Building a Non-Violent Community: Successful Strategies for Youth

REPORT NUMBER 17

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Onondaga Citizen's League

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March 20

Beard School Field Trip	*Anthony Davis*, Beard School *Willie Dowdell*, Beard School *Earnest Wood*, Beard School

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Onondaga County Family Court	*Hon. Anthony Paris*, Onondaga County Family Court *Hon. Robert Rossi*, Onondaga County Family Court

April 10

Huntington Family Services	*Pedro Abreu*, Huntington Family Services *Cathy Diana*, Huntington Family Services *Beverly Kelly*, Huntington Family Services

April 24

Southwest Community Center Field Trip	*Cheyenne Brown*, Southwest Community Center *Jesse Dowdell*, Southwest Community Center *Allan Green*, Southwest Community Center *Vanessa Johnson*, Southwest Community Center *Larry King*, Southwest Community Center

May 1

Impact of Race on Violence	*Vivian Moore*, Onondaga Community College, Multicultural Resources Center *William Pollard*, Syracuse University, School of Social Work

May 8

Moral Leadership

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Reverend Douglas Eddy, First United Church of East Syracuse
Reverend Harold Garmon, University United Methodist

May 15

Early Childhood Development

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In our community, as in many others, the dedication and active participation of volunteers is an essential ingredient in all civic enterprises. This is especially the case in regard to the work of the Onondaga Citizen's League. The League is comprised of volunteers. Officers, board members, committee chairpersons, and committee members give freely of their time and thought to planning and carrying out the work of the League.

This particular study on youth violence involved a large number of resource persons, who informed the study committee. The names of such persons, as well as advisory and study committee members, are included in the Summary of Presentations and the Appendix. OCL is grateful for the time and expertise provided by all of these volunteers.

The League is especially appreciative of the contributions made by the leaders of the project. Paula Freedman, Carol Cowles, and Jesse Dowdell spent countless hours in addition to study committee sessions reviewing progress, planning strategy and future sessions, and obtaining speakers or consultants. Chairing an OCL study is a major committment of time and energy. The League's work could not be accomplished without such dedication. Paula Freedman provided excellent leadership in the production of this report.

The OCL Board of Directors appreciates very much the work of its assistant director and general writer, Marcia Harrington, who wrote this final report. Barbara Dowd, Ms. Harrington's predecessor, was very helpful and assisted the chairpersons through the course of the study.

As it has for 18 years, Uiversity College of Syracuse University provided staff support, office and meeting facilities, telephone, mailing and other forms of assistance as a community service to implement the work of the Citizen's League.

Lee Smith

Executive Summary

Findings and Recommendations

Findings

Youth is the window of opportunity when it is possible to deter individuals from violence for a lifetime. Invest wisely in helping our youngest citizens to become capable adults and we will gain a benefit which far exceeds the investment. Neglect the needs of youth, and the social and financial costs to the community, as well as the loss of human potential, continue for a lifetime.

FINDINGS FOR CHILDREN AND YOUTH

1) Many youth are unable to achieve a transcendence of the moment and an ability to delay gratification of impulses.
2) Many youth do not have effective skills to negotiate life without resorting to violence.
3) Many youth do not possess accurate perceptions of the behavior of others and an acceptance of diversity.
4) Creating a child is a rite of passage for some young men and women, but this passage is different for males and females.
5) Violence has both different causes and different expressions among girls.

FINDINGS FOR PROGRAMS AND INSTITUTIONS

6) There are insufficient resources dedicated to programs which have an emphasis on good parenting, violence prevention, and early intervention for children and youth.
7) A continuity of developmentally-specific programs to carry youth through each critical stage of life is more effective than narrowly focused, time-limited approaches.
8) When structuring programs it is important to recognize that working with children takes expertise, talent, and imagination.
9) Many children and youth grow up in uncontrolled environments with few opportunities for positive experiences and have lives that are unstructured, unorganized, and lacking in vision for the future.

10) The juvenile justice system, as it is now structured, does not achieve desired outcomes.

11) Violence is learned behavior and the primary model for a child's behavior is the family. Therefore, effective violence prevention programs for youth deal with children as part of a family.

12) Parents do not always have good parenting skills.

FINDINGS FOR THE COMMUNITY

13) The community needs to achieve an accurate understanding of violence, both the causes of violence and the full range of its expression.

14) The connection between substance abuse and violence is clear and is an important indicator of individual and community ill-health.

15) The best response to youth violence comes early, with immediate consequences which reflect the degree of severity of the offense.

16) The community has both unrealistic ideals and unfounded fears about youth and violence.

17) Children and youth benefit from good role models, which can come from many sources.

18) Aggressive behavior is learned and the development of violence can be tracked through a common sequence

19) We need to recognize our culture's love of violence and the violent premise which built this culture.

Recommendations

It is perhaps our most important recommendation, that we must each recognize that silence is tantamount to acceptance, and inaction is a form of support for the status quo. We must first charge ourselves to recognize and root out the violence in our own hearts, then undertake to help others do so. But it will not be enough to take to the high moral ground with our words if we do not act on our convictions through our deeds. No progress is made until at least one person steps forward and acts, and no one person can make all the changes necessary to create a non-violent world. Our final recommendation then, is that we empower ourselves to act, that we learn to see the enormous potential for change in small acts of courage, and that we recognize that it is people who will make the difference. Finally, if we can find a way to tap the longing for community and the spirit of hope

that does exist among us, we will have unleashed a profound and renewable resource for our betterment.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CHILDREN AND YOUTH

1) Educate the youth, the community, and programs about the specific dynamics of youth violence and the characteristics of resiliency and resistance to violence which can "inoculate" youth against violence.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PROGRAMS AND INSTITUTIONS

2) Establish guiding principles to direct funding.
3) Develop specific intervention programs based on the nature of the violence.
4) Coordinate services and efforts between agencies and programs.
5) Encourage the growth of multi-purpose community centers accessible to the target population of users.
6) Make changes to the Probation Department, Family Court, and State law to address current inefficiencies and inconsistencies.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE COMMUNITY

7) Educate the community about the specific dynamics of youth violence and the characteristics of resiliency and resistance to violence which can "inoculate" youth against violence.
8) We recommend continual advocacy directed at the media for increased non-violent programming, enhanced parental control through technology, and responsible news reporting.
9) We recommend a careful examination of the ways that cooperation and sharing of resources and information can enhance existing efforts to end youth violence.
10) We must each commit ourselves to act on these recommendations and support others who do so.

Chapter 1

Background and Introduction to the Study

BACKGROUND

Youth and violence is an issue that has always been a matter of community concern. However, in recent years there has been an increasing sense that the violence is both more deadly in nature and more widespread. Youth violence not only engages our intellect as a civic problem, it also engages our emotions as we confront the harm done by and to children in our community, on our streets, in our schools, and perhaps, in our own homes. Youth violence goes to the heart of our sense of personal well-being and the well-being of our neighborhoods. Not surprisingly, we all have theories about its causes and solutions.

Perhaps youth violence matters so much to us because not only are we concerned for our children's safety and our own, but because it violates our beliefs about children and about what childhood ought to be. Our culture envisions childhood as a time of innocence and safety. It is especially painful to confront a child harmed, and particularly shocking to confront a child who has committed a violent and terrible crime. Children are both victims and perpetrators of violence, and either way we fear the impact on the rest of their lives.

A poll conducted in late 1995 by Louis Harris and Associates concluded that "crime has become this generation's Vietnam." It found that

- 46% of teens change their behavior because of crime
- according to the Justice Department, young people between 12 and 15 are the victims of crime more often than any other group

- teenagers of all ages are crime victims at twice the national average, and at ten times the rate of the elderly
- almost 1 in 3 students worried about being victims of drive-by shootings
- almost half the teenagers said they had changed their daily routine because of crime and violence, including staying home from school and cutting classes

There is no question that violence by and against youth has deep roots in racism, in poverty, in sexism, in drugs and alcohol, in media violence, in family stresses, and in the social and family dysfunction that leads to a sense of hopelessness about the future, and to an impulse to live and act only for the moment. This study begins with the stipulation that social forces such as racism, sexism, and poverty must be attacked in order to get at the fundamental solutions for youth violence. However, in spite of these problems, we know that some strategies work. Some programs are very successful in helping young people learn to negotiate conflict, and nurture non-violent communities in schools, in neighborhoods, in youth centers, in youth programs.

The Louis Harris poll cited above also found a widespread willingness on the part of youth to take an active role in dealing with the problems of crime and violence. Almost nine in ten said they would be willing to participate in mentoring, education, or community awareness programs. Many of the youth who spoke to the OCL study group expressed the need and desire for adult support, adult involvement, adults setting clear guides and enforcing consequences. While we are concerned about failure, we know a lot about what increases the chance for success. "Building Non-Violent Communities: Successful Strategies for Youth" hopes its findings and recommendations stimulate discussion that leads to plans for action.

The intent of this study is to look at what works. We sought to learn by studying success. There are many examples of successful programs here in Onondaga County. In these programs, adults support youth, emphasize prevention, and stress accountability. Programs cited here represent only a fraction of the excellent programs currently available in Onondaga County. Given the severe time constraints imposed by a twenty-week study, only a few programs had an opportunity to present. The leadership for this study attempted to insure that we sampled a variety of programs and looked at a range of issues. Therefore, our observations are based on a broad, but not comprehensive, view of youth programs in Onondaga County. It is our intention to promote replication of good programs, to

highlight approaches that work, to suggest guidelines by which funders may select programs to support in an era of scarce resources, to stimulate thinking and, above all, to urge actions that citizens can take. While many of the recommendations are a blueprint for action it is also hoped that this report will serve as a useful handbook, consulted frequently, as organizations, programs, and individuals try to build non-violent communities.

I would like to thank Carol Cowles and Jesse Dowdell for making our leadership team successful and Barbara Dowd and Marcia Harrington for their important staff support. In particular, Marcia Harrington has done an outstanding job in the preparation of this final report.

Paula Freedman
Chair

INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

The Study Sessions

The study was conducted during nineteen sessions from mid-January to the end of May, 1996. As the title of the study, "Building a Non-Violent Community: Successful Strategies for Youth," implies, the focus of the study was not on youth violence per se, but rather was a search for solutions, for what was already working effectively to end youth violence in Onondaga County. At the outset, the desired goal of preventing youth violence was broken down into specific issues ranging from development of aggression in early childhood to the effectiveness of Family Court.

The study was an intentionally broad-based overview and therefore it was necessary to examine a balanced, representative subset of programs which would reflect a variety of perspectives. Once the issues were identified, they were assigned as topics for discussion by panels of experts. Each session dealt with one topic or program. The meetings were generally conducted in two parts, beginning with a speaker or panel of

speakers, followed by a moderated question and answer session. Three sessions were conducted in the field to enable the members of OCL to get a first-hand look at successful programs now operating in Onondaga County. A middle session focused on "mid-course corrections" with participants summarizing interim findings and identifying areas where more information was needed. The final meeting brought the membership together for a full-session discussion of the key findings and recommendations, which are detailed in Chapters 2 and 3 of this report. Appendix 1 contains a detailed synopsis of the minutes for each of the sessions.

