

elements of change

highlighting trends and issues in the criminal justice system

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The Power of Prevention: Action Makes the Difference

October is national crime prevention month. The theme for this year -- *The Power of Prevention: Action Makes the Difference* -- highlights the notion that, when crime prevention is seen as everybody's business, we as a society become empowered, and crime and fear no longer need dominate our lives.

Naturally, most of our efforts toward crime are reactionary and containment driven. This strategy is effective and makes sense. React to criminals who we know exist and contain their criminal behavior. But, perhaps our strongest crime intervention tool -- good old preventative medicine -- is vastly underutilized. By taking action even before we see the signs of criminal behavior, we can inoculate our society against crime. Preventative action is enormously difficult to sustain because it requires a leap of faith. But, returning to the phrase "*Action Makes the Difference*," maybe a greater emphasis on prevention *will* give us something beyond crime reduction: A feeling that we are back in the driver's seat when it comes to fighting crime.

We've all read the reports and seen the articles saying that violent crime rates (and crime rates in general) have dropped significantly in the past few years. This is in fact true. And, with rates for many crimes so low, the temptation may be to dismiss crime prevention as a top priority. However, with general decreases in crime rates there have been significant increases in many juvenile crimes. This increase in juvenile delinquency makes it urgently clear that NOW, more than ever, IS the time to focus on crime prevention. In particular, we need to focus on early crime prevention, to keep the next generation of youth (and the generation behind them) from ever becoming criminals.

We cannot possibly paint a totally comprehensive picture of crime prevention in just one issue of *Elements of Change* (or even one hundred issues, for that matter), but we can highlight a few crime prevention strategies proven to be effective. Our emphasis will fall, as noted above, on strategies that intervene with children and juveniles before they even commit their first serious crime. We will also take a quick look at the cost-effectiveness of some crime prevention programs.

Special Report!!!

Yes! Another special report.

Inspired by Crime Prevention Month (October), this issue focuses on crime prevention.



The Bottom Line

\$ *The total cost of the violent crime career of a young adult 18 to 23 years old is estimated to be \$1.1 million (Cohen, 1994).*

\$ *The average cost of incarcerating a juvenile for one year is approximately \$34,000.*

\$ *Head Start's preschool intervention program, a proven delinquency prevention program, costs \$4,300 per year per child.*

\$ *Research on delinquency prevention programs in California showed that every \$1.00 spent on prevention produced direct savings of \$1.40 to the law enforcement and juvenile justice system (Lipsey, 1984).*

(For more information on the "Bottom Line," see page 4)

Looking at Four Effective Prevention Strategies:

The following strategies are by no means the definitive or final word on prevention. But, they are four widely accepted approaches to minimizing youth problem behavior and delinquency.

The specific programs highlighted below have been selected from *Blueprints for Violence Prevention*, an evaluation of prevention programs spearheaded by the Colorado Division of Criminal Justice and conducted by Del Elliott and the Center for the Study and Prevention of Violence. *Blueprints for Violence Prevention* profiles prevention programs proven to be effective through a process of being 1) scientifically validated using a control group, 2) validated in more than one site, and 3) found to be generally replicative across many sites. (*Other prevention programs not found in the Blueprints report may very well be equal in effectiveness to the programs listed, but they have not yet been scientifically validated to the same rigorous standards.*)

⌘ **Family Strengthening** -- *Giving families the skills and support they need to succeed.*

Inappropriate and inadequate parenting are among the strongest predictors of delinquency in children (Loeber and Stouthamer-Loeber, 1986). Parents wield some of the greatest potential power to put a child at risk. Ineffective parenting severely threatens a child's ability to develop normally. Especially critical are the pre- and postnatal months and the first three years of a child's life when the majority of brain growth and "wiring" occurs. The environment -- including nutrition, stress, and stimulation -- during this early growth stage can have long-lasting effects (Carnegie, 1994).

So, who are likely to be inappropriate or inadequate parents? Studies consistently identify the following three parental risk factors: poverty, single parenthood, and youthfulness. Any one of these factors places a parent at a significantly higher risk of being ineffective or abusive (Farrington, 1994). Also, parental factors such as substance abuse, mental/physical health problems, criminality, and abusive and negligent behavior place children at risk for future problems and delinquency (Sampson, 1995).

Because parents have such an important influence during the early years of child development, an effective prevention strategy at this stage is to concentrate not just on the child, but on the parents as well. By providing at-risk parents with parenting information and an increased support network, you create dependable caregivers, and in turn, healthy, protected children. During the past two decades, a number of programs have realized reductions in problem behaviors and increased

cognitive functioning among children by focusing support on the parents.

