew he was going to die. It was the same thing: "Wow, that's really horrible"; but it is status quo.

Can you talk about the intersections you use in your analysis—the links among interpersonal, community-level, and structural violence; drugs; sexuality; addiction; joblessness—and how your understanding informs what you believe to be the "solutions" to these social problems?

My analysis has developed around young people who are on the margins of youth social service and youth development practice: What are they dealing with and what are they suffering? And when I say "on the margins," I mean that they're being left behind. They're "too hard to serve." And I have a lot of ideas around that—how do you say they're too hard to serve if you don't want to serve them? If you don't want to build with them? That's part of it.

Liberation, to me, comes when young people atone for everything that they've done or that has been done to them. It's not clinical. These spaces go deeper and facilitate a process where young people acknowledge what

they need, what they want, what they didn't get, and what's going to make the difference. So that's one space.

And then there are jobs. The Center provides jobs, and not just jobs but opportunities to transform via employment and training for young women from communities that have dealt with an incredible amount of sexual assault and violence and joblessness. Liberation happens when these young women confront their beauty and their demons.

These issues—violence, health, safety, poverty, lack of education, race, homophobia, xenophobia—are interconnected in every young person in our organization. And they're not all young women anymore. The fathers of the children come in, needing to use the computer. They can't go anywhere else.

There are a lot of dichotomies that I wasn't aware of when we began. We've expanded our work deeply to get young women to look at their lives in racial, political, historical, and economic contexts. An elder brought us Paulo Freire's methodology around building existing intelligence and we were like, "This is it—popular education is the way for us to mobilize!"

How do you evaluate your programs? How do you "prove your success" to strategic allies like funders and influential partners?

It's extremely hard work, honoring the voices of young women *and* making sure that the organization has integrity in its core programs. I spent most of 2004 raising crazy money—our income is over a million dollars. I did that by pushing our circle of funders to really rethink success and failure. I tell funders to expect intense challenges. We have the numbers, but it's irrelevant. Philanthropic organizations expect life change to occur within grant periods. It's not possible! Process evaluation tells more of the story.

Many young women from these situations loop throughout their lives in six to nine month cycles. I don't know what they're going to do tomorrow because they've been living 15 years of straight hell. You can do our groups, go to South Africa, speak at a conference, and all this great stuff, but your demons are still real. Your mom's behind bars—that's real. So you may release that on the streets. We don't want that to happen but we have to be honest about this unrealistic expectation of going from the darkest dark to the brightest light in a particular period. This isn't an organization that's going to give up on our young women. We understand what they're going through. A person has to shift and change a lot to subscribe to the national status quo. Our young women don't like other young women initially. Women have taken their boyfriends, stolen from them on the streets, stolen their clothes in group homes. Their horrible experiences always go back to their mothers. If we're not dealing with that, we fail. Sisterhood is the first

module of our employment-training program: What does sisterhood mean, and how can you lean on a community of women who love you? That is a foreign idea [to them]. Some people critique this as "touchy-feely." Well, that's going to be what changes violent young people who have been on the streets and in the juvenile justice system. It's not just outcome-based, because that's unrealistic.

We've struggled with this. We've not gotten money or we've not applied for money because the funder wants unrealistic stories or unrealistic numbers. Some organizations tell funders that [they manipulate the numbers]—I'm a fundraiser so I know how people can lie on reports. Do we want to keep the field like that or do we want to change so that it's an honest field, so that we ask for stories instead of outcomes? It's revolutionary.

We have two young women in the "Sisters Thriving" program who were rivals, and now they're best friends. They were—we were—shocked when they found themselves together on the first day because one's brother killed the other's brother. It came out in a deeply intense emotional process. One said, "I wanted to see you dead. You killed my brother. Not your brother, *you* killed *my* brother." These two young women called off a two-year beef between two sides trying to kill each other because of that horrible death. We brought in an elder who worked with them around the passing of spirits. They did a ceremony for the dead brother, releasing him from the anger. And I thought, "Wow, this may be a real possibility for young women who have forgotten their internal selves because their external being has become so important. You move mountains when you do that work and you save people's lives. We're saving their lives.

What is your advice for young people who do youth development work? What is your advice for young people and for "allies"—adults, people who have formal education or other historical positions of power who want to do this work well and in solidarity?

I just turned 28 and [*laughs*] now I have to write a national apology for making adults feel unwelcome for years. Because that's ridiculous. Community is community, that's exactly what it is. "For youth, by youth." It's a model that works, but I cannot say that the Center survived because we were young, vigorous, vivacious, and smart. We survived the hardest times because there were adults with lived experience. We, as young people who have been let down by a lot of adults, must let them back in.

The best thing adults can do is listen. Listen. Whether in developing or evaluating programs, we must suspend some of our ideas around what works and just listen to the folks who are benefiting from it [the work]. It

is a scary thing for me because I'm comfortable with what's worked for us. It's important to listen and act in a way that is responsive. My most important advice for practitioners is to be active listeners, but also to move in action with that information.

I don't think all organizations should be like the Center—it's really difficult to have young women in charge of everything. It's a wonderful experiment in possibilities. At

> The best thing adults can do is listen. Listen. Whether in developing or evaluating programs, we must suspend some of our ideas around what works and just listen to the folks who are benefiting from [the work].

the same time, we will tell a young woman to go to other agencies because they provide housing, which she needs and which is something we will never provide. There are youth organizations that are run by adults who are good people and who want to see young people live.

And as for younger activists, it's the same thing as for adults. We have to listen [*laughs*]. Not "we" because I'm not young anymore. You—you—have to listen.

Lateefah Simon, formerly the executive director of the Center for Young Women's Development, the nation's foremost juvenile justice reentry youth-run organization, has spent over a decade creating dynamic community programming, advising public policy, and raising funds on the behalf of young people affected by the justice system. A gifted and highly sought after speaker, Lateefah has keynoted at over 75 trainings and conferences around the country and abroad. Ms. Simon employs her immense knowledge from her years as a street-based youth development practitioner, community organizer, and nonprofit executive to move and inspire communities to proactively engage low-income young people in social change work. In 2003 she was awarded the prestigious Macarthur Fellowship for her groundbreaking work in San Francisco. She has also won awards from the Ford Foundation, National Council for Research on Women, the National Organization for Women, Oprah Magazine and the California State Assembly, which honored her as the 13th Assembly District's "Woman of the Year 2005." She is currently a member of the Board of Directors of the Women's Foundation of California and the Advocacy Institute (Washington DC). Lateefah lives in Emeryville, California with her 9-year-old daughter Aminah. After 11 years, Lateefah transitioned from CYWD to return to college and develop her private consultant practice.

Sarah Raskin is a fellow in the CDC Division of Violence Prevention, where she researches special topics in youth violence prevention. A former community health educator in southern Appalachia and intervention specialist in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, she earned an MPH in International Community Health and Development and a Certificate in Human Rights from Emory University, where she received the Gangarosa Award for "creative approaches to global public health problems." Sarah hopes to begin a Ph.D. program in Medical Anthropology in September 2006.

The views in this article are those of the interviewee, Lateefah Simon.
They do not necessarily represent the views of the U.S. Centers
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Project BRAVE

Engaging Youth as Agents of Change in a Youth Violence Prevention Project

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Jim Randels, *Frederick Douglass Senior High School*
Damian Theodore, *Students at the Center*

In Project BRAVE, high school students write about their experiences with violence and share their stories both in the classroom and with stakeholders in the community. This article discusses preliminary evaluation results on youth and their roles as agents of change. It concludes with challenges faced, facilitating factors, and next steps that are relevant to school- and community-based youth involvement in violence prevention and in health promotion in general.

Introduction

"Building and Revitalizing an Anti-Violence Environment" (Project BRAVE) is a youth violence prevention intervention in New Orleans, Louisiana, guided by a partnership of community- and school-based organizations, public school students and teachers, and public health researchers. Project BRAVE participants view violence as a community-level public health issue created, in part, by conditions in the social and physical environment. Moving beyond an emphasis on individual behavior, Project BRAVE examines and addresses factors that have been identified as social determinants of violence, such as:

- Relationships among individuals and between groups (e.g., adults and youth) in the community (Cotten et al., 1994; Orpinas et al., 1999. Sheline et al., 1994; Reiss and Roth, 1993; Sampson et al., 1997).

- The physical environment in the community (e.g., abandoned housing and vacant lots, street lighting) (Sampson and Lauretsen, 1994; Heinzelmann, 1981; Wilson and Kelling, 1989).

- Policy at the local, state, and national levels (e.g., curfew laws, education policy, gun control) (Catalano et al., 1998; Gottfredson, 1988; Wallack, 1999; Sheley et al., 1992).

Project BRAVE takes what some have called a "youth empowerment" approach to health promotion in which youth are seen not as a source of community problems but as a vital resource to communities with the potential to act as catalysts for and agents of change (Holden et al., 2004; Kim et al., 1998; Wallerstein et al., 2005).

Background and Nature of the Problem

Project BRAVE serves three contiguous neighborhoods in New Orleans. The neighborhoods have high concentrations of poverty with an average annual household income of $26,000, compared to $36,000 citywide and $49,000 nationwide. Ninety percent of the residents in two of the three neighborhoods identify themselves as African-American, compared to 67 percent citywide and 12 percent nationwide. Renters occupy over half of the households in the community and 16 percent of homes are vacant. Women head almost 25 percent of households in which children are present. Only half of the adult residents are employed and over one-third do not have a high school diploma. Racially segregated and economically marginalized urban communities such as those described here often experience high rates of violence (Reiss and Roth, 1993; Sampson and Lauretsen, 1994; Randall et al., 1999; Sampson et al., 1997).

Youth in particular face a number of challenges in this community. Between 45 percent and 54 percent of the 12- to 17-year-old youth in these communities are living in poverty.[1] In 2001–2002, almost 25 percent of enrolled students dropped out of the school participating in Project BRAVE. There were four expulsions and 95 suspensions. The student body is 99 percent African-American, making the school more racially segregated than the surrounding community.[2] On average, between 1991 and 1998, 45 percent of all homicide victims in the zip code in which these neighborhoods are located were under the age of 25.[3]

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Despite these challenges, the intervention and school communities possess a number of strengths that are relevant for violence prevention. Even with a high percentage of renters, there is some degree of residential stability; with 60 percent of residents living in the same house for at least five years. There are a number of neighborhood associations, grassroots organizations, health and social service agencies, and research institutions in the intervention community. One grassroots organization, the Crescent City Peace Alliance (CCPA), is the lead community-based organization for Project BRAVE. CCPA has led the community in a variety of efforts such as closing a nightclub where violence was frequent, cleaning vacant lots, boarding up over 30 abandoned homes, and maintaining a positive relationship with the local high school through four administration changes. CCPA also forged the connection between the principal investigator and the lead school-based organization involved in the project, Students at the Center (SAC).

SAC is a collection of teachers, community members, and students who see education as part of a collective effort to improve the community. SAC offers small classes (15 students) that use traditional subjects (e.g., language arts, history) to engage students in community improvement efforts while helping them to develop practical skills such as journalism and digital media production. Students use their skills to raise awareness of community issues and work on neighborhood activities that help them understand the importance of civic engagement (e.g., street clean-ups, assisting with the creation of a civil rights memorial). In 2003, the Douglass Community Coalition (DCC) was formed to further strengthen the relationship between the community and the school. This coalition of individuals and organizations meets regularly, involves community members in school activities, and supports the school in its role as a resource to the community.

