

# WAKE UP TO SCHOOL VIOLENCE

## Students Stem Violence With Help of Student Mediators

For Amanda Lalu, 12, it was the almost-daily occurrence of fistfights at her school – and a routine spectacle of nosebleeds, black eyes and hair pulling that made her enroll in an 80-hour program in conflict resolution.

Sponsored by the American Friends Service Committee (AFSC), the program trains youths nationwide in conflict resolution techniques. Although the AFSC program is decades old – it was started in 1917, inspired by Quaker ideals of nonviolence – the training has taken on new urgency in the wake of a series of school shootings across the country in the past year.

The good news is that when implemented properly, conflict resolution and peer mediation programs can reduce the number of conflicts reported to teachers and administrators by 80 percent, according to findings by the national center.

One popular model is commonly referred to as HIP, an acronym for Help Increase the Peace. The model involves “skill building” techniques such as active listening and making eye contact, as well as learning how not to rely on reflex reactions when in a tense situation.

Some law-enforcement experts see conflict resolution as preferable to other anti-crime strategies that have caught on in the schools. For example, several studies have concluded that the installation of “target-hardening” devices like metal detectors are ineffective and often downright detrimental to a school’s well-being.

- Robin Antepara

## Cash Rewards for Crime Tips Raised Old-Fashioned Way

Depending on the severity of the crime reported, citizens of Kingman, Arizona receive \$50 to \$1,000 if their information leads to an arrest. The informants are also guaranteed anonymity.

The Crime Stoppers and Mohave Silent Witness Program in New Mexico are similar in that both have a police phone number for reporting crimes and callers are given an identification number at the start of the call by computer voice mail or by a person answering the call.

After police officers have investigated the report, the caller checks back, quoting the identification number. If an arrest was made, the caller is asked where he or she would like to meet someone to receive a reward.

In Keshena, Wisconsin, the program organizers are studying the feasibility of transferring the reward money at a local bank drive-through window. The caller would simply state the identification number at the bank to receive a prepared envelope with cash in it.

So far, officials say neither of the programs has experienced a prank call or had a case of a person abusing the system to get back at someone else.

## Agencies Unite to Stop Truants From Becoming Criminals

A student contemplating playing a little hooky in Corpus Christi, Texas can be fairly sure of one thing. It won’t get overlooked.

Agencies have discovered that collaboration is the key to dealing with truancy and juvenile delinquency. Since 14 different organizations teamed up as the Coastal Bend Alliance for Youth five years ago, juvenile crime has dropped by 35 percent.

The Coastal Bend Alliance for Youth represents five school districts, a police department, a sheriff’s department, a runaway shelter and an alcohol and drug abuse center, among other organizations.

“Agencies have a tendency to carve out their own little areas and protect them,” said Mariah Boone, a licensed social worker and program director of the Truancy Reduction Impact Program (TRIP).

TRIP operates out of an office in the YMCA building. From 9 AM to 3 PM, police officers who pick up truants bring them to TRIP. There,

someone from the Sheriff’s Department is called in to supervise the truant, as required by law, and to process the truant into the center.

Next, a school counselor from one of the five school districts that take turns staffing the office interviews the truant and contacts his or her parents and school. The truant is then referred to a counselor from one of the participating agencies who will determine if the truant is facing any special difficulties, such as alcohol or drug abuse or violence or neglect in the home. If so, family counseling is recommended.

At the end of the day, the truant is signed over to his or her mother or father, who is asked to report immediately to the child’s school to meet with the school’s administrator.

Editor’s note: Special thanks to the contributing writers of ANS for these ideas of impact. We would like to hear about your innovative solutions and programs to correct the violence in schools.

## Teen Victims and Perpetrators Work Together to Prevent Violence

Five years ago, Twinkle Rudberg launched an organization called Leave Out Violence (L.O.V.E.) to give teen-age victims of violence, as well as perpetrators and witnesses, the skills and will to change their lives.

Every year about 40 teenagers who have been involved in violence are recruited from Montreal schools or are referred by social workers and school counselors or teachers. At the heart of the project is a twice-weekly forum where the young people learn to express themselves through photography and journalism.

Organizers say that a unique dimension of the program is that it involves both victims and perpetrators of violence.

- Hélène Katz

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