One such program is Prenatal and Infancy Home Visitation by Nurses. This program targets pregnant women who are at risk for infant health and developmental problems. Visitation begins during the pregnancy, with nurses coming to the home of the pregnant woman about once a month. Visits continue through 24 months postpartum, gradually diminishing in frequency to approximately every six weeks. Health screenings, with transportation to local clinics, are also offered as part of the program.

Compared to a control group at 12 and 24 months, nurse home visitation resulted in lower incidents of child abuse and neglect and higher child developmental levels. Follow-up at 15 years showed significant, enduring reductions in child abuse and neglect, completed family size, welfare dependence, behavior problems due to substance abuse, and criminal behavior on the part of the studied mothers (Elliott, 1997).

⌘ **Family Retraining** -- *Retraining families already having trouble with problem children.*

An effective extension of very early intervention is to retrain families *already* having problems with aggressive or "acting out" children -- focusing on modifying dysfunctional family communication, training family members to negotiate effectively, and setting clear rules about privileges and responsibilities. The idea here is to catch problem behavior early in a juvenile's delinquency career when criminal intervention is more powerful.

A successful example of family modification is Functional Family Therapy (FFT). FFT emphasizes changing emotional (especially blaming) components of family interaction. FFT then provides a program of specific behavior change techniques that are culturally appropriate, family appropriate, and consistent with the capabilities of each family member. FFT generally treats families with youth between the ages of 11 and 18. This is accomplished with between 8 and 30 one hour family sessions, depending on the level of family need. In most cases, contacts are spread over a three month period. A number of evaluations have found FFT reduces recidivism rates for delinquents by 30 to 50 percent (Barton et al., 1984).

⌘ **Emphasize Education** -- *Encouraging commitment to school and academic success.*

Youth not in school are at a high risk for a multitude of problems -- not least of which are a much greater risk of delinquency and crime (Snyder and Sickmund, 1995). Individuals who do not receive a basic education must overcome tremendous barriers to achieve financial success, let

alone meet their basic needs. Children who fall out of the educational process will lack adequate skills to secure employment and become self-sufficient adults. This quickly places them on a very slippery slope which is biased toward dependency, delinquency, crime, and poor parenting choices (which continues a destructive intergenerational cycle).

A wide range of risk factors lead youth to end up outside the educational mainstream by means of truancy, suspension, expulsion, and dropping out. These educational risk factors fall into two main categories -- those originating from the school environment and those originating from community and home (National School Safety Center, 1994). Factors related to school include: lack of motivation resulting from poor academic performance; lack of stimulating academic challenges; and teacher neglect. Factors related to community and home include: negative role models; pressures related to family health or financial concerns; difficulty coping with pregnancy, marriage, or parenthood; lack of family support for education; and violence in or near home or school.

To keep youth in school, prevention approaches need to address this broad range of risk factors -- protecting against problems both inside *and outside* the school. Ultimately, though, in order to be truly invested in education, youth must feel that they have something significant to gain by being in school (and have something significant to lose by not being in school). So, in addition to protecting against problems, successful educational-based prevention programs must create incentive.

The Quantum Opportunities Program (QOP), attempts to provide that incentive. QOP helps youth graduate from high school and attend college by providing high risk teens with supplemental competency-based education, personal developmental opportunities, and community service opportunities (to develop work skills). These activities, coupled with a sustained relationship with a peer group and a caring adult over the four years of high school, create a positive link between education and success in the community. QOP also offers financial incentives to encourage participation, completion, and long range planning.

Results from the pilot test of this program indicated that QOP participants, compared to a control group, were less likely to be arrested during their juvenile years, were more likely to have graduated from high school and to be enrolled in higher education or training, and were less likely to become a teen parent (Elliott, 1997).

⌘ Positive Youth Development -- *Creating supportive, positive peer and adult environments.*

Youth need to bond to a social unit. This social environment will have a significant impact -- either positive or negative -- on

a child's development and life outcome. In order to become engaged by, and invested in, the mainstream (and, supposedly positive) social structure, youth need meaningful, challenging opportunities, the access to the skills necessary to take advantage of those opportunities, and, finally, recognition of their effort (as an incentive for continued effort).

Opportunity, skill, and recognition can be generated on a variety of fronts if a community is lacking those resources. Prevention tools such as tutoring, vocational training, after school activities, recreation programs, and mentoring can work together to effectively create a positive social framework for at-risk youth -- minimizing destructive influences by providing youth with supportive and productive alternatives.

For youth lacking a sufficiently nurturing and supportive adult environment, mentoring is one of the most powerful and proven ways to gain that structure. Mentoring programs aspire to create a stabilizing effect on an at-risk child's life by setting up an extended one-on-one relationship between the child and a caring (unrelated) adult. Mentoring programs vary in their approach. Some programs emphasize academics while others focus on vocational training.

