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## Children and Youth

Children and youth are our future. This is why they must be at the heart of any efforts to deal with crime—its causes, its prevention, and its impact. Reducing the violence children and youth witness and experience—at home, in their communities, and in school—is essential if we are to raise healthy and responsible young people who will take their rightful place in society. Our young people hold great promise but, for many, this potential is diverted by crime and poverty in their communities. The Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention of the U.S. Department of Justice found that juvenile offenders are involved in approximately one-fifth of nonfatal violent victimizations.<sup>31</sup> For those youth who become involved in gangs or criminal activity, diversion or alternative sentencing programs can provide a second chance and a better (and much cheaper) option than incarceration. Young people who live in neighborhoods where crime seems the best—or even the only—choice can benefit from community recreational activities, mentoring, and afterschool programs. For children who have one or both parents in prison, a relationship with an adult mentor can make a great difference in their lives.

A caring community nurtures its children and young people. When they make mistakes, the community works to guide them back to positive choices and responsible living. Many communities of faith believe that this is an important part of their mission, and they provide programs, activities, and volunteer efforts to help young people who are involved or at risk of being involved in the criminal justice system.

### **Amachi Mentoring Children of Prisoners<sup>32</sup>**

**A partnership of secular and faith-based institutions recruits volunteers from congregations to mentor children of prisoners.**

**PROBLEM** According to the Bureau of Justice Statistics, in 1999 an estimated 1.5 million children had an incarcerated parent.<sup>33</sup> By 2004, estimates of the

number of these children ranged as high as 2.5 million.<sup>34</sup> Many of these children will suffer long-lasting effects in every area of their lives as a result of their parents' incarceration. For those who were living in poverty before the incarceration—and many were—the situation worsens when the parent is in prison. The children often move from relative to relative; they may feel abandoned and stigmatized and become at risk for difficulties in school and at home.<sup>35</sup> Some studies have shown that these children have a greater likelihood of being incarcerated than the population as a whole.<sup>36</sup> People of faith who become involved in mentoring programs for these children can make a big difference in the life of a child.

**PROGRAM** The Amachi initiative recruits volunteers from congregations to mentor children of prisoners. Amachi is a partnership between Public/Private Ventures (P/PV), a national nonprofit organization; Big Brothers Big Sisters of America (BBBSA); and the Center for Research on Religion and Urban Civil Society (CRRUCS) at the University of Pennsylvania, with funding from The Pew Charitable Trusts. It also receives support from the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS) members of AmeriCorps and Senior Corps help staff the mentoring effort. Amachi works closely with prisons, community and youth development agencies (both faith-based and secular), social services, juvenile delinquency agencies, and others. Mentors are recruited from Philadelphia-area churches.

Religious leaders are recruited to endorse the program and encourage members of their congregations to volunteer to be mentors. All mentor applicants are carefully screened (including a criminal background check and child abuse clearance). Those who are accepted make a commitment to mentor one child for one hour a week for one year. Mentors receive training as part of the screening process, and ongoing training is offered as needed.

In order to identify children for the program, Rev. W. Wilson Goode Sr., former mayor of Philadelphia, goes into prisons to present the program to prisoners. He explains the problems their children may face (damaged self-image, cognitive difficulties, emotional problems, mental health issues, behavior problems, problems in school, posttraumatic stress from witnessing a parent's arrest, and, especially, an increased likelihood to be incarcerated themselves). Many parents were relieved to know that a mentor, another caring adult, would be looking out for their children's well-being and gladly gave their permission and contact information for their children. Children and mentors were matched by Amachi staff, and the program is carefully monitored.

Through systematic data collection and follow-up. AmeriCorps and Senior Corps members serve as the primary contact point for mentors, making weekly contact and collecting monthly data on meetings between mentors and mentees.

**ROLE OF FAITH** Through mentoring children of prisoners, people of faith demonstrated their concern for and commitment to the neighborhood where they worshiped.

**POTENTIAL OBSTACLES** Obtaining sufficient resources may be a problem although mentoring costs only average \$1,114 per child, according to an analysis performed in 1999.<sup>37</sup> Sources of funding should be in place at the very beginning.

Identifying and locating the children can be difficult, and obtaining the support and understanding of prison officials is essential because the prisoners themselves are the best source of information. Children of prisoners often lead unstable lives and often move from relative to relative.

Mentors need to receive training and encouragement because children of prisoners may find it difficult to build trust in a new relationship, and mentor-mentee bonding may take much longer than expected. Perseverance is important. Mentors must be cautioned not to provide children with material things; the mentor's role is to be a friend, not a Santa Claus. Concerns about a family's social service needs can be passed on to the mentoring agency or the religious community.

Mentoring is not a quick and easy solution, and mentors who don't do their job well may cause more damage than good. Careful screening and training of volunteers and regular monitoring and evaluation help keep the program operating smoothly and effectively.

**SIGNS OF SUCCESS** During Amachi's first two years of operation (April 2001 through March 2003), there were 556 matches, and a high percentage of these matches remained active over time. A 2002 survey by Big Brothers Big Sisters found that mentored children became more self-confident and improved their academic performance and classroom behavior. But the real test is whether "the number of children who follow their parents into prison [declines]." When that happens, "We will know Amachi works."<sup>38</sup> It will be several years before these statistics are available.

