

Reducing **JUVENILE VIOLENCE**
in Communities

A GUIDEBOOK
OF WHAT TO DO
AND HOW TO BEGIN

by Arkansas Advocates for Children & Families

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Paul D. Kelly, LCSW, senior program coordinator at Arkansas Advocates for Children & Families, wrote this guide. Julie C. Robbins, director of communications and development, put the guide in its final form. Annie E. Casey Foundation provided the funding.

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Arkansas Advocates for Children & Families is a nonprofit, nonpartisan, child advocacy group. Founded in 1977, AACF researches, educates, dialogues, compromises and rethinks children's issues to create sounder public policies for Arkansas' children and their families.

*523 S. Louisiana, Suite 700
Little Rock, AR 72201
501/371-9678
www.aradvocates.org*

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introduction

*Be careful what you give children, for sooner or later
you are sure to get it back.*

*-- Barbara Kingsolver,
author, "High Tide in Tucson"*

Every parent watching recent news reports about youth violence has been shocked, dismayed, and forced to reconsider the safety of their own children. Parents demand their schools become safer places. They watch more closely, ask more questions, and worry more intensely when children are outside their watchful eye. Parents may choose to avoid specific areas of the community, be on the lookout for particular types of children, or otherwise change their daily life to reassure themselves they are doing everything possible to remove their child from potential harm.

These are natural and healthy responses to such traumatic events. But these individual protective acts are not enough. Children cannot remain in the confines of their home, their church community or their neighborhood. They grow up, venture out, walk, ride their bikes or drive in cars to public places where other youth shop, play, or gather.

Wherever one lives, the impact of violent juvenile crime is real and no one is immune. We cannot move away or isolate ourselves from the impacts of violence. The safety of our own children, as well as the long-term economical and social well-being of an entire community, is affected by acts of violence. By helping our communities address youth violence, you help tackle a multitude of other problems that ensure all children live full and productive lives.

Violence by children cannot be fully understood or adequately addressed without a broader appreciation of how cultural, social, and economical realities

impact children's lives. At some level, any act of violence is an act of desperation, a failure to take reasoned and effective measures to resolve underlying problems. The community that works together to prevent such violence strengthens and supports all families so they may protect their children from harm.

This is not the first time Arkansas Advocates for Children & Families has published a handbook to address youth violence prevention. The 1994 publication "Computer, Cellos, and Call-in Radio: Violence Prevention Tools for the '90s" was produced in the wake of increases in youth violence, particularly gang violence, in the small urban areas of the state. The final chapter of that 1994 publication was titled "Preventing Violence in Your Community" and gave a brief summary of steps to take to begin confronting this frightening development. Now, almost 10 years later, the need has arisen to redefine the problem of juvenile violence, to plan for specific action, and to identify the new resources available to address violence.

Things have changed in Arkansas. The March 1998 shooting in Jonesboro was the first in a series of shocking school incidents to remind us that youth violence reaches deep into our communities and neighborhoods. In response, several new initiatives have begun in Arkansas. The Jonesboro and Little Rock school districts have received significant federal funds to address youth violence in the school setting. The city of Little Rock instituted a locally-funded program to reduce incidents of youth violence in high-risk neighborhoods. And Arkansas is now the homebase of the new School Violence Resource Center within the National Center for Rural Law Enforcement at the UALR Criminal Justice Institute.

So now, eight years after the publication of the first violence prevention guidebook and new realities of violence in Arkansas, available to us are examples from local sources of what can be done to address youth violence. Local, state and

federal initiatives have invested millions of dollars to prevent juvenile violence in Arkansas with very promising results. These programs take comprehensive approaches to reducing youth violence by focusing on the youth most at risk, by providing services and programs during school and non-school hours, and by addressing the unique problems and opportunities available in their local communities.

This guide is intended to help small groups of individual citizens reduce juvenile violence in their community. On-going local efforts will provide the backdrop and furnish important lessons in helping neighborhoods and communities prevent youth violence. For the past year, Arkansas Advocates for Children & Families has gathered information, talked to experts, visited programs, and convened groups of people working to prevent youth violence. We found that there is no “one-size-fits-all” program and no quick answers to reducing youth violence. It takes a sustained effort by a group of committed people to make the necessary changes in a community. The good news is that an active, thoughtful and engaged community can significantly reduce youth violence.

This handbook is for parents and communities that seek to take action beyond individual efforts. The only enduring and effective way to address youth violence is to work to prevent it from occurring in the first place. Parents must work with the community to create a safe and nurturing place for all children. This handbook, however, does not address all the underlying problems facing children, nor does it provide a comprehensive review of all the research currently available. It is a summary of the ideas proposed by people knowledgeable in the field and gives examples of local efforts in Arkansas. It intends to explain how some communities successfully answer the questions “What can we do?” and “How do we begin?”

get the facts and establish the message

According to an ABC news poll, 76 percent of Americans form their opinions about crime from what they see or read in the news. Lori Dorfman, director of the Berkeley Media Studies, and Vince Schiraldi, president of the Justice Policy Institute are co-authors of Off Balance: Youth, Race and Crime in the News. They report, "The overwhelming evidence from research is that news coverage of crime, especially violent crime, is out of proportion to its occurrence, distorts the proportion of crime committed by youth, and over represents minority perpetrators while under representing minority victims." They go on, "With so much of the public dependent on the news to tell them about crime, they can't make good decisions about how to prevent crime without a more accurate picture of who commits and who suffers from violence."