SAC and CCPA have a history of working together to integrate school and community improvement projects with learning. Through the DCC community residents, neighborhood groups, and institutions and agencies with a history of activism are also involved. Faculty and students from local universities contribute to research, intervention development, and program evaluation. Thus, Project BRAVE builds on the strengths of the community and the school.

Intervention Strategies

Project BRAVE examines and addresses violence based on the experiences of youth. The Project BRAVE classroom intervention pilot involved two teachers and 15 students. Teachers and school counselors encouraged students to register for the elective class based on previous participation in SAC activi-

ties or, in some cases, simply because the class fit in their schedules. A few students selected the course based on the reputation of the teachers or SAC. There were no grade-point average requirements and student disciplinary records were not considered in recruitment and selection.

The Project BRAVE pilot class began with a "Story Circle" method, in which participants shared life experiences in small groups. Community partners who were active in New Orleans' civil rights movement introduced this approach to SAC. In our pilot class, students wrote and edited stories during class time about their experiences with violence. Students explored relevant materials such as literature and film and worked with a local actor who visited the Project BRAVE classroom regularly as they refined their stories. In an early class session, the actor performed a series of monologues about violence in the lives of nine female characters. The teachers and the actor then worked with the students to turn their own stories into monologues.

> After several weeks, one student reluctantly shared the story of a friend who had died in his arms after being hit with a stray bullet in a neighborhood park. Other students supported him by sharing their stories of violence at the same park.

After several weeks, one student reluctantly shared the story of a friend who had died in his arms after being hit with a stray bullet in a neighborhood park. Other students supported him by sharing their stories of violence at the same park. As a result, the students refocused their monologues to recount their experiences of violence in the park. The instructors introduced new reading material and community guests to complement the themes emerging from the student writings. Participants added movement, sound, poetry, and rap to the monologues, creating a living backdrop meant to evoke the location of the events. All students, even those who did not have stories about the park, performed in each story. The students named their work "Inhaling Brutality, Exhaling Peace."

The principal investigator, a public health researcher, worked with the students to conduct a critical analysis of their experiences and to identify the factors that contribute to violence in their community. The investigator used a Freirian technique known as "conscientization," or raising critical awareness (Freire, 1990; Wallerstein and Sanchez-Merki, 1994), which involved the following steps over several weeks:

- Identifying the important events leading to the violent outcomes in students' stories.

- Discussing the factors that they believed contributed to the events.

- Organizing factors into levels, using a social-ecological framework (McLeroy et al., 1988), from those that were most proximal to the individuals involved (e.g., personality traits, employment status) to those that were more distal (e.g., neighborhood conditions, public policy).

This dynamic process is illustrated in the sidebar entitled, "The Power of Stories" (see page 44).

Impact on Participating Students

Public health students, the two teachers, and the principal investigator conducted participant observations in the classroom and at performances as part of the pilot evaluation. At the end of the semester, the principal investigator conducted and tape-recorded a group interview with the students to reflect on their experiences. Author Adam Becker used the focus-coding method (Chesler, 1987; Zimmerman et al., 1995), to analyze observation notes and group interview transcripts. This coding process involved segmenting the transcript into categories according to predetermined themes of interest—in this case, pertaining to the impact on students of their involvement in the pilot intervention class. Authors Jim Randels and Damian Theodore reviewed and commented on the analysis.

In the sections that follow we present selected themes in four areas related to the project's impact on the involved youth: classroom attendance, social support among youth and teachers, youth self-perceptions as agents of change, and avoidance of violent behavior.

Classroom attendance. Although it was rare that all 15 enrolled students were present in class, data suggest that students were interested in participating in Project BRAVE and sometimes came to school only to attend the Project BRAVE class. Students who were not registered for the class occasionally came to observe or participate; one asked to transfer into the class. The interest in the Project BRAVE class suggests that similar classes could potentially increase student attendance (and perhaps attachment) in school—an important protective factor related to violence prevention (DHHS, 2001).

Social support. Data from the focus group and observations suggest that social support among students and teachers increased during the semester. The following exchange illustrates one student's willingness to share a

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THE POWER OF STORIES

One Project BRAVE story involved a student's boyfriend, who was killed in a retaliatory shooting while riding as a passenger in a stolen car. Students identified important events that led to the violence—for instance, the theft of the car and the procurement of the gun. Students also discussed contributing factors such as the fact that the youth did not work or attend school, lack of student and parental involvement in schools, educational policy that influences student satisfaction with school, a lack of community or police presence that might have prevented the theft, a lack of employment opportunities, and public policy related to gun sales.

The facilitator asked questions using different levels of analysis to help the students organize the events and factors. For example, when asked about the characteristics of the young men involved, students mentioned lack of interest in school and work as contributing factors. They cited peer pressure among friends as an interpersonal factor that contributed to the events. In response to questions about community and societal factors, students mentioned that businesses rarely hired neighborhood youth and, when they did, they only made minimum wage.

Students used their social-ecological analyses to develop a list of stakeholders who they believed could affect the factors contributing to violence. The list included neighborhood residents, teachers and school administrators, police, business owners, and city officials. Students and community partners invited these stakeholders to a performance of the piece. The principal investigator helped the students develop a facilitation guide to engage audience members in a post-performance discussion about solutions (see "Facilitation Guide Selected Questions").

One solution that emerged from the discussion was to develop a system for neighbors to take turns monitoring the park. A representative from the city department responsible for parks and recreation programs was present and volunteered to share the idea with her supervisors. Other solutions included training for local police to avoid excessive force and presenting the students' work citywide to motivate other neighborhoods to act.

painful story—the death of his friend—and the emotional support he felt from the class.

> Q: *What is it that helped you get to the point where you felt like you could have, should have, expressed [your story]?*
>
> A: *Because I felt comfortable with y'all telling my story. And I felt like I'm closer to y'all as family—[that's] why I can come down and tell you anything that went on.*

This student also described how telling his story helped him to express his anger and sadness over the incident, something he hadn't been able to do previously.

Self-perceptions as change agents. Data from the group interview suggest that Project BRAVE helped students to see themselves as change agents, with the ability to motivate people to implement solutions to violence, as highlighted in the following dialogue:

> A: *[After the performance] the question was, 'How can we best prevent stuff like this from happening?' And the man said, 'Well, all the good people need to not run away from the park and take over the park.' They just like, you know, take control and not [ignore it].*
>
> Q: *How do you think we can do that?*
>
> A: *Well, even if you start with this play. And then like organize our own group and do clean up. And just go around the neighborhood just talking to teenagers, their parents, anyone we see.*

Violent Behavior. Evidence also suggests that, although emphasis is not placed on individual behavior, involvement in Project BRAVE may help students to avoid violence, as illustrated in these comments:

> A: *I feel real bad, you guys.*
>
> Q: *Why?*
>
> A: *'Cause yesterday we were doing the play and speaking the peace and I was about to fight right before the play.*

This student went on to explain how she decided to walk away from the fight not only to "speak the peace" but to act peacefully as well. At no time in the discussion were the students asked about their personal involvement in violence.

Lessons Learned

The evaluation of this school-based intervention to prevent youth violence demonstrates the project's positive effect on involved youth and its potential to impact certain determinants of violence. Interest in the class (among participating as well as non-participating students) suggests a potential for improving student attendance in school. Some of this interest is likely due to the small class size along with curricula that are interactive and based on students' knowledge and experiences. This effect has also been found in other youth empowerment models (DHHS, 2001). The 15 students involved in this Project BRAVE class became more willing to discuss and perform their stories of violence, an indicator of increasing social support among students and teachers. The experience increased students' perceptions of being supported and valued, and led at least one student to avoid violent behavior during the course of the pilot. The "analysis of events" component helped students organize and think critically about the factors that contributed to violent incidents, and to identify and engage people and organizations that could contribute to solutions. Community members who attended the performance considered actions that might make the neighborhood safer.

Challenges

Project BRAVE encountered a number of challenges in its pilot phase. Funders of school-based violence prevention programs often prefer standardized curricula (Thornton et al., 2002). Some specifics of the Project BRAVE curriculum cannot be standardized, but rather evolve through dialogue as students, teachers, and artists work together to build on students' experiences. Because Project BRAVE is not based on standardized curricula, it was difficult to find funds for the pilot. The pilot was conducted using minimal funds from the principal investigator's institutional research funds and funds obtained by SAC for general classroom work, not specifically for Project BRAVE (approximately $25,000).

Another funding challenge was a typical requirement by funders of youth violence prevention programs to involve very young (elementary school aged) or "most at-risk" youth—those who have dropped out or been expelled from school (Kellermann et al., 1998). Focusing on risk is contrary to Project BRAVE's asset-based approach (Steuart, 1975; Kretzmann and

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McKnight, 1993), in which young people are viewed as potential agents of change rather than as individuals in need of behavior modification. Project BRAVE involves adolescents who may not possess "the malleable nature of young children" (Kellermann et al., 1998, p. 287), and may not be youth who would traditionally be defined as "most at risk"—many of them are motivated leaders and interested in community involvement. Funders who may be reluctant to fund interventions with adolescents who are not deemed most at risk might consider the following: Even youth who remain in school but live in communities with high rates of violence face difficult circumstances and are at risk for involvement in or exposure to violence (Martinez and Richters, 1993).

The conditions and daily events in the school setting also presented challenges. Public schools are increasingly evaluated based on standardized test performance. As already under-funded schools struggle to maintain financial stability, many are pressured to emphasize testing.[4] School officials may be reluctant or unable to free up class periods for "special" courses. The BRAVE class was disrupted frequently to prepare students for standardized testing.

In addition, students and their families experienced challenges that affected sustained student participation in BRAVE classroom activities. Despite student interest in the program, inconsistent attendance proved challenging to the process, as students sometimes missed crucial steps in the intervention. Students were absent due to family obligations, lack of family support for attendance, or lack of motivation based on negative school experiences. Inconsistent attendance in the Project BRAVE class also slowed the pace of course activities.

Interventions that involve youth in similar communities will need to be flexible and supportive of students and families. Project BRAVE partners, for example, often provided transportation to students involved in after-school project activities; teachers sometimes had to contact a family directly and provide social support (e.g., referrals to needed services) in order to facilitate student attendance.

Facilitating Factors
Several important factors contributed to the pilot's success:

- *Relationships.* Project BRAVE built on pre-existing relationships among residents, community-based organizations, the school, and local researchers.

- *Support.* This community welcomed Project BRAVE with open arms. In fact, BRAVE joins a long tradition of opportunities for students to

FACILITATION GUIDE SELECTED QUESTIONS

Inhaling Brutality, Exhaling Peace Discussion

For the whole audience:
- What messages do you get from the play?
- How do you relate to these stories?
- Did you know children go through these things at such a young age?
- What other type of input do you have?
- How can we keep the good things?
- How can we prevent the bad things?
- What can you or your group do to contribute to the cause of preventing violence?

For police:
- Are police aware that mistreatment of youth happens?
- What can the police force do about mistreatment of youth?
- Would you/can you intervene if you see a fellow officer mistreating a young person?
- How can we ensure appropriate use of weapons by police?

For domestic violence counselors:
- How can counseling change to increase trust?
- Can counselors relate to people in domestic violence situations so that people would feel more comfortable going?

For New Orleans recreation department:
- Why not have park security?
- How can you improve [staff] training to prevent rough play in parks and pools?

- Can salaries be raised to increase motivation to be more vigilant?

For community organizations:
- What roles can young people play in your work?
- Can young people take positions of influence in the organization?
- How can your organization contribute to young people's lives and future?
- What can you do about neighborhood improvement?
- How can organizations work together?

For media:
- Why are there always negative images and negative statistics of our communities in the media?
- How can media use power and creativity for positive outcomes?
- What kind of community activities can media get involved in?

