<u>V</u> is for Violence
<u>S</u> is for School

HOW SCHOOL, FAMILY
AND COMMUNITY
COPE WITH UNACCEPTABLE
BEHAVIOR PROBLEMS

A City Club of Tacoma
Research Report

MAY 1995

TABLE OF CONTENTS
V is for Violence, S is for School

OPEN MINDS · EMBRACING THE FUTURE

CITY CLUB 10 years

TRANSMITTAL LETTER
Consensus report of study group

We are pleased to transmit this report to members of the CITY CLUB of Tacoma. Consensus product of a year's effort by thirteen CITY CLUB members and two resource associates, its title reflects its contents: *V is for Violence, S is for School: how school, family and community cope with unacceptable behavior problems.*

Although the research began as an assignment on *Guns and Schools*, we found that the gun could not be isolated from other aspects of youth violence, nor could the study be confined to schools. The broadened scope covers family, community and the legal environment. We all share responsibility to help resolve this difficult problem, but inescapably, the study group recognizes that supporting and strengthening parenting looms as a key to check the epidemic of violence facing this community and the nation. Better coordination among many agencies is needed to make the support that must be forthcoming more effective.

This CITY CLUB report is an effort to deal with an important social issue, one demanding increasing public attention. We hope our recommendations for next steps will prove of value to school, social service and law enforcement officials as well as legislators and administrators when they devise policies and funding for programs serving youth and families. The challenge to deal with this problem is not theirs alone, however. The rest of us have important roles to play in making our voices heard to make sure that city, county, state, and nation deal effectively with these difficult and perplexing problems.

The study group examined local programs dedicated to prevention and treatment of youth violence, and searched available literature, assembling an extensive library of articles and reports. A broad range of experts received a comprehensive questionnaire with forty-one, a good cross-section, returning them. Interviews were conducted with thirty-five persons. The basic report was drafted by a five person writing team with Ben Gilbert, a retired newspaper editor, joining the team to produce the final document. Grateful thanks go to the many individuals who so generously assisted us. [See Appendix A: List of Sources.] Responsibility for the report and its recommendations rests with us, the study group.

Helen Myrick, Chair*   Greg Kleiner**
Judge Sergio Armijo   Ardine Martinelli
Eli Ashley*   Marjorie Pilant*
Beverly Bright*   Helen Pilkey
Ben Gilbert   Susan Schreurs**
Jo Kleiner Heiman   Kathleen Sommers
Kyron Huigens*   Debbie Winskill
Mel Jackson   *Writing team
              May 2, 1995   **Resource associates

OVERVIEW, RECOMMENDATIONS
Needed: parenting help, agency coordination

Our broad community has become increasingly concerned about the continuing upsurge of violence in the schools and among youth in general. All members of the City Club study group agree on the need for strong measures to ensure a safe environment for learning in Tacoma and Pierce County. The group also supports preventive actions to break the cycle of violence and reduce its impact on our community.

RISE IN VIOLENCE

We noted an alarming rise in violent activities by children. Our review of dozens of news media articles, questionnaires to educators and others who work with children and interviews with community leaders confirmed the belief that the increase has not yet peaked. The City Club research effort turned to consider causes and possible solutions to this growing problem affecting all of us.

Frederico Cruz-Uribe, MD, Tacoma-Pierce County Health Department director and Rick Allen, director of the area's United Way, both pointed to research showing that many school age children and teenagers who are at risk for violent behavior have encountered negative experiences before the age of three. They emphasized that preventative steps must be taken very early to avoid problems later on. They are now seeking out these groups, but the numbers they can serve are far below perceived needs.

Children of young parents with limited incomes and substance abuse problems often are vulnerable to difficulties in later years. Similarly, children who live in homes where domestic violence plays a role, or with parents lacking basic skills for raising children, may encounter severe adjustment problems as they grow up. Moreover, programs and services that respond to these needs have measurable, long-term benefits.

We endorse programs directed to parents and very young children which strengthen families, improve parenting skills and reduce the impact of poverty on these struggling families. Such services should be expanded and records maintained to document the long-term effectiveness of early childhood intervention.

Once a child enters school, there are programs available to parents and children directed at conflict resolution, anger management, education about substance abuse, and increased parental involvement. Because of time constraints, we did not evaluate the many programs offered by various school districts and individual schools, although we were impressed by the scope and extent of the efforts being put forth.

INADVERTENT LABELING

Committee members expressed concern that some programs targeted at children identified as *at risk* may inadvertently label those children in negative ways. Members questioned whether adequate coordination exists among individual schools, school districts and community agencies for these programs. Coordination is badly needed to reduce duplication of services, create collaborative structures to address a multiplicity of needs, and lead caregivers and children to services tailored to their needs.

School teachers and administrators interviewed discussed the difficulties inherent in educating latch-key children, children from unstable and unsupportive home environments, students who do not regularly attend school, and ones with a propensity for violence.

Possible solutions discussed include year-round schools, longer school days and closer coordination between school and community in offering extra-curricular activities. Athletic opportunities are needed for children who do not engage in competitive school sports, except possibly as spectators.

We strongly urge designation of a lead agency to identify currently available community and school resources. A resource directory would help those working with children and families to respond to their needs. The same resource material would help service providers and funding agencies reduce duplication and increase their effectiveness.

> We urge all service providers to communicate and collaborate more closely and develop cooperative efforts and joint ventures to increase their awareness of and responses to the problems they face.

Although we applaud the reduction in the level of violent incidents believed to stem from the firm "zero-tolerance" policy for possession of weapons and unacceptable behavior in school, we are concerned about what is happening to expelled students during the mandated year of absence from school. No programs designed to ensure alternative placement and monitoring of those children have been developed. Nor are these children tracked in any systematic way. Often, with idle time on their hands, they end up in worse trouble.

> We believe that responsibility for students who have been suspended or expelled for weapons violations must be lodged with a governmental or community agency to engage them positively while they are out of school. The failure to find appropriate alternatives to educate and monitor those children poses a significant risk to their future and the safety of our neighborhoods.

TRUANTS BECOME DROPOUTS

Truants appear likely to become school dropouts and suffer later on from their inadequate job skills, yet no specific programs appeared focussed on this problem. Truancy and lack of job skills are strong risk factors for criminal activity. Steve Johnston, administrator of Remann Hall, pointed out that most children held at the Hall do not read at or near their grade-level and lack other skills. Yet, while there, they often rapidly improve their reading and other skills when offered tutoring and classroom education.

Persons interviewed acknowledged that a high proportion of children in the juvenile justice system are minorities, but many respondents persuasively insisted that such factors as poverty and deficient parenting loomed much larger than race as indicators of criminal activity and being violence prone. Others questioned whether certain neighborhoods and schools have become targets of law enforcement and social service agencies in well intentioned but disproportionate efforts to deal with identified problems.

> We urge initiation of a cooperative effort of police, juvenile justice and schools to develop programs and follow up services for truants. Laws to enforce cooperation by child and parents would fill an existing enforcement gap. A joint data collection effort could use truancy statistics to spot children and parents, who need help.

Once a child comes into contact with the justice system because of criminal activity, a whole new set of factors comes into play. In response to community criticisms, the juvenile justice system was reformed in the 1970's to ensure that children were afforded certain basic rights and to eliminate the confining of children for offenses for which an adult could not be detained.

REFORMS NEED REFORMING

It is clear that there are problems with those two-decade old reforms. State legislators and others are discussing urgently needed changes to the current system. Study group members appreciate the difficulties our legislators face in seeking the appropriate balance between the need for community protection and the obligation to protect the constitutional rights of arrested juveniles.

The study group observed that first-time offenders and even second and third time offenders rarely receive close supervision and intervention. Although the cost of providing additional services to those offenders may might seem high, if they serve to prevent more serious crimes and the prospect of long-term confinements, substantial amounts would be saved.

> We endorse proposals to supervise first-time offenders more closely, with stronger intervention efforts directed to parents and children. Coordination of these actions with school and community agencies with due regard for established constitutionally rights is essential to assure effectiveness.

'RANDOM ACTS OF KINDNESS'

As the study group attempted to compile the long list services available for students both within and outside schools, it found the task daunting. United Way Director Allen described community interventions to the City Club as "many random acts of kindness." Questionnaire respondents praised their programs as effective, but objective research to support these opinions needs to be supplied in many cases.

3

Program funding comes from many city, county, state, federal and private sources, but donors appear to make little effort to force coordination, collaboration or elimination of duplicated effort. Efforts to collect data and maintain long-term records to evaluate the effect of various programs appear quite limited.

COMMUNITY COUNCILS

The state is creating community councils to make recommendations for distribution of state funds, a new strategy designed to address the lack of coordination among agencies dealing with problems of violence prone children. Concerns have been raised, however, about the background and experience of council members. City and county governments previously tried to address this issue jointly by forming the Commission on Children Youth, and Families, but this dedicated group did not become the focal point for decision making initially envisioned.