To change a community's approach to youth violence, one must change how people think about youth violence and help them understand the links among criminal behavior, school performance, family structure, economic distress, and poor health. Combining the facts on youth violence with personal stories by those affected is probably the most effective way to build public understanding. This storytelling fosters leadership skills and talents to help your effort. Gathering the facts on juvenile violence and formulating a clear message about what to do about it requires time and input from others who collect data, those who have personal stories to tell, and those with the expertise to develop effective community programs. The end result is knowledgeable, confident and credible citizens that have the necessary base of knowledge to complete such a large task.

The following are suggested ways to start looking for the facts. Specific local data may not be available in every community. However, it is important to present data to illustrate trends over a period of time; this will show where things are getting better or worse. And when local data is not available, use statewide or regional data sources that include local information. You can also use statewide data and trends to estimate local facts or trends.

General Information

First, determine the geographic area(s) -- neighborhood, city or county -- that you wish to cover in your search for data. Start your research by collecting general data on youth in your community. Their age, gender, race, family composition

and structure, income level, and locale lay the groundwork for understanding other data you will collect. Issues of unemployment, health insurance, education level of parents, median income, and other general demographic data clarify what other things are going on that impact children in their daily lives. However, data is collected in a variety of ways and covers specific geographic regions, so you may have to reorganize some of the data to explain what is going on in your community. Local chambers of commerce, United Ways, businesses, hospitals, state agencies, service organizations, and county and local governments already collect much of this information. This will not be information about specific individuals or cases; these numbers will show the collective or total number of children and families within the community.

School information is critical and is available through your local school district. Start with the number of children enrolled in early care and education programs or pre-grade programs and those in K-12. Then take a look at the number of suspensions, high-school dropouts, violent incidents, weapons brought to school, youth placed in alternative schools, and measures of student performance. Behavior risk surveys address youth involvement in incidents of violence, exposure to weapons, and drug-and-alcohol use both in and outside of school. The Arkansas Department of Education Office of Comprehensive School Health and the Arkansas Department of Health Bureau of Alcohol and Drug Abuse Prevention conduct such risk surveys.

Criminal and Delinquent Activity

Youth violent crime is measured in a variety of ways by law enforcement agencies (municipal police or county sheriff). The number of juvenile arrests is totaled each year. The local police department collects arrest data on the age, race and gender of violator, incident reports, and other information needed to document criminal activity. It is important to develop a good relationship with local law enforcement officials who have considerable influence in the community and who share your goal of reducing youth violence. More detailed data and information is available from police records. It is important to explore police data to look for trends and causative factors. Detailed crime data can help identify the kinds of crimes, such as break-ins or physical attacks, locale of crime, the relationships between victim and offender, and other community factors that contribute to

Ninety-one percent of voters think there should be some type of organized activity or place for children and teens to go after school every day that provides opportunities to learn.

*-- from a survey commissioned by
the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation*

violent crimes. The Arkansas Crime Information Center (ACIC) compiles statewide arrest data, youth charged in adult criminal court, and other information that may be helpful.

The state source for judicial information is the Administrative Office of the Courts (AOC). It collects information by judicial district, which is not necessarily by county. This court information includes both criminal and dependency-neglect cases that involve children. Criminal charges involving children, cases involving “families in need of services” (FINS) for their children, and the outcomes of juveniles cases in the court system are all tracked by the AOC. The AOC provides information by judicial district and works directly with the court system, so start with your local judge or court clerk who provide information to the AOC and can formally request such information for you.

The Department of Human Services Division of Youth Services (DYS) collects more information on local juvenile offenders who are sent to them by local courts. DYS collects data on the number of youth committed to its facilities and those receiving services from local youth programs. If you know of a local youth service provider who receives funding from DYS, they can help you locate information or share data they collect on youth. These are court-ordered services. But there are other youth providers that may be in your community that also may have information about youth they serve as part of their efforts to help youth at risk of trouble. It is important to note that the names of individual juvenile offenders cannot be given to the public; only cumulative data will be made available from the aforementioned sources.

Other Risk Factors

An abused child is at increased risk for future violent behavior. The Arkansas Department of Human Services Division of Children and Family Services (DCFS) is responsible for handling cases involving child maltreatment. The number and type of child maltreatment cases by county are recorded in the [Arkansas Department of Human Services Annual Statistical Report](#). This report also contains valuable information on the full array of county services and programs provided by the Department of Human Services.

Numerous communities in Arkansas have participated in the Youth Risk Behavior Survey conducted by the Arkansas Department of Education Office of Comprehensive School Health. Other communities have worked with the Arkansas Department of Health Bureau of Alcohol and Drug Abuse Prevention to conduct the Communities That Care Survey to measure risk and protective factors present in students in their community. You can check with your local school district and health department to find out if these surveys were conducted in your community or you may want to see how your community can participate in the next survey.

Inventory of Resources and Services

To fully understand the community's risk for youth violence and its capacity to establish violence prevention programs, your research should also include an inventory of community assets. Children's exposure to violence, their quality of life, access to health care, chance to experience success and positive interaction with others, economic and family resources, and many other factors influence their capacity to deal with problems, including violence. At its most basic level, prevention of youth violence is a concerted effort to provide children with positive opportunities, to learn how to resolve conflicts as they arise, and to expand the list of assets or strengths every child brings to the task of daily living. It is not enough just to have crime-free or problem-free youth; we must develop our youth's fullest potential. For this reason it is important to have an inventory of programs, services, facilities, and other resources available in your community providing positive opportunities to youth.