For businesses:
- Can you hire more young people so that they have better ways to earn money and can learn skills and responsibility?
- How can we resolve issues of conflict between youth and businesses?
- How can wages be made more equitable?
- How can policies be enforced so that weapons don't get into the wrong hands?

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share their experiences and participate in community change. For example, the Douglass Community Coalition provides a context for youth to work with adults on projects related to strengthening the community-school relationship. In addition, SAC graduates return to work with current students, providing young adult role models.

- *Methods*. Project BRAVE built on existing methods (e.g., story circles, community organizing) to address issues that are important to the community. Therefore, the community views Project BRAVE as supporting and complementing other community-based efforts rather than diverting important resources from existing goals.

While the above factors are specific to this community and project, interventions addressing multiple-level factors, which contribute to or protect against youth violence, are more likely to be successful if they identify and build on similar, pre-existing community strengths.

Next Steps
The success of the Project BRAVE pilot suggests that schools and communities can build on pre-existing relationships, use local methods to understand and address violence, and meaningfully involve youth as part of the solution. With future funding, Project BRAVE will be replicated in the school

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and a community component will be added to support community-based solutions to youth violence. Additional evaluation methods will include school and community surveys to measure change in student-related variables (e.g., school attachment, social support) and community-level variables (e.g., collective efficacy, community empowerment). Longer-term outcomes (e.g., violent behavior, crime rates) will also be monitored to further understand the project's impact. The preliminary results of the school-based pilot, presented here, are a promising indicator of future success and an example of how community-based participatory approaches can involve youth to address community violence and health.

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1. These census data were compiled by the Greater New Orleans Community Data Center and accessed in January 2004 in the "Bywater District Profile," available at *http://www.gnocdc.org.*

2. School Information and Achievement Profiles, Frederick Douglass High School. Available at: *http://www.nops.k12.la.us/.* Accessed January 2004.

3. These data were obtained from an unpublished study conducted by the Louisiana Office of Public Health, Injury Research and Prevention Office in collaboration with the Orleans Parish Coroner's Office.

4. For a discussion on standardized testing and school accountability, see the National Education Association's article at *http://www.nea.org/accountability/index.html* (accessed March 2005).

Developing a Statewide Model of Youth Activism in Violence Prevention

A Tale of Program Development and Evaluation

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The YouthPeace®/SisterNet® model was developed by the Illinois Center for Violence Prevention, a statewide nonprofit organization, to build a movement of young people who want to be educated, active leaders in violence prevention and peacemaking in their families, schools, and communities. This article presents the program model and lessons author learned about developing youth activists in violence prevention.

A Positive Youth Development Approach to Preventing Violence

Experts in the field of youth violence have advocated that programs emphasize factors that promote positive youth development—such as leadership and community involvement—in addition to focusing on problem prevention (Catalano et. al, 1998). Indeed, the practice of positive youth development is crucial to the effectiveness of violence prevention programming for a variety of reasons:

- By adopting a positive youth development approach, we recognize young people as experts on the needs of their communities; empower them to become change agents; and give them the opportunity to engage in non-violent activities.

- By exposing youth to leadership roles, protective factors that promote non-violent behavior increase and risk factors for violent behavior decrease.

- The practice of positive youth development helps youth to develop their strengths, which serve as a protective factor in violence prevention.

- Positive youth development is especially developmentally appropriate during adolescence—a life stage in which the peer group has a greater influence than adults, and in which youth are more likely to engage in collaborative decision making and action if their peers are involved (Zeldin et al., 2000). Adolescents are more likely to develop and implement interventions when working with and for their peers to create a violence prevention movement.

The following section describes the YouthPeace and SisterNet programs, which model the Illinois Center for Violence Prevention (ICVP) framework that combines positive youth development with violence prevention.

The YouthPeace and SisterNet Program Model

YouthPeace, ICVP's statewide youth initiative, has provided opportunities for young men and women to be actively involved in developing and implementing violence prevention strategies since 1995. SisterNet, the girls' component, was created in 1998 as a response to gender-based violence, particularly around the need for girls to have a safe space. Both programs reach 12- to 21-year-olds across Illinois, and reflect the region's ethnic, socio-economic, and geographic diversity.

YouthPeace and SisterNet follow a similar program model (see Figure 1 on page 56), in which ICVP builds partnerships with adult sponsors and community organizations to develop local youth chapters. Their goal is to implement "actions" designed and implemented by young people to prevent violence within their communities. Actions have included one-time events such as conferences, peer-led trainings, community beautification events, and community rallies; and ongoing programs such as mentoring younger children and opening a store for teen parents. SisterNet incorporates gender-specific training that addresses violence by and against women.

These programs give a voice to the large group of young people who are ordinarily excluded or marginalized—including persons of color, immigrants, and impoverished communities. Some chapters help teen mothers, while others focus on adolescents involved with the juvenile justice system and/or youth who have been directly impacted by violence.

ICVP provides ongoing trainings and technical assistance around violence prevention to youth members and their adult sponsors. After the training, youth participants and their local chapters must follow four steps:

1. *Define the community.* In this first critical step, youth decide whom their subsequent actions will target.

2. *Conduct an assessment of the community's assets and needs related to violence.* This assessment allows youth to better understand how issues of violence are experienced locally. As part of the assessment, youth members are expected to approach parents, friends, neighbors, and representatives from community organizations, thus developing collaborative relationships with community members and agencies as well as collecting information.

> [The YouthPeace and SisterNet programs] give a voice to the large group of young people who are ordinarily excluded or marginalized—including persons of color, immigrants, and impoverished communities.

3. *Plan an action.* Based on what youth learn from their assessment in Step 2, the chapter collaborates with other community groups to implement a local approach dedicated to preventing violence. Chapters have targeted issues such as racism, gang violence, teen dating violence, child abuse/child safety, and the effects of poverty on communities. Actions include presenting plays on relevant themes, peer-mentoring, and establishing "PeaceZones" to reclaim neighborhood areas from drug dealers. Each chapter conducts at least one action per year.

4. *Reflect on activism experience and think about future actions.* In this final phase, adult sponsors help youth members to reflect on and apply what they have learned from their actions. For instance, in their first year, a new chapter might implement an action focusing solely on their own group members. Through reflective learning about this initial activism experience, youth are encouraged to individually and collectively address the deeper, underlying causes of violence, such as discrimination or poverty, through implementing new actions.

The Role of Evaluation in Program Development

A participatory evaluation helps to ensure that stakeholders are invested in the evaluation process from the beginning and that the evaluation process and results will help to refine the program model. Such an approach was developed for YouthPeace and SisterNet. Program staff, organization administrators, youth chapter members, and adult sponsors were included

FIGURE 1. YOUTHPEACE/SISTERNET PROGRAM LOGIC MODEL

Program Activities Provided by ICVP

Outreach/Recruitment to and from local chapters

Monthly on-site trainings with local youth members

Trainings for Adult Sponsors

Annual youth retreats

Short-Term Outcomes

- Raising youth participants' awareness of diversity

- Increasing youth participants' knowledge of the root causes of violence

- Youth participants will understand the purpose of YP/SN

- Youth participants will develop positive relationships with other young people and adults

Immediate Outcomes

Chapter will define their community

Chapter will identify community assets and needs

Chapter will create Action Plan

Long-Term Outcomes

- Empowerment of youth as change agents

- Youth engage in activism (local, regional, statewide) around issues of violence

- Chapters increase social networks in local communities

- Youth will increase some protective factors

Ultimate Outcomes

- Consciousness raising of the "isms" (i.e., sexism, racism, adultism)

- Actions decrease the incidence of violence in Illinois

- Societal change around youth violence prevention

- Increase youth engagement throughout social institutions

- Increase social capital

Sense of belonging to a group

Chapter Will Implement Action

New Chapters:
Actions might target change at the immediate group level

Experienced Chapters:
Actions might target change at the broader community and social institutions level

Chapter reflects on the action

Increased chapter efficacy

Chapter demonstrates community leadership skills

Chapter demonstrates community organizing skills

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in the process. This approach provided an opportunity for program staff to utilize the evaluation process and results, including raising relevant questions that helped members identify how to engage young people in community mobilization and activism. The section "Lessons Learned Thus Far" highlights these questions and explores how the YouthPeace/SisterNet staff modified the program in response.

Evaluation Methodology

The YouthPeace/SisterNet program evaluation was designed as a three-year project. The first year (2002–2003) was an in-depth process evaluation, which examined the program's capacity-building model of chapter development and whether the program was meeting intended benchmarks. The second year (2003–2004) focused on assessing the short-term and intermediate program outcomes, to determine to what degree chapters were moving through each of the program phases to complete an action (see Figure 1). The final year (2004–2005) is focused on assessing the intermediate and long-term program outcomes. Since each evaluation phase had a different purpose, slightly different methodologies were implemented, as described below.

Year One. During the first year, the evaluation staff worked closely with the YouthPeace/SisterNet staff to develop a logic model and identify key program benchmarks. Once we established benchmarks, we developed a program-monitoring database and conducted case studies with four sample chapters. The case study component included observing chapter meetings and actions as well as interviewing both adult sponsors and youth members.

Year Two. Monitoring program benchmarks continued in the second evaluation year. We conducted interviews with a youth representative and the adult sponsor from each chapter at the beginning and end of the program year to better understand how their chapter moved through each of the program phases. To assess changes in knowledge (the short-term program outcomes), we administered a pre/post survey with youth participants. We also incorporated the program's youth empowerment philosophy into the evaluation by establishing a youth evaluation team. Five YouthPeace/SisterNet members collaborated to design and implement a program evaluation that complemented the work of adult evaluators.

Year Three. This year, we continue to monitor program benchmarks while building the capacity of program staff to maintain the database for program and evaluation purposes. In addition, we are reviewing program documents

collected by the program staff and observing chapter meetings. At a sample of chapters, youth remain involved by evaluating the impact of their actions on their identified communities.

Lessons Learned Thus Far

Based on our participatory evaluation process to date, the program staff and evaluators have learned several key lessons about developing youth activists in violence prevention. This section outlines these lessons and highlights questions raised by members.

Creating social change. Addressing complex social issues in communities, such as preventing violence, is inherently challenging—even for adult human service professionals. Thus, for youth engaging in violence prevention efforts, we should acknowledge that this is a complex and long-term learning process. It is unrealistic to expect that young people will fully comprehend how to create social change in a short-term, annual timeframe. It may take several community action experiences to raise youth's consciousness and deepen their understanding of social change.

The program model has evolved to address this long-term reality. During the first year of the evaluation, the benchmarks revealed that several chapters had not progressed through the four-step program process (defining their community; assessing needs and resources; implementing an action; reflecting on the action) in the course of a year. For instance, some chapters tried to implement such a highly complex, time-consuming assessment in the first phase that it prevented them from moving to the action-planning phase. Other chapters skipped the assessment phase altogether, and went right into planning actions without deeper consideration of their community's needs. To address this challenge, program staff is encouraged to:

> It is unrealistic to expect that young people will fully comprehend how to create social change in a short-term, annual timeframe. It may take several community action experiences to raise youth's consciousness and deepen their understanding of social change.

- Discuss the program model with youth members, so they more fully understand how each program phase contributes to the next step of the process.

- Develop guidelines to help youth members move through the program phases in a feasible and timely way, striking a balance between structure and flexibility. For example, we redesigned the community assessment phase with more structured tasks to guide youth through the steps to completion. While youth still determine what community issues to focus on in the assessment (e.g., teen dating violence, family relationships, gang violence), they now can follow a feasible method to gather pertinent information.