We emphasize that efforts to assure coordination and collaboration among funding sources and individual programs must have the support of both service providers and the community which is served. These efforts must be broadly designed not only to curtail youth violence, but also to enable at risk youth to become useful and productive adults.

SUMMARY

- In summary, the City Club study group strongly favors programs to support families, improve parenting skills and make special efforts to ensure a healthy early childhood.

- Members applaud policies which provide an immediate and strong response to violent behavior in the schools. However, they express strong concern that alternatives to regular classroom attendance be provided children who are subject to that discipline.

- For truants and school dropouts who are referred to the juvenile justice system for criminal activity, we see a clear need for intensive supervision and intervention under court direction in coordination with schools and other community programs. Provision of adequate funds to support these specific efforts to curb youth violence is strongly

urged for priority consideration by the state legislature and the Governor.

- The committee would like to see a lead agency designated to develop an inventory of available services to determine what needs are being met and what ones still need attention.

- An ongoing, wide-spread community effort to encourage cooperation, communication and collaboration among all service providers is an urgent unmet need. We recognize that all of us share responsibility to face these urgent problems for both the short term and long term.

- We urge that arrangements be made to provide more extensive data on agency successes and failures so that concerned citizens and community leaders can better evaluate effectiveness and make recommendations for use of limited resources.

- We understand that some of the measures proposed will take time to put into effect since they require changes in established practices and routines. Others, however, call for little more than a determination to do a better job of networking.

- We look to the Governor, state agency heads, legislators, Pierce County officials including the County Executive and his appointees, the County Council, the Mayor and Council of Tacoma, the City Manager and the appointed municipal department heads to see what they can do with available resources to reduce youth violence. Looming reduction and loss of Federal funds which often are channeled through elected state and local officials would have extensive repercussions within local communities as members of Congress have begun to appreciate.

- We hope these comments and recommendations will help Tacoma and Pierce County reduce youth violence and assist the efforts to move its many at risk youths toward more promising lives. Their sagas which begin in the crib, too often end on the streets, Remann Hall, or prison.

- A challenge remains for all of us to help assure that next steps are taken to resolve these complex problems which have so large an impact on everyone's personal well being, our entire community's quality of life, and its future.

SCHOOLS AND STUDENTS
Challenges for Tacoma parents, teachers

A modern day Rip Van Winkle, awakening from a twenty-year nap in the early 1970's, would have been stunned by the problems facing that period's public schools. If he had taken another nap in the 70's to awaken in the 1990's, he would have become even more startled and alarmed. The accelerating pace of change has turned the public schools into vastly different places from the ones earlier generations of parents and students now recall fondly.

What we remember of our own school days often affects our attitudes and expectations about the schools our children and grandchildren attend. Given the magnitude of change since most of us attended public school, such comparisons no longer work.

A CBS News report has noted that tremendous shifts have occurred in the Nation's public schools, largely parallel those taking place within society.

"In the 1940's, the major problems in public schools as identified by teachers were talking out of turn, chewing gum, making noise, running in halls, cutting in line, dress code infractions, and littering," CBS suggested. "In 1990's, the major problems were: suicide, burglary, arson, bombings, assault, robbery, rape, drug/alcohol abuse, and pregnancy."

STRESSFUL SITUATIONS

These problems have had their greatest impact on large urban centers, but cities such as Tacoma have not escaped. Increases in the number and intensity of instances of student violent behavior have been a growing concern of parents and school personnel. Although problems vary from school to school, Tacoma's educators find themselves challenged to meet the needs of a changing population including many pupils from homes where both parents work or where there is only one parent who may also hold a full-time job. These stressful situations leave most parents neither time nor energy to provide the supervision and guidance that the youngsters need.

In Tacoma and elsewhere, the changing atmosphere has prompted some families who can afford to do so to move to the suburbs or enroll their youngsters in private schools. Home schooling has become an option. These changes have affected the population mix and environment of urban schools.

Officials we interviewed, aware that they are grappling with many difficult problems that are national in scope, not surprisingly find that the time of educators in Tacoma and Pierce County increasingly is diverted from the basic responsibility of teaching children. While schools strive to educate the youth in their charge, administrators and teachers are spending more time to reduce violence and assure an appropriate and safe learning environment.

TRUANTS BECOME DROPOUTS

Juvenile offenders known to youth service agencies and the criminal justice system frequently come from dysfunctional families or single parent families with incomes within or near the poverty level. They may have seen or experienced violent behavior within their families. Profiles depict teen-aged youths, probably mainly but not exclusively male, who are truants with school behavior problems and may have engaged in minor criminal activity and experimented or regularly used drugs or alcohol.

Many eventually drop out of school to join other unskilled unemployables who acquire survival street skills and engage in criminal activity including drug dealing. Although they make up only a small portion of the student body, their behavior gets a disproportionate share of attention from the school staff and eventually, the criminal justice system.

Level of education emerges as a major factor in violence and crime. Six out of ten prison inmates nationally did not graduate from high school. Approximately one of four students in Washington State dropped out without graduating from high school. There is agreement among interviewees that schools must engage in programs to keep youth in school to graduation. They struggle valiantly to do so.

As we learned in our interviews with teachers, administrators, law enforcers and parents in Tacoma and Pierce County schools, violence takes many forms with a variety of solutions emerging to cope with it. Realistically, schools recognize that difficulties within their walls simply reflect the ills of our society. They

know they cannot isolate themselves from those problems, nor waive them away for solution by parents and other public agencies. Nor have the suburbs to which some families have fled y escaped the problems of school and street violence.

All of us are impacted by the problems and therefore must share in finding the solutions. The City Club study group concludes that solutions will continue to elude us unless the schools together with the greater community and with parents join in a coordinated effort to find answers and carry them out.

IDENTIFYING AT RISK CHILDREN

From the survey data, published reports on school violence, and interviews with school personnel and youth workers, it is evident that juveniles who are at risk of becoming habitual and violent offenders can be identified at very young ages.

In identifying at risk children, care must be taken to avoid affixing labels which may follow them throughout their lives. The objective must be to end their at risk status, not to lock them into it.

By kindergarten and first grade, teachers often can spot at risk youth through behavior in the classroom, level of emotional development, social skills and family involvement. Some research indicates that the first two years of a child's life are most important in facilitating a child's adjustment.

If babies are stressed by hunger, trauma or poor parenting, they may suffer irreparable damage leading to other disabilities including a propensity to anti-social behavior. In higher grades, at risk youth often have low grades, reluctance to participate in school activities, discipline problems, and poor attendance. It makes good sense for schools to use every opportunity to identify youths who are violence prone or are impacted by violence as soon as possible to devise programs to meet their needs.

Involvement in gangs can also be identified in schools by teachers and administrators. Truancy is a major identifying factor of at risk youth. Those who bring weapons into school or engage in fights mark themselves as potentially prone to violence. Such students should be targeted for special educational programs designed to deal with their learning and adjustment needs.

A strict policy about any guns and other life threatening weapons in school precincts appears to have succeeded in reducing the number of incidents of violence in schools. A stronger police presence and use of metal detectors has enhanced enforcement.

"ZERO TOLERANCE"

Success in reducing incidents of violence has been recorded under the recent Tacoma Public Schools' "zero tolerance" policy of expelling students found to have brought weapons or realistic replicas to school. Violent incidents and the number of weapons found with students has declined significantly recently.

Students expelled for weapons offenses are kept out of school for a year. For readmission at the end of the year, parents must convince a school committee and the district board that it is in the interest of school safety and good education to do so. Offenders efforts to deal with their misconduct by counseling and other interventions are evaluated. Non-weapons offenders may be allowed back in school earlier, sometimes for enrollment in alternative programs.

The no-tolerance policy has been applied by Foss High School to fighting. Behavior associated with gangs including distinctive clothing and signing are punishable by expulsion. Foss reports it has virtually eliminated fighting to settle differences as a result of this "zero tolerance" policy.

We urge that similar policies be extended to the District's middle schools. We are encouraged that other high schools are considering use of similar strict approaches to violence prevention, but are concerned about the lack of monitoring during the penalty period.

Marilyn Littlejohn, former coordinator of the Tacoma-Pierce County Commission on Children, Youth and Their Families, bluntly stated the issue: "Schools have to stop suspending and expelling kids with no follow-up....We need to remove violence prone students from class and empower a handful of teachers who are willing and able to work with troubled kids."

A Tacoma proposal for alternative classrooms [as distinct from alternative schools], teaching martial arts to encourage self-discipline with meaningful in-school detention programs moves in that direction.

