

**DO THE
WRITE
THING**

Do the

Write

Things

MANAGE YOUR TIME TO STOP

Challenge

Program

1998

185616

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This compilation of writings was produced by the National Campaign to Stop Violence. For more information on the Campaign's programs and activities, please contact the Campaign at the following address:

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Since its inception five years ago over seventeen thousand students have accepted the

"DO THE WRITE THING CHALLENGE"

This spring seventh and eighth grade students from Atlanta, Chicago, Detroit, Hartford, Houston, Las Vegas, Los Angeles, Miami, New Orleans, New York, Philadelphia and Washington D.C., together with students from 20 National Guard Challenge Sites were again invited to consider the sources of youth violence and to make a commitment to seek peaceful, constructive lives. Thousands responded to the question, "What can I do about the violence in my life?" This book is a compilation of the best of these responses. The moving personal stories are representative of the challenges faced by many of America's children each day. All essays are unedited and reprinted exactly as they were submitted.

I can do a lot to stop violence in my life. I don't know about others but I want what is best for me. I have hopes and dreams of becoming something, but I'm not going to throw it all away trying to prove that I am tough.

(Nija Hepburn-Nelson, 7th Grade, Washington, D.C.)

The primary goal of the *Do the Write Thing* Challenge Program is to prompt participating students to think about their role in society and to realize that they have a responsibility and the power to change their environment. By taking time to consider what an individual can do, and then to put their thoughts into written words, each student acknowledges that they can make positive lifetime choices and that these choices can affect not only themselves but their neighborhoods and cities.

So that they don't have to fight, we can help find them an education and a job. So that the next time they want something they don't have to rob. Another thing you can do instead of trying to get some money, volunteer at a soup kitchen and serve food for the hungry.

(Leilani Santos, 7th Grade, Chicago)

The **National Campaign To Stop Violence** is a coalition of organizations inspired by the words of these students. The Coalition hopes that the words and the passion of these students will motivate adults around the country to respond to the young peoples' personal commitment to seek solutions to violence.

I promise you, committing an act of violence is one thing you will never forget in your whole life. Help people learn about violence and get help for yourself, friends and family who need it. Do whatever you can to prevent violence in your life and the lives of others, and you will feel happier about yourself and your world.

(Amanda Cordova, California Starbase)

The **National Campaign To Stop Violence** has developed a variety of programs based on the ideas of these students. If you would like to help with your time or resources, please call 1-800-256-0235.

The National Campaign to Stop Violence would like to thank the following individuals and organizations who participated in the *Do the Write Thing* Challenge Program. We realize that there are numerous people who worked very hard on this program and may not be listed. We would also like to let them know how very much we appreciate their contribution to the effort to end violence.

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National Council of Juvenile & Family Court Judges
National Guard Bureau
The Greater Washington Urban League, Inc.
Kraft Foods, Inc.
The Kuwait-America Foundation
United States Department of Education
United States Department of Justice
Young Astronaut Council

The National Campaign to Stop Violence would like to thank the United States Department of Justice and the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention for their continued support of the *Do the Write Thing* Challenge Program.

Special thanks to our primary sponsor

the

PEACE MEMORIAL FUND

This fund was established by the Kuwait-America Foundation to honor the American soldiers as peacemakers. The Peace Memorial Fund supports programs that motivate people to reduce violence.

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Do The Write Thing
National Finalists

Atlanta

Special thanks to all of the people who devoted their time and effort to making this program a success.

