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Governor's Summit on School Safety and the Prevention of Youth Violence

— Summary by
Mary McPhail Gray, Ph.D.

Listening for Meaning

"I feel safe at school. There are many guns at school, but I don't report them. I don't want to violate someone's trust so then I won't feel safe at school anymore."

"I don't trust the principal or the teachers. There is no relationship at all. If there is no relationship you won't report guns."

"I think most parents really love their children, but they don't have the skills to be good parents. Make information available to them in classes to help them."

"Most of the guns I see are for that person's protection. Who's going to protect them if they don't have their guns?"

"Diversity is not celebrated or taught in my school. All the cliques just create walls between us. We are not united."

"You need to create a community. If you feel you are in a community and you care about your community, then you won't hurt it."

— Quotes from a panel of 35 students from across Colorado speaking at the Governor's Summit, on June 19, 1999, in Denver.

Attorney General Ken Salazar and Mississippi Attorney General Mike Moore facilitated the panel.

The youth's key points were echoed by a number of community professionals and by researchers in the area of violence prevention.

- **Violence prevention is a responsibility of an entire community.**

We need to work across organizations and combine resources to respond creatively to the threat of violence.

- **Violence prevention occurs in trusting relationships.**

Youth said they did not take responsibility for reporting acts of violence or evidence of weapons because they did not have trusting relationships with those persons who should receive this information. Many youth reported that they knew adults who recognized signs of violence but did nothing about it. Recognition of adults' inability to be protective towards youth was damaging. Youth recognize real caring, interest, and concern for their safety and welfare.



- **Unexplored differences encourage violence.**

When youth do not understand members of another group, suspicion, mistrust, lack of respect and potential for violence increase. Youth who attended schools where diversity was celebrated and differences were explored felt safer and more positive about the ability of their environment to protect them from violence. Many students commented that adults did not recognize the power of artificial walls created by groups within the school environment.

- **We have failed to be effective and supportive socializers of males in our society.**

Youth as well as researchers talked about violent behaviors being expected of males and the need to be defensive and aggressive in school and community environments. We have failed to help males learn to negotiate verbally, develop inclusiveness rather than build barriers, and manage appropriate expressions of anger.

A great deal of research and wisdom has already been accumulated in how to prevent violence. We need to exert the will to develop an integrated collaborative effort at the community level.

Governor Owens challenged Coloradans to make a personal commitment to reach out to youth in the community and provide positive supportive environments.

Are Adults Missing in Action?

Dr. Kay Hymowitz, Senior Fellow at the Manhattan Institute, said that adults have abandoned their responsibility for caring for youth, whether they are our children or grandchildren, or the children of neighbors and community members. This results in a sense of disconnectedness in our communities, particularly among youth.

Dr. Hymowitz's research emphasizes that most Americans have mixed feelings about authority. The history of challenges in the court systems and the development of public laws often reflect deep conflicts about authority. We are not willing to reprimand when we see misbehavior, to stand up for universal values, or to be consistent and enforce rules we have created.

Dr. Hymowitz said that a young person who disobeys a rule is making a moral decision. If there are no rules or if no rules are enforced, there are no growth opportunities to make moral decisions.

Her comments echoed many young persons who described rules in their schools that were unfair or unjustly applied. Young people expect to have rules that are rational, fair, and consistently applied. They also expect and have the ability to be part of creating rules for their school environments.



- **Recommendations for communities for the prevention of violence** (from Dr. Hymowitz):

1. All parents should know their children's friends.
2. Parents, teachers, and the communities should make certain that schools are welcoming and safe.
3. Law enforcement personnel need to deal with criminal activity within schools.
4. Counselors and social workers need to deal with mental health concerns.
5. Classroom learning needs to be led by teachers who are willing to be involved in a positive relationship with their students.
6. "You cannot influence a relationship you are not in."

Prevention Ideas: Conventional Wisdom and Some Surprises

Specific ideas for youth violence prevention from studies summarized at the conference:

- High quality available and affordable early childhood education is a bargain in the prevention of violence. This investment supports violence prevention as well as family strengths, positive employment records, and community participation.
- A study of 911 police calls resulted in 12 armed officers being placed in high schools in a large metropolitan area. While this action was controversial, the results were positive. Teachers liked it, youth felt safer, and youth and law enforcement built more positive relationships.
- National studies show that the safest schools in American have these characteristics:

- High academic standards
- Rules created jointly by adults and youth
- Rules consistently enforced
- Adequate adult supervision
- School mission statements include the expectation and commitment to safety
- Zero tolerance for threats, abuse, or violence

Necessary Investments

Several speakers commented that our culture has refused to invest in families. Frequently, community discussions of family support programs are mired in conflicts about values and control. Universal values such as fairness, justice and positive supportive environments for human learning and growth were mentioned as necessary for all young persons.