The largest mentoring program of its kind, the Big Brothers/Big Sisters (BB/BS) of America, simply stresses friendship as its main objective. Big Brothers (eventually becoming BB/BS) was founded in 1904 with the goal of reaching out to children who were in need of socialization, firm guidance, and connection with positive adult role models (Grossman and Garry, 1997). BB/BS matches unrelated adult volunteers with youth from single-parent households. A BB/BS relationship does not set out to address specific problems but to provide general support to all aspects of a young person's life. A volunteer mentor must make a substantial time commitment. Mentor and youth meet for about four hours, two to four times a month, for at least one year.

In 1992-93, an evaluation of the BB/BS program at eight sites found a wide range of benefits to the mentor/child relationship. The evaluation compared children who were placed in the BB/BS program with a control group who were put on a waiting list for the program during the 18 month study period (Tierney and Grossman, 1995). Some of the study results are summarized below:

- ④ Mentored youth were 46% less likely than the control group to initiate drug use and 27% less likely than the control group to initiate alcohol use during the study period.
- ④ Mentored youth were almost one-third less likely to hit someone.
- ④ Mentored youth skipped half as many days of school.
- ④ Mentored youth were 37% less likely to lie to a parent.

(See back page for sources)

The Bottom Line: The Cost-Effectiveness of Prevention

This section is a summary from a 1996 RAND Institution study, *Diverting Children from a Life of Crime: Measuring Costs and Benefits*. The RAND study assessed the cost-effectiveness of four early intervention crime prevention strategies -- focusing (the same way we have in the previous pages) on at-risk youth before the onset of delinquency or very early in delinquency. The four prevention strategies studied were: 1) home visits and child care, 2) family training and therapy, 3) graduation incentives (monetary), and 4) non-incarceration supervision for young delinquents (probation, in-home supervision, community corrections). *Note: The RAND study closely mirrors the types of programs we have already been talking about (except for #4), so we refer you to the previous pages for more explanation on each type of strategy.*

The cost-effectiveness of the studied prevention programs varied greatly. The home visits/day care strategy provided the least crime reduction return for the dollar, while graduation incentives showed the most return for the dollar (with parent training and delinquent supervision falling in between).

An important thing to keep in mind, though, is that compared to incarceration all these prevention strategies are relatively inexpensive. As a comparison, the RAND study estimated the cost-effectiveness of California's three-strikes law (a law guaranteeing extended sentences for repeat offenders). The three-strikes law weighs in at \$5.5 billion/year to implement, realizing an estimated California-wide serious crime reduction of approximately 21%. Based on program effectiveness found in this study, by spending an additional billion dollars, graduation incentives and parent training could nearly double that crime reduction rate.

Ultimately, three of the four studied prevention programs (parent training, graduation incentives, delinquent supervision) beat out the Three-strikes law in terms of cost-effectiveness (*even substantial variations in program parameters do not result in a reversal of cost-effectiveness outcomes relative to the three-strikes law*). So, while each of these prevention strategies *alone* may not equal the crime reduction power of three-strikes, they still deliver more bang-for-the-buck. And, *working together*, as mentioned above, these prevention strategies have the potential to equal or surpass the crime reduction power of three-strikes.

Finally, this comparison of cost and effectiveness is in no way intended to imply that there should be a choice of prevention *versus* incarceration (or even the choice of one prevention strategy over another). Rather, the cost and effectiveness comparison is a means to cast light on some of the existing options for crime reduction at different developmental stages.

Program Cost and Effectiveness: Four Prevention Programs Compared to California's Three-Strikes Law (*three-strikes is a law guaranteeing extended sentences for repeat offenders*)

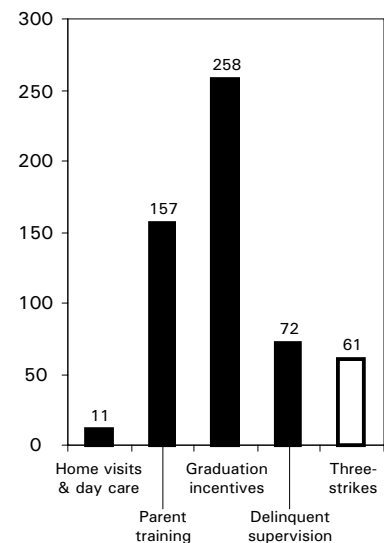
	Visits & Day Care	Parent Training	Graduation Incentives	Delinquent Supervision	Three-Strikes
Cost per participant	\$29,400	\$3,000	\$12,520	\$10,000	n/a
Total yearly program cost in millions of dollars (if implemented statewide)	3,155	360	570	240	5,520
Serious crimes prevented per million dollars spent (based on the individual test program's performance)	11	157	258	72	61
% serious crime reduction (if implemented statewide)	2.7%	4.4%	11.4%	1.3%	21.4%

(For all information on this page)

Source: Greenwood, P.W., Model, K.E., Rydell, C.P., and Chiesa, J. (1996). *Diverting Children from a Life of Crime: Measuring Costs and Benefits*, RAND, Santa Monica, CA.