## MAD DADS WORK THE STREETS

MAD DADS (Men Against Destruction—Defending Against Drugs and Social Disorder) is a national community empowerment organization whose mission is to provide young people with viable alternatives to drugs, gangs, and violence. The model consists of mapping community assets and identifying and responding to factors that push youth to the streets and into risky behaviors. Street patrols go into the neighborhoods to talk to these young people and to get them off the streets. MAD DADS develops programs for youth who have made the decision to leave the streets. Programs include rites of passage, cultural exchanges, teen centers, and juvenile diversion programs, as well as other options that address the

specific needs of the local communities. MAD DADS is a faith-based organization encompassing people of many different faiths. Street patrol DADS pray before and after the street patrol but do not impose their faith on the youth unless in response to a request.

Started in Omaha, NE, in 1989 by a group of African American fathers, MAD DADS has spread to 16 states in 54 cities and is now multiethnic. Over 18 countries from around the world have come to learn about the model, and it has been identified as an American best practice. For more information, visit [www.maddads.com](http://www.maddads.com), or call 877-230-0214.

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## Teen Community Center

### **Law enforcement officers partner with the faith community to establish a teen recreational facility to provide alternatives to juvenile crime.**

**PROBLEM** Young people who live in neighborhoods with no recreational facilities or other positive activities may turn to alcohol, drugs, and gang activity. Latchkey children are often especially vulnerable to these unhealthy alternatives.

**PROGRAM** The SAFE (Safe and Friendly Environment) is a community center that serves teens ages 12 to 15 who live in a public housing project within walking distance. It offers a safe and attractive alternative to the streets by providing activities after school and evenings, weekends, and during the summer. The SAFE was developed through a partnership between officers from the Decatur, AL, Police Department Crime Prevention Unit and 13 area churches. It is staffed by volunteers from the faith community and the police department.

The Crime Prevention Unit of the police department oversees the center's operations, and officers are always present when the center is open. To engage the faith community, officers approached local youth pastors who responded enthusiastically. Faith-based organizations provide additional supervision for the youth, as well as entertainment, food, and spiritual guidance. Church groups sign up to sponsor weekend events, and there are occasional field trips.

Youth who attend The SAFE are given free time to hang out with friends and to play in the game room. The volunteers interact with them to build relationships. Staff believe that the most important thing they can do is to show the kids that people care.

**ROLE OF FAITH** Volunteers from the faith community help youth meet spiritual as well as physical needs. The program introduces the teens to a variety of local church groups, and many have become involved as a result.

**POTENTIAL OBSTACLES** The program is neither baby-sitting nor an extension of school but rather a way to meet teens' developmental needs. Communities with recreation and parks departments may be reluctant to see resources diverted toward a facility focused on one age group in one neighborhood.

**SIGNS OF SUCCESS** Establishing the teen center within walking distance of the public housing unit where many at-risk youth live made the program acces-

sible to these kids. It serves some 2,500 young people. In the target group of juveniles, staff report positive attitude changes, increased self-esteem, and improvements in social behavior in the neighborhood and the schools. School surveys sponsored by the Decatur Police Department show an overall improvement in participants' school performance and behavior. Staff believe The SAFE has alerted teachers and principals to the special needs of these young people in part because

several of the church volunteers also work within the school system.

The strategy builds community cohesion. Officers from the Crime Prevention Unit have established a rapport with these young people, which has improved the relationship between the police department and the community. The faith communities have been able to connect with a group of teens they would not have met otherwise.

#### Contact Information

#### The SAFE

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### STRATEGY IN ACTION

Sergeant Noel Mayfield described a 13-year-old African American boy who has benefited from The SAFE:

As law enforcement officers, we've dealt with this young man's family for years. In fact, he has two brothers who have already been through the corrections system. We know the conditions and environment that this young man lives in. He became involved with us through The SAFE and has become a great asset to the program. He shows up early on program nights to help set things up and is always willing when it's time to clean afterwards. In addition, he has become a positive influence among the young people in his public housing unit and has become a role model at The SAFE. He visits frequently at our Crime Prevention Unit office and travels with us to ballgames. He's also become involved with a local church youth group from his exposure to volunteers at The SAFE. He now says he wants to become a police officer when he grows up, which is pretty amazing considering his family's distrust of law enforcement. Because of his involvement in this program, we believe we've seen the cycle of crime broken in this young man's family.

## Vocational Placement for Gang-involved Youth

### College-age evangelists offer gang-involved youth vocational training, a job, and a caring relationship

*"Most of these men want jobs—but they don't know how to go about getting one. They are a perfect fit for the street, and a perfect misfit for the workplace."*

—Rev. Roger Minassian

**PROBLEM** An estimated 24,500 violent youth gangs with some 772,500 members committed tens of thousands of crimes in 2000, according to the National Youth Gang Survey.<sup>39</sup> A gang member who wants to leave the gang must reject an entire lifestyle in addition to breaking with his or her friends. For many young people who have dropped out of school and live in poverty, the future is unclear. They need money to survive, but they don't have a high school diploma or any marketable job skills. Unemployed youth are more susceptible to recruitment into larger criminal organizations engaged in drug trafficking. When drug dealers and criminals are the wealthiest members of a community, crime will have a strong appeal for youth.