One speaker said that the commodity that is rare and precious at the end of the twentieth century is not money, but **time**. A director of an inner city nonprofit organization serving youth said:

I can always get a check from you for my program. What I cannot get is your time. I use your check to hire people to spend time with your kids.

Giving time to relationships with youth is vital, including using programs that encourage adults to become Big Brothers, Big Sisters, mentors, job coaches, and athletic coaches. Communities that provide safe environments for youth recreation and socializing also need to provide access to caring adults in a variety of roles. One suggestion was that all employers give at least three days' annual leave to each employee to encourage them to be involved with their children's lives.

Promoting positive relationships

with youth includes seeing them as assets in the community. Even though the idea of involving youth as decision-makers with adults in the community is promoted, frequently the youth are invited to participate as token members. Not enough youth are involved to provide an adequate and clear voice in decision making. Sometimes, only a certain class or kind of young person is invited to participate in decision making. If we are to build community and prevent violence, all youth need opportunities to which they can say yes.

Are We All in the Intervention Business?

In the aftermath of the Columbine tragedy, many individuals have commented about their role in violence prevention, expressing fear that everyone is being asked to become a social worker or counselor, or to engage in work for which they feel unprepared.

It is important for professionals in support of families and youth to look at the mission and role of our organizations.

- ◆ If we are in an educational setting, are we educating parents to select from a variety of skills to nurture their young persons?
- ◆ If we are working with young persons, are we providing them education in anger management, decision making, goal setting, and negotiation?
- ◆ If we are part of a community organization, are we actively providing resources to help mentor or encourage young persons? Do we have youth speak to our organization about their concerns and observations of the community strengths and needs?

- ◆ Do we honor their achievements and provide them with scholarships to camp or assistance in finding jobs or scholarships for advancing their vocational and academic training?
- ◆ Do we care what youth in our community are doing? Do we have a relationship with any of them?

Our task is to look seriously at the stated mission of our organization, and be certain that we are not missing in action in support of young people.

— Mary McPhail Gray, associate director of Colorado State University Cooperative Extension and co-director of the Family and Youth Institute, attended the Governor's Summit.

The official report from the Summit on School Safety and the Prevention of Youth Violence is available from the Attorney General's office. Call 303-866-4500 for a copy, or visit the web site at <http://www.state.co.us/>

Programs that Build Skills and Prevent Violence

— by Mary McPhail Gray

Colorado State University Cooperative Extension implements a number of programs that can be used at the local level to enhance skills of family members and community members so that circumstances that encourage violence do not occur. The following three are examples.

Partnerships for Community Safety

A new partnership with the Colorado Regional Community

Policing Institute and the Department of Justice helps communities solve public safety problems through a facilitated process of discussion and decision-making among key community leaders.

Partnerships among Cooperative Extension, Law Enforcement, and a variety of educational and social agencies within local communities come together to identify issues that cause concern for public safety, including:

- youth and violence
- elder citizen safety
- vehicular dangers
- care of dependent family members.

Communities are currently being identified for the first round of training to facilitate their own problem solving processes. For more information, contact the state coordinator of this program, Jacque Miller, at 970-491-2515 or e-mail her at jmiller@coop.ext.colostate.edu.

RETHINK

For the past five years, Dr. Bob Fetsch, Colorado State University Cooperative Extension Specialist in Human Development and Family Studies, has led a team of area and county faculty in training parents and teenagers in anger management through the program entitled RETHINK. It includes skill development, parent/child development, parent/child interaction knowledge, and anger management skills. It is taught in six two-hour sessions to parents or in six one-hour sessions to adolescents. Thirty agents and other human development staff members in Colorado have been trained to teach this program.

Research results show impacts including the following: 58 percent of attendees increase their anger management control levels; 69 per-

cent have more age appropriate expectations of their children; 69 percent reduce their anger levels; and 64 percent reduce their violence levels.

For information regarding the program, call Carol Schultz in Larimer County at 970-498-6005 or Margaret Miller in Colorado Springs at 719-636-8934.



Dare to be You

— by Jan Miller Heyl

Colorado State University Dare to be You (DTBY) is a family-based program that provides a positive influence on family attributes, home environments and personal skill development, which are strongly linked to violence prevention. Important family components include home management skills, parental effectiveness, and discipline techniques that focus on children's learning self-management. Another key is families setting role models for problem solving.

DTBY (Family Component) has been involved in 10 years of long-term studies with control and experimental families. One of the strongest links to emerge in this research is that parents who have strong belief in their effectiveness also have lower use of harsh punishment strategies.