Understanding the Data

During the study, the OCL collected data from numerous sources: agency reports, government statistics, and stories from the media. The data was not always consistent owing to differences in accounting and methods of reporting—fiscal year vs. business year, which expenses were included in determining annual costs, etc.—but the message was clear: the cost to society of youth violence is staggering. The demographics are also clear. We are beginning to experience the "after boom" effect of rising numbers of children born to baby-boomers entering schools and putting demands on services dedicated to children. The statistics of children living in poverty are also alarming, with, conservatively, one in five children living below the poverty line. We know from our study that poverty is a strong indicator for other problems for children, and it is evident that the problems we now face with youth violence will only escalate in the years ahead unless we take decisive action to intervene now. This opinion is shared by many, including some unanticipated sources such as the Business Council of New York State:

> *Focusing on kids as our top priority is, of course, an important goal from a humanitarian and social point of view. But it is just as important from an economic point of view.*[1]

Violent behavior among juveniles is on the rise and some of that behavior is manifested in criminal acts. A great deal of that behavior is expressed in small, hostile, and explosive acts that create an atmosphere of fear, tension, and inhospitability in neighborhoods, on the streets, and in our schools. This report concludes that it is important to develop

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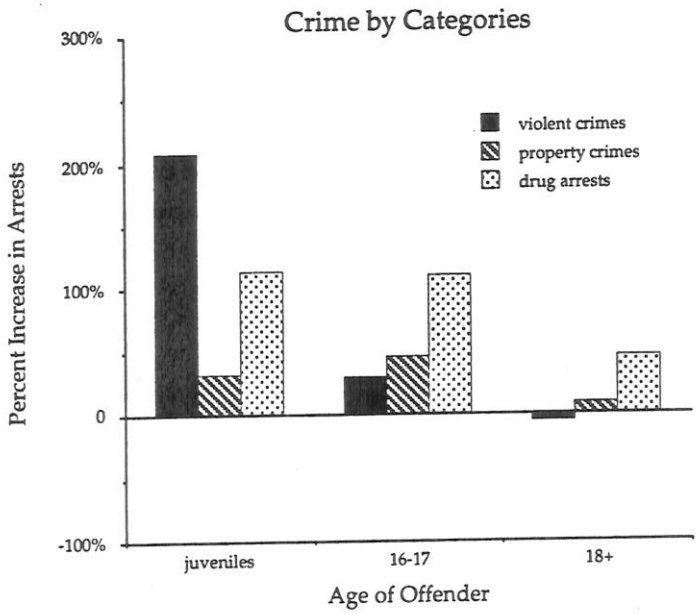
[1] From "The Comeback State", the Public Institute of The Business Council of New York State, January 1994.

informed, data-driven solutions so that our actions will be well-considered, that our actions be community endorsed and organized, and that we begin to make change by using the resources at hand.

When working with statistics we found it necessary to look beyond the percentages. Following are a series of graphs including a graph which shows the percent increase in arrest by type of crime, and three graphs displaying the increase in arrests in several categories: property crime, drug crime, and violent crime. Special note should be taken of the correlation between data as demonstrated by percentages and data as presented by actual numbers. For instance, while arrests for violent offenses in juveniles has increased by over two-hundred *percent*, the *actual numbers* of arrests remain low for youth in this age group. The data also does not explain whether the increase in arrests is a result of increased criminal activity or greater police activity, whether a small number of individuals committed a large number of crimes or if the crimes were committed by a large portion of the population. While this should not encourage us to dismiss the increases, it should serve as a caution against overreaction to a very real problem.

We were also presented with data which indicated positive changes in some of the conditions commonly correlated with youth violence including a drop in the number of female headed households and an increase in the number of high school graduates. While it is true that indicators such as high levels of poverty correlate closely with increases in crime and violence of all kinds, we know that these factors do not *cause* youth violence, and that it is not possible to tell—from even the best statistics—the truth behind an individual act of violence. The challenge then, is to combine the information contained in these statistics with what we learned from the local experts, and to act wisely.

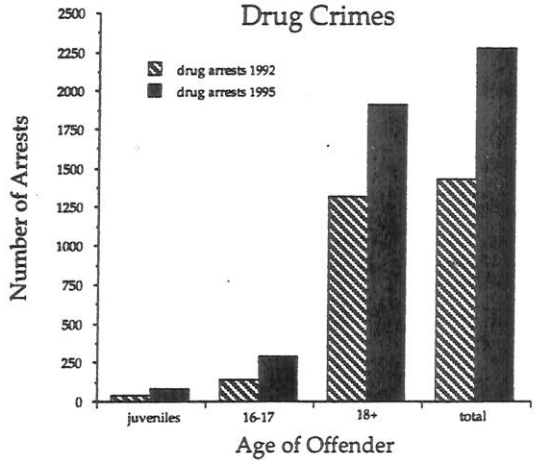
Percent Increase / Decrease
in Arrests for Youth
1992–1995

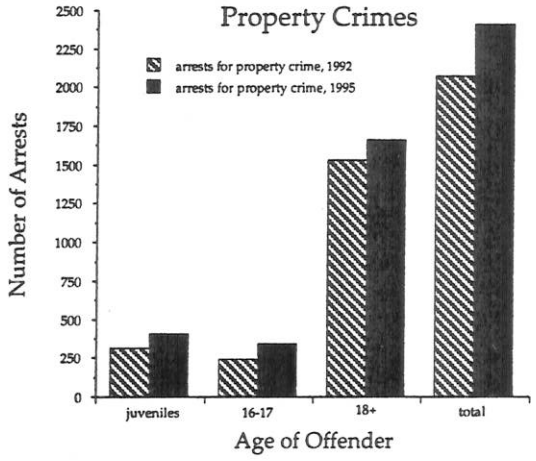


Source: Graph developed from data provided by Syracuse Police Department.

Arrests for youth in Onondaga County by percent of increase in each category, 1992 and 1995.

Number of Arrests
for Youth,
1992 and 1995





Source: Graphs developed from data provided by Syracuse Police Department.

Number of arrests for youth in Onondaga County by type of crime, 1992 and 1995.

Chapter 2

The Findings

The findings listed below were developed from the meetings conducted by the OCL to study some of the programs and initiatives which have been successful in reducing violence and conflict among youth. These findings are based on a perspective which views childhood and youth as a critical stage of life when individuals learn life skills and become part of a community and a culture. The strength of character, the sense of purpose, and the personal resilience developed over the first two decades of life will enable an individual to contribute to society for many additional decades of active, productive life. This leads us to our primary finding:

> Youth is the window of opportunity when it is possible to deter individuals from violence for a lifetime. Invest wisely in helping our youngest citizens to become capable adults and we will gain a benefit which far exceeds the investment. Neglect the needs of youth, and the social and financial costs to the community, as well as the loss of human potential, continue for a lifetime.

> *"Last year, the New York State Division for Youth spent in excess of $75,000 to care for each child in one of its secure facilities; $64,000 to house each youth in a community home. In total, New York taxpayers spent more than $127 million to lock up or supervise more than 2,000 youths who had 'fallen through the cracks.'"*[1]

Youth conflict and violence do not belong to any race, class or neighborhood. These problems occur, in sometimes different forms, throughout our community. Disadvantaged youth have more barriers to success, but they do not "own the problem." The choice to support children is not only a mark of our cultural character but also an indication of our cultural prudence. We demonstrate our wisdom when we do not allow the ruin of our most precious resource through a lack of simple care. We should not condemn children to permanent failure because they grow up without the ideal conditions of childhood: having loving parents, a supportive community, and ample opportunities for positive experience. We also recognize that it is to our own benefit, as well as the benefit of future generations, when we demand the best from ourselves and the institutions and programs we create to support youth.

FINDINGS FOR CHILDREN AND YOUTH

1) Many youth are unable to achieve a transcendence of the moment or the ability to delay gratification of impulses. Transcendence of the moment requires a vision for the future that provides a bridge forward from the present. Racism, sexism, poverty, and other factors contribute to an environment where individuals are less likely to possess such a vision, or the capacity to sustain it. Any community that lacks sufficient opportunities for youth, strong role models, supportive schools, family-friendly policies, and a sense of community commitment to children, can offer little vision for youth to help them grow beyond the difficult and often deeply entrenched conditions which surround them. The experience of growing up in such an environment frequently engenders feelings of hopelessness, helplessness and a sense of alienation.

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[1] The reported costs of juvenile detention vary from source to source. The data presented here come from the report "Root Cures," published by Association of New York State Youth Bureaus, and date from November, 1995.

The ability to transcend means to see beyond the moment, to delay judgment or action, and to endure today in order to flourish tomorrow. This ability can be developed through various means including through the family—however defined—whose members provide unconditional love, support and guidance. It can also be developed through community-based violence prevention programs which help youth develop the skills to understand themselves, gain self-control, and create a hopeful outlook for their future. It can be taught by strong role models in the home, in the schools, at the community center, or on the street. And, the vision needed to transcend the moment can be inspired by active participation in a religion which has a tradition of empowerment through strong values and faith.

2) Many youth do not have effective skills to negotiate life without resorting to violence. This includes the development of pro-social behavior and language skills as well as an understanding of the dynamics of violence. Young people need know, and be able to use, the many alternatives to violence. These skills can be learned in many places. A positive role model of pro-social behavior is one of the most effective teaching tools for youth. Such a role model can be a supportive adult in the family life of the youth, another adult in the community who can encourage and support youth in developing life skills, or some other pro-social environment such as a church group or community youth center which offers encouragement and opportunity for youth. And programs which explicitly teach conflict resolution techniques and pro-social behaviors have proven to be extremely successful and long-lasting in their effects.

3) Many youth do not have accurate perceptions of the behavior of others and an acceptance of diversity. When violence-prone youth perceive hostility or "disrespect" from others they act on what they believe to be a requirement for retaliation, which often takes the form of violence. Along with the need to have effective alternative methods to deal with hostility, for these youth there is a separate but equally essential need to understand and accept the variations in custom between different social groups, whether based on race, class, sex, age or other factors. When these differences are not understood, innocent behavior can be interpreted as an insult.

4) Having a child is a rite of passage for some young men and women, but this rite has different significance for each gender. For some young men, fatherhood is seen as a mark of their manhood rather than an undertaking of responsibility. It is an event in their lives, not a continuing commitment. Some men—be they young men or adults—do not consider the work of parenthood to be their obligation. They may have occasional interactions with their children, may even share some of the expense of raising the child, but if they do not participate fully and place a high priority on the needs of the child they are not giving that child the role model every child needs. The issue of being a good father, with all its social and psychological implications, is worthy of special attention. It is equally true that some young women choose to have a child as a rite of passage. Most of these young women, however, are left to the daily task of raising the children they have borne. The issue of helping young women become good mothers has important and immediate consequences for their children. For both young men and young women there is a need to develop a larger life vision and to value parenthood as part of that vision.

5) Violence has both different causes and different expressions among girls. Too often violence is seen as a male-only problem. While it is true that males account for the majority of violent crimes committed by youth,[2] girls do participate in violence. The motivations and methods used by violent girls are not always the same as those for boys, but school violence for girls has gone beyond the hair-pulling which was understood to be the height of aggression for girls not long ago. Girls are more likely to use violence as part of a group rather than when acting alone; they sometimes manipulate others into committing the violence for them; they seek out less powerful individuals to violate; and they typically commit violence without an audience. While girls expect retaliation, they often feel guilty and anxious about their violent behavior.[3]

The role of violence as it victimizes girls is also different than for boys. Girls are taught to be nice, to accept a measure of ill-treatment as the norm, "a woman's lot," to experience forgiveness as power, and to sometimes equate victimization with passion and love. They

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[2] Males accounted for 92 percent of the arrests for weapons offenses in 1993. Statistic from "Gun Arrests Soaring for Youths," The Associated Press, Syracuse Herald Journal, Monday, November 13, 1995.

[3] This information about the characteristics of violence in girls comes from a supplement to the March 6 session of the OCL, and was compiled and distributed by Girls Inc.

experience violence at home, from their boyfriends, and as a general condition of the world. Many girls are taught to devalue their competence, to underestimate themselves in so many ways that they live out learned patterns of helplessness and vulnerability.

6) Many children grow up in uncontrolled environments with few opportunities for positive experiences and have lives that are unstructured, unorganized, and lacking in vision for the future. Many children spend ten hours or more each day awake, out of school, and in search of something to do. *"... While social disruptions often interfere with these kids' academic development, 'street stresses cause overdeveloped skills in other areas.'"*[4] Children spend more waking hours outside of school than in school. That time can be spent in ways that are enjoyable, productive, and life-enhancing—or it can be spent aimlessly. Statistics are telling; *"One study of eighth graders who were unsupervised for more than two hours a day showed they were more than twice as likely to abuse drugs or alcohol."*[5] The outside opportunities offered by sports, music, or art offer youth more than the skills they learn from practice. They help young people see the benefit from repeated endeavor, to learn to focus on a distant reward, and to see a valuable reason to add structure and commitment to their lives. For children who do not enjoy academic success, and for children who live in communities where academic success is seen as selling-out, there is an even greater need for activities which can provide a sense of accomplishment and the life-lessons that come from working toward a goal.

FINDINGS FOR PROGRAMS AND INSTITUTIONS

7) There are insufficient resources dedicated to programs which have an emphasis on good parenting, violence prevention, and early intervention for children and youth. As a culture we are faced with a complex array of social problems which compete for finite resources. In making our funding choices, we need to recognize that the needs of children and youth are sometimes not as clearly articulated or as loudly championed as other causes. Children themselves cannot act on their own behalf to protect their rights and ensure that their needs are met.

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[4] Quote from Emmett Folgert, founder D.Y.I. "Saving Kids with Sandwiches, Juice and Petty Cash," by Margaret Spillane, excerpted from The Nation, January 8/15, 1996.
[5] From "Root Cures", Association of New York State Youth Bureaus, November 1995.