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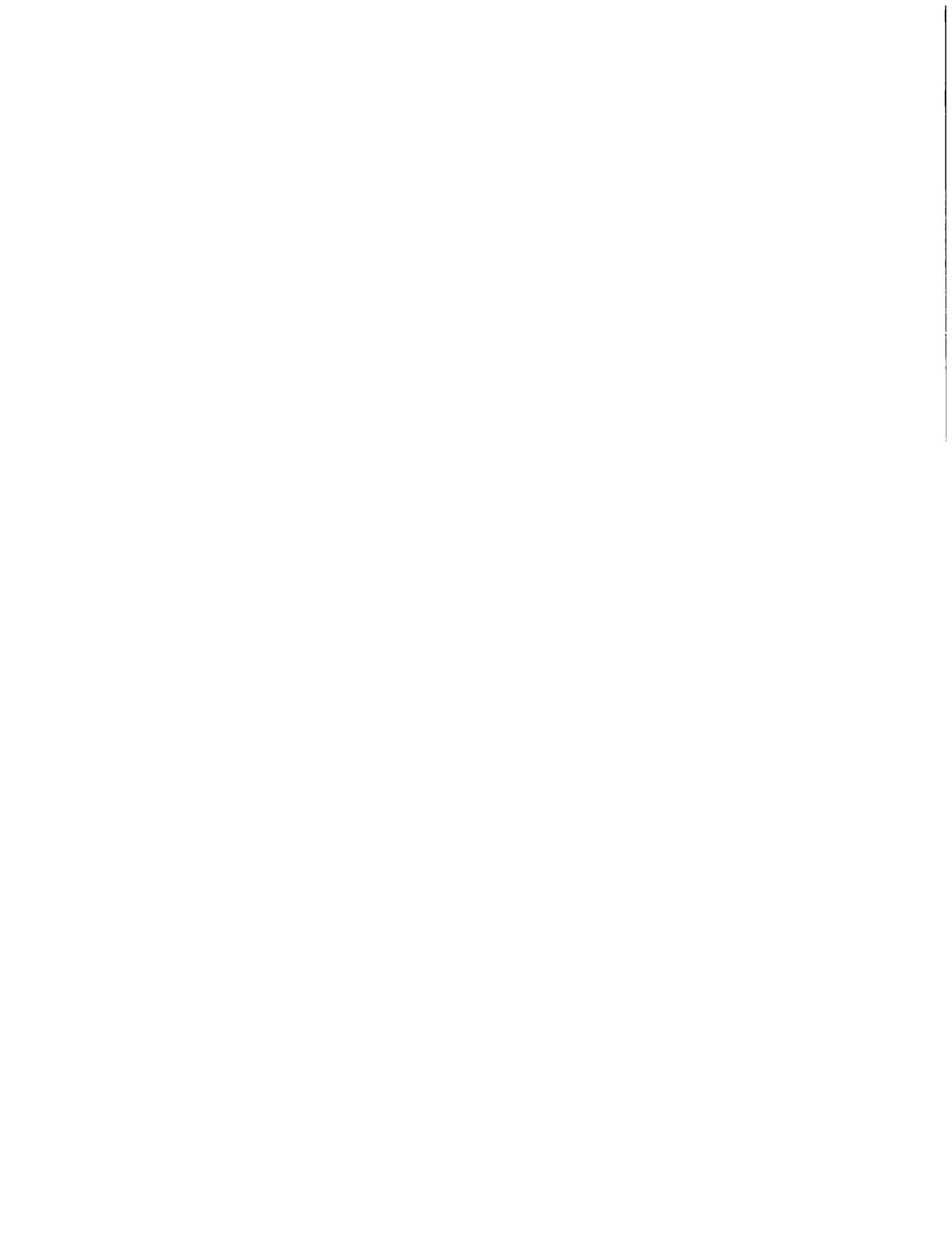
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Mr. Siereveld
Inman Middle School

The committee members also served as judges for this year's competition. Their extra efforts are much appreciated. Thanks to Mimi Robinson for all of her help and the Hilton Hotel and Towers for hosting the local Recognition Ceremony.

Laurie Ellington
West Fulton Middle School



“Changing the Violence in My Life”

In reality, I can do nothing about the violence which surrounds me upon my waking hours until my eyes are closed in sleep at night, for those who are far older and wiser than I am having yet to find a cure for this “common cold.” In other words, who am I, a mere fourteen-year old, to dare suggest that the adults in my world resolve their minor and major conflicts without shouts and shots being heard around the world? Who am I, a fourteen-year old, to recommend that those who violate my right to learn in peace in my classes be banished from my presence for an extended period of time? Who am I, this fourteen-year old, to demand that the community in which I live drive drugs and drug dealers out, all the way out, of the lives of those of us who truly do believe that our bodies are our temples? Who am I? I am that fourteen-year old who does dare to suggest, who does recommend, and by all means who does demand to be heard in a democratic society which appears to feed and grow well on this fungus, this plague called violence.