**PROGRAM** “A caring relationship plus a job lift a gang member from the streets into the American mainstream.” This is the motto of Hope Now for Youth, a Christian nonprofit organization. In 1993 Hope Now established a successful job placement program for gang-involved youth. The organization hires minority Christian college students to work in inner-city churches as role models and vocational placement counselors for young men. While helping gang-involved youth, this innovative technique also provides an income for the college students and a scholarship fund toward their education.

Clients find out about the program through extensive street outreach efforts by the faith/lay leaders and through word-of-mouth from Hope Now graduates. The young men on the streets are given business cards with a 24-hour hotline number to call when they are ready to leave the gang. The men must make contact on their own as evidence of their commitment to change their lives. Hope Now will not accept calls from family members or girlfriends or referrals by court orders. Once in the program, each young man is assigned to a mentor and begins a five-week training process. The mentors model Judeo-Christian values and work ethics to inspire productive citizenship. Volunteer homeowners and business owners from the participating churches provide on-the-job training through paid, short-term employment while the young men are in the five-week program.

Seven churches in the city donate recreational facilities, office space, computers, materials, utilities, and volunteers for the program. Hope Now works to recruit business owners willing to hire its graduates. Participating businesses in turn recruit other businesses and work with the media to recruit employers. Hope Now leverages additional local resources. Professionals in the community donate emergency legal, medical, psychological, and dental services; provide pro bono tattoo removal; help the youth obtain driver’s licenses; and offer family and parenting classes. Men may also look forward to job placements for friends and relatives through the program.

A board of criminal justice professionals, faith leaders, and business owners oversees the organization. The faith community works closely with the criminal justice system, meeting monthly with law enforcement and business leaders to discuss juvenile crime-related issues. Parole and probation officers call Hope Now for Youth to discuss their clients.

**ROLE OF FAITH** Hope Now for Youth was founded by a Presbyterian and is a Christian nonprofit with an explicitly religious mission statement: “Based on the examples of our Lord Jesus Christ, Hope Now for Youth provides opportunities and support for young men who want to break their ties with gangs, by changing their lives and becoming productive, responsible, and law-abiding parents and citizens.” Area churches provide volunteers and facilities, and the career counselors are Christian college students from local schools. Staff include Cambodian, Laotian, Hmong, and Latino members who want to give back to the community that reached out to them. Youth can take part in religious activities as part of the program, but participation is voluntary. Individuals, churches, and local businesses fund Hope Now for Youth.

## A TEN-POINT PLAN TO MOBILIZE THE CHURCHES

The National Ten Point Leadership Foundation (NTLF) is a coalition that organizes partnerships among clergy, law enforcement, and the community to work for youth development and violence prevention among inner-city youth. The ten-point plan is as follows:

1. Establish four to five church cluster-collaborations that sponsor "Adopt-A-Gang" programs to . . . evangelize youth [who are] in gangs; inner-city churches would serve as drop-in centers providing sanctuary for troubled youth.
2. Commission missionaries to serve as advocates and ombudsmen for black and Latino juveniles in the courts. Such missionaries would work closely with probation officers, law enforcement officials, and youth streetworkers to assist at-risk youth and their families. They would also convene summit meetings between school superintendents, principals of public middle and high schools, and black and Latino pastors to develop partnerships that will focus on the youth most at-risk. We propose to do pastoral work with the most violent and troubled young people and their families. In our judgment this is a rational alternative to ill-conceived proposals to substitute incarceration for education.
3. Commission youth evangelists to do street-level, one-on-one evangelism with youth involved in drug trafficking. These evangelists would also work to prepare these youth for participation in the economic life of the nation. Such work might include preparation for college, the development of legal revenue-generating enterprises, and acquisition of trade skills and union membership.
4. Establish accountable, community-based economic development projects that go beyond "market and state" visions of revenue generation. Such an economic development initiative will include community and trusts, microenterprise projects, worker cooperatives, and democratically run community development corporations.
5. Establish links between suburban and downtown churches and front-line ministries to provide spiritual, human resource, and material support.
6. Initiate and support neighborhood crime watch programs within local church neighborhoods. If, for example, 200 churches covered the four corners surrounding their sites, 800 blocks would be safer.
7. Establish working relationships between local churches and community-based health centers to provide pastoral counseling for families during times of crisis. We also propose the initiation of drug abuse prevention programs and abstinence-oriented educational programs focusing on the prevention of AIDS and sexually transmitted diseases.
8. Convene a working summit meeting for Christian black and Latino men and women in order to discuss the development of Christian brotherhoods and sisterhoods that would provide rational alternatives to violent gang life. Such groups would also be charged with fostering responsibility to family and protecting houses of worship.
9. Establish rape crisis drop-in centers and services for battered women in churches. Counseling programs must be established for abusive men, particularly teenagers and young adults.
10. Develop an aggressive black and Latino curriculum, with an additional focus on the struggles of women and poor people. Such a curriculum could be taught in churches as a means of helping our youth understand that the God of history has been and remains active in the lives of all people.