Programs that serve youth and families can be modest in scale but still be highly effective.

> *The day-to-day consistency about ordinary things—the low-key but warm emotional climate, the availability of a place to play or study or have a sandwich, with ready access to adults—is the bedrock ... .*[6]

The most effective programs featured a program-wide objective of non-violence; a curriculum offering pro-social, aggression reduction and conflict resolution skills; the effective delivery of service to youth; and a reliable, data-driven methodology for decision making.

8) Many programs are narrowly focused, time limited, and do not offer a continuity of developmentally specific programs to carry youth through each critical stage of life. Programs now exist to help children and families through specific stages of child development. These represent our community investment to safeguard youth from a life of violence beginning at an early stage of life. Most are highly effective during the time the child or youth participates in the program. It is important not to "drop the ball," by ignoring the need to continually reinforce and enhance what has already been learned. Continuity is necessary until the youth or family has mastered the necessary skills to continue without support. This could take the form of follow-up service through the parent program, a coordination of programs which offer simultaneous support for different needs, or a strategic plan to dovetail one program into another.

9) Working with children takes expertise, talent, and imagination. Child development is a field of study offered at colleges and universities across the country and much is now understood about the science of how children grow. Still, many of our children's caregivers have not hadthe opportunity to benefit from the kind of education offered by schools and colleges yet these caregivers work effectively—often superbly—with children. Mastery of the skills of working with children and families can be developed in many ways, including through family work, and children can benefit from exposure to different approaches to learning. When we looked at programs that featured glowing success with children we invariably found one common denominator: dedicated individuals who apply the full force

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[6] From "Saving Kids with Sandwiches, Juice and Petty Cash," by Margaret Spillane, excerpted from The Nation, January 8/15, 1996

of their creativity, empathy, and intelligence to improving the lives of children and families. Like any other form of lifework, not everyone is suited to youth development. This work has yet to be given the full honor it deserves as an essential role in our culture, practiced best by gifted individuals who deserve recognition, reward and support for the vital work they do. Programs, likewise, are only able to perform as well as the individuals who staff them. These programs then, need to be empowered to attract and keep gifted individuals and to offer them the support they require.

10) The juvenile justice system, as it is now structured, does not achieve desired outcomes. Both the Probation Department and Family Court work hard to deal efficiently with an ever-growing case load but both, according to Probation officers and Family Court judges, suffer from structural flaws which limit their ability to be effective. The effectiveness of juvenile justice could be improved if steps were taken to speed up consequences for offenders and to change the laws governing the prosecution of youth to maximize the potential for prevention and intervention at as early an age as possible.

11) Violence is learned behavior and the primary model for a child's behavior is the family. Therefore, effective violence prevention programs for youth deal with children as part of a family. The family can contribute in many ways to the development of youth violence, through physical or sexual abuse and through neglect, but it can also contribute through the creation of a home environment that supports violence as through:

> *Poor family management practices, including the absence of clear standards for children's behavior, excessively severe or inconsistent punishment, and parental failure to monitor their children's activities ... Family conflict, either between parents or between parents and children ... and favorable parental attitudes and involvement in violent behavior.*[7]

All these make their mark on youth. Simply put, children who grow up in homes which feature violence are statistically more likely to commit violence. They are more likely to create families of their own which rely on violence. And, they are more likely to act violently

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[7] From "Controlling Crime Before it Happens: Risk-Focused Prevention" by J. David Hawkins, for National Institute of Justice Journal.

outside the home. Breaking the cycle of violence requires that interventions on behalf of children include the family.

12) Aggressive behavior is learned and the development of violence can be tracked through a common sequence.[8] This sequence often develops as follows:

- coercive parenting, which can lead to,
- early aggression, which can result in,
- peer rejection, often followed by,
- social isolation, after which youth begin an,
- affiliation with antisocial peer group, which results in,
- inadequate social skills development, leading to,
- continued negative reinforcement and,
- escalating levels of aggressive behavior.

Interventions can help at any point of this sequence but the intervention must be designed to fit the stage of development.

FINDINGS FOR THE COMMUNITY

13) As a community we do not always understand the many expressions of violence nor how to overcome them. Violence takes many forms and developing non-violence needs many different strategies. We need to clearly understand the causes of violence in youth, if for no other reason than to avoid making the same expensive mistakes by repeatedly using the wrong tactics and tools to "combat" violence. We also need to look objectively at the reasons for our own desire to sometimes choose to retaliate rather than search for the most effective solutions to the problem. We need to recognize the harm caused by psychological as well as physical violence and understand that violence can also be experienced through poverty, powerlessness, racism, sexism, exclusion, and neglect. The focus on weapons violence can lead us to ignore these more pervasive forms of violence. When we accept these conditions as inevitable, we find it easier to tolerate physical violence as just one more aspect of a hostile world.

Why does someone act violently? There are many reasons for the use of, even desire for, violence. Sometimes violence is an attempt to seek attention and power through the manifestation of physical

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[8] From the February 7 presentation by Arnold Goldstein.

strength when there is little power to be had through other channels. Sometimes violence is used preemptively, as a protection from a violent world. Sometimes it can be a symptom of mental illness. And sometimes it is a reaction to feelings of abuse, especially when the individual can see no escape from the abusive conditions and no bridge to a successful future. The result of such experience can be a desire to punish a world that offers no hope. Julia Guins, from the Salvation Army, explained, "violence is usually unspoken frustration and anger." Randolph Hawkins, in his January 17 lecture also noted, "when people feel ignored, they react." The community needs to understand that these observations can apply both to youth—and to themselves. These same forces and motivations shape the culture which attempts to deal with violence through the use of violence. We need to understand the motivations of violent youth as well as our response to them. We need to seek effectiveness in our solutions and to respond with multiple and diverse approaches.

14) Parents do not always have good parenting skills. Being a good parent requires expertise and skill building. Many people, particularly young parents, have not had the opportunity to learn these skills either by effective example or by parenting-skills classes.

15) The connection between substance abuse and violence is clear and is an important indicator of individual and community ill-health. Communities are comprised of individuals set in a physical and cultural environment. Together they create the environment in which individual children grow up. The physical and spiritual impairment that results from substance abuse can be seen as clearly with alcohol—the legal drug of choice—as with street drugs. It is statistically evident that when the use of drugs and alcohol is simply factored as a disinhibitor (not as a crime in itself) they contribute enormously to all forms of violence: to family violence, child abuse, sexual assault, gang activity, and suicide. The force of these disinhibiting effects is as evident in the violent actions of youth in the suburbs as in the city. It is also well documented that youths who are addicted to drugs or alcohol are more likely to be violent than youths in the same community who do not participate in drug use.

Often our attention is focused on the inner cities when we consider the problems created by substance abuse. We need to make it clear that communities with average and above-average standards of living are also affected by substance abuse. Affluence can mask this problem, but the problem remains and it will grow unless it is addressed. A

community with a widespread problem of drug and alcohol abuse is also less able to withstand the stresses of poverty, joblessness, racism, and other factors. Substance abuse contributes significantly to the conditions of unemployment, underemployment, job loss, and poverty.

16) The best response to youth violence comes early, with immediate consequences which reflect the degree of severity of the offense. It is the surety of consequence which offers the most benefit, not the severity of the punishment. Interventions need to happen immediately, not after many "chances" are given to change behavior. If the first consequence is swift, but not overly severe, youth are taught a far better lesson than through a severe response after multiple reprieves for the same offense. The lack of consequence as a privilege awarded to youth does them a disservice.

The protections we have provided youth through blanket confidentiality have served to keep violent youth from receiving the help they need and created a protected class status where youth can act with relative impunity until they reach a certain age. This does much to encourage youth to "get while the getting is good" since they do not experience increasingly severe consequences for continued violent behavior. These protections also make youth vulnerable to exploitation by criminals who know a youth will not be punished for crimes as an adult would.

17) The community has both unrealistic ideals and unfounded fears about youth and violence. Our desire to see childhood as a time of innocence and vulnerability, to provide youth with a protected childhood where mistakes can be made while learning how to function in a complex world, and where these youthful mistakes will not follow the inexperienced youth for life, is squarely at odds with the reality that the world demands that young people act as full participants long before they are in fact adults. These seemingly worldly-wise youth still need adults to intervene, and sometimes, to "save" them. Too often our fears—either of being hurt by violent youth or of hurting these youth, our children, through too-severe punishment—keep us from taking action. Our goal must remain the creation of a safe, stimulating, productive environment for all children to grow up in. But to make this vision a reality we must not allow fear, or a rosy-glassed view of the world, to keep us from action.

18) Children and youth benefit from good role models, which can come from many sources. Recognize that children model behavior—for good or for bad—on those around them, that their world experience is local and limited to their immediate environment. The primary role-model in any child's life is naturally the parent. Beyond the parent are other family members, the community, the child's peers and the world as it is presented to the child through the media. As a culture we want to protect the rights of families to raise children as they believe to be best. We want to demand that families do the job of childrearing. We want to depend on individual parents to act responsibly as caregivers.

This vision of childrearing leaves children vulnerable in two ways. First is the obvious problem of parents who do not parent well even within the diverse norms of different communities. Some are unskilled at parenting, some unable to be effective as a parent because of impairment or impediment, and some are simply unwilling to meet the demands that a good parent must meet. The modeling a child gets from a bad parent sets the child at odds with a world that rewards for behavior the child never learns. Bad parenting can be found across socio-economic classes, but because bad parenting teaches ineffective life skills, intergenerational poverty can be the result. This generational dynamic of bad parenting must be interrupted in order for children to develop into good role-models for their own children.

The second flaw in the ideal vision of childrearing is the fact that parents cannot raise children in isolation. The world surrounds the family and brings a child into contact with much that is not in the best interest of the child. Even the best parent cannot prevent a child from modeling behavior on those in the culture that surrounds them. *"... success cannot be understood apart from the neighborhood and children's lives of which it has become an integral part."*[9] Children who are most at risk are those in communities which offer little opportunity for adults to succeed in the larger culture. In these communities adults live lives at odds with the dominant culture, they do not enjoy the rewards of full participation in that culture and they live daily with the frustrations that disenfranchisement brings. Families in these communities are just as likely to offer loving encouragement to their children as parents in more affluent, culturally rewarded communities. But these parents cannot offer their children a direct connection to the benefits of the dominant culture when they have been unable to achieve this connection for themselves. We also

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[9] From "Saving Kids with Sandwiches, Juice and Petty Cash," by Margaret Spillane, excerpted from The Nation, January 8/15, 1996

recognize that sometimes the needs of youth are not adequately served within the biological family.

When a child lives in a family with a history of bad parenting and when the community surrounding that child offers little hope for success, the only place where that child can experience effective role-modeling is through an outside force. Here the community has an opportunity to provide the supplement which can help ensure the success of the child. That force can be a teacher who offers affirmation and a link to a life outside the immediate environment. That force can be a church or community group that helps a child see more in the world than is immediately obvious. Or that force can be a street gang where affiliation is maintained through violence, where the measure of success is not in achievement within the culture but through rejection of it, success through forcible domination.

19) We need to recognize our culture's love of violence and the violent premise which built this culture. From our earliest days on this continent, the desire to dominate, to posses, and control, was the energy which drove this nation. We defined this domination as God-ordained and called it our manifest destiny. This vision of ourselves as supremely dominant remains an essential component of our identity as Americans. From entertainment, to political rhetoric, to business-practice truisms, images of dominance fill our world. Even the language we use to describe our attempts to improve our world is filled with violence. We talk about the "War on Poverty," "Fight against Cancer," and the "Army of God." The media treats the news as entertainment, dwells on conflict, and highlights violence. It does not search for root causes or the pathways to resolution. We savor aggression in movies, from the blatant to the stylishly understated, and we expect both the villain and the hero to participate in the violence.

We insist on good guys and bad guys, on winners and losers, on dominance and subservience, and we apply that conceptual construct across our lives. When we accept without question that there must be winners and losers, we tolerate without question the right to ruin an opponent. When we assume the right to be dominant, we ignore the violence committed by forcing subservience on others. When we define winning as good and goodness as winning, we set ourselves on a dangerous path. We wish to be good; we wish to win. Then someone must lose, someone must be subordinated and those who have lost cannot be as good. This construct, so often unrecognized, accounts for much of our confusion about helping those in need. The very fact that they are in need is a sign that they are not really good, or

else how would they have lost in the struggle to succeed? And if they are not really good why are they worthy of aid? Of course we do recognize that goodness is larger than simple winning and losing, and we do long to be good, and fair, and generous. But for as long as the nagging construct remains, we will doubt our choice to empower others and we will not be able to free ourselves to live in mutually beneficial coexistence.