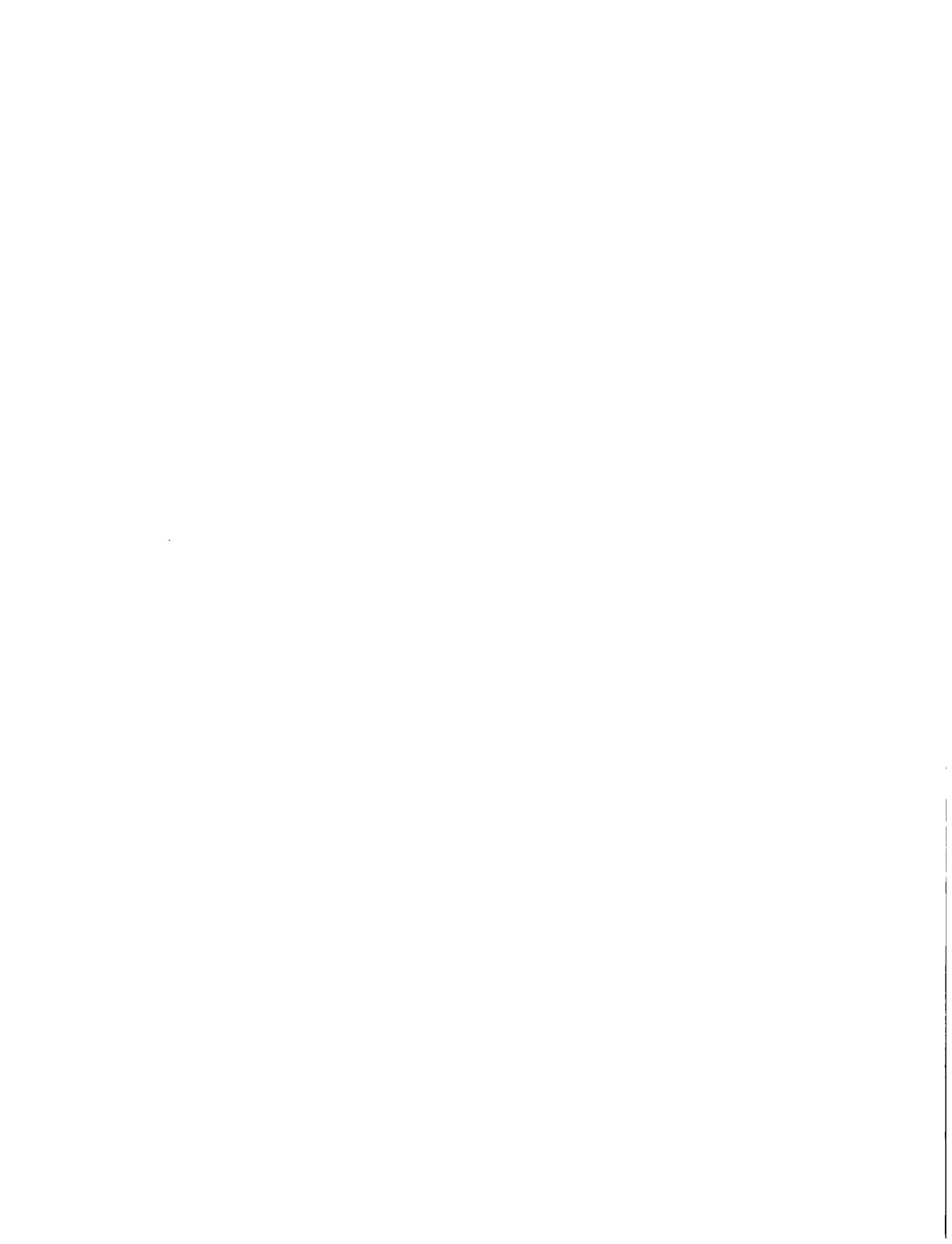
Yes, my elders, I see and hear how well you, too often, settle your differences. I, your child, see you physically and mentally attack each other in the home, on the street, on television, in the movies, in videos, and in the bombing of public buildings and parks if others don't see it your way. I see and hear the threats of war and destruction in Iraq and tremble at the thought of¹ “soft rain” being a real concern for me on American soil. Now, it is my turn to say to you, “Stop and count to ten,” because I, your child, see you and hear you. I am your child and will follow where you lead, my elders.