TALLYING GUNS AT SCHOOLS

A survey by The News Tribune (2-25-95) showed a significant drop in the number of students caught carrying firearms in the Puget Sound area, a decline which school officials attributed to their strict expulsion policies. Tacoma with about 32,000 students expelled 25 students with firearms or realistic

looking replicas in the 1992-93 year, 28 in 1993-94 and only 2 in the first half of the current year. Comparable figures for Seattle with 46,000 students were 27, 32, 6. For Federal Way with 19,847 students, the figures were 14, 15, 1. [Full table, page 19.]

Students the newspaper interviewed reported that they felt their schools had become safer. One commentator, however, has speculated that the reduction may merely suggest that student weapon carriers no longer openly display their trophies. The program is too new to have statistics on the numbers who return and eventually graduate.

We understand the need to suspend or expel students who violate weapon and anti-violence regulations to keep the schools safe for other students and for staff. But we are concerned that waiving difficult teenaged youths off to the streets and the law enforcement community merely removes the problem from the schools, but does not resolve it.

CARROT AND STICK

While a strict policy of expulsion may appear to solve the immediate problem, violent attitudes may persist in the schools, although perhaps be less overtly expressed. Students who are suspended or expelled by the schools and sent back into the community may simply shift their violent behavior to the streets.

In enforcing strict discipline, the schools, in our view, also need to develop other options including appropriate alternative educational programs so that the destructive students are not just dumped on the community without supervision or a chance to resume their education. In some cases that just results in unsupervised expulsion which frequently occurs where parents must balance parental obligations and work.

As noted, Tacoma is developing alternative schools for youth with behavior problems who have been suspended or expelled. This program does not apply to students, regardless of age, who have been expelled for carrying weapons. No alternative programs are provided for them. In unusual circumstances to prevent unduly harsh treatment, the school board may readmit an expelled student, but it is reluctant to do so.

A program to help a youngster who has a pattern of violent behavioral problems to acquire usable employable skills would make sense as part of the disciplinary package, a carrot to accompany the stick of ouster from school. Youth need to be convinced

that their education has value with failure to complete it leaving them handicapped as adults.

To head off incidents of violent behavior which might require suspension or expulsion, some schools are offering special classes for students and parents while joining with community groups to create comprehensive and preventive approaches to the problem of youth violence. In-school detention, school liaison programs with police officers and mentors, special tutorial and remedial programs, drug and alcohol counseling, and parenting classes are several available options to rehabilitate a dysfunctional youth, hopefully avoiding possible future incarceration.

In some cases, the delinquency may stem from inappropriate placement including reading difficulties or other problems needing special attention. More than one of every twelve students in Washington public schools requires special education to focus on learning disabilities and related difficulties. Schools often will promote a poor-performing child to avoid creating an impression of failure. A survey of youth serving time in juvenile rehabilitation facilities in Washington revealed that 48 percent of this population group had severe learning disabilities.

The study group understands that proposals to expand assistance programs must surmount budget cutting barriers being erected at every governmental level. We believe that prevention programs that prove successful are far less costly, more humane, and potentially more beneficial to society at large than incarceration, particularly where it may be avoided.

REINFORCING POSITIVE BEHAVIOR

Although violence prone youths constitute the most visible part of the problem, school administrators stress that the vast majority of students are well behaved and interested in their school work.

How do schools and communities ensure that vulnerable students acquire and accept non-violent or preventive behavior and skills? Some schools now feature programs in conflict resolution, team building, peer mediation, multi-cultural competency, violence prevention, anger management, personal safety, self-esteem and empowerment and relationship violence.

While most schools already offer classes on physical health and hygiene, a youth's mental health state is likely to be crucial to classroom success and integration with other students and ultimately society.

Schools are finding a need to give increasing attention to mental health issues.

Since quality parenting is critical to non-violent instruction, parent support groups have emerged under school sponsorship. Some schools now offer courses with trained counselors that include both students and parents on such subjects as combatting domestic violence and acquiring life skills.

Unfortunately, many parents may not recognize their children's use of alcohol, tobacco and drugs, leaving teachers and administrators to cope with those problems. Some parents may tolerate such behavior or refuse to acknowledge that the problems exist with their children. Schools may find it difficult to convey their messages to recently arrived families who have not yet acquired adequate English language communication skills

To prepare for a productive role in society, all students need to know how to avoid destructive and aberrant behavioral patterns before completing high school. For families with younger children, the Healthy Start program and the Elk Plain School in the Bethel school district provide underpinning and support to families stressed by inadequate social service or health care resources. The Family Involvement Center at the Tacoma Public Schools has similar objectives. Expansion of such programs would enable them to reach more of those needing help.

SEEKING "SAFE PLACES"

Youth often want and need "safe places" in their neighborhoods where they can participate in constructive activities during non-school hours. Creative alternatives requiring little supervision include arts and crafts classes and athletic activities such as the YMCA Late Nite program.

Due to their proximity to students' homes and availability of their facilities, schools are frequently asked to perform "community center" functions, particularly during after-school hours. Schools are beginning to develop stimulating enrichment programs of after-school activities including arts and crafts, career exploration and life skills as well as support and counseling. Summer jobs and after school and weekend activities offer students organized, social programs which can enrich their lives and help them to develop useful skills.

Because they engage larger numbers of students, extracurricular activity programs may be more cost effective than competitive athletic activities, some surveyors believe. Competitive athletics, however, often successfully engage those youngsters who might otherwise become delinquent.

Year-round schools, reducing or eliminating extended vacation periods, have been adopted by some school systems to provide continual learning and to help students make educational progress and earn better grades. A longer school day has been suggested to provide more hours of classroom education and fewer idle hours on the streets. These strategies also would help resolve child care problems for "latch key" children and make fuller use of existing school buildings and equipment.

CONCLUSION

It is a truism that schools provide pivotal links connecting home, community and work. They give road maps to enable youths with high school diplomas to become part of society and live productive lives.

Schools have begun to solve the violence problem by adopting strict rules to prevent and penalize violent acts. However, the rules must be complemented with appropriate remedial programs to enable violent youths who have been suspended or expelled to return to the school system and complete their education. Those youths be subject to supervision and assistance while awaiting their return to school.

A vigorous violence prevention effort must become part of every public school's program to assure a safe and peaceful environment for education. Special classes and activities for youth and their parents are important tools.

We urge school districts to foster partnerships with community groups who share their commitment to reduce youth violence, not only in the schools, but also in the community at large to make sure that the violence prevention effort in all its phases does not stop at the end of the school day. The districts should look at successful programs being developed in Tacoma and Pierce County, elsewhere in Washington and other states.

Funding priorities at all levels of government also must be addressed so that programs to ensure safety in our schools and provide supervised activities for our youngsters do not falter for lack of sufficient funds for staff, equipment and related costs.

FAMILIES UNDER STRESS
Parents are role models — for good or bad

When it comes to violence, parents are role models – for good or bad.

That comment voiced by a Tacoma school administrator hit a theme which reappeared frequently as City Club interviewers talked to dozens of Tacoma and Pierce County youth workers, school teachers, social workers, law enforcement officials and police officers. Parental involvement with their children and parenting skills are critical, they stated.

One respondent stated that a parent's attitude about violence was of greater importance in reaching impressionable young minds than the media, although others did not consider the violence displayed on TV and other media to be either benign or neutral.

A number of those interviewed depicted too many parents, particularly single parent families and those with two working parents, as likely to be overwhelmed by their responsibilities, often having little preparation for parenthood. Many find their energies stretched out between work and home. Limited incomes and difficult housing problems may restrict their options. That some families in those circumstances find it difficult to cope without resorting to violent behavior should not surprise us.

Moreover, some children may find themselves sitting in ringside seats as witnesses to adults using alcohol and narcotics and using violence to establish their authority. Still many parents continue to perform remarkably well in spite of the obstacles, succeeding to inspire their youngsters to achieve.

SEEKING CLUES TO A PUZZLE

Much research has been done to find clues to this puzzle: How do some families succeed in raising exemplary children in spite of great obstacles while others including affluent and well-educated families falter? The question brings us back to the individual family, its structure, goals, leadership and drive.

Nearly everyone the research group spoke to and the many reports we read, brought us to the same conclusion. To halt youth violence, we must begin with the family. It is society's first and most important institution—the seedbed of commitment, the place where America expects cherished values of love,

character, and social, as well as personal responsibility to be inculcated as our children are sent forth to be educated, trained and eventually absorbed into the world of work.

FAMILY AND COMMUNITY

Historically, the Nation has relied on the family as its premier organizing unit, seeing it as crucial to the community's success and well-being. Strong families have built strong communities while strong communities have sustained strong families. To focus on family and family structure to get at the economic and social roots of present day problems is scarcely a new idea. Thirty years ago, speaking at a Howard University commencement, President Lyndon B. Johnson offered these insights:

"The family is the cornerstone of our society. More than any other force, it shapes the attitudes, hopes, the ambitions and the values of the child. When the family collapses, it is the children who are usually damaged. When it happens on a massive scale, the community itself is crippled. So, unless we work to strengthen the family, to create conditions under which most parents will stay together, all the rest -- schools and playgrounds, public assistance and private concerns -- will never be enough to cut completely the circle of despair and deprivation."