This inventory should include programs and facilities offered by schools,

churches, businesses, nonprofit organizations, parks and recreation departments, police, hospitals, and the state serving a community's children and families. The inventory should include what segments of the community these programs serve, who has access to the facilities, and the hours of operation. If possible, include youth in the assessment of services available to them. The city of Little Rock and New Futures for Youth utilized a process called "youth mapping" to obtain an inventory of resources for youth in various areas of the city. The youth themselves conducted interviews with businesses, churches, and other potential resources in the neighborhood to find out what was offered to youth. Jobs, recreation, after-school events, summer activities, art activities, or safe places to "hang out" may be considered positive opportunities for youth.

The Search Institute has created the most comprehensive method of looking at youth development assets. The Institute has identified 40 assets as positive experiences, relationships, opportunities and personal qualities that young people need to grow up healthy, caring and responsible. Its surveys consistently show that young people who experience more of these assets are more likely to make healthy choices and avoid a wide range of high-risk behaviors. The absence of these assets in the lives of young people in a community has prompted some communities to mobilize on behalf of young people. The State Asset-building Program at the University of Arkansas Cooperative Extension Service is working to bring this effort to communities around the state.

Establishing the Message

Despite the importance of good data, it is the development of a clear and effective message that will motivate other members of the community to join your effort. Talk to local experts about what you are trying to do. Listen closely and observe how they feel and talk about youth violence. Understanding the local perception of youth violence and what should be done about the problem is critical in developing a message to reach others. Try to focus on the victims of the violent acts, not the child committing the act. Expect to hear a wide variety of diverse views and opinions. For example, police officers, prosecutors, and court personnel may have a different view than youth ministers, pediatricians, youth service workers, or business leaders. The important thing is to address the misconceptions and capture the essential values revealed by these varied perspectives.

CREATING MESSAGES ABOUT YOUTH

Don't use the word "teenager," which has powerful, negative associations. Instead, use "youth" or "adolescent." Better yet, talk about "adolescence," which is understood to be a process of growing up, a stage everyone goes through.

Show youth participating in positive activities — such as volunteering, playing an organized sport, or participating in the performing arts.

Explain youth activities in terms that include the values of work — responsibility, teamwork, commitment, self-restraint, goal-orientation, leadership skills.

Use coaches and volunteer leaders to attest to the values and hard work of today's youth. These leaders see hundreds of young people regularly and can speak with authority about their attributes.

Avoid the "hero youth" model that lifts up an individual as exceptional and casts doubt on the less-accomplished majority. This is particularly meaningful advice for communities of color where research has shown that the personal exceptions often reinforce the idea that the rest of the group just needs to try harder. Instead of highlighting the young person who organized a park cleanup, for example, focus on the group of kids that did the work.

Show youth in situations in which their work is altruistic and helps solve social problems. The public is hungry for solutions. But rather than suggesting the youth should solve all of their own problems, look to messages that show young people working together with adults and even young children on issues that affect all of them.

Source: "Using Strategic Communication to Support Families," Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2001

engage the community

One of the biggest hurdles facing child advocates is the all-too-common belief that children engaged in violent behavior are “other people’s kids and not my responsibility.” Changing this notion requires a representative group of the larger community be involved in addressing youth violence. No matter how homogeneous your community may be, a wide variety of age groups, occupations, religious beliefs, cultural backgrounds, and life experiences shape views about youth violence. You will meet others with an interest and the knowledge and expertise to help you. It is important to assemble a broad-based group willing to work on the prevention of youth violence. Such a core group can provide the additional person-power, feedback and direction needed to complete all the required tasks.

The most common starting point for involving others is to organize a meeting. An initial meeting or series of meetings with a core group of individuals will help to launch an effort that generates wider public support. It is important to have a core group look at what is needed, establish an initial work plan and set timelines. It only takes a few people to get started. Only the easy stuff gets done in a short time, so be prepared to recruit others and to stay the course. You will need to have a presentation of the facts, a well-defined message that resonates with members of the community, suggestions on how to approach the problem, and a champion who is willing to make this issue his cause. This initial core group can work through the next steps, give feedback, and lay the groundwork for a successful effort. The core group can then invite others to join the effort.

Create a catalyst for changing how your community deals with youth violence. This can be a report, a high-profile sponsor for the cause, or a response to an event that brings public attention to the need for violence prevention. A successful catalyst creates opportunities to strategically use the media and community leaders and bring more of the community into the effort.

Ultimately, to succeed, you will need a coalition of stakeholders from different walks of life who can and will tell stories that matter so people will listen. It is best to start early to involve as diverse a group as possible. They can help sharpen your message about the need for prevention and increase the numbers expressing the message. It is important to tie the benefits of youth development and violence prevention to the economy, the community and families. You will need leaders from all walks of life and all political stripes to become stakeholders investing in youth and willing to speak on their behalf.

target the prevention efforts

Prevention efforts are generally aimed at children. All children are at risk for youth violence, yet some youth are being left behind due to the lack of assets or prevention options in their lives. Ideally, prevention efforts should be available to all children in the community so that all children will benefit. Younger children who are most at-risk are often the most difficult to reach or serve, and at the same time, they are the children likely to benefit the most from prevention efforts. The younger your focus of prevention, the better your chances of reducing violent and negative behaviors.