Furthermore, in all sincerity, I do believe that I have the right to enter into the learning environment without constant interruptions. By this I mean, no other student has a right to interfere in that learning by fighting or causing a fight, or by causing any distractions while I am trying to work out an algebraic equation, nor for that matter, while I attempt to understand how to write a composition. For those who care so little for education as to put mine in peril, I recommend banishment from the regular school for a period of one year. During this time, they who think that education is so insignificant would attend a special school under very strict rules where they could not participate in anything but core studies. This may make a difference in the contributions that they make to society in the future.

Meanwhile, to rid my community of drugs and drug dealers, anyone caught with drugs or caught selling drugs could simply be placed in some swampland surrounded by piranhas and left there for ten years. It may seem harsh, but compare that to the lives destroyed by the poison they pass on to your sons and daughters.

Therefore, I may not be able to do anything about the violence which surrounds me, but I do not hesitate to suggest, to recommend, or to demand that I be heard. Are you listening?

¹ Ray Bradbury, “There Will Come Soft Rain” in Elements of Literature, “Collection Three,” pp. 215-220(Atlanta: Holt, Rineholt & Winston, Inc., 1997).



Aaron Mustifa
Inman Middle School
7th Grade

Stop the Violence Essay

Violence prevention starts with me. The first step to change is to acknowledge problems. Recently, I had a conflict with a peer who became angry with me when I refused to allow him to look at a book. He responded by grabbing my notebook and tearing out pages. We both responded angrily and could have been suspended had it not been for a concerned teacher. I had to admit that I helped to create this problem myself, and there were other ways this could have been handled rather than fighting. Besides, this kid was much bigger than I, and it was not a smart move to strike him. I could have requested help, sought mediation, or said, "I'm sharing this book with Thad, but you can see it next."

I feel the next step is to commit myself to a position of non-violence. I can't expect others to do this if I can't do it myself. If I can learn to control my behavior, then I can be a role model for someone else. In fact, I think it is a smart thing to be able to take a negative situation and turn it around. I guess this is what society calls mediation.

Communication is also very important. I also need to commit to expressing my feelings while being respectful even in angry situations. Holding in deep feelings is what drives people to kill other people. Communicating with my peer as to when he could see my book may have decreased the above mentioned conflict.

I think it is also important to respect each others' differences. No two people are alike, and Atlanta is an international city. Many countries like Atlanta and were drawn here by the Olympics. We must be able to appreciate and seek to learn and admire the differences of other cultures rather than to fear them. When conflict arises, we need to attempt to look at things from the other person's point of view, as well as our own. Their culture may play a part in their response to this situation.

Stopping violence begins with me, but I can't do it alone. I think all students should have a class in non-violence, which focuses on mediation, cultural diversity, social skills and conflict resolution. Completion of this course would include signing a "Commitment to Non-violence contract." Students would then become members of the CTNV (Commitment To Non-Violence) Club. A club of this type could include students of all nationalities and disabilities. Members of the CTNV Club could wear identical t-shirts to promote non-violence and could provide community service to help educate people about non-violence. Not only would this help students like myself by keeping us busy, it would also help the community. Members of the CTNV Club would be positive role models for others.

In summary, I feel the first step toward changing our attitude toward violence is to acknowledge violence as a problem. We must then commit to a position of non-violence, learn to communicate with our mouths rather than our fists, and to respect and admire each others' differences. While this commitment begins with me, it must also be spread through education. I feel that a class in non-violence would be one avenue wherein young people could learn more appropriate ways of expressing themselves.

Chicago

Special thanks to all of the following people who devoted their time and effort to making this program a success.

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7th Grade

What Can I Do About Violence In My Life?

I am 12 years old and in those 12 years, I've seen violence. To start with, I was born black...born and raised in the ghetto. I will begin this essay about violence with one of my earliest memories: a short stay in Cabrini Green. I know you all remember Dantrell Davis, well he was the first kid my family met when we were moving in.

Not knowing there was danger to come, my mother suggested that I go to a nearby playground. This playground should have been loaded with children, as it was a beautiful day outside. I was unaware, as I left our small apartment, that this playground was empty. I walked down the hallway to the elevator (our apartment was on the 12th floor). I waited and waited but it didn't come. So I headed towards the stairs. As I got to the 10th floor, a rat that was actually more like the size of a cat, jumped out of the corner to greet me. He looked as though he were saying, "Hey little boy, welcome to my house." He was nice though. At least nice enough to let me run by. All along every single stair, there was garbage and rotten food thrown about. It smelled worse than any awful thing I could think of. Finally, I made it to the first floor. I was glad to finally arrive at the playground a short time later. Imagine my surprise to find

that not one single kid was playing in the playground. Later, my mother and I found out the a little girl was shot to death by a sniper while she was sliding down the sliding board.