From the National Ten Point Leadership Foundation website, [www.ntlf.org](http://www.ntlf.org).

**POTENTIAL OBSTACLES** For many youth a gang is a surrogate family, providing recognition, self-esteem, purpose, a source of income, and protection in a frightening world. Some have simply yielded to peer pressure and intimidation from their friends or relatives. Volunteers from the faith community who would like to intervene may be intimidated by gangs and by their violence. A

strong relationship with the city police can help residents and volunteers feel comfortable and supported in their efforts. An understanding of why youth join gangs will also be helpful.

**SIGNS OF SUCCESS** Since 1993 Hope Now for Youth has organized programs with 30 participating churches, built lasting relationships with 260 businesses in the area, and collaborated with all levels of the criminal justice system. According to the organization's website,

As of April 15, 2004, [Hope Now had] placed 1,047 youth . . . in jobs with 275 Fresno and Sanger businesses with an 85 percent success rate and an 8 percent recidivism rate. Almost all of these youths have criminal records and over 65 percent are school dropouts.<sup>40</sup>

It costs more than \$41,000 to hold a juvenile in detention for one year in California.<sup>41</sup> At only \$4,000 per youth to provide a mentor, training, and a job, Hope Now provides a cost-effective alternative to incarceration.

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## Home Visits for At-risk Youth

**A team of clergy, law enforcement officers, and a community prosecutor visit the homes of at-risk youth and connect them with community services. Home visits are noninvestigative, informal meetings between youth and a team of clergy and justice professionals.**

**PROBLEM** At-risk youth are in danger of dropping out of school, joining gangs, and engaging in criminal activity.

**PROGRAM** The Neighborhood Prosecuting Attorney Program in Kalamazoo County, MI, convenes teams to make unannounced visits to parolees and probationers throughout the county. Operation NEAT—Neighborhood Enforcement and Assistance Team—comprises a police officer, a religious leader, a community prosecutor, a probation officer, a parole officer, and a victim assistant. During the visits, the team tracks the progress of the ex-offender and provides referral services to ensure successful reentry.

This program is part of the Community Prosecution movement, which takes prosecutors out of the courtroom and sends them into neighborhoods.

There they partner with law enforcement and grassroots agencies, including faith groups, to develop crime prevention initiatives. This keeps the caseloads down, with the ultimate goal of eliminating the need for the community prosecutor to be in court at all. Community prosecutors are assigned to serve one neighborhood, and they become a visible and trusted authority there.

A community prosecutor assembles an average of three teams of six professionals each to cover hot spots. In an email to probation, parole, and law enforcement officers in the targeted area for that month, the prosecutor asks officers to identify people who should receive a visit. The ex-offenders are selected, and pertinent terms of probation/parole and contact information are collected.

The teams vary the times of their visits to ensure that they are not predictable. Ten teams make an average of three home visits one day per month. The parole or probation agent takes the lead in introducing the group and talking to the former offender. The other team members speak to friends and relatives in the house. They try to keep the meeting nonconfrontational, short, and to the point. They provide referrals for shelter, food, and identification papers, and they sometimes visit neighbors to find out if the former offender is integrating successfully into the neighborhood. The clergy member provides a calming presence, reassuring the ex-offender that this is not a threatening situation. The visits are very informal and rarely lead to arrests. If the team finds the former offender is in violation of probation or parole, he or she is told to call the supervising officer the next day. The team also emails a report on the visit to the supervising officer.

If additional assistance is needed, the team members will line up resources and locate an appropriate agency to take the case.

**ROLE OF FAITH** Clergy make the team less intimidating to the youth and his or her family. The clergy provide a calming presence, leading prayer with the participants if requested, and they remain on call for the youth and their families to provide spiritual counseling. Pastors are rooted in the community and knowledgeable about the activity on the streets. They help law enforcement and community prosecutors identify at-risk youth and potential gang members who would benefit from a home visit.

**POTENTIAL OBSTACLES** The faith community members who conduct home visits in partnership with justice authorities must be careful that collaborating with law enforcement does not weaken community trust. All team members must agree to treat the former offenders and their families with respect. Team members must be properly trained on safety measures.

**SIGNS OF SUCCESS** Operation NEAT rotates among all neighborhoods in the county. In 2003, Operation NEAT had ten operations; the teams contacted 165 parolees and probationers and over 200 friends and relatives. The program provided employment assistance, education, mental health counseling, mentors, childcare, and emergency assistance to more than a hundred clients.

Perhaps the most important outcome was the creation of a formal mechanism for partner groups to come together to coordinate efforts. This relationship between diverse faith and justice groups is sustained through a formal commitment from partners. The Kalamazoo County Neighborhood Prosecution Program was designated as a National Community Prosecutor Leadership Site by the U.S. Department of Justice.

