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School Safety



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Pepperdine University's National School Safety Center is a partnership of the U.S. Department of Justice and U.S. Department of Education. NSSC's goal is to promote school safety, improve discipline, increase attendance, and suppress drug traffic and abuse in all our nation's schools.

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About the cover:

Schools are benefiting from a resurgence of community involvement — from private citizens, commercial businesses and public agencies — stimulated both by positive school-public relations and, unfortunately, by a series of crime-related crises. Illustration by Deborah Zemke, Copyright © 1988, NSSC.

CONTENTS



- 4 **Community service — with a smile** 119224
By Cathryn Berger Kaye
- 9 **School crime: Up close and personal** 119225
By Terry Modglin
- 12 **Friendly foundations** 119226
By Joyce Stevens
- 15 **Groundswell response to recent crime wave** 119227
By Brenda Turner
- 18 **Information as prevention** 119228
By Stephen Goldsmith
- 20 **High tech for high risk** 119229
By Dale Mann
- 24 **Role models & sports: A youthful perspective**
- 26 **Crime's aftermath** 119230
By June Feder

Updates

- 2 NSSC Update
- 31 National Update
- 32 Legislative Update
- 33 Legal Update
- 34 Resource Update

NCJRS
 AUG 15 1989

Resources & ACQUISITIONS

- 8 NSSC Resources
- 23 NSSC Resource Papers
- 29 School Safety Check Book
- 30 "Set Straight on Bullies" (film/videotape)
- 35 "Principals of Leadership"

BY BRENDA TURNER

The public is "mad as hell" about crime in their communities and many residents are taking positive steps to counter street violence.

A groundswell response to recent crime wave

Public outcry has echoed from New York City throughout the country in recent weeks, voicing outrage at the much-publicized brutal rape of a 28-year-old investment banker who was reportedly attacked by a gang of black teen-agers while she was jogging in Central Park.

"Wilding" was the term the group of more than 30 youths used to describe their search for "something to do" that April night as they left their nearby East Harlem neighborhood for Central Park. There they allegedly divided into smaller groups and attacked several others before committing their most horrific act of violence. Police reports indicate that at about 10 p.m. the woman was dragged down a steep ravine, where she was gang-raped by perhaps four of the youths — ranging in age from 14 to 16 — while the group beat her with a rock and metal pipe, then left her for dead.

When she was found by passers-by about three hours later, she had lost two-thirds of her blood and lapsed into a coma. The young woman regained consciousness nearly two weeks later, but whether she will fully recover from the serious physical and mental injuries she suffered is not yet known.

The six teens who have been indicted

for this heinous crime are not chronic juvenile offenders — apparently none of them had police records. A school official who was quoted in *People* magazine described one of the youths as "one of our nicest kids."

Community response

A nurse who lives in the same housing complex as some of the suspects in the New York City attack helped organize a prayer vigil for the victim. "The crime was horrendous and the perpetrators should be punished," she told reporters, but added that no great outcry was heard when three teen-agers in their neighborhood were sexually attacked not long before the Central Park wilding.

The brutal crime shocked even callous New Yorkers, but equally shocking acts of violence happen almost daily in our nation's cities. A record number of drug-related murders have occurred in Washington, D.C., gangbanging youths in Los Angeles have committed hundreds of drive-by shootings, and countless schoolchildren have been gunned down in Detroit.

Many urban, suburban and rural communities throughout the nation are experiencing youth-related crime and violence firsthand. Others, through a constant barrage of heart-wrenching media stories recounting these atrocities, are recognizing the truth spoken by the Greek philosopher Solon, who warned,

"There can be no justice until those of us who are unaffected by crime become as indignant as those who are."

Although citizens may loudly voice their contempt for crime, seldom does public outrage alone change the amount of violence that afflicts this country's urban cities and is spreading into once seemingly safe suburban and rural areas. True crime prevention mandates action and a total commitment from the entire community aimed at educating youngsters not to enter into crime, but punishing and attempting to rehabilitate those who do.

Youth involvement in crime

Youthful offenders are responsible for a large percentage of crime, but those between the ages of 12 and 24 also are the most frequently victimized group for crimes of violence and crimes of theft.

"Youths are more likely to be victimized in a street crime — assault, rape, robbery and theft — and they also are more likely to commit a crime and be arrested than any other segment of our nation's population," wrote James R. Wetzel in a Spring 1988 *School Safety* article titled "Kids and Crime." Later, when these youths reach their 20s, he says that "those who were juvenile offenders are the ones most likely to be under the supervision of the criminal justice system for committing a crime."