- Increase the amount of training opportunities for both youth members and adult sponsors. Sufficient time needs to be allotted for youth and adults to learn about the complex topics of creating social change and preventing violence and to build relevant skills. In addition to onsite monthly trainings for chapters, the program staff provides more in-depth quarterly trainings for adult sponsors.

- View the YouthPeace/SisterNet program as a multi-year model. As noted, young people typically need multiple activism experiences to make the connection between what their chapter is doing and how it relates to social change. One youth commented:

  Since we've received training, we're more like patient with it and we actually look at what we're doing . . . when we first started out, we were really talking about stuff we wanted to do or stuff we thought the community would like. But now, we take our time and go through all the processes, see surveys, have a little meeting, and see what the community really wants, and see what they really need and stuff.

How can we make activism developmentally appropriate for youth? During the first year of evaluation, we recognized that activism and community development concepts were not always clear to young people, nor did youth readily see such concepts as relevant to their chapter. For example, evaluators asked youth what the term "activism" meant to them. Many interpreted it as an extra-curricular activity such as sports, hobbies, or clubs. In interviews, youth also struggled to define the word "community." Whereas adults might describe community as a geographic area, some youth defined it as their immediate friends or local chapter. With these different interpretations, we realized that the concept of community has to be an explicit program component to help youth understand their target audience.

To address this challenge, we restructured the community assessment component. Now, before chapters work on community assessments, individual youth must create a personal asset map, which is a helpful lead-in activity to the more abstract community-level assessment. In addition, to build a sense of collective and individual efficacy, the program staff and adult sponsors encourage a "small wins" approach: Newer chapters select smaller-scale, manageable projects that motivate them to pursue future activism efforts.

How do we prepare youth to address challenges in community mobilization? Several chapters planned actions that met with opposition. In one example, a chapter in a school setting wanted to assess teachers' and students' violence prevention needs and use the results to facilitate discussions between students and administration about realistic changes. However, the school administration did not support these efforts and would not allow students to survey the teachers—a frustrating setback for the youth.

In another example, a chapter was working with their sponsoring organization to open a community teen center. At first, the city gave the group positive feedback about purchasing land in the neighborhood. Several months later, however, the chapter learned that the city had promised the land to another organization. Despite an initial sense of defeat, the adult sponsors and youth developed an advocacy campaign. The young people created more than 2,000 postcards that community members mailed to city officials. Eventually, the chapter was able to purchase the land and continues to work on a plan for opening a teen center.

How do we get young people to move from doing service projects to understanding community change? While successfully planning and implementing a community service project may provide valuable experiential learning, reflection is needed to allow participants to see how that project connects to social change at a deeper level. The evaluation results showed that youth members did not always see their action in a broader context of violence prevention. Some actions were either indirectly or not specifically designed to prevent violence. For example, one action involved visiting a women's domestic violence shelter. When asked what they did at the center, a youth representative said,

> We listened to a 911 tape that a little girl made. We helped fold some clothes up, then we talked with some of the women and we watched a movie. The movie was about the women who were getting abused and the men who were abusing them.

Although this was a valuable learning experience, the chapter did not take this information to the next level of using it to prevent violence in their community.

During the first two years of the evaluation, program staff struggled to balance two factors—ensuring that the program was "youth-driven" while ensuring that actions were focused on community violence prevention and not just fun service projects. Consequently, ICVP staff empowered a panel of experienced YouthPeace/SisterNet members, known as PeaceLeaders, to help chapters connect their actions to community change. They developed pre-action criteria to guide the actions in the right direction, and required chapters to submit a pre-action evaluation form to the PeaceLeader panel for review. This process of receiving feedback from their peers about their planned action helped chapter members keep the focus on preventing violence. Program staff also redesigned the reflection piece of the curriculum, allowing structured time for chapter members to evaluate the success of their action by asking, for instance, what they might have done differently or whether their action addressed the assessed community need.

What role do adult allies have in Community Youth Development? Even as young people become more directly involved in community mobilization, adult allies play a critical role. Since the YouthPeace/SisterNet program relies on local adult sponsors to guide and support youth, the sponsor's skills and style impacts that chapter's ability to navigate the program model. The case studies conducted in our first year revealed that adult sponsors have a range of approaches to working with young people—we called it a "youth-driven continuum." At one extreme of the continuum were sponsors who provided minimal support and guidance and let the young people be in charge. At the other extreme were sponsors whose approach was adult- rather than youth-driven: They developed meeting agendas, facilitated the meetings, and developed the action idea. We found that chapters with adult sponsors at either extreme of this continuum had a difficult time navigating the program, while those in which adult sponsors were around the middle were most successful in completing their actions and having a positive experience.

To better define the adult sponsor role, the program was modified in two ways. First, we provided more direct training for adult sponsors in core content areas such as "violence prevention 101" and "youth as activists." Second, adult sponsors received training on how to *support* rather than *direct* young people through the phases of the program model, with program staff modeling appropriate ways to achieve this during on-site trainings.

Conclusion

The YouthPeace/SisterNet program evaluation provided us with an opportunity to look critically at what it means to develop youth activists in the violence prevention movement. The participatory evaluation approach allowed the process to be used for program improvements. Over the course of the evaluation, the data raised several key questions, as articulated in the proceeding section.

The participatory evaluation process was invaluable in helping program staff and participants reflect upon these challenges as we work toward towards guiding youth to become activists in community violence prevention.

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Know Y.A. R.O.O.T.S.:
A Youth Empowerment Program
for Violence Prevention

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This article describes Know Y.A. R.O.O.T.S., a summer program developed to minimize the effects of violence on a group of African-American adolescents from the Civic Park neighborhood in Flint, Michigan. The goal of the group was to raise consciousness about racial identity and social issues that influence violence in our communities.

Know Y.A. R.O.O.T.S. (Young Adults Recognizing, redefining and reclaiming Our Own True Safe-havens) is a culturally relevant, community-based collaborative effort whose mission is to reduce the effect of violence among African-American youth in Flint, Michigan and empower youth to become active adult citizens and public advocates. Part of the Youth Violence Prevention Center, Know Y.A. R.O.O.T.S. (KYR) drew from community change strategies such as mass mobilization, social action, citizen participation, and public advocacy (Checkoway, 1995), empowerment theory (Zimmerman, 2000; Peterson and Zimmerman, 2004), and participatory action research (Israel et al., 1998).

Planting the Seeds of Change on Fertile Ground
The Ruth Mott Community Health Scholars/Explorers (Ruth Mott) program annually invites about 12 Flint-area high school students (Explorers), selected by local community-based organizations (CBOs), to attend a summer program for under-represented, college-bound minority

students at the University of Michigan (UM). In addition to the in-residence program, Explorers work on community health issues at their host CBOs under the guidance of a "community health scholar" (a UM School of Public Health master's student).

The Youth Violence Prevention Center (YVPC) in Flint was a participating CBO for Ruth Mott in 2002. Building on a pre-existing community-university partnership, the YVPC implemented a summer youth program in the Civic Park neighborhood in 2002. The KYR segment of the YVPC summer program included several components to explore safe spaces and other issues related to violence prevention, including an ethnic identity development curriculum, photovoice (a research technique), neighborhood mapping, focus group discussions, and informal interviews of adult key informants.

Prior to entering the Civic Park neighborhood, the Ruth Mott group was trained in the Photovoice research technique and needs assessment methodologies at UM. The Explorers were joined by young adults recruited from the community to form a group of 11 young people under the direction of author Rashid Njai, a Ruth Mott community health scholar.

The group met for nine sessions over three weeks. The curriculum focused on violence and its impact on the African-American community (Mattaini, 2001; Sydlo et al., 2000; Faison and Ingram, 2003). Sessions consisted of ethnic identity development modules, a neighborhood walk-through "photo shoot," reflective writings, drawings, debriefing discussion groups, community asset mapping, informed observation, and other topics and techniques (see Table 1). The group defined three themes of interest: ownership, crossing boundaries, and collective action.

The ethnic identity module infused contextual and cultural reality into the YVPC's efforts (Faison and Ingram, 2003), challenging the youth to think about the relationship between blackness in America and the violence in their community. The Photovoice process provided cameras for participants to take photographs that spoke to the effects of violence in their lives (Wang and Burris, 1997). The group then discussed and wrote about the photographs. Images and narratives from a Photovoice project are powerful advocacy tools (Wang et al., 2004). Figures 1, 2, and 3 (see pages 72, 73, and 74) provide examples of products from our Photovoice project.

The youth research team also conducted email interviews with community leaders and officials, which focused on conditions that contribute to, or help to prevent, youth violence. The photographs, reflective writings and drawings, discussion group records, neighborhood mapping, and interview records were compiled, analyzed (when applicable), and used to guide and illustrate a comprehensive youth-derived community plan.

TABLE 1. KNOW Y.A. R.O.O.T.S COMPONENTS

Thematic Focus	*Program Activities and Objectives*
Week 1&2 (July 8–19):	
Know Thy Self Academic, professional, and personal enrichment. Culture Focus: Overview of African/African-American history.	Background and introduction to public health and violence prevention and the ethnic identity curriculum; research methods training. (Photovoice and asset mapping); exploring Ann Arbor as an example of a youth-informed organization/environment; college preparatory training sessions.
Week 3 (July 22–26):	
Artistic Reflection Photovoice Culture Focus: African/ African-American art and artisans.	"Photo shoot" of neighborhood; neighborhood walk-through tour and asset note taking; creative writing sessions.
Week 4 (July 29–August 2):	
Oral Tradition Focus Groups Culture Focus: African-American music, poets, and orators.	Creative writing sessions and focus group discussions about safe spaces and other issues surrounding violence prevention and coping strategies.
Week 5 (August 5–9):	
Mapping the Village Asset Mapping Culture Focus: Notable African-American scholars and activists.	Community asset mapping, "key informant" interviews, and artistic expression around experiences of violence and community solutions; continue poetry, drawing, free writes, and discussion.
Week 6 (August 12–17):	
Community Voice Wrap-up, presentations, future directions Culture Focus: Speaking across generations.	Review, debrief, and create research overview; present findings to YVPC steering committee; prepare presentation for Ruth Mott closing ceremony.

Cultivating Change

The prevalence of violence within the African-American community in Flint is significant, somewhat higher than the statewide statistics (Michigan Department of Community Health, 2000), and exacerbated by recent political and economic turmoil in Flint— including increased school closings, high unemployment rates, population decline, state receivership due to serious fiscal problems, and the recall of its mayor. The program approach contained several key components that encouraged peaceful behavior and discouraged violence (Caldwell et al., 2004), including enhancing racial pride, attachment to positive role models, engendering family and civic responsibility, and educational attainment.

Minority adolescents may be especially vulnerable to violence because they must handle the developmental challenges of adolescence in addition to the pressure of growing up as a member of an oppressed minority group (Wilson, 1992). Thus the achievement of a healthy and positive ethnic identity is extremely important to the psychological well being of ethnic minority youth (Muuss, 1996). Pro-social and positive ethnic messages/images (e.g., Langston Hughes, Aaron McGruder's "Boondocks" comic strip), politically conscious hip-hop music (e.g., KRS-One, Mos Def, Common), and culturally specific accounts of the effects of violence (e.g., enslaved African narratives, modern media accounts of violence against blacks) were used to enhance the program's appeal to African-American adolescents (Bennett, 1996) and to place the program in a relevant context for participating teens.

At the same time, it was important for youth to explore the relationship between being black and the violence they encounter in their daily lives. Violence prevention within black communities requires sensitivity to the cultural oppression and alienation that African-American youth encounter (Caldwell et al., 2004). A realistic evaluation of African-Americans' societal status may help decrease the likelihood that a person experiencing discrimination will internalize the occurrence (Caldwell, et al., 2004).