## JUVENILE VISITATION AND AFTERCARE

Serve Our Youth (SOY) Network is a Christian organization that reaches out to youthful offenders in juvenile detention facilities and transitional shelters in central Iowa. Founded in 1999 the network trains and equips volunteers from the faith community as victim advocates, mentors to high-risk youth, and facilitators of victim-offender dialogs. Its vision is “to equip an expanding network of congregations to provide high-risk youth with resources and relationships where God’s hope and healing are shared.” Through its Visitation Program, SOY provides activity hosts for youth in detention and shelter facilities. The aftercare program matches these youth with congregational mentors and support teams in a long-term committed relationship to help them assimilate into the community. SOY also provides mentors for detention centers, drug courts, shelters, and other institutions in Iowa. With support from Polk County Youth Services, SOY has empowered the faith community to serve juvenile justice in a fashion that honors both groups. Every year SOY trains more than 150 new congregational volunteers to provide services and support to more than 2,000 high-risk youth. Visit [www.serveouryouth.org](http://www.serveouryouth.org) to learn more.

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## Intervention for Runaways in an Immigrant Community

### **Police work with leaders of the faith community to provide culturally relevant counseling and skill-building activities for Cambodian youth who are first-time runaways.**

**PROBLEM** The Lowell (MA) Police Department found that an overwhelming majority of juveniles charged with violent crimes had been reported missing or runaway at least once before the offense. The National Runaway Switchboard reports that one in seven kids between the ages of ten and 18 will run away from home. Some will return, but some will remain on the streets where there are an estimated 1.3 million homeless and runaway youth and children. Every year approximately 5,000 of these young people die of assault, illness, or suicide.<sup>42</sup> Immediate intervention after the reported runaway incident may prevent further delinquency.

**PROGRAM** Lowell Weed and Seed (a federal program designed to “weed” by eliminating crime and criminal activity from a community and “seed” by restoring human services to the neighborhood) operates out of the Lower Highlands Community Policing Precinct and often works closely with the police department on prevention and intervention projects. Lowell Weed and Seed joined

forces with the Trairatanaram Temple, the local Cambodian Buddhist Order, to develop Operation Middle Path. Using funds from SAMHSA (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services), the program connects first-time runaway Cambodian youth with the Buddhist monks at the temple. Weed and Seed staff and police officers identify runaway youth and, after the teenager has returned home, they visit to introduce Operation Middle Path to the youth and his or her parents. This home visit involves the whole family and gives parents an opportunity to request other services to reduce risk factors for their child.

Lowell Weed and Seed contracts with a taxi service to transport the young people to the Trairatanaram Temple two nights a week. The monks at the temple are among the few authority figures universally respected by Cambodian youth. While at the temple, the youth follow a rigorous prayer schedule and learn meditation and self-control techniques, but they also get to enjoy each other's company in a safe environment. Operation Middle Path seeks to foster self-esteem, a sense of direction, pride, and a sense of belonging that at-risk Southeast Asian young people often seek in gangs.

The monks meet with the youth in small groups and counsel them about improving their relationship with their parents. Many of the young people are truants or dropouts, and most are affiliated with gangs in the area. They learn how to be responsible citizens through the precepts of Buddhism, which teach them not to engage in drug use or violent behaviors. The Lowell Weed and Seed holds an annual banquet to reward the youth and the monks for their work in the program. Youth are also given free memberships to the Boys & Girls Club for afterschool activities such as tutoring, recreation, and computer lab access. Two family liaisons were recently hired to interview parents and collect data on needs in the community.

**ROLE OF FAITH** Weed and Seed staff recognized that religion has a strong place in Cambodian life and culture and that the Buddhist spiritual leaders in the community were revered by the youth. They turned to the Venerable Khon Sao, leader of the Trairatanaram Temple and president of the Cambodian Monks Association. Venerable Sao has been working with Lowell Weed and Seed and the Lowell Police Department since April 2003. He believes that the Weed and Seed concept is harmonious with the precepts of Buddhism, and he travels around the country encouraging temples to work with local police departments to reach runaway and gang-involved youth.

**POTENTIAL OBSTACLES** Attracting former runaway youth to the program is the first hurdle. In addition, many immigrant and refugee families have negative perceptions of law enforcement from experiences in their home countries and will be wary of this joint effort. Local Refugee Resettlement agencies can help officers gain access to this population.

**SIGNS OF SUCCESS** Staff and volunteers report that the participants in Operation Middle Path show improved self-esteem and conflict resolution skills.

## RAVEN'S WAY: ALASKA NATIVE SPIRITUAL WILDERNESS TREATMENT<sup>43</sup>

The Southeast Alaska Regional Health Consortium (SEARHC) uses Alaska Native cultural elements in treatment and activities. Alaska Natives have an alcohol-related mortality rate 3.5 times greater than non-Natives. According to the Alaska Commission on Rural Governance, 97 percent of the crimes committed by Alaska Natives are committed under the influence of drugs or alcohol. Raven's Way is an intervention program for 13- to 18-year-olds who have problems with alcohol or drug abuse. This focused youth intervention program combines conventional and adventure-based therapy to help the youth find their own path to spiritual healing. The program includes a three-week wilderness excursion, two weeks

of family-oriented living in a group home, and a ropes challenge course. Referrals come from the courts, villages, and state agencies. SEARHC works with court officials to ensure follow-up and aftercare for program graduates. Alaska Native Elders guide the teachings, and healthcare providers help youth develop teamwork skills and improve self-confidence through a treatment that uses both Alaska Native cultural elements and traditional interpersonal techniques. These include talking circles, ceremonial protocols, and Native art forms. Since 1989 Raven's Way has graduated 638 students, with 83 percent completing the program successfully.<sup>44</sup>

Parents report that they are communicating with their children better and that school attendance and adherence to curfews have improved. Parents are more involved in their child's education, and the Southeast Asian community has developed a better relationship with law enforcement officers. Lowell Weed and Seed is currently working with an evaluator to assess the program formally.

