



September 12, 2008

*~helping youth
promote safe schools
and safe communities~*

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Terry Cowan, Chairman
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Dear Mr. Cowan:

Thank you for the opportunity to address the Community Action Network Community Council on Monday, August 18th, on the topic of Youth Violence as a Public Health Issue in Austin and Travis County.

I shared with you and members of the Council that in 2001 U.S. Surgeon General David Thatcher assembled the Center for Disease Control, the Substance Abuse Mental Health Service Administration and the National Institute for Mental Health for review and study of the issue of youth violence. Public testimony was taken and extensive research was conducted on the issue of youth violence. Surgeon General Thatcher concluded that child and adolescent violence is so extensive and damaging that irreparable harm is caused not only to victims, but to perpetrators, and to the families and friends of victims and perpetrators throughout this country and in our cities. In his 2001 Report on Youth Violence By the U.S. Surgeon General, Thatcher made the declaration that "youth violence is a serious public health issue" and that with this designation we should review public policy and "focus more on youth violence prevention rather than on rehabilitation".

In comparing the seriousness and extent of youth violence in Austin and Travis County against Thatcher's review of national data, I also shared with you and the Council the significant level of youth violence that is documented by arrest data and available through the Texas Department of Public Safety Texas Crime Reports. The data for Travis County and the City of Austin shows almost 20,000 arrests of school age youth (ages 10-20) from 1997 through 2006 for serious crimes including murder, rape, aggravated robbery, aggravated assault and other assaults.

Cumulatively, almost 20,000 school age youth in Travis County and Austin were taken into custody this last decade for:

- 83 arrests for rape
- 111 arrests for murder
- 1,225 arrests for aggravated robbery
- 2,016 arrests for aggravated assault
- 15,344 arrests for other assaults

Our annual average for the violent crime arrests for school age youth is 8 rapes, 10 murders, 120 aggravated assaults, 200 aggravated assaults and 1,500 other assaults. The volume of the arrest activity for this youth group is alarming.

The trend of greatest concern during the past 5 years is the tremendous increases in four of the five categories. Arrests for murder increased 22%; arrests for aggravated robbery increased 23%; arrests for aggravated assault have increased 39% and arrests for other assaults have increased by 28% for the 10 through 20 year school age youth group. Council on At-Risk Youth considers these arrest rates to be unacceptable.

The epidemic of youth violence not only leaves lasting scars on victims and perpetrators but it also wounds the families and friends of both groups. "Devastation" is the term most often used to describe the impact of youth violence on victims, perpetrators, and families according to David Martinez, a presenter at the Gray Panthers "Rehabilitation vs. Incarceration" symposium August 17, 2008 in Austin. Being robbed of personal belongings with physical assault and/or threats to cause bodily harm brings about irreparable harm that is disruptive to each of life's daily tasks. Frequently, the devastation caused by violence lasts for a life time. For most victims, being physically assaulted normally prompts fear, grief and anger for many years to come. Family members of victims and perpetrators suffer considerably. The loss of a child to murder or to an aggravated offense is terribly hurtful and damaging, again with an emotional toll of grief and sorrow that is ever lasting to family members. The perpetrators' families who approach the criminal justice system asking for help and support for their loved ones are often shunned and turned away. Their feelings are that they are the ones who become victimized by the very system from which they are seeking help.

This data and information indicates that Travis County and Austin also have a serious public health issue with youth violence consistent with Dr. David Thatcher's 2001 finding and declaration.

I also shared with the you and the Community Council that in addition to the benefits of reducing the devastation, agony and grief of youth violence for victims, perpetrators and families, there are four very good reasons why we need to address the issue of school age youth violence with an assertive prevention and intervention program initiative. Those reasons include:

- **Knowledge**: We know with a high degree of accuracy who our future public offenders are. According to a recent study by the Texas A&M Institute for Public Policy Research, following an analysis of Texas Education Agency data and Texas Juvenile Probation Commission casework data for 2 million youth over a five year period, one of the significant findings was that one single serious school incident report is the most powerful predictor for future criminal involvement and subsequent entry into our justice system. Another study by the National Institute for Child Health and Human Development found that 40% of bullies in middle school will have at least one criminal court conviction by age 24; 60 % of bullies will have three criminal court convictions by age 24. Having the knowledge of being able to identify who has the greatest probability for entry into the criminal justice system, places us in a strategic position to conduct youth violence prevention successfully.
- **Tools** and program methods exist to successfully conduct youth violence prevention programs. These have been documented by the U.S. Center for Disease Control and Prevention in "Best Practices of Youth Violence Prevention: A Sourcebook for Community Action" and in the Department of Education and Justice publication "Annual Report on School Safety". As early as 1999 Attorney General Janet Reno and Secretary of Education Richard Riley provided a "summary on school violence prevention and related programs that work—programs that are well-designed, have demonstrated effectiveness, and can be implemented as part of a comprehensive school safety plan" in the School Safety Report. These programs have been rigorously evaluated and found to be successful before being endorsed by three federal agencies including the U.S. Departments of Justice and Education and the U.S. Center for Disease Control and Prevention.
- **Results** are very satisfactory and documented for young people participating in "evidence based" violence prevention programs. Research with the Positive Adolescent Choices Training program shows a 50% reduction in serious school incident reports and a 50% reduction in juvenile court referrals.

Independent evaluation of CARY programs by Dottie Carmichael Ph.D. in CARY Positive Adolescent Choices Training Evaluation also shows a 50% reduction in serious incident reports and this reduction is sustainable over an 18 month period of time.

- **Costs** for youth violence prevention programs are significantly less than costs for criminal justice processing. CARY's cost for one youth in a 12 month "evidence based" violence prevention skills training and individual behavioral counseling program is less than \$1,000. By comparison, cost for one year at state prison is \$15,000, cost for a one year term at Travis County Jail is \$25,000 and cost for one year at the Texas Youth Commission is \$100,000. Mark Cohen's 2005 study in The Costs of Crime and Justice demonstrates that the individual high school dropout who begins a 10 year crime cycle with repeat arrests, court appearances and jail and prison terms, will cost the American public \$2 million.

I concluded my remarks by stating that youth violence is a serious public health issue as declared by U.S. Surgeon General David Thatcher and as the data shows an equally serious public health issue with school age youth violence in Austin and Travis County, it makes sense that we adopt public policy and move forward with an assertive youth violence prevention campaign. I also recommended that we consider an allocation equivalent to 1% of our expenditures for juvenile and criminal justice to be used for youth violence prevention initiatives, specifically, for at risk youth assigned to local school disciplinary systems. I stated that with this allocation, we could achieve at least a 10% reduction in the level of youth violence that we currently experience in Austin and Travis County.

You inquired as to how a projection equivalent to 1% of criminal justice expenditures toward a proposed youth violence prevention initiative for school disciplinary systems could achieve a reduction in youth violence by at least 10%. My analysis for this projection is as follows:

- **One Percent Allocation:** The annual expenditures for Travis County juvenile and criminal justice services represent more than \$600,000,000. This figure consists of city, county, state and federal expenses for: 1) law enforcement, 2) courts, 3) prosecution, 4) public defense, 5) jails, 6) probation, 7) prisons, and 8) parole.

City budgets for the Austin Police Department and Municipal Courts are \$237,000,000; Travis County budgets for the Sheriff's Office, Juvenile Probation Department, District Attorney's Office, Pretrial Services, Criminal Courts, Public Defense and Criminal Justice Planning offices represent \$178,000,000; and State budgets for proportionate expenses for the Texas Juvenile Probation Commission, Texas Youth Commission, Texas Dept. of Public Safety, Court of Criminal Appeals and Texas Dept. of Criminal Justice amount to \$172,000,000. Federal grant dollars made available to in state criminal justice agencies exceeds \$13,000,000 according the Texas Comptroller of Public Accounts. The equivalency of one percent of the total \$600,000,000 of juvenile and criminal justice expenditures that I recommended for youth violence prevention and intervention programs for youth assigned to the school disciplinary system is \$6,000,000.