Part of the KYR strategy, grounded in the work of Paulo Freire, was to help participants become aware of the roles and effects of historical, institutional, social, and political legacies in their community (Freire, 1973; Wang et al., 2004). In addition, the program was designed to help adolescents connect to the larger society, integrate with their peers, foster a stronger bond between them and their community, and help them understand how to mobilize the community to promote positive self images and peaceful behaviors (Stern and Smith, 1999; Kuperminc et al., 1996). The KYR program also focused in a culturally sensitive manner on four of the five major tasks of adolescent development: autonomy, achievement, identi-

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ty, and intimacy (Phinney et al., 1990) and the development of a positive concept of adulthood. Teen participants worked with caring adults to communicate their feelings about race, sociopolitical issues, and the connections between race and violence.

Reaping What You Sow

Program participants learned valuable lessons about building relationships and a sense of community as they developed an empowered organization. YVPC was a critical partner in addressing implementation limits and problems.

Relationships and community building. Relationship building was a motivating factor as well as a learning opportunity in KYR. Indeed, relationships with community leaders, activists, and other youth were the foundation for youth empowerment and the KYR collaborative process.

Explicit discussion of group norms and values helped to develop group members' collective and individual identities. We successfully established a sense of community as people of African descent, connected by our commitment to minimize the effect of violence on our lives and on our community. KYR's "bottom-up" emphasis on mutual respect, ownership, and emotional investment allowed the youth, with the help of adult facilitators, to understand the issues and articulate them in presentations to community leaders. By adhering to an assets-based approach, we were able to build on the community's strengths and resources to promote a learning process that attended to social inequalities in the youths' lives (Israel et al., 1998).

The empowered organization. Another goal of the program was to develop an empowered youth organization (Peterson and Zimmerman, 2004), which may be vital for creating a youth community that can critically examine the causes, consequences, and prevention of violence (Fals-Borda, 2001). Several factors contributed to the successful application of empowerment theory in the KYR program:

- *Youth involvement.* Youth owned the program, took leadership roles, and developed skills. Explorers were involved in almost every aspect of the KYR project, including the decision to examine the problem of violence in Flint's African-American community. They helped to recruit neighborhood youth to participate in the program, developed a research agenda, conducted focus groups, mapped neighborhood safe spaces, and interpreted the results. Ultimately, the Scholar, Explorers, and neighborhood youth group developed an action plan to create safe spaces, environments, and attitudes in the neighborhood.

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- *Photovoice.* The Photovoice project enhanced youth involvement and commitment to the program and helped participants reflect and act upon their personal and community strengths.

- *Effective communication.* Critical dialogue enabled youth to build and strengthen relationships and to have a voice with local policy makers.

- *Participatory Evaluation.* Program assessment was built around empowerment evaluation, a community-based participatory approach that aims to foster self-determination and improvement and skill building in program participants and administrators (Fetterman, 1996).

Program limitations. Throughout the summer we faced a number of logistical problems, including finding a location for the daily program, developing film in order to view photos in a timely manner, and accounting for unexpected expenses. YVPC helped to solve these problems and otherwise supported the KYR approach. The KYR-YVPC relationship was pivotal in our attempts to create a learning community for preventing youth violence. YVPC provided needed support while also relinquishing control, so that genuine youth empowerment could emerge.

Time was the biggest obstacle we faced during the summer pilot program. Prior to recruiting additional youth members for KYR, the core group had planned specific daily activities. After recruitment and the initiation of the program, however, it was difficult to complete the planned activities. As a result, the KYR core group reorganized some program components, such as combining Photovoice picture taking with qualitative data collection for our needs assessment and asset mapping objectives. Given more time, we would have been able to progress further, allowing for more critical analysis of the emerging themes by the program participants.

Lessons Learned

The KYR program provided an opportunity for sharing power and coping with violence. Professionals may need special training and an open mind to prepare them for the level of intensity and rigor necessary to conduct and implement a grassroots, community-based program that truly engages youth. Community work is not a cookbook process. Professionals must not only be able to relinquish control in order to empower the community, they also must remain fully engaged in order to lend assistance, share knowledge, and facilitate legitimacy. The roles of learner and teacher shift across generations and through program activities.

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Lee Bell (belll@umich.edu) has over 17 years experience as a community organizer and is the local leader of Youth Violence Prevention Center in Flint, Michigan. He represents the YVPC on local committees and coordinates the Center's activities with related initiatives and programs. As an officer of the Flint/Genesee County Neighborhood Roundtable, a voluntary organization of associations and block clubs that coordinates activities, his work influences policy and promotes community development.

Figure 1. ALIENS
by Sonsat Tom-Quinn

I see two people walking.
These people live in the world that we all live in
but they are not part of it.
Our lives are all intertwined.
One cannot be a part of our world without being
a part of another person's world.
We are aliens for a number of reasons.
We are aliens because we are of a different race,
because we wear our hair differently,
or simply because our hair is different.
We can eliminate the status of being aliens by
learning to accept anyone else's differences.

Figure 2. The So-Called Park
by Shalane McFarlane

I see a park with nothing to play with. There's no grass.
It's only a little and there's trash on the ground.
The kids in the community don't have anything to do
except get into trouble.
This relates to my life because I have to look at it every day.
How can people call this a park?
All I see is drug dealers and hear the dogs bark
It's so sad that I sometimes feel bad
The kids have nowhere to play
They have to stay at home all day
The slide is all dirty and the swings could break any day
'Cause they're really not steady
The parks were made for the kids
But now they're just taking up space
Now when kids go they feel out of place
But we should fix the community
So all the boys and girls can come together in unity

Figure 3. Voices of a Desolate Pile
by Leda Turner

A massive pile of garbage lies in front of an abandoned home. At first glance, I think the people who once lived here left this behind. A neighbor enlightens us all—and explains that when the previous tenants moved out, the neighbors all began to dump their trash there.

This pile speaks to me and the voices all say—it just takes one. One person to lead the crowd. One person to stand up. Everyone else will just follow behind them. Most likely one neighbor dumped his/her trash there and a few more followed their lead. All it takes is one. So why are we all still sitting here? Why are we just taking pictures of the trash rather than picking it up? The answer remains the same: All it takes is one.

In life we all play different roles. Few people lead but many follow. So many people sit around waiting for someone else to do something—someone else to lead. It's a lot easier to follow than to lead. Still, all it takes is one. One person, one hour, one effort, one day, one chance—you could be that one.

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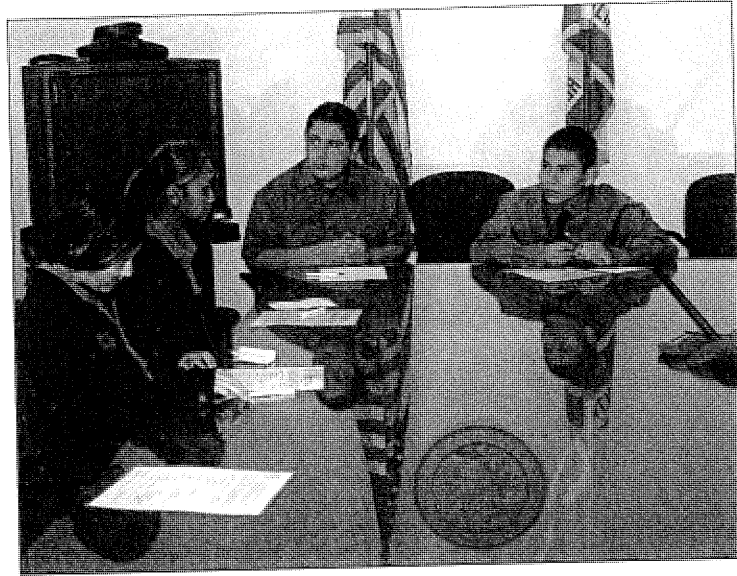
Law and Order San Diego
Teen Court Metes Out Restorative Justice

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San Diego Teen Court is a program based on the belief that youth are a valuable, underutilized resource in the justice system. The program empowers youth to learn about the challenges facing their peers and to help generate creative solutions and consequences that address those challenges. Teen Court prevents future delinquent and criminal behavior and reinforces positive youth development for both the offenders and volunteers.
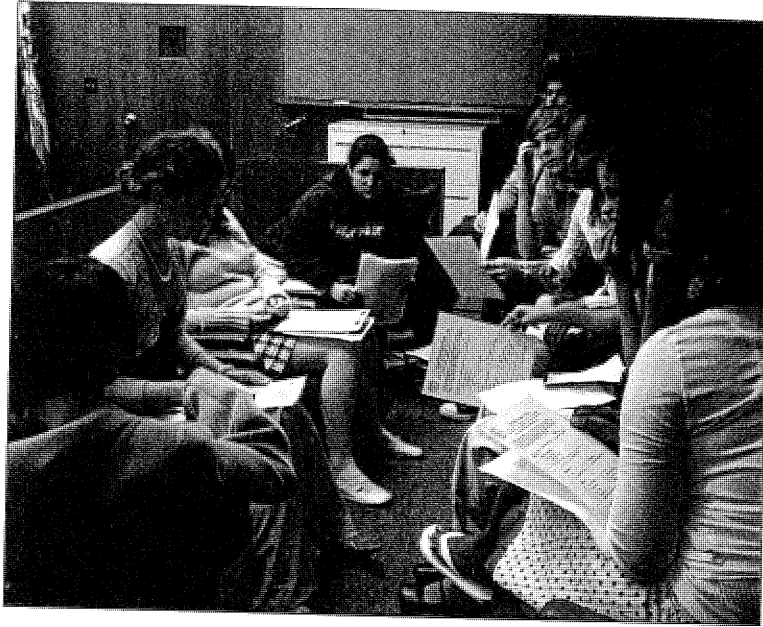
Twelve students re-enter a courtroom. "Has the jury agreed on a sentence?" A judge questions the group. A member of the jury steps up to the microphone. "Yes, your honor, we have. We the jury suggest a sentence of 30 hours of community service and mandatory enrollment in a substance abuse workshop." Murmurs and quiet sighs of disappointment and victory echo throughout the courtroom. "Court adjourned." With these final words, the judge pounds the gavel and the defendant's sentence is final. This scenario may seem like a parody from an episode of Law and Order, but, in actuality, this is a typical procedure in a hearing of the San Diego Teen Court (Teen Court).

—Aletta Cooke, 18, Teen Court Volunteer

Cynthia,[1] 15 years old, was arrested at school for public drunkenness and possession of marijuana. Sent to Teen Court by her arresting officer, she has now completed her sentence and declares, "This program made [me] realize that anything at school besides school is a bad idea." Cynthia is now getting good grades and realizes that the friends she chooses will make a difference in the path her life takes.

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San Diego Teen Court is an innovative juvenile justice and delinquency prevention program run by youth and for youth. In it, first-time juvenile offenders accept responsibility for the crime they have committed and agree to a binding sentence imposed by a jury of their peers—high school students from around San Diego County. Juvenile offenders who are sent to Teen Court appear and testify before a jury of their peers, fulfill their sentence, and re-appear before their peers to explain what they learned from the Teen Court experience.

Since September 2001, Teen Court juries have sentenced more than 250 juvenile offenders, and more than 4,300 high school students from more than 20 schools have received invaluable restorative justice training. For this work, San Diego Teen Court received a special commendation from the San Diego County Grand Jury in 2004.