* * *

It is important to include in this "Findings" chapter, the remarkable level of dedication we found in so many individuals and so many programs in our county. These individuals who choose to work toward creating a non-violent community do so for little financial reward and in the face of enormous obstacles. We are fortunate to have such individuals among us, and it is our hope that through the implementation of the recommendations that follow, their work will be made easier.

Chapter 3

The Recommendations

Unlike previous OCL reports, this report does not identify specific agencies or entities assigned to carry out its recommendations. Rather, it is hoped and expected that readers will ask whether they, or any organization with which they are associated, can be involved in making them happen. If the answer is "yes" then DO IT!

Recommendations for Children and Youth

1) Educate youth, programs, and the community about the specific dynamics of youth violence and the characteristics of resiliency and resistance to violence which can "inoculate" youth against violence. Youth need to understand the complex dynamic of violence in their lives in order to see beyond the conditions that surround them and make changes toward the goal of eliminating violence from their lives. Agencies and programs also need to consider these dynamics when developing intervention strategies. The community needs to understand the development of aggression in youth and the multiple causes of aggressive acts. Simple reporting in the media about youth violence and youth crime, or even in-depth human-interest reporting about victims and families does not go far enough to educate the community.

Aggression can have many causes, but it is always an individual act. Each act occurs as a result of multiple causes which can include:[1]

- psychological predisposition
- cultural context
- immediate interpersonal environment
- perpetrator's personal qualities
- disinhibitors such as drugs and alcohol
- presence of means such as possession of weapons
- presence of potential victim

Researchers have found that there are some personal characteristics of resiliency and resistance to aggression[2] which can explain why some children survive, even succeed, in negative environments where other children fail. They include:

- A belief in the future, feelings of hope.
- Attachment to a pro-social group.
- Personal goals.
- Feelings of personal control.
- Positive decision making abilities and problem solving skills.
- High self esteem, a sense of identity, personal insight.
- Feelings of competence.
- Good communication skills and the ability to relate to others.
- Ability to be socially responsive to others.
- Ability to anticipate how their behavior will impact others.
- Self discipline.
- Responsible behavior.
- Motivation from within to perform well.
- Ability to generate and find humor in situations.
- A belief that life has meaning.

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[1] From the February 7 presentation by Arnold Goldstein.

[2] From a table by the Onondaga County Youth Violence Task Force, Youth Services Committee. The original document was distributed as a supplement to the January 24 meeting of the OCL.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PROGRAMS AND INSTITUTIONS

2) Establish guiding principles to direct funding. Choose to fund programs that are consistent with community goals, have the capacity to work effectively with youth and their families, and are willing to incorporate anti-violence methodology into programming.[3] Funding should also support programs committed to the long-haul, and funders should themselves commit to long-term funding for successful programs. Also, it is important to recognize that despite the need for accurate, timely, well organized data to effectively evaluate programs, these programs should not be forced to choose between services and reporting. Both funders and programs need to look for alternative ways to support data collection such as pooling monies to fund outside evaluation of several programs, or working in conjunction with a university graduate school to create a program evaluation "laboratory" for students.

Programs that *satisfy community goals* typically:

- Have a vision.
- Are broad based and service a cross-section of the whole community.
- Support families.
- Have a strong local community base and provide some quasi-family functions.
- Place a priority on ending youth violence.
- Help children find structure, organization, control, discipline and accountability.
- Offer skill-building opportunities.
- Offer mentoring opportunities.
- Have data to demonstrate outcomes and use research-based decision making processes.

Once a program is identified as possessing a number of the larger community goals, check to see if the program deals with the needs of at-risk youth. The typical, *high-quality youth and family program:*

- Tailors program to individuals.
- Acknowledges the level of sophistication of youth.

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[3] From information provided by the Onondaga County Youth Violence Task Force and Girls Inc.

- Understands underdeveloped social competency.
- Accepts the need for a level of self-defense.
- Expects youth to want control of the world around them and respects this need for control.
- Allows peer leadership.
- Bridges the gaps between expectations and realities.
- Clearly articulates cultural expectations.
- Teaches why social expectations have value.
- Defines acceptable behavior and rewards it.
- Has clear limits on behavior with immediate and appropriate consequences for misbehavior.
- Attracts and retains quality staff.
- Expects quality and continuity from leaders.

To support, enhance and develop life-skills training opportunities for youth and families, *effective skills training programs* will:

- Recognize that individuals learn in different ways.
- Work well with targeted populations
- Offer broad based curriculum including learning skills such as literacy skills and traditional academics as well as skills to negotiate life and culture such as communications, conflict resolution, parenting, civics, etc.
- Offer training close to consumers, in non-traditional settings when necessary.
- Provide support for those with difficulty learning.
- Offer programs at times to suit consumers needs.

Programs that incorporate critical, violence-prevention strategies typically have a *curriculum* which:

- Features age / developmentally appropriate programs.
- Teaches management of negative emotion, conflict resolution, negotiation, peer mediation, and the ability to restore relationships after conflict.
- Teaches youth how to employ self defense based on values without physical intervention.
- Allows appropriate expression of feelings.
- Teaches youth how to use assertive communication.

- Gives youth the ability to develop healthy, non-violent relationships.
- Gives youth the ability to manage peer pressure to behave violently.
- Gives youth the ability to overcome personal stereotypes of victim or aggressor.
- Teaches youth how to know when to terminate relationships, and to have the ability to do so.

These programs provide an *environment and program culture* which typically:

- Provides children with role models and opportunities outside the curriculum and offers activities which allow children to be emotionally healthy, responsible, and compassionate.
- Engages children's time, attention, and commitment to non-violence.
- Is a personal resource for children.
- Is a safe haven, a place of hope.
- Provides clear avenues for problem solving.
- Has clear rules governing behavior including zero-tolerance for physical violence, verbal / psychological violence, weapons, or substance abuse.
- Applies rules fairly and consistently.
- Is aware of messages about violence found in the general environment including decor, activities, and staff interactions.

These programs also typically share an *institutional commitment to violence-prevention* demonstrated by:

- Articulation of the goal of non-violence through a mission statement or areas of focus and emphasis.
- Devotion of time and resources to promoting non-violence.
- The development of a curriculum which is integrated into service-delivery systems.
- Support for curriculum through financial and human support needed for implementation.
- Policies to address the various issues which surround violence. Policy statements about: possession and use of weapons,.

A) *Confidentiality for youthful offenders should be earned–not given automatically as an entitlement.* The system was designed to protect the one or two time offender, not shield the fifteen to twenty time perpetrator from the consequences of a life lived without regard for others. By amending the system to make the granting of confidentiality a reward for staying out of trouble and completing the obligations of sentencing, the original purpose of protecting youth would be preserved.

B) *Allow for the sharing of information between agencies charged with different aspects of monitoring youth.* Probation, truancy, the police, the courts, and the schools all need to work together to prevent youth from "playing the system" to their own detriment. These agencies now find that their hands are tied when they attempt to connect to perform effective interventions.

C) *Close the gaps between rights and responsibilities of sixteen to eighteen year olds and clean up the ragged ends of childhood.* For instance, sixteen year-olds can choose not to go to school, but parents are still legally responsible for children until age eighteen. There needs to be one standard, both for fair treatment of youth and for reasonable demands on parental involvement.

D) *Use alternatives to Family Court to achieve swift action.* Use youth courts more extensively and allow local jurisdictions (e.g. town justices) to have authority over youthful offenders rather than require all cases to be referred to an overburdened central processing system.

E) *Act earlier, more often.* Do not wait until the youth has had many "chances" to clean-up-the-act. Respond to low levels of violence, be swift and certain. Make consequences for every level of offense, make consequences fit the crime, and be sure to follow through and insist on compliance with, and completion of, sentencing.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE COMMUNITY

7) Advocate for changes directed at the media for increased non-violent programming, enhanced parental control through technology, and responsible news reporting. Advocacy for programming should respond to: the need for a reduction in the violence content of programming, the need for content-oriented programming aimed at

youth and dealing with issues of non-violence, and the need for storylines which include themes of aggression control and the results of violence. The community should continue to advocate for violence ratings for movies, television and the music industry. It should also advocate for the rights of parents to control children's access to violent programming on TV and over the internet. While TV and movies are the usual targets of anti-violence advocacy, we must also work to diminish the violence showcased on the radio, in print media, and in video games.

8) Develop alternative living options outside of foster care which do not eliminate the bond between family and child by terminating parental rights. These options should accomodate the needs of the child and rely on the continued support and involvement of the family. Such an environment can form a bridge for the child and family to a more successful future relationship. These options could include kibbutz-style living and transitional living for youth who are entering adulthood.

9) Examine carefully the ways that cooperation and sharing of resources and information can enhance existing efforts to end youth violence. We recognize that important and effective efforts are already being made across the county and we should begin by searching for ways to support them, enhance their effectiveness, and, when appropriate, build on them.

A) *Data should be collected in such a way as to be useful to funders, programs, and evaluators.*

B) *Change the rules and methodology of interagency communication to allow for the creation of shared databases useful to programs, evaluators, and funders.* These databases will need to incorporate the same releases which now safeguard confidential information. But once such a system is established it will facilitate the timely flow of information, track the delivery of services, and correlate data to find individuals who are at risk of "falling through the cracks."

C) *City and county government should look for funding to establish this shared data resource* and find ways to support the data collection requirements placed on agencies.

D) *City and county governments, in cooperation with agencies, should establish clear guidelines and methodologies through which data will be used for long-term planning.*

10) Commit ourselves individually to act on these recommendations and support others who do so. In our final recommendation we recognize that silence is tantamount to acceptance, and inaction is a form of support for the status quo. We must first charge ourselves to recognize and root out the violence in our own hearts, then undertake to help others do so. But it will not be enough to take to the high moral ground with our words if we do not act on our convictions through our deeds. No progress is made until at least one person steps forward and acts, and no one person can make all the changes necessary to create a non-violent world. Our final recommendation then, is that we empower ourselves to act, that we learn to see the enormous potential for change in small acts of courage, and that we recognize that it is people who will make the difference. Finally, if we can find a way to tap the longing for community and the spirit of hope that does exist among us, we will have unleashed a profound and renewable resource for our betterment.

Appendix 1

Synopses of the Presentations*

- January 17, **Introduction and Historical Overview,**

SPEAKERS: *Paula Freedman, Randolph Hawkins, Peggy Ogden, and Lee Smith*

This first session of the series included an introduction to the Citizen's League for new members and a description of the context in which the issues would be examined. Peggy Ogden, League President, gave a brief history of OCL's seventeen years of community involvement and provided an overview of the importance of the topic of this year's study. Lee Smith, Executive Vice President, explained the scope of the study, reviewed the schedule of speakers and field sessions, and described the final report. Paula Freedman, Chair of the study, placed the topic in a contemporary cultural context by detailing statistics of youth violence nationwide and in Onondaga County. Randolph Hawkins, African-American studies scholar, placed the topic in an historical context by describing America's long history of violence, suppression of power, and disenfranchisement imposed by race, ethnicity, and class.

- January 24, **Youth Violence Task Force**

SPEAKERS: *Sharon Alestalo, Reverend Douglas Eddy, Joseph King, John McCullough, David Wall*

This session examined the role of the Youth Violence Task Force (YVTF) in the community and the Task Force's innovative programs. John McCullough, Task Force Co-chair, gave a brief history of the YVTF and its mission: "The Onondaga County Youth Violence Task Force is an innovative community partnership dedicated to changing the conditions which cause youth violence in order to eliminate it in our society." The Task Force was organized to identify the root causes of youth violence, to promote discussion about these causes, and to be an advocate for change on a wide range of fronts. The Task Force has identified some twenty-six reasons for youth

* A full set of minutes, or the complete minutes of individual sessions, may be obtained by contacting Dean L. Smith, University College.

violence ranging from the systemic, social acceptance of poverty through individual intolerance of others. McCullough also noted that Syracuse is a service-rich community with many available resources.

Pastor Douglas Eddy of the First United Church of East Syracuse brought his experience with youth interactions to the Task Force, and has been active in the YVTF's Community Mobilization Committee which is charged with identifying and articulating the values of diverse local communities and creating innovative ways to mobilize, unify, and motivate these communities.