Succeeding presidents of both political parties have repeated this theme, one that has re-echoed in the halls of Congress, in pulpits and in the media. We heard similar comments many times during our interviews. Much past talk bore fruit; public and private agencies emerged to deal with facets of the problem and, until recently, a great outpouring of funds sustained them.

The number of single parent families, particularly those headed by women lacking sufficient income, nevertheless, has continued to swell. Of the more than 83,000 families with children under 18 in Tacoma and Pierce County, nearly 22,000 are headed by single parents, four-fifths of them female with a substantial proportion at or below the poverty level. Significant numbers depend on school lunches, welfare, and food stamps to feed their children and make ends meet.

President Johnson laid down his public challenge to do something about it. Family fragmentation drives the communities' most pressing social problems: crime, educational failure, declining mental health, drug abuse, violence and poverty. These, in turn, further fragment families.

MANNERS AND MORALS'

A statement by William Bennett, former education secretary, a vocal conservative, paralleled President Johnson's comment. Bennett rhetorically asked whether "government can supply 'manners and morals' if they are wanting?" He answered:

"Of course not. What it can supply, through policy and law, is a vivid sense of what we as a society expect of ourselves, what we hold ourselves responsible for and what we consider ourselves accountable to. In this last generation, the message our laws have been sending our young people and their parents has been the profoundly demoralizing one that we expect little, and hold ourselves answerable for less."

(News Tribune, April 9, 1995)

The trend away from strong family structures must be reversed before we can effectively treat our growing youth violence problem, many of the interviewees told us. Reversal of this trend will require renewed personal commitment, cultural change, and public policy changes. Sadly, we have not yet found a magic wand to vitalize personal commitment.

Washington, D. C. politicians of both political parties use the term "family values" as a surrogate description of the ideal family, a sustained, two parent group which disapproves of premarital teenage sex and enforces clear and understandable rules to govern the youngster's behavior. However, it has not had a lofty place in budget debates where important family sustaining programs appear destined to land on the cutting room floor.

ROLE PLAYED BY POVERTY

One of the most urgent problems to be addressed to strengthen families is the role poverty plays. Nationally, one in five children lives in poverty which is closely linked to family structure. More than half of all poor households are single-parent families. The number of poor children cared for in single parent homes is still increasing. Strong linkages exist between single-parent homes and such problems as violence, crime, and poor school performance.

(Families First - National Commission on America's Urban Families, January 1993.)

Several studies indicate young males from one-parent homes are more likely to commit crimes and become involved with the juvenile justice system than those from two parent households. One study made the significant point that relationships between youth crime and family configuration were stronger than those with income levels and race.

Children living with unmarried parents are nearly three times as likely to repeat a grade in school than those living with both biological parents. Children from fragmented families are more likely to suffer emotional or behavioral problems than those who live with their own parents, a study showed.

City Club study group members recognize that many single parents do excellent jobs raising their children in the face of great difficulties, that one loving parent may be better than two abusive ones, and that an ideal family environment will probably never be attained for all our children.

STABLE FAMILY BASE VITAL

Such acknowledgment should not deter us from recognizing the need to encourage and support an expanding base of stable families. It will be complicated and difficult in this era when many dysfunctional families exist, when many parents are hard-pressed with energies divided between work and home, and when the needs of children younger than three have left the screen of national attention. We also know that resistance to continued government involvement in family life is increasing. It keeps costing more for government to do for children what parents are expected to do. But, doing nothing is even more costly to taxpayers—in terms of crime, welfare, school failure, unemployable adults and having to deal with still another cycle of dysfunctional families.

The family is the primary and most important influence on the development of a young person our interviewees emphasized. In family life and by adult example within the family, children learn how to live and work with others to reach common goals.

Children learn to respect and care for others and learn honesty, trustworthiness, civility, and compassion in the context of the family. Every child needs the love and protection of his or her family. If a child does not acquire this learning and loving through the family, basic traits of character and competence may never fully develop.

FAMILY RISK FACTORS

There are many risk factors in family behavior that often hurt today's youth. If children are raised in a family with a history of addiction to alcohol or other drugs, the risk of their having alcohol or other drug problems themselves increases, many studies have shown. If children are born or raised in a family with a history of criminal activity, their vulnerability for delinquency increases accordingly.

Similarly, there is much evidence that children born to teenage mothers are more likely to become teen parents, and children of dropouts are more likely to drop out of school themselves. Where domestic abuse exists, children are apt to pick up those behaviors. Children of parents who engage in violent behavior are at greater risk to exhibit violent behavior.

Poor family management practices about substance abuse, delinquency, violence, teen pregnancy and dropping out of school need to be faced with families at risk. Other deficient practices include administering harsh or inconsistent punishment, failing to convey clear expectations about behavior and not supervising or knowing where their youngsters are and whom they are with.

Persistent conflicts within the family including serious conflict between primary caregivers and between caregivers and children appear to increase risk for children. Conflicts among family members appear to be more important than family structure. Whether the family is headed by two biological parents, a single parent, or a guardian, children raised in families high in conflict seem to be at risk for many problem behaviors. [See chart on back cover.]

PERMISSIVENESS MAY DO HARM

Finally, in families where parents are tolerant of or excuse their children for breaking laws, using drugs and alcohol and not succeeding in school, the chances for such negative behavior occurring greatly increases, interviewees told us. Permissive parental attitudes influence the attitudes and behavior of the children and often can lead to very destructive outcomes.

Family risk factors show much consistency across races, cultures, and socioeconomic classes. While levels of risk vary in different situations, the ways these risk factors work do not appear to vary.

The negative effects of family risk factors can be reduced when schools, families, and peer groups teach their children healthy beliefs and set clear standards for behavior. Examples of clear standards include explicit family rules about drugs and alcohol, expectations of good performance in school, and accountability for problem behavior.

STRONG BONDS IMPORTANT

Studies of successful children who grew up in high risk environments suggest that strong positive bonds established with concerned caregivers tended to keep them out of trouble and helped them to resist other risk factors. Children attached to such families, friends, school and community who are committed to valued goals are less likely to develop problems during adolescence, the studies indicate.

Children who are bonded to others with healthy beliefs are less likely to do things that threaten those bonds, such as using drugs, dropping out of school or committing crimes, the experts have determined. If children are attached to their parents and want to please them, they will be less likely to risk breaking their connection by taking actions their parents strongly disapprove of.

Persons to whom children are bonded need to have clear, positive standards for behavior. The contents of these standards are vital. For example, a standard of clear opposition to youth alcohol and drug use has helped to protect young people from the damaging effects of substance abuse. Children of parents with high expectations for school success and achievement are less likely to drop out of school. Clear standards against criminal and violent behavior and early, unprotected sexual activity are believed to have similar protective effects.

CLEAR COMMUNICATION

Communication that is clear, open, frequent, and honest contributes to family strength as does encouragement marked by mutual support and respect. There is a commitment through which members of strong families feel valued and have a sense of being part of a team. Appreciation is shown by a sense of delight, liking, warmth, and humor.

Studies have listed a number of factors that characterize strong families. Their members have clear, well defined roles that are flexibly carried out. They spend time together that is high in quantity and quality. They tend to cope more readily and effectively with stress and changing circumstances.

Such families often participate in support networks that share resources through family, friends, neighbors, and community organizations. Religious orientation manifested in attendance at church or synagogue, or adherence to positive belief systems also appear to characterize strong families.
(Successful Families, Dept of Health and Human Services, May 1990.)

FAMILY/COMMUNITY GOALS

Family/community relationship researchers have concluded that goals for programs, policies, individuals, and organizations should include:

- Giving family needs community priority,
- Fostering mutually supportive relationships among families, churches, schools, and other local organizations, and
- Reinforcing families as vital units for raising children.

To support these goals, communities must act to make their neighborhoods safe for their children and families. They need to build family-centered programs and require local governments, schools and businesses to become more responsive to family needs. Delivery of social services to families needing assistance should be integrated and comprehensive.

Concern was expressed about media content, particularly television, which too often focuses on violence and other destructive behaviors. The complex subject of the media and their affect on youth behavior needs further focussed attention with respect to the possible causal relationship between what is displayed and violent behavior.

The First Amendment has been construed to prohibit governmental action restricting artistic expression. The Constitution, however, does not forbid parents from making their views known to the media outlets their children tune to. Some television sets have devices to block undesired channels or programs, but blocking may add to family stress and tension, rather than resolve the problem.

CONCLUSION

We need to honor the family as the first and most essential element of a healthy society.