Background

Teen Court currently serves the City of San Diego, an extremely diverse community with increasing needs and decreasing resources. For the many first-time juvenile offenders in San Diego, few options exist outside the traditional punitive court and probation system. Some offenders who are sent through the traditional system are not given meaningful sanctions due to the backlog suffered throughout that system. When it does mete out sanctions, the traditional system may be unjust (e.g., when a youth does not have adequate representation) or overly punitive.

As summarized in Table 1 (see page 80), findings from a Youth Risk Behavior Survey conducted by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention show that youth in San Diego are engaging in behaviors that place them at higher risk for involvement with the juvenile justice system (Grunbaum et al., 2003).

These data illustrate the need for more prevention resources to divert youth from criminal activity. The opportunity to prevent further juvenile crime in San Diego begins the moment a youth comes into contact with a police officer. The San Diego Police Department (SDPD) has expressed in its mission and strategic plan the importance of juvenile crime prevention and diversion. Within SDPD, juvenile diversion is a community-based alternative to the formal court system. It targets youth ages 10 – 17 who have been taken into custody for misdemeanor crimes. However, few diversion opportunities, especially those specifically designed for first-time offenders, are available, within either San Diego law enforcement agencies or the traditional juvenile justice system. Among the existing programs, all except Teen Court focus solely on the offender and do not include prevention for the

Table 1. Youth Risk Behavior Survey, San Diego Unified School District, 2003 (n=1811)	
Students in San Diego responded that they . . .	**% of youth reporting**
Had at least one drink of alcohol during the 30 days preceding the survey	38.5%
Were so sad or hopeless almost every day for two consecutive weeks or more during the 30 days preceding the survey that they stopped doing some usual activities	31.1%
Carried a weapon such as a gun, knife, or club on one or more days during the 30 days preceding the survey	14.7%
Were in a physical fight one or more times during the 30 days preceding the survey	35.5%
Used marijuana one or more times during their life	42.5%
Were offered, sold, or given an illegal drug on school property by someone during the past 12 months	41.1%

larger population of youth. Teen Court serves as SDPD's primary diversion opportunity for first-time juvenile offenders. Within the next year, Teen Court will expand its program to also serve other San Diego County law enforcement agencies. This youth-initiated and youth-centric outreach program is a nexus between offenders and non-offenders where clear standards for behavior are conveyed, harm is repaired, and where future criminal and delinquent behavior is prevented.

How Teen Court Works
Teen Court consists of multiple components. The cases heard in Teen Court vary from substance abuse and fighting in public to minor possession of an air gun.

Training high school volunteers. San Diego offers numerous opportunities to become involved in all aspects of Teen Court. Whatever the interest of a volunteer, there is a position available. Teen Court staff and volunteers train local high school students to serve as jurors, bailiffs, attorneys, and clerks for juvenile sentencing hearings. During training, students learn about the juvenile justice system and principles of restorative justice. Restorative

justice teaches that instead of issuing sentences merely to punish offenders, sentences should enable offenders to repair the harm their actions have caused for victims, their community, themselves, and their parents.

According to 18-year-old veteran Teen Court volunteer Aletta Cooke, teen attorneys have the most demanding training procedures. Following a brief introduction to the goals, values, and principles of Teen Court, aspiring teen attorneys spend a day with volunteer adult attorneys familiarizing themselves with the basic functions and routines of a general court session. After this introduction, the novice attorneys are asked to review a sample case, to hone their analytical strategies and become familiar with the structure of a court case. When the novices have presented their first case in court, they are officially labeled "attorneys." There are also training sessions for the court bailiff and the court clerk.

Hearing sessions. After completing the training, students apply what they've learned to actual court settings where, with the exception of an adult judge to supervise, the courtroom is entirely youth-led and the sentences imposed on juvenile offenders are binding. Sentencing options include letters of apology to victims and parents, workshops related to the offense, community service, curfews, and Teen Court jury duty.

After the hearing. After a verdict is received, the defendant and his or her parents or guardian meet with an adult volunteer case manager, who serves as an informal probation officer for the program. The case manager explains the sentence, provides guidance and deadlines for each item, and specifies contact information for referral resources. The case managers also serve as mentors for the defendants, most of whom are considered high-risk youth.

If a defendant successfully completes his or her sentence within 90 days, the San Diego Police Department "closes" the file, leaving the minor without a criminal record. On the other hand, a defendant who fails to fulfill the imposed sentence or is re-arrested on another charge before the expiration of the 90-day sentencing period is referred back to the Police Department and/or Juvenile Court.

Why Teen Court Works

Like other teen courts around the country, San Diego Teen Court provides alternative sentencing options such as restitution, apology letters, jury duty, and research papers. Teen Court programs "may be preferable to the normal juvenile justice process in jurisdictions that do not, or cannot, provide meaningful sanctions for all young, first-time juvenile offenders" (Butts et

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al., 2002). Teen Court out-performs the traditional system in terms of recidivism and other pro-social behaviors where, under the same circumstances, offenders in the traditional system would receive nothing more than a warning or be dismissed (Butts et al., 2002).

Schneider (1990) suggests that a restorative justice model that incorporates restitution and service by juvenile offenders creates a greater sense of citizenship and remorse, thus decreasing the likelihood of re-offending. One of the most highly regarded successes of Teen Court is its low recidivism rate of 8.4 percent.[2]

Teen Court also instills principles of restorative justice and the importance of civic participation among its high school volunteers. In addition, Teen Court volunteers educate, adjudicate, and mentor their peers, and learn about the juvenile justice system. Student volunteers in Teen Court programs are, therefore, deterred from delinquency as a result of witnessing the consequences of the cases they encounter in court (Nessel, 2000).

Principles of Restorative Justice

In March 2000, the American Probation and Parole Association convened a focus group to examine the role of restorative justice in teen court programs. According to the subsequent report (Godwin, 2001):

> [Programs that include a focus on the principles of restorative justice provide] more effective services for respondents, victims, and the community; better respondent accountability; increased skills and competencies for respondents; improved relationships among respondents and their families, friends, victims, and community; and more meaningful community involvement in solving local problems.

In addition,

> [Youth volunteers are] exposed to a new way of thinking about justice, thus increasing the educational experience that teen courts can provide to them by raising their awareness of the effects of crime and facilitating the development of their empathy toward others.

As noted earlier, the restorative justice model incorporates restitution and service by juvenile offenders, both creating a greater sense of citizenship and remorse and decreasing the likelihood of re-offense. In San Diego, the principles of restorative justice are the foundation for the entire Teen Court process, from experiential learning and training for student volunteers, to sentencing options and case management for defendants. Not only do Teen

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Court youth volunteers apply the principles of restorative justice to hold offenders accountable for their behavior; sentences also reinforce protective factors, clear standards for behavior, and connection with pro-social community members.

The Teen Court youth volunteers and defendants are both male and female; attend diverse high schools from across San Diego; and represent all economic, religious, and ethnic backgrounds. As a result of their participation in Teen Court, many high school students consider legal careers. Often, youth volunteers ask to participate more than once. In fact, one group of students organized a special Teen Court club at their high school so they could receive additional formal training, recruit their friends to participate, and volunteer at more court sessions. Teen Court also reinforces positive youth development by inviting all defendants back to participate in the program as jurors, bailiffs, court clerks, and attorneys.

Really Making an Impact

It only takes one visit to a Teen Court hearing to realize that the student volunteers take their responsibilities as attorneys, bailiffs, and jurors very seriously. According to Armando Mantecon, a 17-year-old high school senior who has not missed an evening Teen Court session since March 2003,

A Defendant's Story

For 16-year-old "Jonathan," the San Diego Teen Court program was a chance to avoid a permanent record following an arrest for petty theft. At first, he thought Teen Court was merely "a younger person's justice system." He did not realize how serious the punishments could be or how his peers would impose the consequences. Jonathan was impressed with the way the program was organized. He thought it was good for first-time offenders who had not done anything before, claiming the program can "wake them up."

Jonathan says that the experience of being a defendant in Teen Court helped him realize "what was really going on in the world and that my actions impact others." He understood that he needed to be held accountable for his actions, and believed that Teen Court was a "cool" way of helping him recognize his mistakes. Jonathan was sentenced to participate as a jury member in two future Teen Court cases. The jury gave him a relatively light sentence because, prior to coming to Teen Court, he had already written an apology letter. He currently performs community service, and has shown remorse. He thinks his sentence was fair and believes that Teen Court's sentences are generally fair: unlike in Juvenile Court, defendants have no permanent record.

For Jonathan, participating as a jury member in the Teen Court process was the most powerful part of the process. He felt he could understand more than other jury members because he'd been there:

> When I sat in on other cases and saw how the actions of the defendant impact parents and friends, I realized there was other stuff going on than just the arrest . . . it helps a lot to know the rest of the defendant's life to put things in perspective. [Under the same circumstances] I would not steal in the future because I now know the impact on others.

Jonathan continues to serve as a Teen Court juror and has participated five times since his own hearing session because he feels like he's helping others. "When people serve as jurors, they find out how much they can help others and it's cool to be part of that process," he says. Jonathan may serve as a youth attorney if he has time, and if the opportunity comes up. He doesn't want to just jump in before he fully understands the system. According to Jonathan, attorneys who understand how Teen Court works before serving will be better advocates for the defendant. He was well represented in his own case—his attorneys researched the case and took it (and him) seriously.

Jonathan's advice to other kids contemplating petty theft, or other juvenile offenses, is this:

> Look at the bigger picture and realize what the consequences are. Realize what other means there are to solve problems. [Restorative justice] means "you did something, but we want to help you so that you don't do it again." [Restorative Justice] is about gaining knowledge about subjects and learning from mistakes and experiences.

Being judged by youth is harsher than being judged by adults. Youth have a different perspective and are able to put things in perspective and give benefit of the doubt in instances where adults wouldn't. But at the same time, youth know when other youth are making excuses unreasonably.

Armando has always loved law enforcement and legal issues. When he graduates, he plans to go through the police academy and become a police officer. When his teacher offered him the chance to participate in Teen Court, he jumped at the opportunity:

At first I just wanted community service hours, but after I saw [Teen Court] I was struck by the fact that they are real people committing real crimes. I was there to make a strong impact on other youth. When I realized it wasn't mock trials, I realized I was really making an impact.

Before Teen Court, I thought that most of the less serious crimes (i.e., loitering) weren't all that big of a deal, but after seeing Teen Court I was really impacted and decided that "ditching" wasn't a good thing to do. Teen Court made me realize how dangerous it can be if you ditch and how the world works. Teen Court strengthened and reinforced my desire to go into law enforcement.

I've also gotten better grades as a result of Teen Court. [I used to get] D's and C's before, now I study harder and more and put more emphasis on grades. Now I get C's, B's, and A's.

Armando's favorite moment in Teen Court was when he got into an argument with the judge. Having a voice in the courtroom was empowering—part of the thrill of being an attorney, arguing facts, and advocating for defendants. His advice for future volunteers:

Go for it! It's a thrill. You'll love it. You'll meet great people. It will change your perspective of how you judge the world and the system of law.

And to potential defendants:

Think of the long-term effects of your actions. You might think you can get away with it at the time, but think of the long-term impact. Stay in school, get a job and contribute.