Dave Wall, from the Sheriff's Department's abused persons unit, has worked first hand with offenders and victims. He reported that younger and younger children are both victims and perpetrators of violent crime; that despite a drop in the incidence of crime, the fear of crime continues to increase; and that innovative police methods have brought police into new, supportive roles through programs such as DARE and New Visions, which empower youth and help them form lasting, positive relationships with adults.

Sharon Alestalo, Executive Director of Girls, Inc. described the problem of violence among girls which has recognizable differences from violence in boys.[1] She explained the characteristics of a successful violence-prevention program,[2] and reminded the members that it is one of "the jobs of youth to misbehave in order to learn" and that programs must be designed to "fit the kids—not fit the kids to the program."

Joe King explained that the legislative goals of the YVTF have been recommended through State Senator John DeFrancisco to Governor Pataki who has incorporated these goals in his plans. He concluded with the message that when helping youth "it's the how—not the what—that counts."

- January 31, **Center for Community Alternatives**

SPEAKERS: *Jeffrey Bellamy, Evelyn Hall, Candice Major, John Taylor, Marcia Weissman*

This session offered an overview of the conditions which promote violence in youth and a look at some of the many innovative services available for youth through the Center for Community Alternatives (CCA). Jeffrey Bellamy, Director of Youth Services, led the panel from CCA which also included Marcia Weissman, Executive Director; Candice Major, Mentor Coordinator; John Taylor, program participant; and Evelyn Hall, parent of a participant. Bellamy described issues attendant to youth violence including social reconstruction resulting in new family structures; lack of supervision and structure in the lives of youth; promotion of violence by music and television, increased hostility from police; escalating rates of incarceration; emphasis on punishment over prevention; lack of follow-up after detention; and the dire need for innovative, cost effective prevention programs.

The CCA offers services to youth including: Choices III for youth at risk for HIV/AIDS which features peer support, court and community advocacy, and social service referrals; JUMP, a mentoring program which works on an individual basis to support youth and families; and the Community Corps. Program which is organized to offer learning through community service and is run in collaboration with the Syracuse City School District at William Beard alternative school.

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[1] See Chapter 2, Findings, for information about the characteristics of violence in girls.

[2] See the Chapter 3, Recommendations, for a list of characteristics of programs which effectively teach non-violence.

- February 7, **Aggression Retraining**

SPEAKER: *Arnold Goldstein*

This session explored productive and non-productive strategies to retrain individuals to become non-aggressive. Arnold Goldstein, Professor of Education at Syracuse University, explained that violence has many forms and listed types of physical abuse ranging from hitting with a weapon to swatting a child, and psychological abuse from death threats to ridicule. He explained that aggression is learned behavior, that to intervene effectively one must identify the level of violence-development of a youth, as well as the circumstances surrounding the act itself.

He described unproductive strategies to reduce aggression: 1) counter aggression with aggression—does not teach positive problem solving behavior; 2) catharsis through blowing-off-steam—reinforces aggressive behavior; 3) accepting and accommodating violence by living with it—teaches passivity and victimization. He then described effective aggression reduction strategies which include: 1) using complex thinking—recognize there are no "magic bullets"; 2) thinking prescriptively and using data to determine the course of action; and 3) consider the situation and context, the dispositions and traits which predict behavior in order to act effectively. He also noted that there are three potential arenas for learning aggression:
home—exposure to parent violence and criminality; school—exposure to aggression by peers; and the mass media—teaches both aggression and desensitization to violence.

Continuing the description of the effect of media on youth, he noted three ancillary effects of repeated exposure to violent imagery: 1) the "aggression effect" which promotes acts such as copycat violence especially when the media presents the violence as "justified" (as when a bad guy gets his just reward), when violence involves a weapon shown in detail, or when violence is "painless" (as in action adventure films or cartoons); 2) the "victim effect" which results in fearfulness, mistrust and self-protectiveness; and 3) the "bystander effect" which is marked by increased desensitization and callousness. He described successful intervention strategies as featuring: the search for long-term solutions rather than quick fixes, establishing realistic expectations, and employing the use of complex thinking which takes into account the interactions of individuals and the environment.

- February 14, **Suburban Schools**

SPEAKERS: *James Chupaila, Jerome Melvin, Ray Savarese, Frederick Thomsen, Andrew Voninski*

This session examined innovative programs at five suburban school districts to curb violence and coordinate services. Moderator Fred Thomsen, Superintendent of Fabius-Pompey CSD, recognized the work of the Youth Violence Task Force and described successful collaborative efforts between the YVTF, schools, communities, law enforcement, and not-for-profit agencies. Jim Chupaila, Principal of Fayetteville-Manlius High School, described a character education program in place at FM which emphasizes respect and responsibility among youth. The program is simple but effective. Six times per year the 1,700 member student body breaks into small groups of 20–25 students and, led by trained student facilitators, the groups discuss topics of concern. The program also incorporates assembly programs where the entire student body participates in a presentation about a character-defining situation (date-rape is a recent example) then breaks into small groups for "debriefing" and discussion. Though data had not yet been compiled to demonstrate the improved quality of life at FM, anecdotal evidence strongly indicates that the program has had a remarkably positive effect.

Jerome Melvin, Superintendent of Cicero-North Syracuse CSD described the need for systemic change through a multi-level response to youth violence such as that which has been implemented through the North Area Community Coalition (NACC). This umbrella organization creates change through cooperation between schools, government and community organizations by implementing planned, sequential, consistent actions. The NACC, through a program called Community Connections, has developed programs including a youth court, a safe homes directory, a teen institute and an initiative founded by the teacher's union to combat drugs and violence through a comprehensive three-year program for students and faculty.

Andrew Voninski, Assistant Superintendent of Educational Services at East Syracuse-Minoa CSD, detailed an in-school suspension program which isolates students suspended for infractions ranging from insubordination to alcohol or drug violations which keeps students in school where they can be supervised in a structured environment. Suspended students continue to do schoolwork through teacher-provided instructional packets they are matched individually with a mentor/teacher to review the student's history and academic record; to provide necessary referrals to social service agencies; and to look for creative ways to end the cycle of misbehavior. Since this program was implemented at Pine Grove school there has been a 44% drop in repeat suspensions.

Ray Savarese, Director of Secondary Education in the Liverpool CSD, faced with a highly publicized problem with youth violence, created a task force comprised of students, teachers, administrators and community leaders to develop a series of kindergarten through grade 12 programs to eliminate youth violence. These include a very effective "No Put Downs" program designed to help youth recognize verbal abuse and replace it with positive communication skills; a youth-at-risk program which devotes additional resources and peer mentors for students in need; several conflict resolution initiatives which include a full-time staff person devoted to conflict prevention and mediation, a "Let's Talk" program to strengthen in-school communication by daily matching a randomly chosen group of students and teachers to meet for a shared lunch, conflict resolution training for both teachers and students; and a violence prevention training program for transportation staff.

- February 21, **Department of Probation**

SPEAKERS: *E. Robert Czaplicki, Al Giacchi, John C. Harmon, John Young*

This session examined the Probation Department as it now exists, the need to overhaul and redesign the department, and the participants' vision for the future. The panel of speakers was united in their respect for fellow juvenile justice workers and also in their view that the system as it now exists be dismantled and started anew. Al Giacchi, Principal Probation Officer, and John Young, Probation Supervisor, explained that Probation now performs three services: 1) *Intake diversion*, is appropriate for youth who would benefit if steered away from the formal judicial system. Through the diversion to PINS (Persons in Need of Supervision) program youth are required to meet weekly with probation officers and participate in mandatory home visits. 2) *Social investigation*, results from a Family Court Order to provide information about a youth. 3) *Juvenile supervision*, can take place at the Civic Center, in the schools through a new pilot program, or in secured facilities such as Hillbrook Detention Center.

Robert Czaplicki, Commissioner of Probation, described the increased numbers of juveniles entering the system and the need to keep case loads at a manageable level to be effective, noting that a hallmark of the juvenile justice system is the inter-agency cooperation necessary to achieve individual supervision.

Charles Harmon, Director of Hillbrook Detention Center, described the residents of Hillbrook as ranging from "first-time offenders to un-successful graduates." Hillbrook is expensive, $60,000

per year of residency, but provides 100% supervision. Hillbrook stresses structure, accountability, responsibility and reward; offers education, counseling, and violence prevention training; and provides the best results when youth experience an extended stay of perhaps a year or more.

The panel had several recommendations including: 1) strong support for the Youth Violence Task Force's legislative initiatives including creating more consequences for individuals and allowing localities to maintain jurisdiction over all but the most serious offenses; 2) reexamining the "right" to confidentiality so that a rule intended to shield a 1 or 2 time offender does not protect a 15-20 time chronic offender, and so that confidentiality is "earned" by compliance with sentencing and continued good behavior; 3) revision of the Family Court Act to attach consequences at a much earlier age and the use of RICO statutes, originally enacted to combat organized crime, to break up gang activity; 4) the requirement that families participate in rehabilitation or face civil penalties; and 5) the need to provide both support services and rehabilitation programs in the geographic community the youth lives in. The panel stressed that building bigger and better detention facilities would not work and advised, "look up-river and see why kids are getting into the stream."

- February 28, **Department of Corrections**

SPEAKERS: *Michael Atkins, Kathy Burns, Robert Chappell, Patricia Tappan*

This session examined the path of violent youth into adult correctional facilities and the role these facilities can play in offering another chance to break the cycle of bad choices. Department of Corrections Commissioner Patricia Tappan defined "youth" in an adult facility as minors between the ages of 16 and 18. For these youth, facilities such as Jamesville offer a place of last resort. By the time they reach Jamesville they have a significant number of arrests and have failed to change their behavior despite multiple attempts at interventions and supervision by the Probation Department. Demographics at Jamesville show that youth make up 25 percent of the population, that what was once an almost equal division between black and white prisoners is now predominantly minority, and that for 75 percent to 90 percent of the population drug and alcohol abuse is a significant problem. While most of the inmates were not sentenced for drug crime it is rare for residents *not* to have a substance abuse problem. Consequently, Jamesville sponsors several abuse related programs including Alcoholics Anonymous, Narcotics Anonymous, and Power Program, a substance abuse, education, training, and counseling program. Unfortunately these programs are more effective with the older prison population as youth are less able to admit to having a problem.

Jamesville offers two new personal growth programs targeted to specific acute needs including: Making Choices, and AIDS education, counseling, and testing program; and an intensive violence prevention workshop program, modeled on a similar program offered by the Quakers to teach alternatives to aggression.

Bob Chappell, BOCES Program Coordinator at Jamesville, described the collaborative educational programs BOCES offered in cooperation with Jamesville including: state-mandated GED, English as a Second Language, and high school subject tutorials; life enhancement programs which help inmates explore career goals, learn job-readiness skills, prepare resumes, and practice interviewing techniques; and the Action for Personal Choice program, an intensive, 60 hour critical thinking program which helps inmates explore issues surrounding past choices, bad decisions, troubled relationships, substance abuse, and co-dependency.

Mike Atkins, Director of Transitions, suggested that the Transitions program is perhaps the most important offering to incarcerated youth because they have been in the juvenile justice system for a long time, they lack life skills, and they need encouragement and vision. Transitions

relies on case management to work individually with youth, and employs the use of a contract in which details of time and commitments are memorialized. Through the program inmates are offered opportunities to learn including: career and education planning, career skills in computers and building trades, Parent to Parent classes; as well as opportunities to develop self-awareness such as how to expand an individual's "comfort zones," and to discuss life style issues, encouraging inmates to see the benefits of participation in main-stream culture. Most important are the bonds that develop between counselors and inmates, bonds which can help to break the hold a peer group may have on the inmate.

- March 6, **Girls Incorporated of CNY**

SPEAKERS: *Sharon Alestalo, Christina, Julie*

This session explored the different experiences girls have with violence through a long question and answer session with two girls, Christina and Julie, who participate in programs sponsored by Girls Inc. The discussion was led by Sharon Alestalo, Executive Director of Girls Incorporated of CNY, who explained that youth violence is an explosive issue for communities and reminded the members that most youth violence is directed at other youth. The girls were asked a series of questions by the OCL participants and the following are a few of the important messages these girls had to offer:

Adults and violence: Both girls felt today's parents are too lenient, that there are not consequences for bad behavior. They faulted adults for not intervening when they witnessed youth violence, and not following through with consequences for violent behavior, explaining "there was too much warning and no consequence". Adults should set good examples, not just "let things go through." Teachers especially need to help, and they need to do more than send the offender to the principal.