The community can foster parenting skills. That is one f the goals of programs such as Headstart, Even Start and Healthy Start which involve parents in early educational development. Their demonstrated results include increased parental competence and significant progress in language and social development.

To strengthen parent-child bonds by involving parents in their children's growth and development, public and private funding sources need to increase their investment in effective, proven programs for parent education and early childhood development.

Parenting education should be incorporated in curriculum frameworks, guidelines and content. Schools should include parenting education in social sciences and human relations courses.

Parents should be part of curriculum development including decisions about the grade level at which sex education and other sensitive topics should be introduced. Information on child development, parenting skills, and the responsibilities of family life should be part of parenting classes.

It is vital to provide parents with the knowledge, skills, and respect to enable them to do their job well. The public sector needs to make sure that efforts are coordinated and consistently directed to achievement of community goals of supporting its parents.

Private sector entities need to respond sensitively and appropriately to the parenting needs of employees, particularly when problems requiring immediate attention appear.

All of us must show by the ways we respond that we mean it when we say that parenting is the most important job one can do. The kind of parenting we encourage for ourselves and our neighbors well may determine the kind of community that we create and sustain for ourselves and our children.

THE ORGANIZED COMMUNITY
It takes a village to raise a child

It takes a village to raise a child!

A Tacoma educator quoted that venerable proverb to help us learn just what role the community should play in protecting at risk children and curbing youth violence. In effect, he replied that **all of us**, in our own neighborhoods and in the formal and informal organizations that make up the community , are needed to accomplish these complex and difficult tasks.

There is no dearth of organizations striving to make an impact on key parts of the problem including many scores of dedicated nonprofits with special missions and a host of public agencies at all levels of government. Reinforcing them are many dedicated volunteers who extend the outreach efforts of the staffs of the public and private agencies.

Private sector efforts, largely by nonprofits who may be sustained with public funding, range widely in their missions and goals. They include such different groups as the YMCA Late Nite program to keep kids off the streets at midnight, Lemonade, an activity off-shoot of Safe Streets, the Boy Scouts and the Girl Scouts, Mothers Against Violence, a number of family service organizations, churches with their sponsored affiliates, and a range of anti-drug programs, some focussed on youngsters. The total number of local programs dealing with youth and family matters exceeds 100, the study group found.

Public sector activities revolve around schools, health departments, park and recreation organizations and arms of law enforcement, police, prosecutors and courts; but here too, there is likely to be fragmentation.

PROLIFERATION PROBLEM

Much of the proliferation of services is plausibly explained by the agencies; no one agency can possibly gear up to take care of all the health, education, rehabilitation, social, psychological and other needs that may emerge with one dysfunctional family which also may have members involved with the criminal justice system. Many are overwhelmed by the volume of distress cases they encounter.

So, we have been told in interview after interview, violent prone kids may get lost in the cracks between agencies, both public and nonprofit. We have also been told that intervention then probably has come too late. If we really want to prevent violence and delinquency, the time to intervene is in early childhood. Those we fail to reach during early childhood because of a general lack of available resources and specific programs are those who appear sooner or later as truants, minor delinquents, victims, or as participants in major criminal activity, even murder.

In effect, our agency structure is designed primarily to catch up with our failures, those needing help whom we miss at the beginning of life. That is the story we heard from those on the front lines who deal with aggravated behavioral problems every day.

We heard a great deal about lack of adequate funds for both public and private nonprofit agencies who deal with these problems. Funding will continue to be a problem as national, state and local legislative bodies wrestle with taxes and deficits and demands for money that they are not prepared to meet. The agencies cling to hope that ways will be found to shift priorities to meet these needs.

ASTRONOMICAL COSTS

The costs of violence are astronomical. In terms of dollar costs, it has been estimated that taxpayers are shouldering $850 million for treating gunshot wounds in the U.S. each year. The tab for treating intentional injuries is estimated at $60 billion a year in for property damage, medical costs, and work time lost.
(Face of Violence, Washington's Youth in Peril, 1993.)

To figure out the proportion attributable to juvenile violence, one statistic may be helpful: Juveniles account for one-fifth of all weapons arrests nationally. None of these figures capture the incalculable cost in lost and destroyed human lives.

Since costs are increasing yearly and are too great to ignore, it begins to make fiscal sense to support community programs to turn the tide of violence and bring down these costs. The community faces a dilemma in deciding which programs to back. For Tacoma and Pierce County, lack of agencies evidently is not the problem. In a sense the number of them may be part of the problem because of the lack of coordination and fragmentation. Programs too often

are set up to address single problems rather than to provide comprehensive services to treat the "whole" child and the family. One program or provider may not know about other related programs or providers or of prior contacts the client had with other agencies. Some families may be abusing overloaded services while others in need may be denied access to them.

NO "CLEARINGHOUSE"

The agencies do cooperate with each other, but the cooperation may take place only as individual children needing attention come into view. Most agencies do not hesitate to refer clients when needs emerge. There is no operating "clearinghouse" for services, however, a deficiency that the study group sees as a glaring weakness of the system.

The need for organizations and agencies to work closely together is well recognized, and a step is being taken in Washington state to do something about it. A Community Council Network is being created in each county to focus on at risk children and youth violence. Network councils have been set up both for Tacoma and Pierce County and have begun to function.

State dollars earmarked for violence reduction and drug enforcement soon will reach the local level through the Networks which will also have the task of developing comprehensive plans to reduce the number of at risk children in the locality. Each 23 member network is composed of 13 citizens and 10 representatives of cities, counties, affected agencies and Indian tribes. The state Family Policy Council on which the Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS) and other involved state agencies participate, has an oversight role with respect to Networks.

Under the legislation creating Networks, the State Health Department is directed to set standards for a list of pathologies to assess local at risk factors. Among them are "violent criminal acts by juveniles, teen substance abuse, teen pregnancy and male parentage, teen suicide attempts, dropping out of school, child abuse or neglect and domestic violence." All have ramifications for Tacoma and Pierce County.

The goal of Networks is to restructure and improve the way family services for at risk children are provided. An outcome based program, it is designed, according to its stated objective, to "empower communities to support and respond to needs of individual families and children by reconnecting parents and other citizens with children and youth,

families and community institutions which support health and safety."

Those points were made by Wes Pruitt who sponsored the Networks idea in the state legislature in 1992. They are his answers to concerns that Networks may become just another stopping place for agency struggles to establish turf and secure funding. The fund distribution and planning duties are important tools to give Networks the power to see that both the publics and nonprofits coordinate their activities, not only overall, but with their individual cases as well, according to Pruitt.

If the local Networks receive the same testimony at their hearings that the study group received, they will focus on supporting parenting and making early intervention and prevention more accessible and effective.

WHAT WE HEARD

It is useful to note what interviewees told us about the role of the community in curbing the epidemic of youth violence. Here are some high points:

VIOLENCE - Although the rise in incidents of violence is a national problem, its severe impact on Pierce County and Tacoma was emphasized by many interviewees. Violent incidents occur in Tacoma at 2.4 times the state average, a figure that, in part, may reflect differences in record keeping practices. The head of the City/County Health Department told us he regards violence as a public health problem as does the national Center for Disease Control.

The role of guns received discussion as did parents' behavior patterns. Parents can take measures to secure weapons and keep their own guns out of youngsters' hands, but what can they really do in a society that says it is okay to carry guns, one source wondered. Similarly, parents who abuse alcohol and drugs and exhibit violent behavior inside their homes fail to set the examples that growing children need.

THE MEDIA - Some interviewees felt that the media only reflect the violence that already exists in our society but others thought that the media emphasis on violence promoted it and provided approval for it with potentially unstable youngsters. News media traditionally make the argument that violent behavior is news and we all need to know about it for our own protection. The entertainment media face different pressures from a competitive environment that encourages fictional depictions of violence, some of

which are presented in ways that are grotesque and probably difficult to believe.

LABELING KIDS - We focus on **problem kids** whom we tend to label as such; shouldn't our focus be on all kids and their well-being? Babies need nurturing, preschoolers need child care; school-age kids need something to do after school; teens need special programs, summer activities, jobs, education, and high school diplomas. We are unlikely to restore the two-parent family where one stays at home, so we must replace that resource--which will cost money we don't want to provide.

A school principal said we need to accept the society that we have and work with it. But another interviewee would focus on restoring the value systems of earlier generations with emphasis on family structure and religious observance. A judge who handles many cases of juveniles in trouble said we must decide as a community or culture whether we want to step in and solve the problem of kids who raise themselves with limited peer assistance.

There was comment on the practice of promoting students who don't read very well. That ispartly a labeling issue. Some teachers would like to retain in grade poor readers to improve their skills, but others insist that doing so lowers a child's self esteem and stigmatizes the child as a failure.