Prevention programs can also be targeted to reach a wide spectrum of children of different ages and circumstances. Preschool, after-school, in-school, church-based, hospital-based or neighborhood-based programs all can have positive impacts on youth violence in the community, particularly if they are directed to those youth most at-risk. These interventions should reach all young people in a community, not just those with a history of violent behavior or most at risk for negative outcomes. However, limited resources may prohibit such large-scale efforts. In that case, the decision about what population of children will be the focus of your prevention efforts should be based on several variables. These include:

- ✍ the number, age and location of children most at-risk for violent behaviors;
- ✍ the services already being provided to reduce youth violence;
- ✍ the type of services or programs most likely to receive funding or support from the community; and
- ✍ the cultural context and attitudes toward at-risk youth held by members of the community.

The steps to implement violence prevention programs in your community include:

- ✍ know the facts;
- ✍ find others who share your concern;
- ✍ know what the common thoughts and ideas about youth are in your community; and
- ✍ decide how to target the solutions. What are the policies that need to be changed, programs to start, and/or attitudes that need to be changed?

It is critical that you choose an approach that matches your community's identified needs and resources. The approach should also be one that has a proven record of success and one that you can replicate. The long-term goal of expanding prevention programs and services may hinge on how well your initial effort is viewed.

WHAT ARE EFFECTIVE MESSAGES?

1. Clear, consistent and free of jargon
2. Include stories about people and issues. Effective messengers are good storytellers who connect the community to each individual's story.
3. Realistic and truthful. Good messengers don't promise more than they can deliver, and are prepared to talk about what works and what doesn't – and the lessons learned from both.
4. Created after target audiences have been identified and their understanding of the issues surveyed. Listening is as important a skill as lecturing.
5. Specific and local. Different audiences require different messages.
6. Repeated over and over again.
7. Start with a non-controversial "head-nodder" with which everyone in the audience can agree. Then, the message can move to more controversial elements.
8. Include logos, Web site addresses and phone numbers on every written (brochure) and promotional (refrigerator magnet) product. This is also known as "branding."

Source: "Using Strategic Communication to Support Families," Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2001

promising approaches in arkansas

Communities in Arkansas respond to juvenile violence in a wide variety of ways. The most immediate response is to secure the youth that commit violent acts and protect the public. This usually means incarceration for youthful offenders in a juvenile facility that rarely provides the rehabilitation and treatment that state policy demands. Public opinion polls confirm public support for prevention programs as much as efforts to impose harsher punishment on juvenile offenders. But politicians lean more toward retribution in response to juvenile violence because it provides an easier solution for a complex problem. This move toward more retribution was not the case in some Arkansas communities, where thoughtful public reaction has resulted in a variety of efforts to address youth violence. Communities that respond by asking what can be done to prevent such tragedies are reaping rewards for their effort.

Little Rock's Prevention, Intervention and Treatment (PIT) Initiative

One of the best examples of a local prevention approach resulting in reduced incidents of violence is currently operating in Little Rock. In 1993, increased incidents of gang violence and juvenile crime brought the community together to solve this growing problem. After a series of community meetings, public forums and reports by local experts, city officials proposed recommendations to help address youth violence, public safety, economic development and a variety of community concerns. As a part of this broad effort to improve the future of their city, citizens made the bold demand that a proposed tax increase, which included more money for police, be matched with a financial commitment for prevention. As a result of this "Future Little Rock" tax, funds were set aside for local prevention, intervention and treatment programs.

Using the individuals and organizations originally engaged in the community discussions on crime, the city launched its Prevention, Intervention and Treatment (PIT) initiative. A newly-established city Department of Community Programs was given the responsibility of administering PIT. New Futures for Youth, a local nonprofit organization already working with police, schools and local government to create positive opportunities for youth, played a key role in formulating the city's approach. Local service programs were asked to provide drug-and-alcohol treatment to children and adults. Specific neighborhood-based interventions were aimed at youth already involved in gang activity, and a wide variety of prevention

programs were created in neighborhoods with large concentrations of at-risk youth. These programs were operated by a variety of groups, including Arkansas Children's Hospital, Boys and Girls clubs, Boy and Girl scouts, the Arkansas Arts Center, and the city's Parks and Recreation Department. In order to reach more at-risk youth, the city worked with neighborhood churches and organizations to provide more youth programs in the neighborhoods where the youth lived. Special attention was given to after-school and neighborhood-based programs. New Futures for Youth and city leaders also knew it was important to measure these programs to illustrate the impact of tax dollars, and therefore, developed methods of evaluation. The PIT initiative currently funds 15 separate year-round and 17 summer youth programs serving more than 6,000 children and youth each year.

The impacts were significant. From 1989-99, juvenile arrests for violent crimes dropped 54 percent in Little Rock. During this same period, the juvenile arrest for violent crime in the 10 other largest cities in Arkansas rose 86 percent. As tax revenues increased, a significant effort was made to expand summer programs because juvenile arrest rates were often higher during that time. The number of youth engaged in summer prevention activities increased from 3,346 in 1996 to 6,046 in 2000. As a result, the number of youth arrested for violent crimes during the summer months dropped 81 percent between 1996 and 2000. These positive trends continued into 2001.

Arkansas Safe Schools Initiative

Two school-district-based prevention efforts are currently receiving federal funds to reduce school violence — the Little Rock School District and a joint venture of the Jonesboro, Nettleton, Valley View, and Westside school districts in Craighead County. Both receive more than \$2 million a year for a three-year period to provide a comprehensive approach to reducing school violence. They contrast prevention approaches in urban and rural school districts.