Cost-Effectiveness of Early Interventions, Compared with California's Three-Strikes Law

Serious Crimes Prevented per Million Dollars

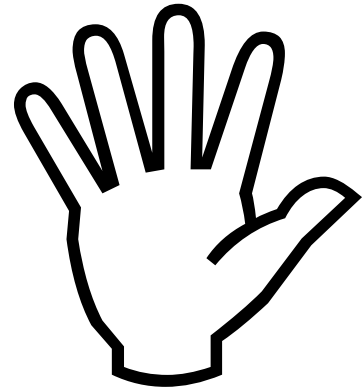


How Can YOU Lend a Hand?: Some Local Prevention Options

Those of us in the criminal justice and public safety fields work day in and day out in an attempt to prevent crime. Even so, Crime Prevention Month is a great opportunity to refresh our commitment to crime prevention, both at our jobs and at a more personal level. Being "public safety experts" already, we must capitalize on our knowledge, engaging in every opportunity possible to work *within our own neighborhoods* to prevent crime and violence. How can we help out putting crime prevention to work in our own backyards? Here are a few ideas:

- ▣ Become a mentor. Mentoring is one of the most effective and personally rewarding ways to prevent juvenile crime and violence. How do you get involved as a mentor? The central office of **Boys and Girls Clubs of Metro Denver** (303-892-9200) would love to hear from you. Other mentoring programs are **Project PAVE** (303-322-2382) and the **One-to-One Network** at Jefferson County Build A Generation (303-742-9466). **Partners, Inc.** (303-698-0808) also has mentoring programs across Colorado. Call them to learn how to start or join a mentoring project. Look for other mentoring programs throughout Colorado by contacting the **Build A Generation** program at the Division of Criminal Justice (303-239-4471). Finally, promote the idea at your neighborhood association meetings. You can find out about neighborhood associations and homeowners groups by contacting the **Neighborhood Resource Center of Metro Denver** (303-561-3790) (NRC can also identify organizations in other parts of Colorado).
- ▣ Become an instructor for the **Alive at 25** program. Alive at 25 is a program coordinated through the Colorado State Patrol that helps youth handle peer pressure and peer influences about drug and alcohol use. Contact Sylvia Maestas at the State Patrol (303-239-4536).
- ▣ Volunteer at **The Conflict Center** in metro Denver (303-433-4983). The Conflict Center works with youth to develop skills to avoid violence and confrontation.
- ▣ Get involved with the **Juvenile Firesetter Prevention Program**. This program helps juveniles avoid arson-related delinquency (FBI records indicate that juveniles accounted for 52% of arson arrests in 1995). Contact Deanna Butler at the Division of Fire Safety (303-239-5704).

(Why *these* programs? -- because we at the Division of Criminal Justice know and work with all the above programs. We've contacted them and asked if they wanted to be included in this article. If you call them, they will answer!)



Looking for More Prevention Info or Other Ways to Get Involved? **GET WIRED**

<http://www.weprevent.org>

The National Citizens' Crime Prevention Campaign site serves as a gateway to the National Crime Prevention Council, the Crime Prevention Coalition of America, Youth as Resources, and the Teens, Crime, and the Community program.

<http://www.servenet.org>

SERVEnet, posted by Youth Service America, provides a service opportunities database, message boards, news groups, resources, and links.

<http://www.jointogether.org>

JoinTogether Online provides a forum for information exchange and resource sharing for communities working to reduce substance abuse and gun violence.

<http://www.communitypolicing.org>

The Community Policing Consortium maintains this site with information on community policing, training, related organizations, sources of information, bulletin board, and chat room.

<http://www.childabuse.org>

The National Committee to Prevent Child Abuse offers parenting tips and a comprehensive annual 50-state survey of child abuse data.

<http://www.safekids.org>

Safekids provides family safety checklists, tips on keeping kids safe and avoiding accidents, and an extensive question and answer list.

Also, Check Us (DCJ) Out!

http://www.state.co.us/gov_dir/cdps/dcj/dcjinfo.htm

The Colorado Division of Criminal Justice web site. In addition to information about ourselves, we have links to other criminal justice and prevention sites.

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http://www.state.co.us/gov_dir/cdps/dcj/dajinfo.htm

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