FAMILY FRIENDLY WORKPLACES - While on their jobs, working parents may be worried about the well-being of their children. Many businesses have established day care centers for preschool children to ease those concerns, an important response to the needs of single parent households and those where both parents are employed.

How businesses react when an employee receives an emergency call about a school age child who has gotten into a scrape or needs medical attention is of crucial importance. Will the employee be released; will the employee be docked? Businesses need to be "family friendly workplaces."

FINDING SAFE PLACES - We heard a chorus of comments about the need for facilities after school hours and programs to keep kids off the streets and out of trouble. After hours opening of schools and other locked-up public buildings was repeatedly suggested as after school activity centers. Attracting youngsters, will require the development of imaginative programs.

Participatory, but not necessarily competitive athletic programs were suggested as were art classes and recreational programs. Midnight basketball as a magnet for kids who roam the streets at night received applause.

Other program suggestions include tutoring, mentoring, conflict resolution, job training and job opportunities for teens, and finally, to use them as family support centers. Funding for staffing, light heat and maintenance would have to be provided.

Interviewees stressed providing **safe places,** ones that are not only safe, but are perceived as such. Homes and schools are not always viewed as safe, we were told, although the "zero tolerance" program has reassured students about schools.

CONCLUSION

Among interviewees, a clear consensus identified a need for two closely related community preventive programs: to help at risk children and to curb youth violence. Many felt that these matters deserved much more attention than they are receiving.

For the short run, stepped up law enforcement strategies are essential. We also must emphasize prevention strategies that have succeeded, particularly those providing assistance for babies at risk.

The Networks strikes us as a sensible way to start chipping away at these seemingly intractable problems. Initially, the Networks are charged to make sure that more than 100 governmental and social agencies are coordinating their actions. That is only part of the job. They then must draw up plans and devise strategies to curb youth violence. The package of strategies the Networks are likely to produce may be costly, but failure to act to break the cycle of violence will be even more costly in human terms as well as dollars.

The advice we received, to open schools after hours, develop imaginative programs, encourage business to become "family friendly workplaces," all make sense and are all worth pondering by Networks.

With limited funding, the task for the Networks and other funding reviewers becomes one of deciding how best to divide the "pie" between prevention and remediation. The study group wants to make sure that proven preventive strategies are not forgotten.

We like the sound of the proverb: *it takes a village to raise a child.* It makes sense to us, but it also calls for a lot of work by **all of us.**

LEGAL ENVIRONMENT
Pendulum: attitudes about youth offenders

Old-time silent movies sometimes depicted the hero hanging onto a swinging pendulum, struggling to avoid disaster. Our juvenile justice system is on such a pendulum, swinging from decade to decade as attitudes and laws dealing with kids in trouble and troubled kids change with the times. It is swinging again to cope with the upsurge of youth violence.

We tend to think of children at risk and juvenile offenders as two different kinds of youngsters in need of public attention. We have separate systems of laws and institutions to deal with each in Washington State and elsewhere in the Nation. But we haven't always treated them that differently, nor have our policies and procedures been consistent over time.

Juvenile offenders in this state enter a system modeled on the adult criminal justice system under which they are formally charged, tried, convicted, and sentenced for the same felonies and misdemeanors that adults commit. Involuntary detention, both before trial and after, is an integral part of the system, and probation under active supervision of a court officer is the norm for those not actually detained.

Children who are at risk as runaways, drug or alcohol abusers or truants, on the other hand, fall under a system designed to avoid *involuntary* commitments. Crisis Residential Centers and Alternative Residential Placements were created to meet the child's need for food and shelter, but not for supervision, counselling, or treatment. There are no longer secure facilities to commit a child involuntarily "for his own good."

PROBLEM BEGINS IN HOME

Extensive interviews with law enforcement and juvenile justice system professionals lead the City Club study group to question the wisdom of this split system. Without exception, those who apprehend prosecute and supervise juvenile offenders say that the problem of juvenile crime begins in the home. Juvenile offenders are those whose parents, for whatever reason, have failed to provide a system of values, a structured lifestyle, a decent example, discipline and guidance.

The connection between criminal behavior and being at risk through running away, drug and alcohol abuse, truancy, and other "problems in the home" is clear to these professionals. Treating criminal and at risk behavior separately in legal and institutional terms runs counter to reality, they believe.

CONSTITUTIONAL BARRIERS

Difficult constitutional, philosophical and legal barriers have complicated efforts to unite, or in a historical sense, reunite these two halves of juvenile law. For much of this century, the state of Washington and the Nation rarely made precise distinctions between criminal and at risk behavior or circumstances in juvenile law. Nevertheless, the juvenile system has generally endeavored to differentiate the way it treats the "good" kids and the "bad" kids, too often with indistinguishable results.

1913 STATE LAW

Under the state juvenile law of 1913, the law separately defined "dependent" and "delinquent" children , but as a matter of practice treated them much the same. A "dependent" child was one who, in the words of the statute, had no parent capable of exercising proper control, whose home was "unfit" due to "depravity of his parents," who was incorrigible or associated with criminals, vagrants, or prostitutes, who was in danger of living an "idle, dissolute, or immoral life," who was truant from school, who used cocaine, heroin, or marijuana, or who "wander[ed] about in the nighttime." A "delinquent" child was simply one who violated the law.

The consequence of being found dependent or delinquent was the same: the child became a ward of the state. The state, acting through a court sitting in its juvenile capacity, appointed a probation counselor to ascertain the child's history, family situation and environment, and report the findings to the court. The counselor, performing dual roles as social worker and law enforcement official, had power to arrest and confine the child temporarily to one of the residential facilities set up for that purpose.

More important than the probation officer's power of arrest, however, was the court's almost

unlimited authority to detain the child under an order of commitment, "temporary or permanent in the discretion of the court," which could be modified as circumstances required.

The result was a system of law under which responsible adults could and did take charge of the life of a child not only if he broke the law, but even if he was only showing signs of becoming delinquent. The same early-warning signs that we rediscover as we grapple with problem of youth violence – truancy, alcohol and drug use, and patently inadequate parenting – could be addressed promptly and vigorously under the old juvenile law, although at a cost sometimes to the rights of the child.

HIGH COURT DECISION

For several decades starting in the 1930's, social workers and law enforcement officials debated the merits of the system. Arguments were advanced to require the separation of "good" from "bad" kids under statutes of various states designed to prevent their so-called "home" schools from becoming "crime" schools. Those arguments finally reached the U. S. Supreme Court in 1967.

Juvenile court proceedings, which the justices viewed as resembling criminal prosecutions, had to meet many of the *constitutional* requirements of adult criminal prosecutions, the high court held that year in the *In re Gault* case. These included the rights to counsel, to be formally charged, to refuse to testify, and to cross-examine witnesses.

In re Gault gave the High Court's approval to a revolution in juvenile law which led to Congress's passing, in 1974, the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act. That act required, among other provisions, the removal of all children who had not committed criminal acts from all juvenile correctional and detention facilities by August 1, 1977.

The Washington Legislature responded by repealing the 1913 juvenile law and passing the Juvenile Justice Act of 1977. This act, largely the current law, eliminates juvenile court jurisdiction over at risk behavior, also known as status offenses, so that a child cannot be detained for running away, associating with criminals, being truant or generally incorrigible, or from a parent's point of view, "out of control." Such behavior has to be dealt with on a *voluntary* basis, meaning with the child's concurrence.

The act sets up a variety of institutions and services to replace involuntary detention under the old law, including at risk petitions by which parents can request court assistance with uncontrollable children, petitions for Alternative Residential Placement to enable youth to leave home without running away, Crisis Residential Centers to provide shelter to those who do run away, and Family Reconciliation Services to work at reintegrating families and alienated children.

Unfortunately, none of these programs has ever been adequately funded. Compared to the system in place for delinquents – which has its own difficulties and inadequacies – the legal system for at risk children is marginal and ineffective.

ADULT TREATMENT REQUIRED

Under the 1977 act, as *In re Gault* apparently requires, juvenile crime is treated before the bar of justice virtually as adult criminal behavior. The law incorporates the adult system of felonies and misdemeanors as "juvenile equivalent" offenses.

Minor offenses up to a certain limit can be diverted from prosecution, with the juvenile expected to make restitution and get counselling or treatment. Most offenses, however, are charged and tried or plea bargained just as in adult criminal court, a response in some cases to overloaded dockets. For serious or violent offenses, the 1977 act gives the prosecutor the option, and in some cases requires him, to seek the offender's "declination", or remand to adult status.

The main difference between the adult and juvenile criminal justice systems in Washington state is in the severity of consequences. Juvenile sentences are determined under a complex point system that takes into account age, prior offense history, the severity of the offense, and how recently the prior offenses were committed. It is often claimed that juvenile offenders engage in criminal behavior strategically so as to avoid reaching a point level with serious consequences. That seems unlikely.