Despite some differences, both of these Safe School and Healthy Students initiatives have common approaches critical to successful prevention programs. Their approaches are comprehensive, serving youth from birth to 18. They include programs to address the prenatal care and early care of infants born to teen mothers, understanding the critical importance of early intervention and the role of

More than 80 percent call after-school programs a necessity in their communities. Most would pay more taxes to cover the cost.

*-- from a survey commissioned by
the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation*

parents in long-term positive outcomes for children. Services also include health care, quality child care, home-visitation programs, and parenting training for teens. Both of these efforts focus on the detection and treatment of youth mental health and substance-abuse problems -- training teachers to recognize mental health problems, offering school-based mental health services, and having alternative school placement for students needing more intensive therapy and behavior management. Both initiatives recognize and address the importance of positive opportunities offered students during after-school and summer hours, the hours when juvenile crime occurs, when the risk of teen pregnancy is higher, and when youth have much of their unsupervised time. In Jonesboro, the program entered into a joint venture with the Jonesboro City Stars recreational program that involves hundreds of children in soccer and basketball programs. These positive activities help prevent gang involvement, drug use, and other negative activities.

In both initiatives, the mental health services provided to schools have been used extensively, and include individual and group counseling services. In addition, Jonesboro's Early Parenting Teens program provides information to pregnant and parenting teens and assistance in raising their children. This helps keep these parents in school while attempting to reduce future problems. The program has significantly reduced the number of dropouts in this group. Another unique feature of Jonesboro's program is the awarding of mini-grants to teachers for programs designed to increase student involvement in safe and healthy activities. Examples include programs where students, parents, and community business leaders interact in fostering math skills in children; a school provides a "coffee house" for students to attend a safe, drug-free activity; and new junior high school students are provided with mentors to reduce the anxiety and frustration involved in moving from elementary school to junior high each year.

These initiatives have built non-traditional partners with municipal government and local civic groups to improve and expand recreational and cultural opportunities available to students during non-school hours. Both efforts provide training and resources to schools to create an atmosphere supporting non-violent conflict resolution, safe and secure learning environments, and student success. This also includes student and teacher training, encouraging parental involvement, and changing school policies so they may contribute to these improved learning environments. These two initiatives continue to address a wide variety of students needs and recognize the importance of collaboration among individual school districts, parents, local service providers, and the larger community.

Other Model Programs

During recent years five local school districts in Arkansas have qualified as a “21st Century School.” This is a program to improve student outcomes funded by several national foundations and Yale University. The Arkadelphia, Batesville, Hamburg, Paragould, and Pulaski County school districts receive funding to operate a school-based child care and family support model program. The school becomes a year-round, multi-service center for the community providing a variety of supportive services. This model program helps ensure that children arrive at school ready to learn and receive the support they need to succeed academically. These programs promote the optimal growth and development of children beginning at birth.

Successful violence prevention efforts are working each day in every community in Arkansas. Prevention is created through the effort of families, local churches, youth service agencies, schools, state agencies, and local civic groups who care deeply about children. Municipal parks and recreational programs, scouting, 4-H, and numerous other community efforts bring positive opportunities to children each day. In many cases, expanding or slightly altering current youth programs to reach at-risk youth can provide immediate and positive opportunities to impact children’s lives.

elements to successful youth violence prevention

1. Youth Development Approach

A holistic approach to violence prevention includes addressing the needs of children from the prenatal months to age 21. For a community to assess its effort at preventing violence, it must understand that children of different ages need developmentally appropriate opportunities to thrive. The health of a pregnant mother, the basic needs for food, shelter and affection, and the safety of a newborn are as essential as the educational preparation and job training needs of a young adult. Strong evidence supports early intervention with disadvantaged children as the most cost-effective way to sustain positive outcomes, improve academic performance, reduce teen pregnancy, and otherwise ensure that youth lead productive lives.

2. A Targeted Approach

Those interventions that have had the most impact on juvenile violence in Arkansas identify youth at highest risk and target interventions and services to reach them. Little Rock's PIT initiative used geographic targeting by using Census data to reach at-risk youth. School-based prevention efforts placed resources in those schools where there are high poverty levels, low academic achievement, and high mobility. Other prevention efforts target youth living in single-parent families, in families with incomes below poverty, or in families without a car. Prevention efforts may target those areas where a higher percentage of children in the neighborhood score in the bottom quartiles on standardized math and English tests, where juvenile crime is more prevalent, or where a larger percentage of youth live. With communities having limited resources, targeting helps get resources to those most in need of services.

3. Youth Services Infrastructure

It is important not only to inventory existing programs offered to youth through the schools and social-service programs, but also to understand the role of churches and businesses in providing opportunities for social enrichment and jobs. In those neighborhoods where there is the most need, fewer resources are likely to exist. Here the efforts should be on identifying those programs capable of creating more resources for youth activity. Often, small, established neighborhood churches or

enterprises are in the best position to reach youth and families. Significant improvements in youth outcomes can be realized by either increasing the program capacity of these neighborhood churches or through direct collaboration with them to improve how services are provided.