- **Target Population:** As indicated above in research conducted by the Texas A&M Institute for Public Policy Research and by the National Institute for Child Health and Human Development, we know that our best target population for violence prevention and intervention initiatives consists of students having disciplinary actions taken by school disciplinary administrators. The Austin Independent School District (AISD) reported in the Redacted Discipline Reports for the 2006-2007 School Year that: 1) 12,080 “aggressive disciplinary acts” were committed including abusive conduct to students and adults, sex offenses, illegal weapons and robbery, theft and destruction by 9,159 students; 2) 13,542 “disruptive disciplinary acts” including insubordination, disruption and throwing objects by 7,219 students; and 3) 16,148 “other disciplinary acts” by 6,678 students. Disciplinary actions such as in-school suspension, home suspension, and removal to the disciplinary alternative learning center were taken by the AISD in 37,853 cases with 18,797 students. Given the research indicating many school disciplinary students don't graduate from high school, but rather graduate into the juvenile and criminal justice system, it is not surprising that in the same school year 18,797 students were engaged in the school disciplinary system. We know during the same reporting period that 6,000 youth between the ages of 10 through 16 were taken into law enforcement custody. They were also referred to the Travis County Juvenile Department. Thus, this data ratifies that the group within the school disciplinary system has a very high likelihood of subsequent criminal offending.

We suggest that our target population consists of no fewer than 6,000 students involved in acts of school-based aggression, assault, abuse and intimidation of others.

- **Violence Prevention Program Initiatives:** A series of youth violence prevention programs for at-risk and high-risk youth are identified by the CDC publication Best Practices of Youth Violence Prevention. At-risk and high-risk youth are defined as those who are aggressive and having difficulty with impulse control, problem solving, anger management, assertiveness and empathy. A small sample of “best practice” violence prevention programs includes the following:

1) Elementary school programs including the “Anger Coping Program” and the “Coping Power Program”. Both interventions focus on developing children’s abilities to manage anger, reduce hostile intents, and improve social problem-solving skills through 18 to 30 group sessions. Post interventions showed significant reductions in children’s aggression.

2) One sixth grade program, “Responding in Peaceful and Positive Ways”, designed for students with a history of violent behavior used Prothrow-Stith’s model including 25 sessions of 50 minutes each in behavior repetition for conflict resolution, skill building and didactic learning opportunities. Results showed significantly fewer disciplinary code violations, fewer weapons carried and fewer injuries reported from fighting.

3) Middle school programs included “Aggressors, Victims and Bystanders”. This program was based on the premise that all three players can build the cognitive and social skills necessary to resolve problems nonviolently. The curriculum was evaluated in a study of over 300 high-risk adolescents and a control group. The intervention reduced students’ belief that violence is a favorable response to conflict and it increased their intent to resolve conflict without aggression and improved their self-rated behavior.

4) The PACT (Positive Adolescent Choices Training) was designed for aggressive 12 to 16 year olds and includes components of social skills training used to express anger, frustration and disappointment constructively.

Anger management training is used to recognize anger triggers and learn anger responses. Techniques are learned to control anger; violence risk education is used to raise the awareness of the dynamics of violence.

The program is delivered in groups fewer than ten, one to two times weekly, for 19 weeks. Researchers found that compared to controls, PACT participants had 50% fewer serious school incident reports and 50% fewer referrals to juvenile court.

CARY (Council on At-Risk Youth) has used PACT intervention since the 2003-2004 school year, and it is offered to students who have serious school discipline reports including assault, aggression, abuse and intimidation of others. Referrals are made by assistant principals and counselors. The CDC recommends combining social cognitive interventions with other types of interventions, Therefore, in 2005, CARY added individual behavioral counseling, service learning activities and parent involvement to the PACT Program. It has also been extended from 12 to 52 weeks for each participant.

Evaluation results of CARY programs are very positive. Academic Research Associates found statistically significant "improvements in social behavior and decreases in anti social behaviors" with CARY students during the 2003-2004 school year. Pablo Martinez Ph.D. found statistically significant results in improved social skills, anger management skills, conflict resolution skills and social responsibility skills for a group of CARY students in the 2005-2006 school year. Repeated surveys of school administrators and parents shows that CARY program participants demonstrate positive attitudes, positive behaviors, improved social skills, improved problem solving skills and diminished reports of fighting and aggression. In recent evaluation of pre and post serious school incident reports by Dottie Carmichael Ph.D., she found that among 300 participants, CARY students demonstrated a 50% decrease in serious incident reports with the decrease being sustainable for an 18 month period of time. Nationally, PACT has demonstrated a 50% reduction in juvenile court referrals. This local outcome is presently being measured by Carmichael. Though the data is not yet complete, CARY believes this 50% reduction in referrals to Travis County Juvenile Court can be achieved in this group.