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## Reducing Racial Disparity in the Justice System

**Advocates from the faith community help arrested minority youth and their families navigate the juvenile justice system and help develop alternative sentencing options on behalf of minority defendants in court.**

**PROBLEM** Minorities are overrepresented at all stages of the juvenile justice system, from arrest to sentencing. According to the Office of Juvenile Justice and

*“Equality before the law in a true democracy is a matter of right. It cannot be a matter of charity or of favor or of grace or of discretion.”*

—U.S. Supreme Court Justice  
Wiley Rutledge

Delinquency Prevention, in 1996–97 African American youth represented 15 percent of the youth population in the United States but 26 percent of the youth arrested, 30 percent of those referred to juvenile court, 46 percent of those whose cases were judicially waived to criminal court, and 40 percent of the youth in residential placement.<sup>45</sup>

**PROGRAM** Reintegrating Alternatives Personal Program (RAPP) is a faith-based nonprofit in Washington, DC, that seeks to reduce the racial disparities in the justice system by providing a supportive presence in court for at-risk juvenile offenders. Cases are referred to the program through the congregation or by local law enforcement. For young offenders, RAPP sends letters to the judge and the defendant’s attorney explaining the organization’s services and offering them as an alternative sentencing option. Whenever possible, RAPP staff and volunteers accompany the juveniles to court to help them navigate the system and even to testify on their behalf. The fact that a volunteer is willing to appear in court and advocate for the youth indicates to the judge that the young person deserves a chance and will have support if he or she enters the program.

RAPP provides a range of services to court-involved youth and to ex-offenders. Its parole and probation monitoring program allows volunteers to keep in touch with their clients’ supervising officer to make sure they are complying with all court orders. The ex-offender mentoring program matches clients with parishioners to build relationships and connect them with needed services through bimonthly sessions. One of the greatest challenges for ex-offenders is finding a job when they get out of prison. Through a partnership with the private sector, RAPP connects clients with employers in the community who have committed to hiring ex-offenders.

Faith Tabernacle of Prayer, the church in which RAPP is based, organizes citywide events to mobilize other congregations to help inmates make the difficult transition from prison to home. RAPP works closely with Court Services and Offender Supervision Agency of the District of Columbia (CSOSA) to build partnerships between the city and its religious organizations to help ex-offenders and the neighborhoods to which they return.

**ROLE OF FAITH** RAPP operates out of a nondenominational church, and Rev. Dr. Judith Talbert, the executive director of the organization, is also a pastor at the church. Staff and volunteers are members of the congregation; they believe that this work allows them to “exemplify Christ as his disciple” and that God works through them to help offenders stay out of prison by providing “miraculous” relationships with employers who are willing to hire ex-offenders.

RAPP is able to reach former offenders because it has grown from a religious congregation that is rooted in the community it serves. Returning offenders settle in its neighborhood in large numbers. Members of the congregation—who are also the neighbors of these former prisoners—are a source of relationships and practical support.

**POTENTIAL OBSTACLES** A staff member or volunteer needs to commit the time to recruiting and training volunteers and monitoring their progress over time.

## DEINSTITUTIONALIZING GIRLS: A PARTNERSHIP EFFORT

DESIST (Deinstitutionalize Every Sister and Insist on Some Treatment for Her) was founded by Rev. Roslyn Satchel, to address the situation of sexually exploited children in the Georgia State juvenile justice system. DESIST works with the Fulton County Juvenile Court, the Fulton County Public Defender Office, and a law firm to provide adequate legal representation for these children—mostly girls—and to find alternatives to detention, such as treatment and release to an appropriate placement within the community. DESIST has taken faith community leaders into juvenile detention centers and group homes to work with children in state custody. Faith

community representatives also sit on DESIST's board of directors. Rev. Satchel, who is also a lawyer, had represented abused, neglected, and imprisoned children as part of an Open Society Institute Justice Fellowship to curb excessive and inappropriate use of imprisonment of girls. DESIST works to educate the public about the need to provide rehabilitation and alternatives to detention. In May 2001 Rev. Roslyn Satchel joined other child advocates to establish the Interfaith Children's Movement of Metropolitan Atlanta (ICMMA), an organization of faith communities acting on behalf of children living in poverty or in state custody.

