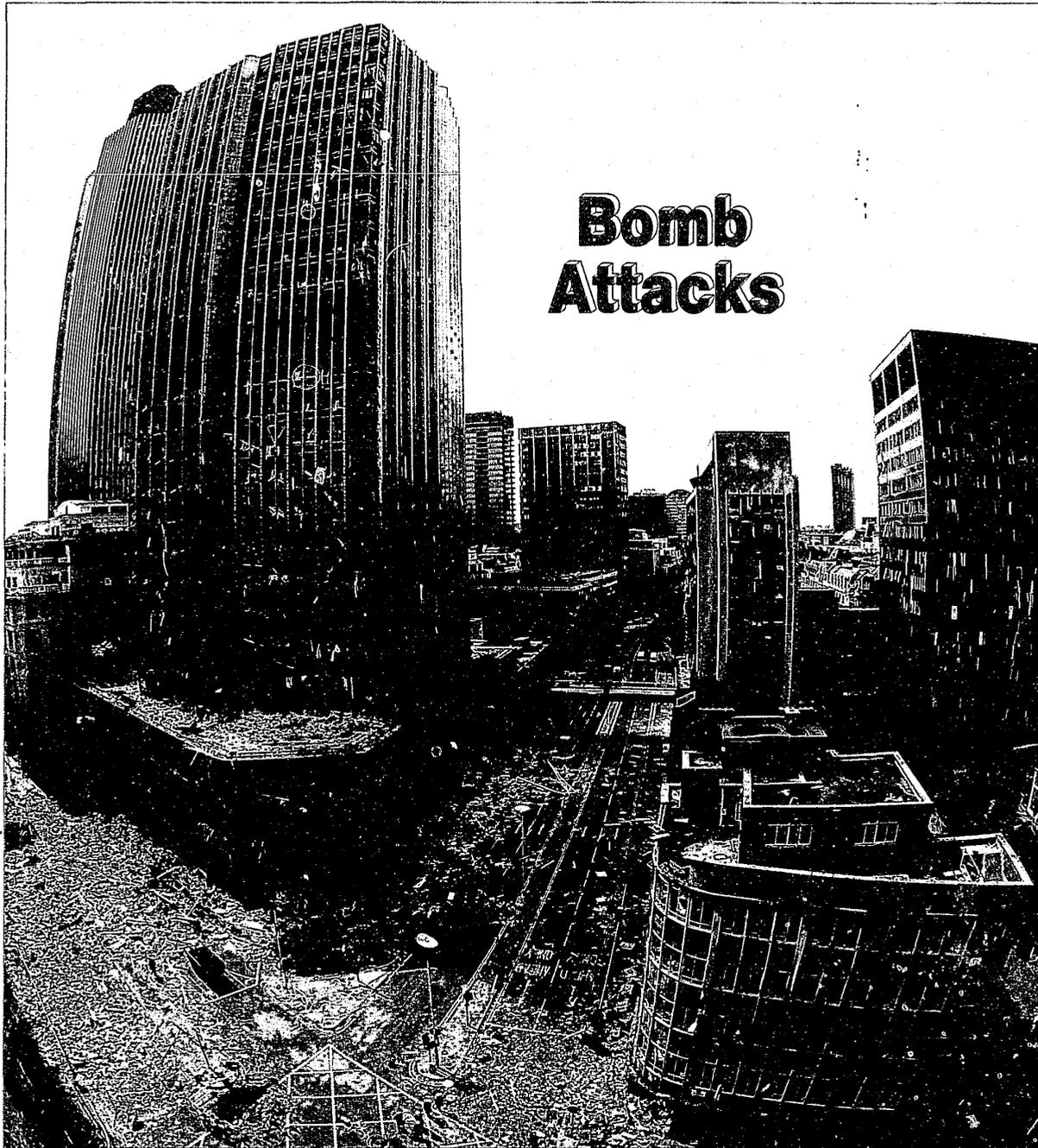




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Director

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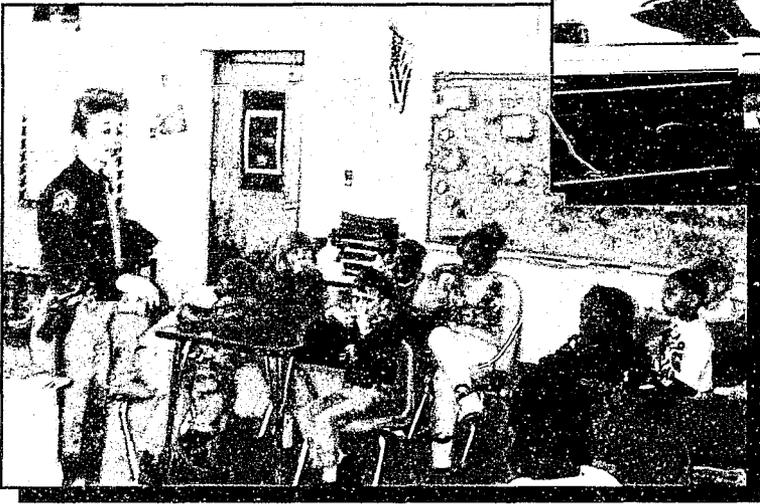
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The GREAT Program

Gang Resistance Education and Training

By
KIM R. HUMPHREY
and PETER R. BAKER



From coast to coast, gangs spread their message of violence. Communities that once boasted a relatively peaceful lifestyle now literally see the handwriting on the walls. Community leaders and citizens around the Nation are reaching out with questions, seeking help from crime control experts. They are, in reality, demanding an end to the violence that threatens not only their well-being but also the future of their children.

What are the answers to the violence that endangers families, schools, neighborhoods, and communities? While many police

departments experience temporary success by establishing task forces, gang members generally regroup and develop better ways to avoid recognition and apprehension. In many cases, agencies simply chase their gang problem into neighboring communities. When these neighbors develop task forces, the gang violence spreads to yet another venue. Youth gangs do not represent a new problem, but the mobilization and networking abilities exhibited by these gangs intensify their menace.

Law enforcement officers who confront gang activity understand that no "magic bullet" exists to rid

communities of the problem. No single weapon will break the cycle of youth violence and gang participation. However, in Phoenix, Arizona, a cooperative effort between the police department, area schools, and the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms (BATF), known as the Gang Resistance Education and Training (GREAT) Program, shows promising results.

Through this program, uniformed officers direct a structured antigang message to students. They teach them various life skills in an effort to combat violence, prejudice, victimization, and negative attitudes toward law enforcement. In