- **Reduced Youth Violence Projections:** In my own 40 plus years experience in juvenile justice and correction projects with organizations such as the New Mexico Youth Authority, the Texas Youth Commission , the National Council on Crime and Delinquency and the American Correctional Association in approximately 25 states, I have always made it a practice when visiting with incarcerated youth to ask them why it was that they were locked up.

Responses that I have received over the years consistently center around three themes including: 1) anger and frustration with others, 2) conflict and/or retaliation toward others, and 3) impulsive decisions and not thinking about consequences of the act. Typically, these are the same responses received from students assigned to school disciplinary programs. And, consistently, these are the same deficit areas that many of the “evidence based” youth violence prevention programs tend to address.

Thus, it seems entirely feasible to achieve the reduction in youth violence arrests by 10% given the equivalency of a 1% allocation of juvenile and criminal justice expenditures for school based youth violence prevention programs with disciplinary students. That 10% reduction of the average of 2,000 arrests annually represents 200 fewer arrests for serious crimes by Travis County at-risk youth.

A \$6,000,000 allocation to schools and/or to non profit agencies to conduct comprehensive year long “evidence based” programs in the schools would finance participation for the 6,000 highest risk students. CARY’s cost is \$750 per year, per student, with each staff serving up to 100 high-risk youth. With a \$6,000,000 allocation, the 6,000 high-risk youth could be served at \$1,000 or less for a full year of comprehensive service. The \$6,000,000 would easily fund the equivalent of 60 full time graduate level personnel to conduct services with 100 high-risk youth at each of our middle schools and high schools and at many of our elementary schools.

If the program outcomes approach the PACT outcome data of 50% reduction in serious disciplinary reports and/or a 50% reduction in juvenile court referrals, we might assume then, that the \$6,000,000 initiative with these 6,000 high risk youth would reduce the arrest and referral rate by 50% or by 3,000 students. If we reduced the arrest rate by only 5% rather than the 50% that has been demonstrated nationally, we would reduce the number of violent crimes by 300 rather than the 200 youth or 10% that I had projected.

Furthermore, consider Mark Cohen’s assessment of the cost to the public for the 10 year career criminal in his book The Costs of Crime and Criminal Justice. For the young person who drops out of high school, offends and victimizes repeatedly and is arrested numerous times followed with prosecutions, jail admissions, convictions, sentences to, probation and prison repeatedly during this 10 year period, the public pays dearly.

If he/she does not pay tax revenue and/ or does not pay child support, along with minimal costs for victimizations, then the cost to the public is \$2,000,000, according to Cohen. Even if we accept only part of Cohen's analysis and assume that we save only \$1,000,000 in redirecting youthful career criminals, and if minimally we divert only 100 of our 6,000 high risk youth away from criminal career status, then our \$6,000,000 investment will have saved the Travis County taxpayer \$94,000,000. This is an astronomical savings, not to mention the dramatic impact of reducing victimization to others.

My conclusion to this discussion is that we need to move forward with a strategic plan for a community-based youth violence prevention initiative consistent with the 2000 Community Action Network Community Assessment Report on Public Safety, Crime Prevention and Victimization calling for "improvement, development and implementation of a comprehensive prevention method that directs services to youth at risk of offending..." and to create "a balance between funding for incarceration and funding for prevention and intervention".

Please let me know if you or others have questions; let me know also when I might have time for additional discussion with your Committee, and/or whether CAN may have other avenues to help educate the public about the need for and to more highly prioritize youth violence prevention in Travis County.

Sincerely yours,

Adrian L. Moore

Adrian L. Moore

Executive Director

Council on At-Risk Youth

~helping youth promote safe schools and safe communities~

CC: CAN Community Council Members
CAN Executive Director Vanessa Sarria