The first few days were really hard on us. We could hear gun shots all the time. We could hear sirens all the time. We could hear people yelling at each other all the time. We could hear crying all the time. Eventually, we settled into a routine and all of these sound became ordinary. I tried not to think about it.

One day my mother decided to take us to visit my aunt in Harvey. We were walking down the street on our way out of Cabrini Green when all of a sudden, we heard three shots. My mother held us close and we ducked down a little. When we looked up, a man across the street was falling over dead. My mother grabbed us and pulled us along. We kept going as if nothing had happened... talked about what we were talking about before we heard the shots, and continued on our way to Harvey. Our mother is not an uncaring person. She acted as though nothing had happened for two reasons. First of all, being nosy in Cabrini Green just puts you in the way of gunshots. Second, there was nothing she could do about the violence around us. She hoped that by her acting as if she was not upset, we would not become upset.

About a week later, we were driving home to Cabrini Green, when I

noticed a Chevy Blazer with the driver's window shot out. We were told by a neighbor that an innocent man had been parked in front of the convenience store waiting for his mother to return with a few groceries, when he was shot in the head by random sniper fire.

Shortly after this, the Chicago Bulls won another championship and I watched the whole community go biserk. People tore up stores, broke windows, and stole stole stole. They stole any and everything they could get their hands on. It was sad to see. Our mother encouraged us to ignore this. So we went on about our business as if nothing were happening.

Probably the most painful thing to happen to us while we were at Cabrini Green was the time we arrived home after visiting my aunt in Harvey to find that our front door had been pried open. Shortly before we left, our mother had gone grocery shopping for the month. The refrigerator was stocked up. the cabinets were filled. However when we entered our home, we found that there wasn't a speck of food left. Mom cried. I was very afraid. I didn't know if we would have anything to eat for a while. Later, we received help, but I was beginning to realize that I was tired of being scared all of the time. I was sick and tired of worrying.

That's when I realized that my favorite place to be was school. At school, there were people who wanted to make sure I was safe. Through teachers and

reading, I was able to learn about places that were safer and cleaner and prettier than my own home. All the while, my teachers kept reminding me that if I tried hard at school and succeeded at my lessons, I could have all of these things. School gave me the most important tools that a person needs to survive in a situation like mine. Hope and faith. That's why I believe that one thing that can change violence in the world is education. I know that there is no simple cure for the problem of violence in the world. If there was a simple answer, then there wouldn't be a problem. But education seems to be a good place to start. Maybe if people realized that there is a better, happier way of life out there, they would try to do better. Maybe if all children were taught about all of the wonderful places to go in the world and all of the exciting things there are to see and do, they would have high hopes of making sure that they change their lives from the way they were brought up, to something better... and maybe they would have the faith that they will change things for the better.

Rebecca Liu
Beaubien
8th Grade



What Can I do About Violence in my Life?

"An ordinary girl, an ordinary name, ordinary is just not good enough today."

-Our Lady of Peace

Driving home with my father from guitar lessons is very ordinary. This goes with me ordinary life. A nice house, a great family, a quiet community, and wonderful friends, all very ordinary things. Yet, this time, heading home from lessons, things would be very different, and would help me appreciate my ordinary life.

As I was singing along with the music on the radio (I do this ordinarily), my father and I pulled up to a stoplight. While I was still singing, my father abruptly told me not to turn my head towards my window. Having him say that automatically made me wonder what was out my window. I slowly turned my head, not wanting my father to catch me doing exactly what he told me not to do. Out that window, I saw a parking lot, a Brown's Chicken, cars. I peered closer. I saw a man and a little girl no older than 6 or 7. I turned down the music and heard the girl yelping and screaming. I then realized what was happening. This girl was a victim of abuse. The man beat her and yelled profanities endlessly. The little girl just stood there, seemingly paralyzed with grief, taking all of it in. What else could she do? Blow after punch after blow, the abuse persisted for what felt like an eternity. I looked down at my lap, feeling sick from watching. I shut my eyes, trying

to block what I had seen from my mind. Then the screaming ended. I looked up. The child and the man both went into a car. The man, unphased by the "discipline" he had exhibited, started the car. The girl, red-faced, red-eyed, tear-streaked, sat slouched in the passenger seat. She gradually rolled down her window as the car pulled out of the parking lot. She looked out into the sky and blinked back tears.