Such assistance has enabled Arkansas programs to expand their services, find additional funding and support, and improve outcomes for youth. The Little Rock PIT initiative issued requests for proposals from nonprofit organizations in the targeted neighborhoods. To enhance the capacity of these emerging programs, the city contracted with New Futures for Youth to provide technical assistance. Program management and evaluation, staff development and training were offered to increase the capacity of new programs. The Safe School Initiative in Little Rock worked with neighborhood organizations to monitor bus stops to ensure the safety of students getting off the bus each day. The Safe School Initiative in Jonesboro collaborated with the Jonesboro Department of Parks and Recreation to bring a larger number of youth from the at-risk areas of the community into their established sports programs.

4. A Focus on In-School and Out-of-School Time

What happens within the context of the school day has far-reaching impacts on youth. In fact, Arkansas initiatives to prevent youth violence are focused on affecting the school environment. School is also the place where youth are gathered for a majority of their daytime hours, where programs can be easily incorporated into an educational curriculum, and where at-risk youth can be identified. However, the majority of violent juvenile crime occurs outside of the school setting, after school, and during the summer when youth are not in structured activities.

This is not to say that violence prevention efforts should avoid a focus on school-related activities and resources. However, those communities that look at youth's in-school and out-of-school time are going to be more effective in reducing the incidents of youth violence. Placing the entire responsibility of addressing school violence on the school system is doomed to failure because attention must be given to the wider assortment of needs required by the most at-risk youth in the community.

5. A Sustained Source of Funding

One of the most difficult problems facing prevention programs in Arkansas is the absence of sustained funding. Federal initiatives for school safety are time-limited or inadequate. State-funded efforts are often focused on start-up or pilot efforts with short time limits, and competition for limited resources always puts prevention at a disadvantage because of the demand for immediate results. Arkansas' Common Ground Initiative began with a yearly allocation of \$1 million, was reduced by the Legislature to \$250,000, and then recently eliminated completely. This was one of the largest sources of flexible funds for local youth crime and after-school prevention efforts in Arkansas. Even when fully funded, these grants were small and were only provided from year to year, leaving programs with little sense of security. On the other hand, Little Rock's success is due in large measure to a sustained and designated source of funds from an ongoing tax source that now provides approximately \$3 million a year for the PIT program. The Safe School Initiatives receive funding over a three-year period, allowing time to establish programs, measure success and to make the case for ongoing funding from other sources.

Before starting a new effort, it will be necessary to weigh the benefits of a program that does not have long-term funding. Many worthwhile programs have used start-up money to help prove the benefit of a critical service to the community, only to close operations after a year. Any new endeavor to reduce youth violence should include a realistic plan for obtaining a source of ongoing funding.

6. Build on Youth Assets

For youth to succeed, they must achieve more than a status of being problem-free, and prevention programs and youth services have too often focused on just the problem behaviors. As Karen Pittman of the Forum for Youth Investment says, "If a child comes before an employer and points out that they are not involved in the criminal justice system, they are not drug or alcohol abusers, they are not pregnant, and they have not dropped out of high school; is that enough to qualify them for a job?" The asset approach promoted by the Search Institute provides an excellent example of the developmental assets that help young people make wise decisions, choose positive paths, and grow up competent, caring and responsible.

The focus on the positive assets of youth is critical to the ability of a neighborhood to provide youth development services. This approach also implies that a variety of programs be made available in the community. The emphasis on athletic activities leaves many youth without opportunities to explore their artistic, social, or educational interests. An effective prevention effort must provide a variety of activities where assets and abilities are fully realized.

USING THE FAMILY RISK INDEX FACTOR

Featured in the 1999 National Kids Count Data Book, the Family Risk Index Factor is a way to measure how many children in your community face a multitude of problems that put them at an elevated risk for negative outcomes. While each of these factors is a clear disadvantage, children growing up with four or more of these risk factors face far greater odds of failure than the average child. These children are labeled "high-risk." The six measures of vulnerability include:

- ✍ child is not living with both parents;
- ✍ household head is a high school dropout;
- ✍ family income is below the poverty line;
- ✍ child is living with parent(s) who is underemployed;
- ✍ family is receiving welfare benefits; and
- ✍ child does not have health insurance.

In 1999, an estimated 13 percent of Arkansas children were in this high-risk category.

conclusion

*We are bound together by the task that stands before us
and the road that lies ahead.*

*-- James Taylor,
singer/songwriter, "Shed a Little Light"*

We have an opportunity to develop solutions to youth violence in each of our own communities. Knowing the facts, bringing the right people together, and learning from the experiences of others can help make the prevention of youth violence a reality for our communities.

This handbook is intended to help small groups of individual citizens reduce juvenile violence in their community. It provides guidelines and steps to follow, examples of how other Arkansas communities are working to reduce violence, and a listing of state and national resources to use in finding out more helpful information.

Working behind the scenes over long periods of time to prevent the problems associated with youth violence may seem less alluring than the emotionally-charged reactions or solutions offered in response to serious acts of youth violence, but we cannot punish or incarcerate our way out of violence in a community. Unless we begin to work on preventing violence now, we are fighting a losing and a costly battle. Nothing can destroy our sense of harmony more than the fear, anger and distrust arising from acts of violence committed by and against other members of our own communities. This is why this work is so urgent and important. It affects our family, our neighbors and those with whom we interact each day.

resources and sources

Sources

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Best Practices of Youth Violence Prevention: A Sourcebook for Community Action. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, Atlanta, Georgia. September 2000.

High-Risk Kids in America During the 1990s. A Kids Count Working Paper. By William O'Hare and Megan Reynolds of the Annie E. Casey Foundation, Baltimore Maryland. June 2001.