**SIGNS OF SUCCESS** RAPP's advocacy efforts have improved outcomes for minority youth and adult ex-offenders. Hundreds of clients are assisted each year in the courts, through community supervision, in job placement, and with addiction recovery. RAPP has been recognized by CSOSA as a leader in Washington, DC, prisoner reentry efforts. The U.S. Department of Justice has contracted RAPP to train mentors in a national reentry effort as part of the Value-based Initiative of the Community Oriented Policing Service.

### *Contact Information*

#### **Reintegrating Alternatives Personal Program (RAPP)**

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## Alternatives to Detention for Juveniles

**The faith community works with courts, parents, and school officials to divert young offenders from detention and to help them succeed academically.**

**PROBLEM** Because of language and cultural barriers, some parents of court-involved immigrant and refugee youth are not able to navigate the juvenile justice system and effectively advocate for their children.

**PROGRAM** The Asian Youth Services Program (AYS) collaborates with the New Orleans Juvenile Court System to divert youthful offenders from incarceration

into the afterschool and summer youth program. According to a 2001 survey of the Mary Queen of Vietnam Church Parish, 129 of the 502 youth living within the Versailles Garden community (a resettlement location for Vietnamese refugees since 1975) and enrolled in the youth education program had a grade D average or lower. Another 32 adolescents enrolled in the program had already dropped out of school. The Catholic Charities of the Archdiocese of New Orleans began the AYS program as a response to concerns about these Vietnamese youth.

The program's three-tiered design addresses at-risk Vietnamese youth at different stages of their development.

- **Tier One: a recreational program with sports activities, field trips, art classes, and weekend outings.** Young men learn to perform the traditional Vietnamese Dragon Dance, which requires discipline and builds pride in their cultural heritage. The youth learn teamwork and leadership skills from counselors and mentors as they participate in basketball, volleyball, and soccer games.
- **Tier Two: a family life education program.** Chapters on sexuality, relationships, health, violence prevention, and community responsibility help at-risk youth understand themselves, learn to make good choices, and set goals. Parental involvement is key to the child's success, especially in this part of the program. Counselors make home visits to help with family problems and to mediate issues between teens and parents. Life planning curriculum workshops are offered to parents as well as youth.
- **Tier Three: a computer-based afterschool tutoring program with interactive educational software.** These teens are often discouraged by poor school performance and undermotivated. Most are two to three grade levels behind their age level, and many are deficient in both Vietnamese and English language skills. The computer program is less intimidating than the classroom because it proceeds at each student's individual rate. As an added incentive, youth who improve their scores are rewarded with special events. When the youth improve their academic skills, they often want to return to school, and Catholic Charities employs two full-time counselors who work with school officials to get youth reenrolled.

**ROLE OF FAITH** The mission of the program is to provide at-risk teens in the Versailles Gardens community not only with educational and recreational services but also with the spiritual guidance they need to develop "God-centered" and productive lives. Staff believe that their clients suffer spiritually, and through counseling sessions and life planning lessons they hope to show them "God's loving presence in their lives." Their goal is to guide youth toward responsible behavior and more "prayerful" living.

**POTENTIAL OBSTACLES** Getting youth to participate in the program may be difficult. But the three-tiered system of AYS, with sports and other recreational

## REENTRY PROGRAMS FOR JUVENILE OFFENDERS

Straight Ahead Ministries focuses on young people who are already entangled in serious, chronic, and violent delinquency. When these youth come out of juvenile lockup, they are ill-equipped to reenter society: they are likely to have poor reading and writing skills and to be a few years behind their grade level in school. These high-risk youth are difficult to manage in any community, especially when they enter it without a positive support system to hold them accountable. As a result, schools develop policies to keep them out of the classroom, and many employers refuse to hire them because they are ex-offenders. Many are rearrested within a year of their release.

Since 1987 Straight Ahead Ministries, a Christian-based 501(c)(3) organization, has been working to interrupt this cycle of juvenile crime. Straight Ahead staff and affiliates facilitate weekly programs in more than 350 juvenile facilities through 32 staff and several hundred volunteers from faith-based communities. Programs include Bible studies, one-on-one mentoring, and special events. Straight Ahead's aftercare program includes a three- to five-month stay at a residential facility, three to four months in Straight Ahead Independent Living, and participation in an ongoing mentoring program. For more information, visit [www.straightahead.org](http://www.straightahead.org).

activities, helps draw in youth who might be intimidated by life-planning sessions or computers or who want to avoid daily tutoring.

Some of the youth who have participated in the program have gotten into legal trouble. The program maintains contact with these youth while they are incarcerated and welcomes them back to the group when they are released. One of these children made a marked improvement in his outlook and actions after release and has stayed out of trouble.

Welcoming new girls to the program has been a challenge. The girls bond throughout the program and were often not open to newcomers. To address this problem, the older girls (and boys as well) may be given particular duties and responsibilities, such as tutoring the newcomers. This breaks up the cliques. Staff try to draw in new girls slowly rather than in larger groups, which is less threatening to current participants. They try to gear sports and other recreational activities to the girls' interests.