Outcomes for families attending up to 20 hours of classes spread over 3-4 months include:

- Significant decreases in harsh punishment ($p < .005$) over nonparticipating peers. This effect actually increased over two years following the program.
- Significant ability both to set limits and to use democratic control strategies over nonparticipating peers. ($p < .005$)
- Parents' belief in their effectiveness increased over that of nonparticipating parents. ($p < .005$)

The program also showed increases in developmental attainments of participating children over their control peers. These results have all been sustained over a two-year follow-up period. All of them provide important pieces of a comprehensive approach to violence prevention.

Success sharing is a simple strategy that has proven effective in building on the inherent strength of families. At weekly meetings, participants share a simple, small success they have had during the week. This changes the focus from everything that has gone wrong to the ability to recognize and build on what works.

Because of the science base of the program, the independently reviewed and highly significant results and adaptability of the program, DTBY was selected as one of seven model programs that the National Center for Substance Abuse Prevention is disseminating nationally. Visit the web site describing the program at <http://www.health.org:80/hry/Programs/4-dare/dare.htm>

— Jan Miller-Heyl is state director for Colorado State University Cooperative Extension Dare to be You. For more information, contact her at 970-565-3606 or darecort@coop.ext.colostate.edu

Juvenile Crime

– by Elizabeth Hornbrook Garner

The relative responsibility of juveniles for the U.S. crime problem is hard to determine. Studying the proportion of crimes that are cleared by the arrest of juveniles gives one estimate of the juvenile responsibility for crime. Crimes are categorized into violent and property crimes.

Juveniles were involved in about one in five arrests made by law enforcement agencies in 1997, one in six arrests for a violent crime (17 percent), and one in three (30 percent) arrests for property crime offenses, which is substantially above the juvenile proportion of arrests in other violent offences.

The proportion of violent crimes attributed to juveniles has declined in recent years. Juvenile involvement in violent crime grew from nine percent or 10 percent in the early-to-mid 1980s to 14 percent in 1994. Since 1994, the proportion of violent crimes cleared by juvenile arrest has declined, reaching 12 percent in 1997.

Clearance statistics measure the proportion of reported crimes that were resolved by an arrest or other, exceptional means (e.g., death of the offender, unwillingness of the victim to cooperate). A single arrest may result in many clearances. For example, one arrest could clear 40 burglaries if the person was charged with committing all 40 of these crimes. Or multiple arrests may result in a single clearance if the crime was committed by a group of offenders.

Between 1994 and 1997, the juvenile Violent Crime Index arrest rate dropped 23 percent. Even with this decline, the 1997 rate was still about 30 percent greater than the average rate of the years between 1980 and 1988.

Over the last 25 years, changes in the number of juvenile arrests for violent crime have been unrelated to changes in the size of the juvenile population. From 1987 to 1994, while the juvenile population increased 7 percent, juvenile arrests for violent crime increased 79 percent. Since 1994, juvenile arrests have dropped 18 percent, while the juvenile population has increased 4 percent.

For the period from 1988 through 1997, during which juvenile violent crime arrests rose precipitously, juvenile property crime arrest rates remained relatively constant. The 1997 rate of approximately 2,300 arrests for every 100,000 youth in the United States between 10 and 17 years of age is the lowest since 1984.

How does Colorado compare?

Colorado's juvenile violent crime rate is significantly below that of the nation; however, the property crime rate and alcohol violations rate are substantially above the U.S. rate. (See chart below.)

Juvenile crime statistics were adapted from the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency program – U.S. Department of Justice web page: http://ojjdp.ncjrs.org/jjbulletin/9812_2/contents.html

Data sources: Arrest estimates were developed by the National Center for Juvenile Justice based on arrest data from the FBI; population data is from the U.S. Bureau of the Census.

Link to data sets and research focused on school violence: <http://ojjdp.ncjrs.org/highlights/schoolviolence.html>

– Elizabeth Hornbrook Garner is the County Information Services Coordinator for Colorado State University Cooperative Extension. Call her at 970-491-5706 or e-mail ehornbro@lamar.colostate.edu.

1997 Arrest Rates per 100,000 persons ages 10-17				
State	Violent Crime	Property Crime	Drug Abuse	Alcohol Violations
U.S.	412	2,338	732	654
Colorado	258	2,838	728	1,056

For information about trends in juvenile crime, see the accompanying article.

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Invitation to dialogue

What issues and concerns would you like to see addressed?

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Visit the Family and Youth Institute updated web site:

<http://www.colostate.edu/Colleges/CAHS/fyi/>



Coming next: Family Literacy

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Concerns About Violence