The Asset Approach: Giving Kids What They Need to Succeed. Search Institute. Minneapolis, Minnesota.

Youth Development in Pennsylvania: Why not here? Why not now? The Center for Youth Development and Philadelphia Citizens for Children and Youth. 2001.

National Resources

Kids Count
The Annie E. Casey Foundation
701 St. Paul Street
Baltimore, MD 21202
(410) 547-6600

www.kidscount.org

www.aradvocates.org/kidscount

A national and state-by-state effort to track the status of children in the U.S. By providing policy makers and citizens with benchmarks of child well being, Kids Count seeks to enrich local, state, and national discussions concerning ways to secure better futures for all children.

Building Blocks for Youth

www.buildingblocksforyouth.org

This is an alliance of children's advocates, researchers, law enforcement professionals and community organizers that seeks to protect minority youth in the justice system and promote rational and effective justice policies.

Center for the Study and Prevention of Violence Institute of Behavioral Science
University of Colorado at Boulder
Campus Box 439
Boulder, CO 80309-0439
(303) 492-8465
www.colorado.edu/cspv

The Center provides informed assistance to groups committed to understanding and preventing violence, particularly adolescent violence. It works from a multi-disciplinary platform on the subject of violence and facilitates the building of bridges between the research community and the practitioners and policy makers.

Federal Interagency Forum on Child and Family Statistics
www.childstats.gov

This website offers easy access to federal and state statistics and reports on children and their families, including population and family characteristics, economic security, health, behavior and social environment, and education.

Fight Crime: Invest in Kids
2000 P Street NW, Suite 240
Washington, D.C. 20036
(202) 776-0027
www.fightcrime.org

Fight Crime is an organization of more than 1,000 police chiefs, sheriffs, prosecutors, and crime survivors dedicated to preventing crime and violence. They publish a Youth Violence Prevention Plan, and America's After-School Choice.

Forum for Youth Investment
7014 Westmoreland Avenue
Takoma Park, MD 20912
(301) 270-6250
www.forumforyouthinvestment.org

The Forum is dedicated to increasing the quality and quantity of youth investment and youth involvement in the United States. Its goal is to create strategic alliances among the full range of organizations that invest in youth and to forge relationships between these organizations, families and communities.

National Resource Center for Safe Schools
Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory
101 SW Main, Suite 500
Portland, OR 97204
1-800-268-2275
www.safetyzone.org

The Center works with schools communities, state and local education agencies, and other concerned individuals and agencies to create safe learning environments and prevent school violence.

National Youth Violence Resource Center
1-866-723-3968
www.safeyouth.org

The Center is a central source of information on prevention and intervention programs, publications, research and statistics on violence committed by and against children and teens. It is a collaboration between the Centers for Disease Control and other Federal agencies.

Search Institute
700 South Third Street, Suite 210
Minneapolis, MN 55415
www.search-institute.org

The Search Institute is an independent, nonprofit, nonsectarian organization whose mission is to advance the well being of adolescents and children by generating knowledge and promoting its application.

School of the 21st Century
The Yale University Bush Center in Child Development and Social Policy
310 Prospect Street
New Haven, CT 06511
(203) 432-9944
www.yale.edu/21c

These are school-based child care and family support model programs that promote the optimal growth and development of children beginning at birth. They transform the school into a year-round, multi-service center providing services from early morning to early evening. The model helps educators ensure that children arrive at school ready to learn and receive the support they need to succeed academically. These programs exist in the Arkadelphia, Batesville, Hamburg, Paragould and Pulaski County school districts.

U.S. Department of Agriculture Partnerships Against Violence Network (PAVNET)
www.pavnet.org

This is a "virtual library" of information about violence and youth-at-risk, representing data from several different Federal agencies. It includes a section on youth violence prevention through education, enforcement, sports/recreation, treatment and rehabilitation.

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
National Center for Injury Prevention and Control
4770 Buford Highway NE
Atlanta, GA 30341-3724
(770) 488-4362
<http://www.cdc.gov>

The Center offers information on the problem of youth violence, the risk factors, understanding what works, and specific activities and publications offered by the CDC that addresses the issue of youth violence.

U. S. Department of Justice
Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention
<http://ojjdp.ncjrs.org>

Supports local communities in their efforts to develop and implement effective and coordinated prevention and intervention programs and improve the juvenile justice system.

U. S. Department of Justice Title V Community Prevention Grants Program
Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention
State and Tribal Assistance Division
(202) 307-5924

www.ojjdp.ncjrs.org/titlev/

This is a federal grants program to fund collaborative, community-based delinquency prevention efforts. The three-year prevention plans are designed to reduce risk factors associated with juvenile delinquency and decrease the incidences of juvenile problem behavior.