Why girls are violent: Both girls believe violence is a real problem for girls and recognize that girls are both experiencing and perpetuating violence in increasing numbers. They attribute some of the increase in violent behavior to peer pressure which pushes some girls toward actions they would not otherwise commit, and to a need to feel "equal" to boys stating, "this generation of girls is trying to prove it can be as tough as boys."

Who is violent to girls: Girls experience violence most often from boyfriends, but girl-on-girl violence is also increasing. Girls often grow up in violent homes and both girls believe that most violations to youth happen at home—then the youth take that violence to the street.

The forms violence take toward girls: Molestations, rapes, sexual abuse and sexual harassment were the most common forms of violence directed at girls.

Reasons for violence: Neither girl believed there were good reasons for violence except in rare cases of self defense. They felt that while violence could always be justified, there was never a good reason for it.

Fear of violence: Both girls had experienced harassment, threats and name-calling. They both knew friends who were afraid to go to school. Because of the fear of harassment both girls conceded that they were afraid to even go to the store by themselves. "Fear is true" for both girls.

Media and violence: The girls felt that youth do learn violence from TV, but eliminating violent programs wouldn't help until violence was also out of the news, until "everything was peaceful."

Effectiveness of law enforcement: Julie didn't feel the police were tough enough, but Christina felt they were "just right." Neither girl thought the Courts were helping people they knew who were in trouble.

To summarize, Sharon Alestalo noted the critical pathways to violent behavior for girls: through home-violence, sexual abuse, and bad relationships. She described the cycle of learned violence starting with the parent, often an abused mother with an unhealthy belief system who teaches helplessness and adaptation to violence by her own victimized response to violence in her life. These girls begin by equating victimization with love then learn to accept violence as a woman's lot in life and end by seeing violence as inevitable. Girls growing up in such environments devalue their own competence, perceive themselves as being at constant risk, are fearful for their own safety, and depend on others to defend them from a hostile world—including the "protection" of a battering boyfriend.

- March 13, **Conflict Resolution**

SPEAKERS: *John McCullough, Eric Weissa*

This session examined the requirements of an effective anti-violence, conflict resolution program and the common social misunderstandings which must first be addressed. John McCullough, from New Justice Services Inc., described the tensions which result from the difference between society's view of childhood—a culturally defined period during which society understands young people will be innocent and protected—and the contemporary reality of childhood—a time when youth receive few protections and must assume mature roles they are ill-equipped to fill. The shortened period of childhood is not enough time for youth to develop social competency but youth must nevertheless act in dangerous real world situations. In these situations youth learn quickly the rules of aggression, who can be a target and under what conditions violence can be perpetrated without consequence. Youth peer groups reinforce these values and the adult world offers no sanctions for social incompetence. This discrepancy between expectation and reality is a source of misunderstanding which can stand in the way of effective program design.

Eric Weissa, from American Friends Service Committee, described the Increase the Peace program, an intensive three day seminar, the purpose of which is to teach conflict resolution skills, prejudice reduction, and community skills. People trained through the program then spread the message through grassroots efforts. Peer mediation programs have also been started in the Syracuse City School District and is aimed at the 15% of youth who are not yet aware of the importance of social expectations and must still learn to build social commitments.

- March 20, **Beard School Field Trip**

SPEAKERS: *Anthony Davis, Willie Dowdell, Earnest Wood*

This session was conducted on site at Beard School and provided a look at the school's innovative programming for troubled children and youth. Beard was created fourteen years ago by the Syracuse School District to work with students who have been removed from their home schools for violating student behavior codes. The current student population (at the time of the visit) was 223 students, ranging in grade from elementary grades through high school, with a 4:1 male to female ratio and a strong, 3:1 minority presence. Principal Ernest Wood explained the two ways students are channeled to Beard, either as the result of a Superintendent's hearing or by referral from the Probation Department. The Superintendent's hearing is usually the result of an extensive history of student infractions. The assignment of a student to Beard is a recognition that stronger intervention is necessary to help the student. Probation Department referrals, the other route to Beard, do not constitute the end of Probation's involvement with a student. Probation works

closely thereafter with both the students and the teachers at Beard. Students are sent to Beard for a minimum ten-week period which can be extended, but usually to no more than a year.

Beard School "has it all" when it comes to the problems of troubled youth—drugs, pregnancy, aggressive behavior. But Beard is a safe haven for many of these youth, a place where they get the help they need, where they fit in. Beard strives to be well connected to the community and offers support through the Center for Community Alternatives, Barnabas, and the Southwest Community Center and tries to connect students to the community through these affiliations. Vice Principal Anthony Davis explained that community support is vitally important noting that students need help with many things, academics, behavior modification, building life-skills, maintaining attendance and performing as required by Probation. Beard has also been "adopted" by Haynor-Hoyt Corp. The company has built an on-site workshop and sent employees to work on projects with youth, has sponsored incentive programs, an Olympics program, a Christmas gift-giving program, and a jobs fair.

The programming at Beard is innovative in many ways and always strives to meet the individual needs of each student. The school offers both an 8:00–2:00 school day targeted to elementary students and a 3:00–5:00 education program for older students with jobs or other outside responsibilities. Teacher Willie Dowdell explained that the class size at Beard is small so students get the help they need and that teachers use a curriculum that is all-encompassing to help students with both traditional academic subjects and such things as hygiene and social skills. Beard offers many options for youth, including the alternative 3:00–5:00 schedule, in-school suspension, field trips to community youth centers, GED preparatory classes, occupational training, and encouragement of volunteerism. It also accommodates the special needs of these students by offering some social services on site as well as on-site Probation visits. Success for a student at Beard lies in doing one thing: being a good student. Beard has, of course, a necessary emphasis on behavior, but it also has set new, higher academic standards for youth and a clear set of expectations, they "tell students what we want."

Beard recognizes the importance of family involvement and has struggled to get parents to participate in their child's success. With the addition of on-site social services, more parents are now participating in the activities at Beard. The school continues to strive to make parental involvement easier, knowing that this will make it more likely that parents will be supportive. Beard also supports a novel approach that the courts are beginning to adopt in sentencing to require parents to participate in their child's rehabilitation. If given additional funding, the school would like to offer more family programs, stay open longer, and offer serious counseling programs.

- March 27, **Onondaga County Family Court**

SPEAKERS: *Hon. Anthony Paris, Hon. Robert Rossi*

This session was a view from the bench of the current Family Court system and included suggestions for ways to improve the system. The five justices in the Onondaga County Family Court handled approximately 11,150 cases last year. This court handles cases involving custody, termination of visitation, child support, child abuse and neglect, and juvenile crime. Nearly 18% of the total number of cases, or 2,100, were PINS (Persons in Need of Supervision) cases. The PINS program recognizes at-risk youth under the age of sixteen who have a pattern of problem behavior. The designation of PINS is the result of a petition brought before the court through one of two channels. Youth can be designated as a PINS for truancy, in which case the schools bring the petition. Or, youth can be designated as PINS for ungovernable behavior, and in this case the petition is brought by a family member, sometimes with the assistance of the Probation Department.

Juvenile crimes are most often assault, robbery, drug crimes, vandalism, and joy-riding. But before a youth reaches Family Court there have been mandatory attempts to intervene in the pattern of misbehavior by diverting the youth's case to programs serving at-risk youth, programs that emphasize community service and restitution offered by the Probation Department, Youth Court, and Project Legal.

Youth do not develop problems overnight and their criminal behavior is learned behavior, learned from role models at home or among their peers. In juvenile court cases, the County Attorney acts as "prosecutor" and the youth is appointed "defense counsel" from a pool of law guardians who the judges described as knowledgeable and caring, and who often act as mentors to these youth.

After being charged with a crime the first step in the Court process is a fact-finding session, and here the system has a major flaw. Due to budgetary constraints, sufficient groundwork is not always performed and if criminal activity is not proven during the fact-finding session, no punitive disposition can be made. As a result, unless the youth admits to the crime, there is most often a dismissal of all charges. This sends the wrong message to youth. The system has had an opportunity to teach youth that there will be consequences for their actions but fails in that responsibility. Instead, the result is negative reinforcement for criminal activity without consequence.

If the case proceeds, and if there is a finding of criminal behavior, the judge can either dispose of the case immediately or order a social investigation. This investigation can include an examination of the youth's life at home and in school and access to the medical and psychological records of the youth. The social investigator makes recommendations to the court, from adjournment in contemplation of dismissal (ACD) to probation or outside placement. Dispositions are limited in some respects by case law. For example, if a PINS petition was brought because of a runaway problem, the judge is limited to non-secured detention such as placing the youth in a group or foster home—from which it is possible to run away

The justices cited two significant problems with the system including: delay of consequences—sometimes for months—while waiting for a court date; and the chronically overbooked, centralized system which could be made more effective by limiting Family Court cases to the most serious offenses and processing the less serious cases in local town courts. The judges also mentioned that the court could only be as effective as its tools. While there are a number of sentencing alternatives for youth, many are quite expensive. And the judges agreed that sometimes incarceration can be a benefit, for serious repeat offenders the environment in a secured facility teaches them respect, responsibility, privilege, and consequence. It is time to look for cost-effective, creative solutions for the problems of youth and to recognize that sweeping statements about youth violence are inappropriate, that youth and their problems are individual.

- April 10, **Huntington Family Services**

SPEAKERS: *Pedro Abreu, Cathy Diana, Beverly Kelly*

This session provided an overview of the programs available through the Huntington Family Center, a neighborhood based multi-service agency dedicated to the preservation and strengthening of families. Huntington began as a settlement house in 1919 and has continued to offer some of the same services, including pre-school child care and parent support services, for over seventy five years. Huntington serves, and is located in, a low-income high-crime neighborhood. It strives to serve this community from "birth till death" with multiple forms of assistance. It provides food, clothing, housing, and basic skills training. It also offers programs targeted to the specific needs

of groups within the community such as teaching English as a second language, offering senior citizen programs, and providing an after-hours intervention program for families in crisis.

Beverly Kelly, Executive Director of the center, stressed that it is important to understand the nature of the community and their needs when designing programs to serve them. The community served by Huntington is poor, some 5,606 families in this neighborhood depend on public assistance. The residents are often poorly educated and it is estimated that 60% lack a high school education. Nearly 70% of the households are single-parent families. Clients of the Huntington Family Center share a common need for basic skills training and the center has programs to teach the basics: reading, writing, and cognitive reasoning. Huntington also offers counseling programs aimed at target populations including seniors, foster care visitation, after hours family crisis intervention, and court related youth counseling. In each of these programs the problems attendant to youth violence must be confronted.

Kelly believes some of the problems of youth and violence begin with young single parent families. These families are most often headed by young women, often young enough to be considered girls, who have witnessed a great deal of violence in their own lives. They are unprepared for parenting and have unmet needs of their own. They often receive little or no support from the fathers for whom becoming a parent is a rite of passage not an undertaking of responsibility. Given these conditions the young mothers are ill equipped to become an effective parent. Kelly expressed her deep concern that these mothers become the primary role model for their own children. It disturbs her to know that children who start out in Huntington pre-school, who have had every advantage Huntington offers, themselves become single teen parents. She is continually surprised when these soon-to-be-grandmothers—often in their early thirties—are "delighted" by this.

Huntington continues to develop new programs to address critical needs. The HATSOP, Huntington Adolescent Sex Offender Treatment Program, works with adolescent males, from 12 to 17 years of age, who have committed a sex crime or who practice inappropriate sexual behavior. Some youth express inappropriate situational behavior, others have never had an opportunity to express themselves in sexually appropriate ways. The program is tailored to the individual and assessments are done—sometimes taking months to complete—to determine the root causes of the behavior, whether the acts have been consensual, whether they result from predatory behavior and whether there is a high or low likelihood of recurrence. These youth share common characteristics of low self esteem, an inability to get along with their peers, an inability to understand responsible behavior, and cognitive distortions about sex—and life in general. They repeatedly point to the media, magazines, television, and videos as a source of learned behavior. They often have a diet high in soft-porn and violent images consumed from sources such as HBO and video games.