Given the complexity of the sentencing system, few if any juveniles have any idea what their points are or would be for a contemplated offense. Nevertheless, it is clear to all concerned, including the offenders, that the sentences imposed at any point level are relatively light. The department in charge of incarcerating more serious offenders -- the Juvenile Rehabilitation Administration (JRA), part of the Department of Social and Health Services -- is chronically underfunded and overcrowded, compounding the problem. Juveniles *as a general rule* do not serve even their minimum terms.

Efforts to revise the system have focussed recently on ways to increase the severity and certainty of juvenile punishment. The 1994 legislative session mandated remand to adult status of 16 and 17 year-olds who commit murder and other violent felonies. The Legislature also criminalized possession of a gun by juveniles and added 90 days to sentences for crimes committed with firearms.

MORE LATITUDE FOR JUDGES

In the 1995 session, however, more ambitious proposals have been advanced for both branches of the system -- laws on at risk youth and juvenile offenders. As of this writing, bills with a strong likelihood of passage would grant judges more latitude in sentencing, opening the way to more severe sentences in some cases. Currently, offenders on the lower end of the point scale cannot receive detention time, limiting judges to impose probation, often an ineffective remedy. Even at higher point levels, detention time is nominal -- in the 5 to 10 day range. One proposal would grant judges authority to impose up to 30 days at their discretion for offenders at lower point levels.

The ability of judges to tailor punishment is as important as increased time. For more serious offenders, the ranges would be recalibrated to start at 30 to 40 weeks rather than 8 to 12 weeks. For the long term, this legislation would ensure adequate sentences by eliminating a perceived conflict of interest: the commission which currently sets the sentence ranges is dominated by JRA, the agency responsible for carrying out the sentences. No doubt, budgetary and space considerations have kept the commission from setting realistic sentencing ranges. Another proposal would eliminate the release of juvenile offenders at less than their minimum sentence.

LOOKING AT CAUSES

It is more encouraging, however, to see the Legislature addressing the causes as well as the effects of juvenile crime. A return to the days of paternal intervention in the lives of at risk children is impossible. Constitutional law imposes legal barriers. Public budgets and the amount and severity of juvenile crime impose practical barriers. There also seems to be a philosophical consensus that the State makes a poor parent. Nevertheless, there is a wealth of proposals which enjoy sufficient support to ensure either their passage in the current session of the

legislature or a strong return in subsequent sessions. All of them address problems which the 1977 act either did not anticipate or which it underestimated.

There is a consensus that at risk behavior cannot be dealt with on a voluntary basis. Several current proposals would give parents the ability to demand the detention of runaway children. Runaways would either be returned home or held in Crisis Residential Centers involuntarily for a short period when they would receive family reconciliation, mental health, and substance abuse evaluation and services.

Clear recognition exists that the number of Crisis Residential Center beds must be increased to carry out this approach. That parents should be able to authorize mental health and substance abuse treatment on an involuntary basis has also received strong support. Currently, involuntary treatment is illegal for juveniles over the age of 13.

Substance abuse problems could also be addressed as part of the offender system under a proposal to make treatment an alternative to incarceration, a way to get around constitutional problems. Such a system is currently used for sex offenders.

SPOTLIGHTING THE PARENT

Those proposals differ from the old juvenile law in making the parent rather than the state the instigator of involuntary detention and treatment. That raises the question of what is to be done with at risk cases where the parent's situation is at the root of the problem. The old law permitted state intervention on that basis alone. New proposals cannot go as far, but clearly do not go far enough. A currently viable proposal would require parental attendance at juvenile court hearings, with failure to attend punishable by contempt. The problem goes deeper than that.

Parents often are absent from hearings because they are often absent from their children's lives. As the 1913 law recognized, juveniles who commit crimes come from homes in which the parents do not know how to care for them, in which the parents are overwhelmed by their own drug or alcohol problems, in which the parents themselves are too young or immature to provide meaningful guidance.

In the 1990's those patterns are even more widespread. Teen pregnancy is a problem not only for the uneducated, unskilled teen parent, but for the child who grows up with a teen parent who may be particularly unskilled in setting limits, imposing discipline, setting goals, and in the other basic

functions of parenting. Drug use is a problem, not only for the adult addict, but for the crack baby, for the child who must fend for himself on a daily basis, and for the youth who, perhaps through genetic predisposition, will follow the parent's example. In many cases as noted elsewhere in this report, parents, particularly single parents, also may have to struggle with poverty and lack of decent affordable housing.

CONCLUSION

The undeniable explosion in juvenile crime, whatever the cause, stems in many cases from overwhelmed and incompetent parenting. The legal responses formerly available to authorities to cope with juvenile crime in its incipient stages are virtually none existent now. Ways to meet the need that the experienced law enforcement and juvenile court professionals clearly identified must be found.

The professionals cautioned, however, that steps taken after a child's involvement with the juvenile justice system come too late. Patterns leading to criminal conduct are set early in life; that is when society should intervene—before a child's conduct comes to the attention of the law enforcement system.

Legislators and administrators find themselves challenged to devise effective ways to intervene early enough and forcefully enough in the lives of children at risk without making the state their parent or infringing on their established constitutional rights.

GUNS ON SCHOOL CAMPUSES

This chart shows numbers of firearms and other weapons found in possession of students in various area school districts over the last three school years. (Some numbers for firearms include realistic-looking replicas.) Figures for 1994-95 are from the beginning of the current school year through mid-January or February, depending on the district. NA means not available. Each of these districts automatically expels any student caught with a firearm on school grounds.

	'92-'93	'93-'94	'94-'95		'92-'93	'93-'94	'94-'95
Tacoma (31,766 students):				**Clover Park** (13,227 students):			
Firearms	25	28	2	Firearms	NA	7	2
Knives/daggers	88	119	44	Knives/daggers	NA	44	15
Other	130	106	23	Other	NA	51	28
Seattle (46,000 students):				**Federal Way** (19,847 students):			
Firearms	27	32	6	Firearms	14	15	1
Knives/daggers	84	85	21	Knives/daggers	26	41	20
Other	NA	NA	NA	Other	22	29	15
Auburn (11,000 students):				**Peninsula** (9,100 students):			
Firearms	NA	2	1	Firearms	4	6	NA
Knives/daggers	NA	27	6	Knives/daggers	9	11	NA
Other	NA	5	7	Other	4	3	NA
Bethel (13,673 students):				**Puyallup** (16,272 students):			
Firearms	4	10	1	Firearms	2	2	2
Knives/daggers	16	18	3	Knives/daggers	7	0	0
Other	10	16	5	Other	2	4	0

Sources: School districts

THIS CHART FROM THE NEWS TRIBUNE OF FEBRUARY 25, 1995 SHOWS WEAPONS CONFISCATED IN SOME AREA SCHOOL DISTRICTS DURING THE LAST TWO AND A HALF SCHOOL YEARS. A DISCUSSION OF THESE NUMBERS APPEARS ON PAGES 6 AND 7. REPRINTED BY PERMISSION.

Appendix A: LIST OF SOURCES

Individuals providing information

Rock Thomas	Tacoma School Dist. official
Lei Lani Jackson	Director, Early Childhood Education, Tacoma Schools
Jack Sonntag	Vice Principal, Wilson High
Steve Johnston	Administrator, Pierce County Juvenile Court
Larry Newman	Hilltop Activist, Parent
Demitris Foley	Bates Technical College student
Chuck Owens	Parole Officer, Washington Work Release Program
Charles Leech	Tacoma Human Rights Department
Dorothy Diedrick	Prin. McCarver Elementary Schl.
Charles Carlson	YMCA Late Nite Program
Jimi Johnson	YMCA Late Nite Program
Maggie Ross	Deputy Prosecutor, Pierce County Remann Hall
Bil Moss	Special Assistant to Pierce County Executive
Theresa Turpin-Watson	Research & Development Officer, Tacoma Police Dept.
Sally Steckler	Bates Tech. College Counselor
Vern Chandler	Bates Tech. College Counselor
Melissa White	Student Eatonville High School
Charlotte Carr	Principal, McIlvaigh Middle School
Dawud Mateen	Muslim Community
Meagan Foley	Commissioner, PC Superior Court
Vicki Hogan	Judge, Pierce County Superior Court
David Moore	Retired Tacoma police officer
Laura Odegard	Children's Home Society
Rick Allen	Executive Director, Pierce County United Way
Artie Steffens	Juvenile Court Liaison, Tacoma School District
George [surname omitted]	Client, STRIVE
F. Cruz-Uribe, MD	Director Tacoma-Pierce County Health Depart.
Marilyn Littlejohn	Children's Home Society
Bruce Pennell	Manager, Tacoma-Pierce County Health Depart.
John Kvamme	Leg.Liaison Tacoma School Dist.
Bill Rossman	Stewart Middle School
Bob Yamashita	Director, Community House
Bill Notarfrancisco	Dir. Prof .Services, Family Center
Janice Watson	Assistant Superintendent, Franklin-Pierce Schools
Name withheld	Patrol Officer, Foss High