Teen Court's impact can be measured by increased numbers of youth participating in the program, improved recidivism among youth offenders, and increased knowledge about the juvenile justice system. But for those involved in Teen Court, the most powerful impacts are the profound insight gained by active participation in the juvenile justice system and enhanced self-efficacy as participants become active, productive, engaged citizens. Perhaps this innovative program can be a model for how adults can not only teach young people about their roles and responsibilities in society, but also how they can learn from them as well. Armando sums it up:

> *Restorative Justice means restoring peace. Restoring kids from going bad. Bringing kids back to society of hard work and realizing there's more out there. Taking those who have fallen, picking them up, and helping them out.*

TEEN COURT OFFENDERS SERVED
September 2001 – March 2005

2001-2002	Offenders Served	42
	Repeat Offenders	7 (16.7%)
2002-2003	Offenders Served	45
	Repeat Offenders	3 (6.7%)
2003-2004	Offenders Served	66
	Repeat Offenders	10 (15%)
July 2004	Offenders Served	110
Mar 2005	Repeat Offenders	2 (1.8%)
Total	Offenders Served	263

TEEN COURT YOUTH VOLUNTEERS
September 2001 – March 2005

2001-2002	Students Trained	821
	Schools Served	8
2002-2003	Students Trained	836
	Schools Served	7
2003-2004	Students Trained	1531
	Schools Served	10
July 2004	Students Trained	1123
Mar 2005	Schools Served	9
	Training Sessions Offered	14
Total	Students Trained	4305+
	Schools Served	16
	Training Sessions Offered	39

Kara Williams, Community Health program manager, University of California, San Diego (UCSD) Division of Community Pediatrics. Ms. Williams manages the UCSD Academic Center of Excellence on Youth Violence Prevention, the UCSD Community Outreach Partnership Center, and the San Diego EXPORT Center, a research center on minority health

and health disparities. She is a member of the Board of Directors of the San Diego Coalition to Prevent Youth Violence, San Diego Teen Court, and the Mid City Community Advocacy Network.

Heather Dugdale, Esq., executive director, San Diego Teen Court. Ms. Dugdale is a licensed attorney in Colorado who has been executive director of San Diego Teen Court since September 2001. In that time, Teen Court has almost tripled the number of juvenile offenders served while doubling the number of youth volunteers. In summer 2005 Teen Court expanded the program outside the City of San Diego into the San Diego East County region.

Aletta Cooke, volunteer, San Diego Teen Court. Ms. Cooke, age 18, is a senior at Rancho Bernardo High School in San Diego who has been actively involved in the San Diego Teen Court program for over two years. Ms. Cooke also volunteers for La Jolla Scripps Memorial Hospital as a junior volunteer in the emergency room. She has received awards and recognition for her outstanding accomplishments in both programs.

Armando Mantecon, volunteer, San Diego Teen Court. Armando "Tj" Mantecon is a senior at Montgomery High School in San Diego. He has been involved with San Diego Teen Court since March 2004. Teen Court has been a great experience for him. He plans to become a law enforcement officer and work his way up to chief of police.

Kari Herzog, project coordinator, University of California, San Diego Academic Center of Excellence on Youth Violence Prevention. Ms. Herzog is a Project Coordinator for the University of California, San Diego (UCSD) Academic Center of Excellence on Youth Violence Prevention and is pursuing a Master of Public Health (MPH) at San Diego State University.

Vivian Reznik, M.D., MPH, Professor of Pediatrics, University of California, School of Medicine. Dr. Reznik is Principal Investigator of the UCSD Academic Center of Excellence on Youth Violence Prevention and is co-principal investigator for the San Diego EXPORT Center, the Annie E. Dyson Community Pediatrics Training Initiative, and the National Centers of Leadership in Academic Medicine. Dr. Reznik received the National Community Leadership Association Distinguished Leadership award in 2001, the UCSD Chancellor's Associates Faculty Excellence in Community Service award in 2002, and the Children's Hospital and Health Center Physician Leadership Award in 2004.

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1. The names of the San Diego Teen Court defendants have been changed to protect their identity.

2. San Diego Teen Court has a rigorous standard for determining recidivism. It defines recidivism as a second arrest (before the age of 18) after a Teen Court offender is sentenced by the program While almost all other San Diego juvenile diversion programs track recidivism for only six months after sentence completion (which in most instances is less than one year from the time of arrest), Teen Court tracks recidivism for an average of two and as many as seven years from the time of arrest (the latter applies to youth who are 11 at the time of arrest).

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Destiny's Children

Photo essay by Donna DeCesare

Photo: © Donna DeCesare 2005

The images in this special *CYD Journal* photo essay are part of a body of work by Donna DeCesare, whose photographs and testimonies from children who are survivors of violence have won many national and international awards. These include the Dorothea Lange prize (1993), the Alicia Patterson fellowship (1997), the Mother Jones International Photo Fund grant (1999), and the top prize in the National Press Photographers' Association "Best of Photojournalism" contest for her photo-essay on children in organized armed violence. More recently, Donna was named a fellow of the Dart Society for Journalism and Trauma, and was awarded a Fulbright fellowship to continue her documentation of children affected by armed conflict. DeCesare's work has appeared in news and arts publications including *The New York Times Magazine, Life, Newsweek, The Atlantic, Aperture, DoubleTake,*
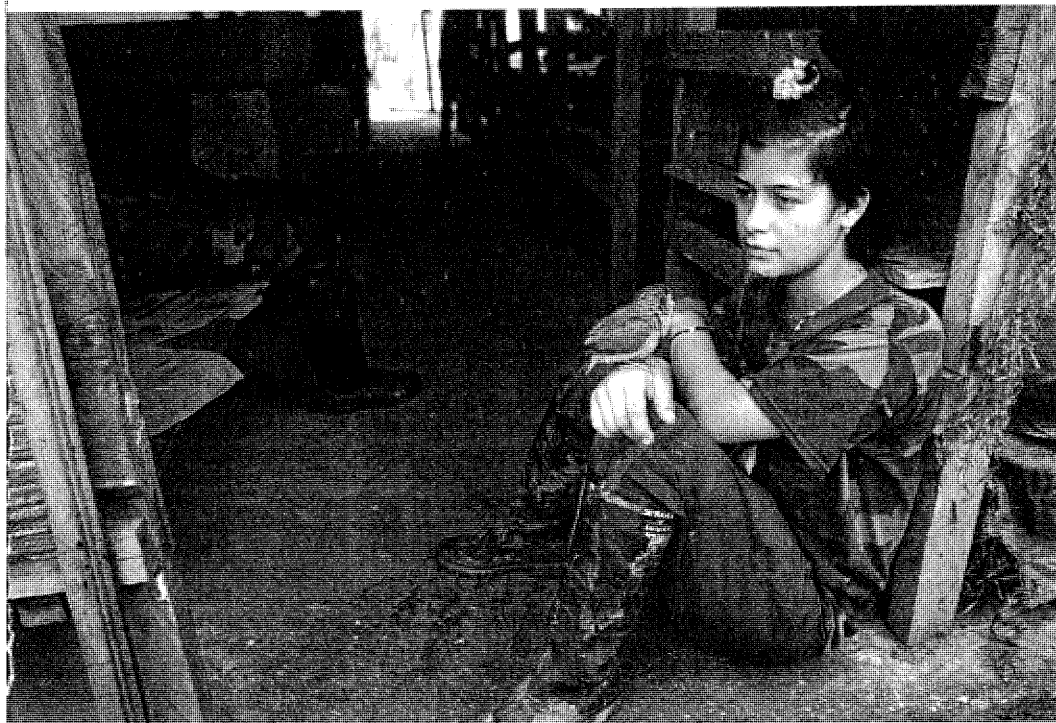
Photo: © Donna DeCesare 2005

and others. Since 1996 her work as a videographer/producer has been broadcast on PBS, Discovery, and TLC (The Learning Channel).

DeCesare's forthcoming website, *Destiny's Children*, will feature a collection of photo novellas exploring how war, trauma, and gangs impact the personal choices and social stigma faced by young people across the Americas. This English/Spanish website will be a tool for educators and activists of all ages working to address the challenges and legacy of youth violence. Currently, you can view her work at *www.donnadecesare.com/*.

Donna joined the journalism faculty at the University of Texas in 2002. She teaches photography workshops for at-risk youth, journalism students, and professional photojournalists in the Americas.