Wetzel, director of the Center for

Brenda Turner is associate editor of School Safety.

Demographic Studies at the U.S. Bureau of the Census, says Federal Bureau of Investigation statistics show that one out of every 25 persons arrested for a violent crime (murder, rape, robbery and aggravated assault) and one in eight persons arrested for a property crime (burglary, larceny-theft, motor vehicle theft and arson) is less than 15 years old.

The number of youths victimized in a violent crime is more than double the victimization rate for all adults, Wetzel notes. One out of 18 youths was robbed, assaulted or raped during 1986, according to the latest available statistics from the U.S. Department of Justice.

Because young people spend a large portion of their day at school, many of these youth-related incidents of crime and violence occur on campus. Even when a crime does not occur at school, students directly are affected by the events that go on in their community — from drug dealing to gang conflicts to neighborhood crime.

The first National Adolescent Student Health Survey, conducted in the fall of 1987, confirms that crime and violence are serious problems for today's students. The study, which surveyed approximately 11,000 eighth-grade and tenth-grade students, revealed:

- More than one-third reported that someone threatened to hurt them, while 14 percent reported being robbed and 13 percent reported being attacked at school or on a school bus at least once during the past year.
- Almost half of the boys and about one-fourth of the girls said they had been in a fight at least once during the last year.
- Four out of 10 boys and nearly one-fourth of the girls said they could obtain a handgun. Three percent of the boys said they had brought a handgun to school and 23 percent of the boys said they had carried a knife to school at least once during the past year.

Call to action

Clearly, the problem of crime and violence is leaving its imprint on our

youth. A Philadelphia mother voiced her frustration to other parents and school personnel during a day-long meeting earlier this year at Wannamaker Middle School, one of more than 200 schools throughout the city where such discussions occurred that day to help enlist community support in forming a districtwide plan to fight drug abuse.

According to an article in the *Philadelphia Inquirer*, the mother said she thought her two teen-age children would learn after two young drug dealers in their neighborhood were executed gangland-style last summer by drug pushers they had somehow crossed. But her children merely shrugged the incident off, the woman said, adding that her 15-year-old daughter's response was: "Didn't they know better than to be there at that time?"

The *Inquirer* article describes Wannamaker, where the Philadelphia school district is trying to set up a model program of parental participation, as "a school where most of the students live in public housing developments and bring their gang and turf wars right into the building." Teachers told of finding empty crack bottles in the hallways and of trying to teach while rival gang members sit across the aisle from each other, the tension thick in the air.

School Superintendent Constance E. Clayton and the city's newly appointed drug czar, Robert F. Armstrong, are hoping to get more collaboration and help from community groups and other local organizations as the city's drug-fighting strategy becomes more fully developed. The district's 24 drug and alcohol prevention specialists in recent weeks have been running assemblies, special programs, parent workshops, family counseling and other programs.

Another fed-up Philadelphia resident, Herman Rice, who lives in a low-income area known as Mantua, started a group called Mantua Against Drugs (MAD) after the neighborhood baseball team disbanded due to drug dealing. Rice said his first target was an abandoned building that served as Mantua's

busiest crack house, according to a recent article titled "Getting as Mad as Hell: Citizens Are on the Offensive in the Neighborhood War on Drugs," in the National Weekly Edition of the *Washington Post*.

"One day, I got a sledgehammer and about eight or nine guys, and we knocked the door off the hinges," chasing the occupants away until police arrived, he told the *Post*. Rice said that soon afterward about 200 neighbors marched on another crack house, shouting, "Come out, you stinking dogs!" MAD members, who wear white helmets, have worked with police in closing 200 crack houses, Rice reported. Philadelphia Police Captain David Morrell was quoted in the article as saying that such groups are "a tremendously effective tool. We find crime actually is reduced."

A group of Muslims in Brooklyn, N.Y., became similarly angered at seeing crack dealers overrun the neighborhood surrounding the mosque where they worshiped, *Newsweek* magazine reported in a March 28, 1988, article on "Saying 'No' to Crack Gangs: Angry Citizens Fight Back Against the Drug Trade." A 24-hour patrol of the area was organized and, armed with walkie-talkies used to contact police, they stopped crack transactions by boldly placing themselves between the dealers and buyers until police arrived.

The Muslims got police to flush out the 12 crack houses operating in the area, and when potential buyers came back they were told that the dealers had left. Police said they had closed down the crack houses before, but this time they stayed shut.