Susan Malmquist	Arts & Culture Coordinator, Health Dept./Safe Streets
Art Verharen	Judge, Pierce County Superior Court
John Ladenburg	Pierce County Prosecutor
Sunny Hansen	Librarian, Puyallup Schools
Jill Barkley	Parent
Deana Briese	King County Housing Authority
Grant Hosford	Principal, Spanaway High School
Dan Barkley	Assistant School Supt. Tacoma
Clint Scott	Director, Lakewood YMCA
Roy Fletcher	Manager, People's Park
Daryl Faber	Manager, Norpoint Centre
Sandy Caviezel	Early Childhood Educator, Bates
Bonnie Pinckney	Specialist, Tacoma Schools
Sheila Sawyer	Park District official
Rep. Tracey Eide	State Legislator
Wes Pruitt	Networks Dir., Norpoint
Jackie Spears	Advisor, Students Against Violence Everywhere (SAVE)
Jacci Krajewski	Chair, SAVE
Julian Bagwell	Member SAVE
Collette Shappart	Chair, Mothers Against Violence In America
Carol Strong	Sup. OSPI Drug Free Schools
Todd Bogardus	Staff, Remann Hall Center
Jack Paul	Teacher, Oakland alternative School & Learning Center
Joseph Torres	Security, Franklin-Pierce HS
John Knight	Prin.. Jason Lee Middle School
Tony Ginn	Boys and Girls Club
Mike Smith	Intern, Private Industry Council
Jesus Villa Hermosa	Pierce County Sheriff's Department
Sam Chandler	Tacoma School District
Vicki Turner	Remann Hall
Steve Gregorick	Pierce County Prosecutor's office
Karen Kelly	Tacoma Police Department
Rob Masko	Pierce County Sheriff's Department
Don Berger	Superintendent, Bethel School Dist.
Art Himlee	Supt.,Steilacoom School District
Jim Adams	Principal,Goodman Middle School
Tom Morgan	Director of Special Services, Puyallup School District
Sue Hall	Prin.cipal, Sumner High School
Lee Landrud	Trainer, Conflict Resolution
Priscilla Martin	Homebuilders Legislative Liaison
Eugene Wiegman	Dir. Family Counseling Services

Appendix B: BIBLIOGRAPHY

STUDIES OF VIOLENCE

The American Teacher 1994, Violence in America's
   Schools: Family Prospective, Metropolitan Life
Safe Schools & Communities: Keeping Our Children
   Alive, '94, State Commission on African American Affairs
Washington State Omnibus Alcohol & Controlled Substance
   Abuse Act: Enhancement of School Based Security Progrms
Assessment of the Effectiveness of the Washington State
Omnibus Alcohol & Controlled Substance Abuse Act:
Enhancement of School Based Security Program
A Preliminary Assessment of Violence in Washington State, 1993,
Washington State Dept of Health
Gun Control In Washington St., '94, League of Women Voters
The Face of Violence, Tacoma - Pierce County, WA, 1993
Growing Up Drug Free - A Parents Guide To Prevention
Relating Risk Behavior: Selected Analyses of the Washington State
Survey of Adolescent Health Behaviors, 1994,
   Northwest Regional Laboratory
Washington Survey of Adolescent Health Behaviors '88-92 SPI
Violence & Youth, Psychology's Response, American
   Psychological Association
Communities That Care: Risk-Focused Prevention - An
   Approach To Reducing Adolescent Problem Behaviors,
   Development Research and Program Inc.
The Face Of Violence - Washington's Youth In Peril, CDC
The State of Children In Tacoma - Pierce County 1991
(prepared by Marilyn Littlejohn for City Club),
Commission on Children, Youth and Families
The Turning Point - Choosing Alternatives To Violence, 1994,
   Depart. of Community, Trade and Economic Development
Communities For Resilient Youth - A Directory of Youth Violence
Prevention Programs in Washington State, 1994, Washington State
Depart. of Community, Trade and   Economic Development
Cities In Schools - Turning Kids Around
Men Beating Women: Ending Domestic Violence, 1993, Family
Violence Prevention Fund
There's No Excuse For Domestic Violence, 1995, Tacoma-
   Pierce County Comprehensive Domestic Violence Plan
Families First - Commission on America's Urban Families, 1993
Does Prison Pay, Brookings Review, Winter, 1995

*NOTE: Study group materials will be donated to the
Tacoma Public Library.*

PROGRAMS MENTIONED

*Listed below are programs mentioned in the course of the study
groups interviews. Some are general, others are specific programs
identified geographically when possible.*

   Advocates for Youth - Lakewood; Al Davies Boys and Girls
Club; Anger Management - several schools;
   Blue Cross Community Partners; Boy Scouts; Boys and Girls
Clubs; Call-A-Kid - volunteer Barkley;
   Cambodian Language Cultural Arts School; Casey Foundation
Program; Cedar Tree Institute; Child Abuse Prevention Resources;
Church Programs; Clover Park Alternative Instruction; Communities
and Schools; Conflict Resolution - TPS and PSD; CPS; Cultural -
arts, music and crafts; Committee on Children in Seattle;
   DARE; Directory of Youth Violence Prevention Programs in
Washington;
   Eastside Neighborhood Center's Cooperative Venture with 7-
11; Efficacy Training - Tacoma Public Schools; Even Start - SPI -
Family Literacy;
   Family Support Centers; Family Involvement Center - TPS;
Federal Job Corps; Foss High School Relationship Training;
   Girl Scout Programs which target high-risk youth; Girl Scouts;
Goodman Middle School anti-violence two-year grant - Peninsula
Schl. Dist; GREAT program; Guidance Curriculum - Tacoma Public
Schools;
   Health and Guidance Curriculum - Puyallup Schools; Healthy
Start; Hilltop AIR (Artists in Residence); homebuilders; Homework
Connection; Housing Authority Drug Elimination Program - Auburn
and Kent;
   L-Club - McCarver; Latch Key; Lemonade;
   MADD; Midnight Hoops; Mothers Against Violence;
   Neighborhood Community Groups;
   Oakland Alternative School;
   PAAYS; Parenting Support Groups and Classes; Parenting +;
Park Department; Peer Mediation - Sumner HS; Personal Safety
Courses - TPS; PIC; Pierce County Alliance; Pierce County Sheriff's
programs; Police Explorers Program; PTA's Reaching Back - Giving
Back - alternatives to incarceration, release to mentors
   Reading programs at libraries;
   Safe Streets; Seafirst Bank Youth Job Program; Second Step
Violence Prevention Curriculum - FP School District; SMART
Tutoring Program - McCarver; Student Assistance Program -
Franklin Pierce School District; Sumner HS closed campus program;
Summer Youth Employment Traiing Program (SYETP);
   Tacoma Youth Hall of Fame; Tacoma Urban League; Tacoma
Police School Liaison Program; Tacoma Schools Community Based
Transition Programs (Disabled); Tacoma Schools Volunteer
Program; Team Building - TPS; Tennis Shoe Brigade; THA/Metro
Parks sports leagues;
   Violence Prevention Curriculum - Puyallup Schools; WSU
Star Project; WWEE;
   Yakima's Parent Accountability Plan; YMCA; YMCA - Late
Nite Programs; Youth Consortium; Youth for Christ;
YWCA Battered Womens Shelter; Youth Intervention Prevention
Project, 1992-93; 4-H Clubs.

ADOLESCENT PROBLEM BEHAVIORS

Risk Factors	Substance Abuse	Delinquency	Teen Pregnancy	School Drop-Out	Violence
Community					
Availability of Drugs	✔				
Availability of Firearms		✔			✔
Community Laws and Norms Favorable Toward Drug Use, Firearms, and Crime	✔	✔			✔
Media Portrayals of Violence					✔
Transitions and Mobility	✔	✔		✔	
Low Neighborhood Attachment and Community Disorganization	✔	✔			✔
Extreme Economic Deprivation	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔
Family					
Family History of the Problem Behavior	✔	✔	✔	✔	
Family Management Problems	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔
Family Conflict	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔
Favorable Parental Attitudes and Involvement in the Behavior	✔	✔			✔
School					
Early and Persistent Antisocial Behavior	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔
Academic Failure in Elementary School	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔
Lack of Commitment to School	✔	✔	✔	✔	
Individual/Peer					
Alienation and Rebelliousness	✔	✔		✔	
Friends Who Engage in a Problem Behavior	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔
Favorable Attitudes Toward the Problem Behavior	✔	✔	✔	✔	
Early Initiation of the Problem Behavior	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔
Constitutional Factors	✔	✔			✔