Cathy Diana, director of HATSOP, explained that the program offers a twelve month curriculum with four basic components including individual counseling, group counseling, family counseling, and recreational therapy. The program goals are to teach social skills, to expose youth to new ideas, and to teach alternative confrontation skills. The youth participate in apology sessions, work on developing appropriate personal boundaries, develop safety plans to redirect impulses, and work on relapse prevention. The program works hard to keep youth in the program for as long as possible because the rate of recidivism drops when participation is extended. What is needed, according to Diana, is for Family Court to commit offenders to long, initial, mandatory enrollments—rather than repeatedly adding extensions to a short term enrollment—so that both youth and their families will understand that this will be a long process requiring a serious commitment and that there will not be an imminent reprieve through an adjournment in contemplation of dismissal.

Pedro Abreu supervises the teen program and the street reach services geared for youth ages 13–24 years of age. These programs attempt to provide positive structure and role models for at-

risk youth; to give youth opportunities to communicate; to provide opportunities for youth to develop self esteem and support education through structured recreational opportunities, discussion groups, and after school programs. The Street Reach program attempts to build trusting relationships with youth who are disconnected from the mainstream of society and who are instead socialized by their peers, living by their own rules. To Abreu, today's gangs are a cry by youth for family, structure, and support.

The Huntington staff points out that the social messages sent to youth contribute to the problem of youth violence. When society admires material wealth and when individuals are measured by the accumulation of expensive things such as cars and jewelry, youth learn to adopt this measure themselves. Frustration and anger result from living with an unattainable measure and violence and criminal activity result from this frustration. When the message is made worse by a lack of consequence for violence, youth learn a dangerous message—that material things must be taken by whatever means possible and that during this time of their lives they enjoy protection from the consequences. Youth need to learn early that there are alternative ways to measure success beyond material things, that there are multiple avenues to achieve success, and that there are swift and certain consequences for criminal behavior.

- April 24, **Southwest Community Center Field Trip**

SPEAKERS: *Cheyenne Brown, Jesse Dowdell, Allan Green, Vanessa Johnson, Larry King*

This session provided an on-site view of the diverse programs available to the community through the Southwest Community Center (SWCC). The director, Jesse Dowdell, explained his vision of the role of the community center as a supportive environment that serves as an extension of the family to combat violence, hopelessness and fear. The center provides a multitude of youth, family, and senior activities as well as services to the community that include education, training, counseling, and recreational programs. SWCC also provides inclusive programming to deal with issues such as substance abuse prevention, parenting, education, and other important life skills. Dowdell emphasized that *all* SWCC programs deal with violence prevention issues. Vanessa Johnson spoke about the community center as part of "the village that raises the child" and creates a model of a safe neighborhood.

The community served by the SWCC is culturally mixed, and youth often come from homes that are third- or fourth-generation economically disadvantaged. These factors contribute to community tension and create inherent disadvantages which youth must overcome. In response to this the SWCC has created a fluid environment to serve youth which includes a theme of violence prevention reinforced with codes of appropriate behavior. The SWCC has been declared a drug-free zone and has posted codes of behavior which must be adhered to by everyone in the center, users and staff alike. These rules support mutual respect and prohibit activity related to weapons, fighting, gambling, cursing, yelling, misuse of equipment, defacement of property, and smoking. The staff at SWCC recognizes that their own adherence to these codes is essential. When staff models this positive behavior they challenge youth to confront their own violence and participate in creating a safe environment for everyone.

Johnson uses inclusive theories of non-violence in her work with developmentally challenged youth and tries to provide a structured environment that encourages independence, reasoning, and empowerment for these youth. Many of these youth face ridicule and discrimination on a daily basis, and feel anger and frustration as a result. It is important for them to learn alternative methods of coping including walking away, ignoring taunters, or getting an adult involved.

Cheyenne Brown supervises a youth jobs and apprenticeships program nicknamed RESULTS, an acronym for Respect Each Student's Unique Learning Styles. This program works with youth individually to build the fundamental skills necessary to gain employment through programs which include GED preparation, class-based career training, resume preparation, interpersonal communication, internships and job shadowing, and welfare-to-work programs. The target population for these programs is the 17–21 year old age group and can take four months to a year to complete. The RESULTS program attempts to clearly articulate goals and expectations while encouraging private resolution of conflict, responsible choices, cultural awareness and sensitivity issues. And the RESULTS program includes other life-skills training opportunities including Project Legal which teaches the intricacies of the legal system, positive parenting classes, life management explorations, and conflict resolution workshops.

Alan Green uses a holistic approach to substance abuse prevention because substance abuse prevention cannot begin and end with the individual but must include the family and the community. Youth often feel alone combating peer and family pressures and try hard to choose to be drug-free when faced with street-level dealing perpetrated by peers and sometimes family members. The program attempts to provide information, education, and support for positive choices to avoid substance abuse. To that end, SWCC offers educational and recreational opportunities as alternatives.

Other SWCC programs help youth experience self-discovery, learn self-respect, and build self-esteem. These programs act as a substitute for violence and street activities. Programs include classes in karate, photography, skating, soccer, double-dutch and drill teams and creative arts including theater and dance. The Intelligent Young Minds Program and the Lethal Weapons Room, stress the power of the mind as a key factor in controlling violence, teach pro-social skills to reduce the impulse to commit violence, and help teens strive to avoid pregnancy. SWCC also sponsors programs to expose youth to new career choices. Teens in Action is a program organized to help young girls develop basic, practical skills like sewing while at the same time learning anger management and positive ways to cope with peer pressure and violence. The Bishop Forey Foundation (BFF) operates a unit at SWCC and serves youth aged 6–12 with individual tutoring using Syracuse University students as tutors and mentors. These youth need attention, encouragement, and a safe environment. These tutoring sessions often begin with free time activities such as cooking or swimming lessons.

All the SWCC's programs combine to create a fluid, supportive environment for youth and neighbors. The center succeeds in its violence prevention programs because they are part of a holistic approach to behavior related issues and are delivered in a compassionate and safe environment.

- May 1, **Impact of Race on Violence**

SPEAKERS: *Vivian Moore, William Pollard*

This session examined the impact of race and racism on the culture of violence. Bill Pollard discussed the role of racism in the evolution of neighborhoods, noting that the poorest populations have historically succeeded one another in gateway neighborhoods, leaving for the suburbs when a measure of financial success is achieved. A relationship exists between racial climate and business climate in such neighborhoods. There is also a relationship between racial tension and the general climate of interpersonal relations including the presence or absence of everyday social courtesies. America has a history of racial violence, of violence perpetrated by the government against its citizens, of violence perpetrated by individuals against other individuals, and of violence as a method of problem solving. Americans idealize violence and teach it to children thereby

perpetuating violence from generation to generation until it becomes part of the fabric of everyday life. The manifestations of violence may be different in the 1990's, but violence manifests itself daily and often in deadly forms, as in the Oklahoma City bombing or the shocking incident at a Chicago high-rise when two children, profoundly desensitized to the consequences of their violent actions, dropped a four year old from the roof of the apartment building.

Pollard noted a study conducted by Marc Singer from Case Western University which looked at the forms and levels of violence as experienced by children from diverse communities. The teens questioned "why so many black men are dying" and believed that "people must learn to face the violence" and that "violence will find you, good or bad." Singer concluded that violence has an especially profound effect on youth who lack vision for the future and hope for tomorrow.

Pollard drew a comparison between characters in Wright's *Native Son*, men who went crazy or met with violent ends when trying to resist Jim Crow, and the effect on black men in today's America who are estranged from their own culture and who find themselves compelled to answer the call of a dominant culture whose driving force is mere glitter. When the dominant culture does not allow individuals to flourish and prosper within their own culture, when it effectively denies the entire culture the right to exist because of racism, then tension and violence result. Youth within that culture are both devoid of opportunities and reminded daily of the rewards offered to those who are allowed to participate in the dominant culture. The cultures must blend or the result will be a spiritual void in which individuals with no ties to the culture are left without reasons to support the dominant culture, left to be free agents willing to act on impulse.

Pollard also discussed Payton's *Cry the Beloved Country* and the divisive and violent results of racism. The story tells of estrangement from culture within one's own culture when racism divides families and communities. The protagonist searches for his son in South Africa, his own native land, expecting to find and celebrate his Zulu heritage. Instead he finds segregated cities-within-cities, a place where Zulus live together but a place devoid of the culture, values, and traditions of the Zulu. He found families separated from each other—men separated from their wives and children by racist policy—along with prostitution and gang activity. These cities-within-cities served to all but eliminate the sustaining forces of African culture: family, neighborhoods, and institutions. Pollard concluded by comparing this example with our own African American neighborhoods. Conditions which create a sustaining culture: strong families, neighborhoods, and institutions must be strengthened if we hope to see a decline in racial tension and a decline in the violence that results from racism.

Vivian Moore described violence as played-out racism. She quoted Martin Luther King in describing violence as a "triple evil" umbrella sheltering poverty, sexism and racism. For all those affected by "isms" violence is too often a common fact of life, so common that only when violence is extreme is it even recognized as problematic by society. Poverty has a direct link with violence because poverty increases an individual's chance of being excluded from the benefits of culture. Exclusion increases the likelihood of alienation and violence. Combining poverty with racism dramatically increases the likelihood of exclusion.

Moore cautioned that the language we use can perpetuate violence—or challenge it. Be aware for instance, that the message "society expects the worst" or "color and poverty go together" can have a profoundly negative effect on children. Through such messages children both internalize and externalize racism, taking it for granted. We must redefine violence to recognize racism as a form of violence and we must challenge the traditional views of race. Adults chastise youth for abandoning values, values they have abandoned themselves. Adults must work with youth to solve the problem of violence and to undo the damage caused by racism.

- May 8, **Moral Leadership**

SPEAKERS: *Reverend William Coop, Reverend Douglas Eddy, Reverend Harold Garman*

This session explored the role of churches in the community and the issue of moral leadership. Douglas Eddy discussed his view of youth violence as one part of the relationship between family, community, and the individual. He recognized the loss of common civility as one aspect of the modern world which leads to a breakdown in the fabric of society—people who don't speak to each other don't learn about each other and therefore don't care about each other. This lack of civility also means a loss in the ability to engage in constructive, respectful discourse. Without civility individuals cannot disagree without resorting to ever more inflated language and this results in an increasingly hostile environment.

He also noted that violent behavior is learned behavior, that almost 3.3 million children live with violence in the home. He cited the statistics that 1:3 females and 1:5 males are the victims of sexual abuse by the time they reach 18. It costs society between $1.5 to $2 million dollars over the lifetime of a delinquent-turned-adult-criminal. At a time when we spend nearly *twice* as much on prisons and crime—nearly $490 billion— as we do on the military we need to address the issue of youth violence or face the crushing weight of our own neglect.

Eddy believes religion should be a central resource for building a non-violent community by teaching traditional religious values such as personal responsibility, repentance and penance within the framework of community, and the importance of individual action for good. Practice of these values allows an individual or community to transcend the moment, to endure difficult times, and experience a sense of participation in the greater good. Traditional churches also provide a community of spirit to support these values. Eddy encourages his fellow pastors to get out in the community and develop a strong role for the church in building a non-violent community.

William Coop also supports a strong role for churches in the community and notes that churches, especially inner-city churches must change with the times and support their congregations in new ways. The tutoring program at South Presbyterian which offers both 1:1 and group activities through a program designed to enhance self esteem, teach respect and responsibility, provide conflict resolution skills, and enrich lives by expanding knowledge. This program hopes to expand to include a drop-in program for parents who often lack the life-skills to help their children learn and consequently do not always offer the support their children need. South Presbyterian also supports Habitat for Humanity projects in which tenants have formed work teams with Syracuse University students to rehabilitate properties. This type of project does much to create, block by block, a greater sense of community.

Hal Garman, pastor of the United Methodist church, works with a predominantly middle-class white congregation set in the middle of an economically disadvantaged neighborhood. The church provides many services to its neighbors through its own programs and through services provided by tenants including Girls Inc., Kids Unlimited, Catholic Charities, Community Linkages and a food pantry. He sees his church as an alternative to the Christian right and his congregation strives to understand and celebrate diversity. He believes the core issues are spiritual and that there is great danger in sitting back and letting things just go by. The attempt to foster non-violence must be broad based because violence is so pervasive and transcends race, culture, or class. It is a challenge to the community to develop non-violence throughout their lives.

- May 15, **Early Child Development**

SPEAKERS: *Ellen Douglas, Nancy Gabriel, Julia Guinns, Stephanie Leeds, Mary Mahoney*

This session looked at early child development and its impact on youth violence. Ellen Douglas discussed youth-at-risk issues which are present in families, day-care centers, and educational institutions asserting that issues surrounding youth violence have had an impact on both the theory and practice of early child development and this presents a new challenge to the child development community.