short, the GREAT Program is a contingency plan to impact the future.

The GREAT Program

Based on the premise that the best defense is a good offense, the GREAT Program targets elementary and middle school students. Its



Lieutenant Humphrey, a former coordinator of the GREAT Program, now serves as a shift commander in the Phoenix, Arizona, Police Department.



Officer Baker serves with the Community Relations Bureau of the Phoenix, Arizona, Police Department.

proactive, antigang message encourages youths to develop their own solutions to problems and promotes positive alternatives to the revenge-driven violence that gangs foster and perpetuate. The curriculum is structured so that lessons build upon one another; the overall goal is to provide students with real tools to resist the lure and trap of gangs.

During the pilot year (1991), the police department solicited select school districts to implement GREAT. Since then, additional school districts have requested the program.

Currently, GREAT is directed to four specific grade levels through two distinct programs. The elementary school curriculum was developed specifically for third and fourth grade classes; the middle school curriculum targets students in the seventh and eighth grades.

In addition, a separate middle school curriculum is used during a summer component of the program. GREAT summer participants not only receive educational classes to reinforce their school-year experience but they also participate in numerous recreational activities and community projects. On summer days, these youths can be found painting over graffiti, working with food-share programs, and assisting in any number of community-oriented events.

Eight GREAT Lessons

The GREAT Program's ultimate goal is to keep youths out of gangs and off the streets. Toward this end, the program provides a broad-based message that

encourages youths to become responsible members of their communities. Officers teach the students how to set goals, resist gang pressures, understand the positive effects of cultural diversity, and resolve conflict without violence.