**SIGNS OF SUCCESS** In the program's 2002 evaluation, 77 percent of the parents surveyed noted an improvement in their relationships with their children. One parent who saw a big improvement commented, "H. knows how to listen and seems to care for us more." Another parent commented, "They seem to have a new perspective on life." When asked, "Does AYS help your child in any way?" many parents responded positively: "Yes, it helps her to get on track with her life." "Very much, after the retreat camp, H. paid more attention to the family." "Yes, AYS helps [by] providing the at-risk kids activities that eliminate trouble in the community." "Yes, it helps my child with everyday obstacles such as peer pressure." "Very much, you take care of our kid's education daily."

The National Asian American Pacific Islander Mental Health Association identified the AYS program as one of the eight most "innovative, culturally competent" programs serving at-risk Asian American youth in 2003. In February 1998, the New Orleans *Times-Picayune* described the program as an oasis for troubled teens.

*Contact Information*

**Asian Youth Services Program**

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## **Child Abuse Prevention**

### **The faith community helps build nurturing parent-child relationships to reduce the incidence of child abuse and neglect.**

**PROBLEM** In 1999, an estimated 1,396 children in the United States died as a result of parental maltreatment and neglect—nearly four children a day.<sup>46</sup> Isolation and poverty are among the factors that can lead to poor parenting and neglect. Many parents don't know how to utilize services in the community or believe that they are not entitled to them. Many are repeating the pattern of their own childhoods.

**PROGRAM** Trained volunteers from the faith community serve as rural parent aides, making weekly home visits to families at risk of child abuse or neglect and helping them manage the household and develop healthier parent-child relationships in their isolated environment.

Lutheran Social Services of Wisconsin and Upper Michigan (LSS) is one of the largest human service agencies in the two-state area. The Stop Child Abuse and Neglect (SCAN) program provides the community with faith-based child abuse prevention, support, and parenting programs for families. Law enforcement officers refer families to SCAN when they see a potential for abuse but no legal cause to intervene. Community agencies also make referrals, and families who have had their children removed may seek the help of the program. Referrals from the justice system, the court commissioner, the probation and parole office, or the department of human services provide an opportunity to reach families who are involved in the child welfare system. This initiative is funded by the United Way of Racine County.

A program case manager visits the home to assess the needs of the family and to identify stressors such as the presence of an older dependent in the home, poverty, and isolation. A trained volunteer parent aide from a local congregation is assigned to the family. The aide calls and visits weekly, providing techniques for positive parenting, from discipline to recreation, and keeping the parents informed about healthy family activities and events. He or she helps the

## STRATEGY IN ACTION

A woman who had lost custody of her three children was ordered by the court to attend the SCAN program. At first she was reluctant and felt overwhelmed by the requirements she had to meet in order to have her children returned. But after about three weeks of the program, she started arriving early, eager to discuss the homework assignments. By the end of the program, the family was having unsupervised visits and was working toward reunification. The children were delighted with their mother's motivation to complete the classes.

parents or caretakers communicate with the children, develop a household budget, and plan for the children's future.

**ROLE OF FAITH** As the social ministry arm of over 800 Evangelical Lutheran Church in America congregations in Wisconsin and Upper Michigan, Lutheran Social Services is "motivated by the compassion of Christ to help people improve the quality of their lives." SCAN volunteers are recruited from local Racine area churches, and congregations will some-

times "adopt" a participating family. Services are available to all regardless of faith.

**POTENTIAL OBSTACLES** Parents or caregivers who have been mandated to participate through the court system may be reluctant because of negative experiences with the criminal justice system. Probation and parole agents may need to come to the program to take a participant into custody because they have been unable to locate him or her elsewhere, which adds an intimidating factor. The sponsoring agency needs to protect its image as a volunteer-based community service, not as part of a government agency that could take children away from parents.

The screening process should be thorough. For their own safety, volunteers should never be sent into homes where drugs are known to be present or where alcohol appears to be a problem even though these families may desperately need the intervention. Such a situation should be handled by trained professionals.

## EARLY INTERVENTION PROGRAM

Pastor Ken Scrubbs at the First Baptist Church of Leesburg, FL, works with a variety of city agencies to provide early intervention strategies for first-time offending youth and juvenile status offenders (those who have committed non-criminal offenses such as truancy and loitering). His technique is to "surround the life of the child" by providing a caring volunteer to be a consistent presence for that child. Volunteers from the congregation connect with youth before they are released from juvenile detention centers. The volunteers form Accountability Groups and lead character-building sessions, Bible study, and academic counseling exercises. When the youth return to school, Pastor

Scrubbs and other faith-based volunteers make weekly visits to their schools to make sure they are sticking to the goals they set in their Accountability Groups. The youth are invited to a Saturday fellowship program that serves 200 kids each week. Eight buses tour the city and pick up children. Volunteers meet with the kids ages four through 18 for recreational and fellowship activities. Pastor Scrubbs has also developed a relationship with probation officers who will often turn youth over to his faith-based nonprofit, the Youth Action Network, where they can perform community service hours with mentors rather than serving time in a juvenile detention center.

*Children and Youth*

**SIGNS OF SUCCESS** The SCAN program provides child abuse prevention services to 35 to 40 families each year. Law enforcement officers trust the work of this organization and often call on staff to intervene in order to avoid putting children and adolescents in contact with Child Protective Services.

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