

10 IDEAS OF IMPACT

Wake Up To School Violence

When Vietnam Veterans Talk About Violence, Even Tough Teens Listen

Before he began his talk to a room full of teen-age boys, Michael Harrington asked three of them to hop about on one leg. He wanted the boys to know what the last 25 years have been like for him. Harrington lost his right leg in the Vietnam War.

Harrington belongs to the Veterans Education Project. Based in western Massachusetts, the project is trying to do something about the epidemic of youth violence in America. Members of the veterans group use their military experiences to get through to teen-agers about alternatives to violence.

The Veterans Education Project's dozen speakers visited more than 25 classrooms last year, a number they

expect to double this year. The project began in 1980s as a peace group concerned with violence around the world. However, its focus changed as the veterans saw the growing wave of youth violence in the United States. "The major danger today to young people is right here in the streets," Steven Sossaman, an artilleryman during the Vietnam war.

By talking about how violence has affected them, Veterans Education Project members get teen-agers to talk about the violence in their own lives. "We tell our stories in a way the kids can related to," says member Gordon Fletcher-Howell. "It opens up a dialogue that is amazing." - Paul Bush

Teen Courts

Advocates say that the growing trend in teen courts ease the burden on the juvenile justice system by lightening the load of misdemeanors and, in some states, minor felonies, that otherwise would go through juvenile or family courts. At the same time, the teen courts allow youngsters a second chance and provide a valuable education in the legal system.

Most such courts are funded by a combination of grants and local funds

from civic groups, such as the Junior League, or through school district and municipal court budgets.

And although statistics are hard to come by - partly because of confidentiality laws involving minors - advocates say teen-agers are less likely to become repeat offenders and juvenile crime is falling in communities using teen courts.

Silverstein, a Florida attorney who serves as a volunteer judge, told the young defendants, "Peer pressure seems

Inner-City Debaters Channel Physical Aggression Into Conflict Resolution

The Urban Debate League of Kansas City, sponsored by the University of Missouri. The league is a part of a proliferating number of debate societies aimed predominantly at minority students of urban high schools. Many believe competitive debate can help channel the anger and aggression often felt by inner-city youths.

Formal, refereed debate - whether it's over war and peace, religion and politics, or education and economics - has for

centuries been the province of aristocrats, philosophers, professors and historians and their students at elite schools. There are, of course, plenty of arguments on the streets, but now the new urban debating movement is seeking to put the squabbling on academic turf.

Through these programs, students attend various institutes in the summer that train them to compete with students from other inner-city schools as well as the suburbs. The students

debate one topic for an entire school year. The National Forensics League, an educational organization that oversees high school debate societies, chooses the topic. This year's subject is U.S. foreign policy toward Russia, though the debates have involved related questions such as Kosovo and the role of NATO.

- Kimberly Easley

Interactive TV Creates Study Class for Students of Different Races

Bryanna Johnson, a bright, inquisitive college student, hesitated to get into discussions on black and white social issues for fear of offending someone.

She found freedom to talk about race-related concerns with people of a different racial background in a class that uses interactive television technology to connect students at her predominantly white Central Michigan University with students at the University of Arkansas at Pine Bluff, a his-

torically black institution.

Ground rules for the class are few. Students are free to discuss what's on their mind within the boundaries of the class subject and with respect for other points of view.

Via interactive television, students and faculty from both universities see and interact with each other, share in discussions, ask questions and participate in class exercises despite the 900 miles that separate the two campuses,

Before hitting the streets each day, Cheri Jacobs prays for a way to bring hope and peace to the young people of East Cleveland, Ohio.

With youth violence of all types on the rise, and male teen-age homicide up 154 percent between 1985 and 1991, Jacobs has no illusion about the problem she has taken on.

Two years ago, Jacobs, 47, decided on a different vessel for her faith, a mobile home she describes as a 1977 "el cheapo" Itasca model with a rebuilt Chevrolet engine.

Jacobs is the director of the Youth Services Mobile Mediation Project in East Cleveland. The mobile home, her "baby," as she calls it, is her armor in battle, her oasis in a desert.

Mediation is simple in concept: drawing conflicting parties together to resolve problems before they escalate into warfare.

Although community mediation is a relatively new phenomenon - the NBA reports

to be the most important factor in whether a kid commits a crime," he said after the court session. "Here you have a whole room of peer pressure, trying to turn you around."

- Nancy Weil

Mediation-Mobile Reaches Teens

that there were fewer than 100 such programs in 1980 - the idea of solving problems without handcuffs or fisticuffs is showing a growing appeal.

In East Cleveland, Jacobs, with her project partner Artimus Carter, faced several obstacles while setting up their program.

First, there were the logistics. Focusing on young people meant going to school, and going to school meant shuttling between sex elementary schools, one middle and one high school.

Another problem was fear - fear among Jacobs' friends and family that she would be hurt, even killed, taking her message of mediation to gang-infested neighborhoods. "Some people said 'you'll need bullet-proof vests,'" Jacobs said. "Well, I never thought about bullet-proof vests."

But perhaps the biggest obstacle of

all was the public's misunderstanding of about what mediation is and what it can do.

Jacobs, a lifelong mediator as the eldest of nine siblings, is now launching this school year's mission - to multiply herself. With Carter, she and a corps of volunteers are planning to work with the city's 11th and 12th graders to help them train the East Cleveland's 450 to 500 fourth graders in the techniques of mediation.

Fourth graders make the best mediators, Jacobs said, because they are old enough to understand the process and the language, but not yet old enough to be cynical.

Her idea here is that these nine-year-olds will become the first generation of adults specifically trained and committed to resolving conflicts peacefully.

- Tom Mitchell

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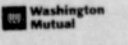
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