In the middle school program, the central feature of the curriculum revolves around the eight GREAT lessons:

- Lesson 1 introduces students to the program and to their GREAT officer
- Lesson 2 familiarizes students with crimes, victims, victims' rights, and the impact of crime in their neighborhoods
- Lesson 3 teaches students about cultural diversity and how failure to accept cultural differences can lead to prejudice and other negative ramifications
- Lesson 4 focuses on conflict resolution to create an atmosphere of understanding that enables all parties to better address problems and work on solutions together (This lesson is divided into two parts.)
- Lesson 5 equips students to meet their basic needs in ways other than by joining gangs
- Lesson 6 explains the correlation between gang involvement and drugs and their destructive effects on neighborhoods
- Lesson 7 encourages students to understand the diverse responsibilities of people within their community

- Lesson 8 stresses the need for establishing goals in life and suggests ways to set and meet these personal goals.

To bring the concepts in these lessons to life, officers employ various methods, including demonstrations, role-plays, and practical application exercises.

Officer Training

Phoenix police officers must volunteer to become GREAT instructors. Depending on their previous experience levels, selected officers undergo specific training to ensure that they will meet their responsibilities effectively. Instruction includes:

- 40 hours of training for officers with previous classroom teaching experience in which they employed a comprehensive curriculum
- 80 hours of training for officers with little or no public speaking and/or teaching experience. Instruction spans from basic public speaking skills to instruction methodologies.

Once certified, officers work closely with local teachers to deliver the GREAT message. GREAT management training, the final optional level of instruction, provides supervisory skills to those officers who are already certified GREAT instructors and who desire to become team leaders.

Cooperation

The development of GREAT was a model of cooperation. In December 1991, supported by special congressional funding, BATF

sponsored the Phoenix Police Department in developing and implementing a pilot gang prevention project. During the pilot year, the police department solicited school districts in which to test the program. Officers from the department's Community Relations Bureau then worked closely with local educators and their schools to develop the GREAT curriculum.

“

By directing a strong antigang message to elementary school students, officers can make children aware of the true dangers of gangs before they are pressured to join one.

”

This spirit of cooperation produced immediate positive results. Quickly, educators in embattled schools saw the credibility and potential of using police officers to confront the growing gang problem. GREAT received widespread acceptance from the students and praise from teachers, parents, and administrators for its positive approach. A preliminary evaluation conducted by the Arizona State University Prevention Resource Center showed tremendous potential for GREAT and wide acceptance of its approach.

Spreading the GREAT Message

By the summer of 1992, additional Phoenix school districts were added, and agencies outside Phoenix began to express interest in developing similar programs. These requests for assistance led BATF to commit additional resources so that the GREAT initiative could be expanded outside the pilot area.

Subsequently, in October 1992, the Federal Law Enforcement Training Center (FLETC) in Glynco, Georgia, became a partner, assisting in the extension of the program to other agencies and providing valuable logistical support to the national GREAT effort. This led to the formation of a national policy board and training committee, which provides a vehicle for the national expansion effort.

The GREAT training program provides a “how to” manual for agencies to develop similar but customized programs that will work in their respective communities. This flexibility allows agencies, regardless of budget, to implement a positive community program that addresses the gang problem year-round.

To date, over 751 officers in 250 agencies representing 39 States and the District of Columbia have been certified to teach the GREAT Program.¹ Over 105,000 students nationwide received GREAT instruction during the 1993-94 school year.²

Conclusion

For over 100 years, schools have played a vital role in the socialization of American children. The GREAT Program builds upon this tradition by teaching

youths how to become productive members of their communities and positive forces in their neighborhoods.

Because gangs target school-age youths, an effective prevention strategy also should target the same age groups. By directing a strong antigang message to elementary school students, officers can make

children aware of the true dangers of gangs before they are pressured to join one. In the middle school program, officers provide youths with the skills necessary to resist gangs and to make reasoned, intelligent choices. In doing so, the GREAT Program offers an effective approach to keeping youths out of gangs. ♦

Endnotes

¹ Based on a telephone survey of police departments.

² For more information about the GREAT Program, contact the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms, P.O. Box 50148, Washington, DC 20091-0418, or the Phoenix Police Department, Community Relations Bureau, 620 West Washington Street, Phoenix, Arizona 85003.

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Manuscript Specifications

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Format: All manuscripts should be double-spaced and typed on 8 1/2" by 11" white paper. All pages should be numbered, and three copies should be submitted for review purposes.

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