— Joan S. Hoffman, Guest Editor

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ALEX SANCHEZ
HOMIES UNIDOS
FREE
THE PEACEMAKERS

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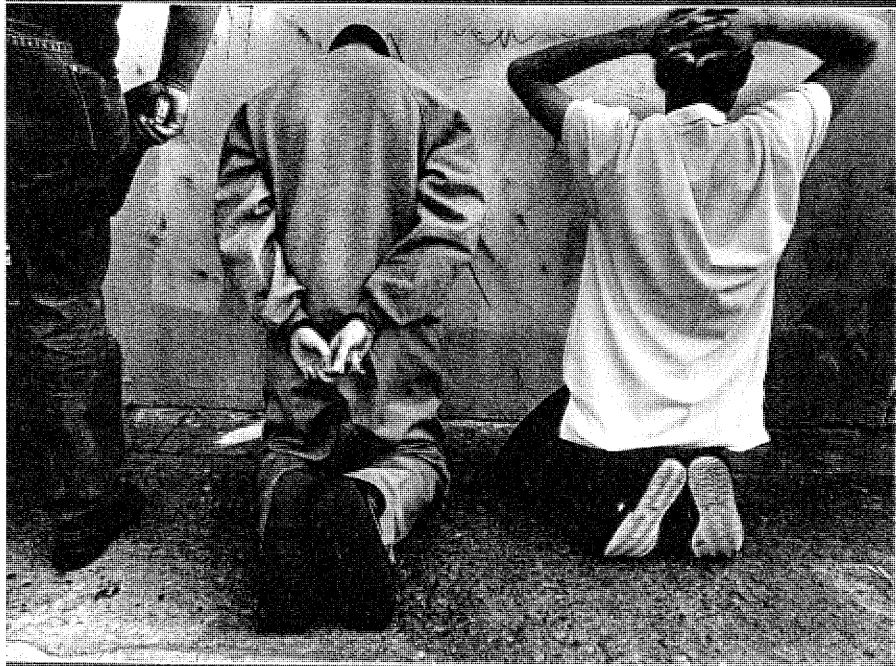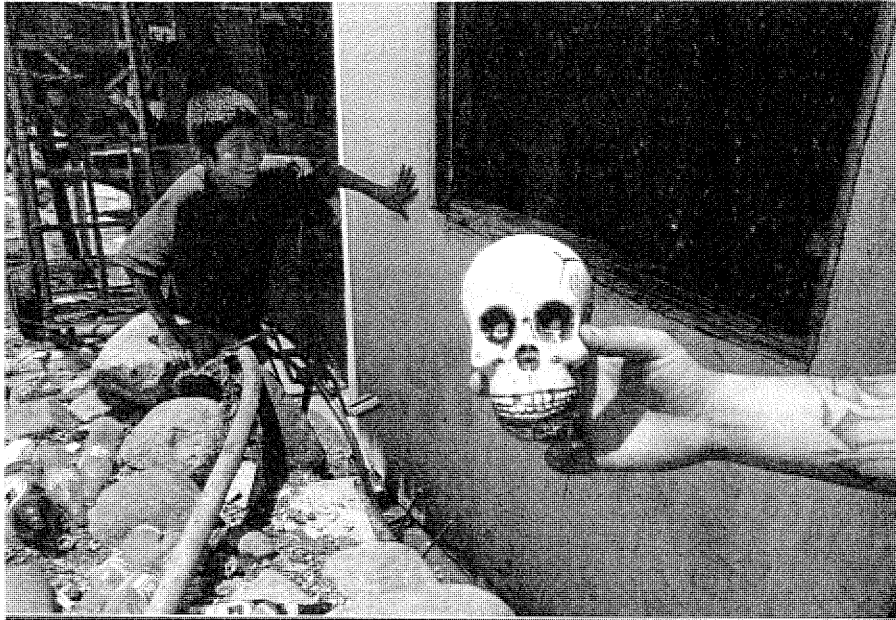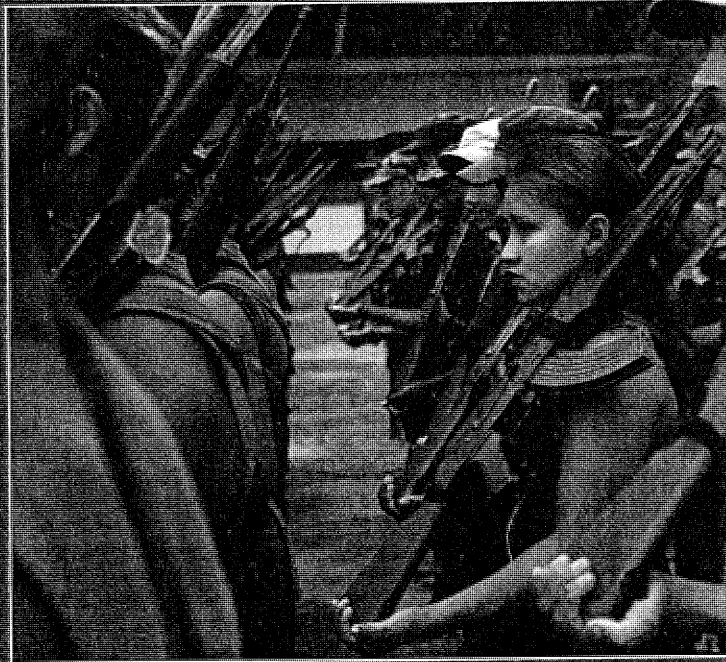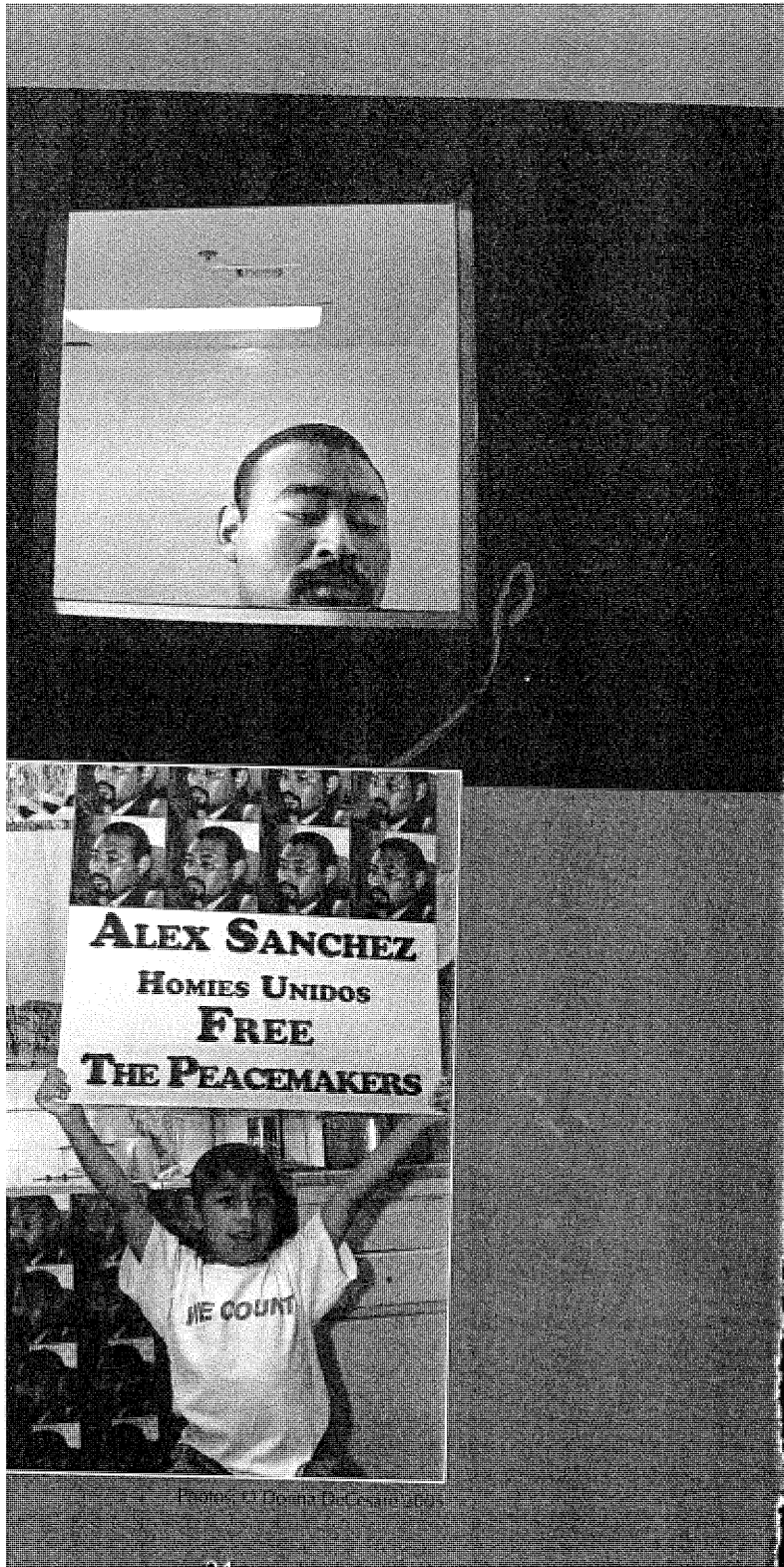
If it Takes a Village to Raise a Child, How Many Children Does it Take to Raise the Village?

Harry Wilson, *Associate Commissioner, Family and Youth Services Bureau, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services*

The National Research Council proclaimed recently that 75 percent of American youth are doing quite well, but a quarter of our young people are missing some or all of their protective factors and lack critical developmental assets. As a result these young people are deemed seriously "at risk." For these young people, at least, the "village" has not lived up to its commitment.

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Studies have shown that when young people are connected to their families, schools, and communities they are often protected from harm. Protective factors are an important ingredient in keeping young people on the road to a successful transition to adulthood. For the past several decades our government has targeted nurturing support and rescue efforts to the very youngest children of our society; providing early childhood services to preschool-age children and even prenatal services to give babies a healthy start. Honorable as these efforts have been, the focus has been much less on services to older youth.

Perhaps this is because there has historically been less confidence in the promise of positive outcomes in programs serving older youth. Programs and strategies for older kids quickly devolve into the suppression of the negative rather than the promotion of the positive. And yet, scientists have recently confirmed that the human brain develops far beyond the age of five and offers developmental windows of opportunity with pre-teens and older youth.

Therefore, the call to the village is to provide supportive, developmentally appropriate services for youth across all age groups. Among these kids are the Research Council's 25 percent or the neediest kids in the community—vulnerable youth in disadvantaged situations. These are tough kids to connect with, but when connections are made, they have the largest appetite for purpose and belonging. It is precisely the experience of these kids living in the gaps that makes them the best resource for community planning and development.

In communities, schools, and local governments across the nation, young people are becoming actively engaged in defining their own villages. New technologies have enabled youth to not only connect in real time, but more importantly to think globally and act locally. Connectivity is driving young people to become more than the passive players of just a decade ago. These young "millennials" are not content to wait until adulthood to make significant contributions; they want their lives to have meaning long before they assimilate into the adult world.

How much do youth already contribute to our society? Judging by economics alone, quite a lot! It is estimated that youth account for 141 billion dollars in discretionary spending each calendar year. In February 2005 the Harris Interactive Poll did a study of American youth in relation to the Tsunami relief effort. The poll found that one-third of American youth between 8 and 18 years of age contributed an average of $63 to the relief effort. American youth raised nearly a billion dollars toward the effort. These personal efforts amounted to more relief than any single government committed and more than any private relief agency collected. In 2001 the

President asked that all young Americans send a dollar to help the children of Afghanistan; a month later the White House had received 242,000 pieces of mail with well over 1.5 million single dollars enclosed.

We should not be surprised when most kids ask, "Whose village is it anyway?" A recent report showed that young people in the mid-west were becoming disengaged and walking away from their farming communities. In response, several states have instituted measures to try to keep their young people from leaving. Iowa offered young adults a tax break, Nebraska and North Dakota offered small business loans, and Kansas has even offered free land to young people as inducements to stick around. Yet these worthy efforts ignored the stickiest factor of all: Young people, more than anything else, want to belong to something bigger than themselves. Financial inducements are not enough. When youth are civically engaged they gain a sense that what they do matters, that they belong in their community, and their community belongs to them. If a young person is involved in planning the community park they might stay around to see their own kids use it. If they help on a school district strategic plan they might be proud enough to want their own kids to attend. When youth are connected in meaningful ways to their communities, they become the best of citizens. They see themselves in the everyday life of the village, and they feel that they can make a difference—that their actions matter to others.

Recently there has been a quiet movement in the federal government to utilize youth as project advisors, policy analysts, and grant reviewers. When agencies take the time to involve youth at this level, they find that everything changes. Talking with (and not about) youth is a powerful tool in creating successful youth policy and programs. What better way to engage youth both as consumers of services and also as consultants than as the experts on youth-targeted service delivery systems?

Youth engagement strategies offer these young people a glimpse of public service and the possibilities of a civil service career. College students report that serving as grant reviewers not only opens their minds to how different communities think about issues; it also enriches their studies when they return to school. One elderly professor related to me after a grant review that, at first, she was skeptical about working with youth on her review panel. She soon found, however, that they added a new energy and expert dimension of analysis. She said, "I have old and tired eyes, these young people see everything with fresh eyes." (It's noteworthy that, according to estimates, between 50 and 60 percent of federal employees are currently eligible to retire.)

Could it be that a proposal with a solid theoretical base, good organizational structure, and great community partnerships might miss the boat

completely on methodology? By not considering how youth might connect to a program, policymakers and program managers make a critical mistake.

When I was a young youth worker I met Dr. Henry Maier (master youth worker) who told me something I've never forgotten: If adults work to be in sync with the young people they work with, to walk next to them and become part of a joint rhythm, they have the potential of being "in tune" with them. This point will mark a turning point in which children and adults will share moments of moving ahead together.

The synchronization of adults and youth is key to young people's involvement at any level. If adults fail to affirm the significance of youth by providing access, support, and safe opportunities for honest participation, they miss the chance to be part of a "joint rhythm" and youth contributions will be no more than an appearance. It is not enough to invite them into the room; if young people merely occupy space those moments of "moving ahead" will be lost. Once the decision is made to involve youth it takes perceptive adults and due diligence on every detail regarding young people and their expectations to create a successful connection. Organizations may find it expensive and time consuming to prepare for strategic planning meetings that involve youth, but the results are well worth months of preparation when they see the fruits of a rich, rewarding exchange of ideas.

Working with youth adds a higher level of accountability. Adults often commit to action only to find excuses about why projects do not move quickly enough, or fail to be executed. But covenants are formed when working with young people and they are not to be taken lightly. It is imperative that when young people are brought to the table that adults work to keep them inspired, informed, and involved. Following through on their suggestions is the signal that what they say has been honored.

When the elders welcome young people, accept their fresh perspectives, and tap into their abundant energy, they create a much stronger village. In these enlightened communities young people are celebrated for their citizenship and see themselves as the collective hope for the future. At the end of the day the village and the child are indispensable to one another, are in tune with each other, and will share lifetimes of moving ahead together.

Harry Wilson is an associate commissioner for the Administration on Children, Youth, and Families. He is charged with leading the Family and Youth Services Bureau. The Bureau provides national leadership on youth issues and assistance to help community-based organizations provide effective, comprehensive services for youth in at-risk situations.