Communities take a stand

Although the actions of MAD and the group of Muslims are somewhat extreme, a number of communities are beginning to take a stand against crime and violence. A Manhattan, N.Y., group calling themselves East Villagers Against Crack joined with local block associations in forming street patrols

and sending out letters to all neighborhood residents urging that they join in their community's fight against drugs. According to the *Newsweek* article, the group even advertised its presence to drug dealers and users by placing six-inch letters on an abandoned theater marquee with the messages: "You Buy We Spy" and "Drug Dealers Out."

A citizen group in California, the North Oakland residents of the San Pablo Avenue/Golden Gate Improvement Association, have created a handbook titled "Just Say Go" that offers communities tips for dealing with gang and crack problems. Their advice includes asking police to have the telephone company convert public pay phones to a one-way line for outgoing calls only since many street drug dealers virtually set up offices and receive calls on pay phones, according to an article in the *San Francisco Examiner*. The group also recommends complaining to landlords when drug dealing is done from rented houses in the area.

Community Youth Gang Services (CYGS) in Los Angeles is made up of both former gang members and professional social workers who have developed a multifaceted approach to combating gang influence. The organization, funded by the city and county, has been instrumental in influencing hundreds of young people to give up their gang lifestyle, has helped provide ghetto families with counseling and other services, and has secured truces between rival gangs. During the summer, CYGS hires kids to plant trees and remove graffiti before it triggers gang clashes.

At Los Angeles' Jordan High School, gang rivalries reportedly have caused about 100 students to stay home from classes for several months out of fear for their personal safety. A vocal group of their parents, aided by the American Association of Women, has filed an official complaint with the U.S. Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights contending that students who live in the Imperial Courts housing project cannot safely attend Jordan because of

threats from gang members living in the Jordan Downs housing project adjacent to the Watts campus. The district recently granted the Imperial Courts students transfers to other schools, but a study by state officials found no gang threat at Jordan.

The Crisis Intervention Network, Inc. (CIN) has been successful in preventing youth gang violence in Philadelphia, with the number of gang-related youth murders dropping from 40 per year when CIN began in 1975 to about two each year today. Youth crisis teams, which include former gang members, use two-way radios to patrol their neighborhoods. The teams also respond to calls to CIN's 24-hour crisis hot line, intervene and mediate in conflict situations, report suspicious activity to police, and work with youth and parents. CIN, coordinating its programs with schools and city and community organizations, conducts workshops and seminars, operates a speakers' bureau, and provides counseling and training.

Everyone working together

The National Crime Prevention Council's 1986 handbook titled "Preventing Crime in Urban Communities" stresses that citizen participation can make a big difference in reducing crime and violence. "Cities around the country are now discovering that crime prevention is an integral part of creating and sustaining livable communities," the handbook states. "Crime-prevention thinking needs to be woven throughout the community fabric, to be woven throughout the actions of various departments, divisions and agencies which provide the services that make our cities work."

One city that has made this vision a reality is Clifton, N.J. During a year-long assessment, a master crime-prevention plan was developed. Agencies ranging from the school system to the fire department to the parks and recreation department were integrally involved in making Clifton a safer and better place in which to live and work.

The Atlanta Police Bureau believes

that crime prevention is the whole community's business. The Georgia city has several programs — Neighborhood Watch, Home Security, Business Security and Operation ID — that receive communitywide support. In addition, a corps of civilian security inspectors works closely with these groups. Police officers teach personal safety to children in kindergarten to third grade, and eighth-graders learn about practical law. The Police Athletic League helps young people become involved in sports, skills development, mentoring programs and crime-prevention activities.

John A. Calhoun, the National Crime Prevention Council's executive director, expressed hope for cities plagued by crime and violence: "As we dug into the subject of crime prevention in urban communities, we were moved by flowers of hope we found blooming amid landscapes of despair. We found individuals in collapsing communities who had finally reached their limit, saying, 'I've had enough. I won't live like this anymore.'"

These individuals, he said, "began a watch program, or a day-care center for kids, or an after-school program for teen-agers." He continued: "We found programs where teens were tired of being regarded as the community plague, teens who began to work for their communities and schools. We found programs in which groups previously suspicious of the police teamed up with them to increase crime reporting and to reduce the community's tolerance of crime. We found churches tackling the difficult issues of neighborhood cohesion, family values and teen pregnancy; we found people trying to turn the energy and commitment of gangs to positive ends. In the midst of a host of objective circumstances that shouted defeat, we found hope."

Some amount of crime may be unpreventable. But when everyone in the community works together at finding solutions to the pervasive problem of crime and violence, hope does exist for our nation's youth. □