Nancy Gabriel underscored this belief with "grim statistics worth repeating" beginning with the fact that the United States is the most violent country in the world according to recent studies. In 1991, 2.7 million children were reported to social service agencies as possible neglect or abuse victims. This number is triple the number for 1980, with untold numbers of cases unreported. Children die from handguns at a rate of one every three hours which translates into one kindergarten class every three days. A recent study conducted in a Chicago housing project revealed that each and every child under the age of five had witnessed a violent weapons crime. And, to add to the violence load for children, a violent act is committed on the average television program every six minutes. This exposure results in an increase in violence in classrooms across the country. When children are raised in unsafe and insecure environments they are traumatized by it, they are often victims of violence, and they are more likely to become perpetrators of violence. But studies indicate that children raised in these environments do not sustain damage if they have at least one unconditionally loving relationship, if they have a model for pro-social behavior, or if they receive some other positive social support.

Gabriel suggested several goals for individuals, families, and the community including advocacy for non-violence at the national political level and a public outcry for increased resource allocation on violence prevention and pro-family strategies; advocacy for jobs, health care, housing, quality education and other quality of life issues; legislation to limit access to firearms; regulation of children's programming to reduce violent content; and support for training in violence-prevention strategies for teachers and child-care providers.

Mary Mahoney explained that violence prevention programming is directly related to the quality level of the child care program, that high quality programs support staff who are trained or self-motivated to model and teach non-violence. These staff redirect children away from aggression toward self-fulfillment and confidence and allow children to develop independence within limits while supporting their self esteem. Day care can provide an ideal setting for the development of non-aggression through daily and weekly routine activities. The day care environment recognizes continually changing child dynamics and helps children learn pro-social skills through these regroupings. The lessons children learn in quality daycare centers include orienting behavior, focus and attention span methods, perceptual ability, communication skills, and negotiating skills.

Julia Guinns became concerned about violence among young people and asked youth directly about the causes of their violent behavior. She discovered that they lacked language skills which made it difficult to verbalize problems. This resulted in isolation and a lack of self esteem. These youth were prone to frustration which often turned to anger and violence. For Guinns, "violence is unspoken frustration and anger." She believes that these tendencies can be reduced by empowering youth with language and communication skills. She involves parents in this endeavor as this is a hands-on process.

Stephanie Leeds advocates for the development of "peaceable environments" which can be recognized by the absence of violence and the presence of alternative, proactive, pro-social approaches to interpersonal communication. Peaceable environments attempt to connect family, neighborhoods and communities. These environments are rare, but can be created and expanded

with care and commitment. Classrooms which attempt to be peaceable environments stress clear and concise goals and demand that children practice sympathy, kindness, and altruism. Children are encouraged to express affection, to develop compassion, to cooperate help, comfort, and share with others. When discipline is necessary, adults must respond in age- and developmentally-appropriate ways through actions which are not excessive and are based on reason and authority and that affirm the value of the child. These environments should stress the importance of problem-solving and other life skills to "create a barrier against violence" that the child can use for life.

- May 22, **Truancy and The Police**

SPEAKERS: *Charles Anderson, Wendy Tiffin*

This session examined the relationship between the Police Department's Family Services Division (FSD), the role of the Truancy Officer, and the problem of youth violence. Wendy Tiffin serves as Commanding Officer of the FSD which consists of 39 people working on all youth and family issues. The division was created to better serve youth and families in crisis through consistent policy, shared information, and concentrated attention. It replaces the old Juvenile Delinquent Unit which was plagued with manpower shortages which meant juvenile cases received low priority. It is built around a communication model in which all members of the section share information. The division is made up of the following departments:

YOUTH SERVICES SECTION
- *Juvenile Delinquency Unit*, which assists with all juvenile arrests.
- *Missing Persons Unit*, because most missing persons are runaway youth.

SCHOOL RESOURCES SECTION
- *SIRP Unit*, which places plainclothes officers in all schools—public and parochial—in Onondaga County.
- *DARE Unit*, a self-esteem based drug resistance program with an anti-violence theme for 6th and 8th grade students, with additional reinforcement planned for 10th grade.
- *Officer Friendly*, for grades K–3, which offers programs such as Stranger-Danger, Good Touch/Bad Touch, bicycle and railroad safety programs.

FAMILY CRISIS SECTION
- *Child Abuse Unit*, which deals with neglect, physical and sexual abuse of children.
- *Domestic Violence Unit*, to which each case is transferred from the original patrol response. (A mandatory arrest policy has been in place since January, 1995)

Arrests for violent crime among juveniles are increasing in all categories in Onondaga County. There are several integrated reasons for the increases including the protected status of youth in the courts which encourages repeat offenses; increases in demographic changes which correlate with crime including increases in poverty and single parent households; and also the enhanced efforts of the new Family Services Division. Captain Tiffen believes there is a direct connection between drugs and youth in trouble whether that trouble is violence, property crime, or other deviant behavior. Tiffen also sees a problems with criminal behavior tracking through families and sees the children of violent parents later become juvenile offenders. There are direct links between neglect and abuse in childhood and later violent behavior, and also between early educational failure and later truancy problems.

Tiffen sees a problem with increased numbers of arrests for individual offenders because of the mandates and limitations imposed by existing laws. There are no immediate consequences for many repeat-offending youth until the criminal behavior is deeply entrenched. In addition, there is often a lack of parental supervision which exacerbates the problem. Family Court also operates under a system of secrecy, attempting to protect a juvenile's rights and to prevent the youth's misdeeds from following the youth for life. The result of this secrecy means that the Probation Department cannot release the results of sentencing to the schools or the police, that the police do not know whether a youth on the street is violating probation, and that juveniles cannot be fingerprinted for any crime except select categories of felonies.

Existing laws also grant youth the power to choose whether or not to enter the Persons in Need of Supervision (PINS) program when they are suspected of committing a crime—parents cannot place the youth in the program without the youth's consent. If the youth refuses to enter the program the matter stalls until the youth can be sent to a secure facility, leaving the youth on the street. Existing laws also create a gap between the age when a youth can refuse parental control, at age 16, and the age when parents can be no longer be held responsible for the actions of the youth, age 18. Even when youths are charged with select class A and B felonies, their prosecution can still be affected by juvenile laws. While these juveniles can be brought before the criminal courts for these crimes and treated as adults, thereby losing many of the protections of the juvenile laws, the overcrowded criminal courts often refer the cases back to Family Court, and once the case is returned to Family Court all the juvenile protections are reinstated despite the severity of the crime.

Tiffin's co-workers had several recommendations to strengthen the juvenile justice system including the opening of military-style "shock camps" similar to those run by the Division to Youth; the reorganization of Family Court so all juvenile cases are handled by the same judge or judges so that offenders will experience consistency and accountability; the recommendation that passengers in auto theft cases be prosecuted, and the recommendation that truancy be addressed within the juvenile justice system.

Charles Anderson is one of two truancy officers for the city of Syracuse assigned to handle a student population of 22–23,000 students. Each officer has an annual caseload of approximately 250 youths. They concentrate their efforts at the middle school level for a variety of reasons. It is the time when interventions can be most effective, and it is during this time that students who experience trouble with school begin to abandon the effort required to succeed. Truancy cases are referred to an officer after a student has been absent for more than ten consecutive days without verification from a parent or guardian. There is a concentration of cases at the middle school level, in part because youth experience a new found freedom at this age, and in part because older truants have often been dropped from the school rolls.

Anderson explained that there are two forms of PINS petitions, one for ungovernable youth brought to the court by parents, and one for truant youth brought to the court by a truancy officer. The result of the petition can be adjournment in contemplation of dismissal (ACD) or probation. If ACD is recommended, the youth must stay out of trouble for six months after which the charges are dismissed. If probation is recommended, the youth can be supervised for up to twelve months, often with weekly visits to a probation officer. If neither of these options is sufficient, the court can opt to place the youth in foster care or in a secured facility for up to twelve months. He agreed that there need to be changes to the courts including lowering the age for juveniles to be prosecuted in adult court and zero tolerance for truancy.

Anderson sees educational neglect as symptomatic of more difficult problems and sees a direct correlation between truancy and more serious crimes. The problems of educationally challenged youth should be cured with successes, recognition, and support rather than punishment and failure. The goal is to keep youth in school for as long as possible, long enough to realize the

value of education. Parental involvement is key to combating educational neglect and parents also need to be educated about the benefits of early intervention.

Both Tiffin and Anderson recommend that the Syracuse School District and the Police Department look at a truancy prevention program now operating in New York City, designed to enhance the effectiveness of truancy officers and reduce the amount of time police must spend on truancy. In this model, truants are picked up by the police and referred to a central processing center leaving the police free to continue patrol while the center contacts the home school and the student's parents. The student is either released to parent or returned to the home school. The model has proven to be both successful and cost-effective, is based on the principle of immediate intervention and consequences for behavior, and supports the importance of education.

- May 29, **Media**

SPEAKERS: *Molly Manchenten, Francis Ward*

This session dealt with the role of the media in the development of violence in youth. Francis Ward began by speaking to the role of media in informing the public, the media's portrayal of youth, and how the media reports on the culture of violence. He noted that two perceptions he had in 1977 are still relevant, first, that black men are incarcerated at rates inversely proportional to the number of mainstream jobs available to them, and second, he noted that there are more black men in prison than in college. He was concerned that there is a black underclass which is viewed as socially and economically expendable and he views this as sentencing these individuals to a lifetime of incarceration within the culture. He explained that in our current culture, both the courts and the opportunities for employment are controlled by white conservatives.

Ward faults the media for not looking critically at this and related issues which contribute to the rise in youth violence. Instead, the day-to-day media coverage features stories of sensationalized conflict and violence. News is often reported as entertainment. The media has a responsibility to seek solutions and develop public consensus. It has the power to shape perceptions so that when it ignores pervasive social problems it is tantamount to editorial bias. He believes that the media should explore why society is interested in violence, why society condones aggression and encourages competition. The entertainment industry should recognize the link between frequent exposure to violent programming and subsequent aggressive behavior and begin to promote alternatives to violence. The government has a role to play by guiding media, not through censorship, but through ratings and warnings about violent content. For these changes to be effective however, fundamental change must come from parents who must take responsibility for their children's viewing. They must vigorously advocate for change because only a public outcry and a change in profitability for producers and sponsors will be effective in creating change.

Molly Manchenten agrees that violent programming begets violence. She is impressed by the number of youth who struggle with peer pressure and extra-curricular activities. She notes that these students, who make up her readership at HJ, are too busy to get into trouble. The difference in the lives of these youth is the fact that some adult took the time to get involved and took some interest in the life of the child. All children need individual attention, when we ignore children we tell them we don't care.

Manchenten does not censor the contributions to HJ since that would be counterproductive to giving youth a voice. She has been impressed by the depth and breadth of knowledge that youth posses and is disturbed by the problems they face. Interestingly, the only complaints she has had about opinions raised by youth come from adults. It is clear to her that current reporting

sensationalizes youth's problems and does not offer analytical insight. It is also clear that media coverage obscures the fact that crime levels are down nationwide while the fear of crime has risen.

Both Ward and Manchenten agree that it is the public who must voice opposition to violence in the media. And it is parents who must teach children how to critique the material they view so that children can put the negative messages they receive in perspective. Through our silence we send the message that what these children witness is what they should expect from the world.

Appendix 2

List of Previous Studies

1979	Equality and Fairness in Property Assessment
1980	Young People in Trouble: Can Our Services be Organized and Delivered More Effectively?
1981	The County Legislature: Its Function Size and Structure
1982	Declining School Enrollments: Opportunities for Cooperative Adaptations
1983	Onondaga County Public Works Infrastructure: Status, Funding and Responsibilities
1984	Police Services in Onondaga County: A Review and Recommendations
1985	The City and County Charters: Time for Revision?
1987	Blueprints for the Future: Recommendations for the Year 2000
1988	The Role of the Food Industry in the Economy of Onondaga County
1989	Poverty and its Social Costs: Are There Long-Term Solutions
1990	Syracuse Area Workforce of the Future: How Do We Prepare
1991	Schools that Work: Models in Education that Can be Used in Onondaga County
1992	Town and Village Governments: Opportunities for Cost-Effective Changes
1993	The Criminal Justice System in Onondaga County: How Well is it Working
1994	The Delivery of Human Services: Opportunities for Improvement
1995	Reinvesting in the Community: Opportunities for Economic Development

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