U.S. Department of Education
Safe and Drug-Free Schools and Communities Program
www.ed/offices/OESE/SDFS

Arkansas Resources

Arkansas Advocates for Children & Families
523 South Louisiana, Suite 700
Little Rock, AR. 72201
(501) 371-9678
www.aradvocates.org

Arkansas Coalition for Juvenile Justice
c/o Division of Youth Services
700 South Main Street, Slot S 502
Little Rock, AR 72201-4608
(501) 682-8654
www.arjuvjust.org

Arkansas Department of Education Office of Comprehensive School Health
2020 West 3rd, Suite 320
Little Rock, Arkansas 72205
(501) 324-9740

Arkansas Department of Health
Bureau of Alcohol and Drug Abuse Prevention
Prevention Resource Centers
Freeway Medical Center
5800 West 10th Street, Suite 907
Little Rock, AR 72204
(501) 280-4500

Arkansas Department of Human Services Division of Youth Services
700 South Main Street, Slot S 502
Little Rock, AR 72201-4608
(501) 682-8654

Arkansas Department of Human Services
Division of Children and Family Services
700 South Main Street
Little Rock, AR 72201-4608
(501) 682-8772

Arkansas Supreme Court Administrative Office of the Courts
Justice Building
625 Marshall Street
Little Rock, AR 72201-1078
(501) 682-9400

State Asset-Building Program
University of Arkansas Cooperative Extension Service
2301 S. University Avenue
Little Rock, AR 72203
(501) 671-2027

City of Little Rock Department of Community Programs/PIT
City Hall
500 W. Markham, Suite 220 West
Little Rock, AR 72201
(501) 399-3420
www.littlerock.org

New Futures for Youth
400 W. Markham, Suite 702
Little Rock, AR 72201
(501) 374-1011

Little Rock School District Safe Schools/Healthy Students Initiative
810 West Markham Street
Little Rock, AR 72201
(501) 660-6612

Jonesboro Safe School Initiative
1307 Flint Avenue
Jonesboro, AR 72401
(870) 933-5800 ext. 2234

21st Century Schools in Arkansas

Arkadelphia Public Schools
Pat Donlow, 21C Coordinator
235 N. 11th Street
Arkadelphia, AR 71923
(870) 246-1148

Batesville School District
Mavis Elrod, Early Childhood Director
330 East College
Batesville, AR 72501
(870) 793-6831

Hamburg School District
Marilyn Chambers, Special Programs Director
521 E. Lincoln
Hamburg, AR 71646
(870) 853-9851

The School of the 21st Century
Paragould School District
Vicki Shelby, Director
427 East Poplar
Paragould, AR 72450
(870) 236-8064

21st Century School
Pulaski County Special School District
Bobby Lester, Director
P.O. Box 8601
Little Rock, AR 72216
(501) 490-5721

Publications

Best Practices of Youth Violence Prevention: A Sourcebook for Community Action. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Centers for Disease Control and Prevention National Center for Injury Prevention and Control. Atlanta, Georgia. September 2000.

Blueprints for Violence Prevention. University of Colorado Institute of Behavioral Science Center for the Study and Prevention of Violence.
www.colorado.edu/cspv. 1996.

Comprehensive Responses to Youth at Risk: Interim Findings from the SafeFutures Initiative Summary. Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention. 1999.

Early Warning Timely Response: A Guide to Safe Schools. U.S. Department of Education Special Education and Rehabilitative Services. www.ed.gov/offices/OSERS/OSEP/earlywrn.html. Washington, D.C. August 1998.

Finding Funding: A Guide to Federal Sources for Out-of-School Time and Community Initiatives. By Nancy Reder of the Finance Project in Washington, D.C. www.financeproject.org. 2000.

From America's Front Line Against Crime: A School and Youth Violence Prevention Plan. Fight Crime: Invest in Kids. www.fightcrime.org.

High-Risk Kids in America During the 1990s. A Kids Count Working Paper. By William O'Hare and Megan Reynolds of the Annie E. Casey Foundation in Baltimore, MD. June 2001.

Less Hype, More Help: Reducing Juvenile Crime, What Works – and What Doesn't. By Richard A. Mendel of the American Youth Policy Forum. www.cwla.org/pubs. Washington, D.C.

Predictors of Youth Violence. U.S. Department of Justice. www.doj.gov.

The Asset Approach: Giving Kids What They Need to Succeed. Search Institute. www.search-institute.org. Minneapolis, MN.

State Data Sources

Arkansas Department of Human Services Statistical Report. DHS Administrative Services Research and Statistics Division. www.accessarkansas.org/dhs. Little Rock, AR.

Arkansas Youth Risk Behavior Survey. Arkansas Department of Education Office of Comprehensive School Health. Little Rock, AR.

Arkansas Communities that Care Survey. Arkansas Department of Health Bureau of Alcohol and Drug Abuse Prevention. Little Rock, AR.

Risk Factors for Adolescent Drug and Alcohol Abuse in Arkansas. Arkansas Department of Health Bureau of Alcohol and Drug Abuse Prevention. Little Rock, AR.

Arkansas Crime Information Center Information Services Division. www.acic.org. Little Rock, AR.

Arkansas Supreme Court Administrative Office of the Courts. Little Rock, AR.

University of Arkansas at Little Rock College of Business Administration
Insitute for Economic Advancement Children's Research Center. Little Rock,
AR.

Arkansas Department of Education School Report Card. Arkansas Department of Education. www.as-is.org/reportcard.

Arkansas Advocates for Children & Families. www.aradvocates.org/data/counties.asp.

Media Advocacy Resources

University of Maryland Casey Journalism Center of Children and Families
<http://casey.umd.edu/home.nsf>

California Now Children and the Media Program
<http://www.childrennow.org/media/index.html>

Families USA Media Center
<http://www.familiesusa.org/media/index.htm>

Benton Foundation Communications Capacity Building Program
<http://www.benton.org/Practice/Toolkit/home.html>

FrameWorks Institute
<http://www.frameworks.org>

University of California at Los Angeles
Center for Communications and Community
<http://sscnet.ucla.edu/issr/cc>

Public Agenda Foundation
<http://www.publicagenda.org>



www.aradvocates.org