Now, in retrospect, I feel like I should have ran out of the car and yelled at the man, telling him how wrong he was, the pain he was causing, the laws he was breaking. I wanted to have him reported, and the child to now be in a safe home with parents who don't hit.

But now, I also feel like because I've seen this, I've grown up just a little more. I realize how lucky I am, how happy I am, and how sad others are. I think I can change that. I can make others better. Maybe not happy, but better. I can volunteer at Battered Women and Children shelters and donate money and care. Maybe someone else saw what happened and did something. I know that if I saw what I saw now, I would.

Detroit

Special thanks to all of the following people who devoted their time and effort to making this program a success.

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Wendy Sanders
Munger Middle School

Christopher Gresham
Munger Middle School

These Streets Trying To Get Me Caught Up!

VERSE 1

When I walk down the street all I see is young ballers
Fools tossing them like a bunch of quarters
I saw my main homey sprayed like some mace
One in the back and a bullet in his face

I want to ride till I die
No shelter from the gangs
Call themselves gangbangers
But barely know how to slang

Seen so much bloodshed
Over this and that
Just trying to make it in this world
And get your pocket fat

Dopefiends by any means
Seeing green on the table
From cornbread to steaks
And black and white TV's to cable

Police drive by and pay
No attention to the hood
Don't keep any kind of watch on it
As they should

The streets get so mad
I have to roll in groups
Seen violence like no other
Just call me a troop

VERSE 2

We live in vain these days
People getting crazy paid
Like it's a daily thang
Just get with the new swang

Should I get in a gang try to bang
Same brothers on the corner
Trying to slang kang

Try to take the drugs off the streets
And see one of your friends laying at you feet
Time and time again I have to turn my head
From some stuff that a crack head just said

Live my life if you want to,
I dare you
Just don't come running
When the affects scare you

Tears streaming down my boy's face
Trying to run and hide
Realizing his time is up
But he wants to stay alive

Got a strong man
Weaken by his atmosphere
Some think it's just the crimes
But the ghettos here

Poor families live on the same streets that you walk
But you can't acknowledge them even if they talk

That concludes the summary of how my streets are. I spoke to you through rap which is really my only way of talking about things that are important to me. I related my life based on the issues we are talking about which are violence and what we can do to stop it. I think that we can form meetings or even groups sponsored by the police that would focus on ways of getting the violence off of the streets. We could also carry some kind of protection; such as, mace or something that would signal the police or at least a targeted person in the neighborhood that there are drugs, gangs, prostitution, etc. in the vicinity and help is needed.

Anything we do will be a big step to help get the violence off the streets. I hope that the paper that I wrote will give future activist some idea of what's going on.

Roberta Robinson
Butzel Middle School
7th Grade

Eliminating Violence

**I'm eternally tormented by the fears
that gnaw at my harrowing pain,
for each night I cry one thousand tears
that fall down my cheeks like the rain.
Swords of defeat knife through my heart
with every single tear I cry.**

**My soul is virtually torn apart
by the driving rain outside.**

**Each deleterious drop burns my skin;
My eyes scream with pain and fright
as they whisper tales of hate and sin
where never again I'll see the light.**

**But I'll try to keep my head up
regardless of my plight.**

**With violence all around me, I feel so alone;
there is fighting, killing, hatred and fear; the things
we should not condone.**

**I sometimes wonder about my future and
what the future holds .**

**I think about whether someday I will
accomplish any of the goals, that
I have made for myself as my contribution
to this world.**

**I want to be a positive force in the center of
negativity;**

Eliminating Violence

**so that I can try to evoke creativity among
my people in establishing peace and
harmony in our schools and neighborhoods.
I am anxious to see what is in store-
I await the day that violence is no more.**

Hartford

Special thanks to all of the following people who devoted their time and effort to making this program a success.

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Robert Fricchione

"Oz" Greibel

Robert Cattell

Yolande Spears

Officer Eric Graddy

Roger Gelfenbien

Don Desiderato

Jane Driscoll

Tom Mitchell

Teachers

Beth Sellers

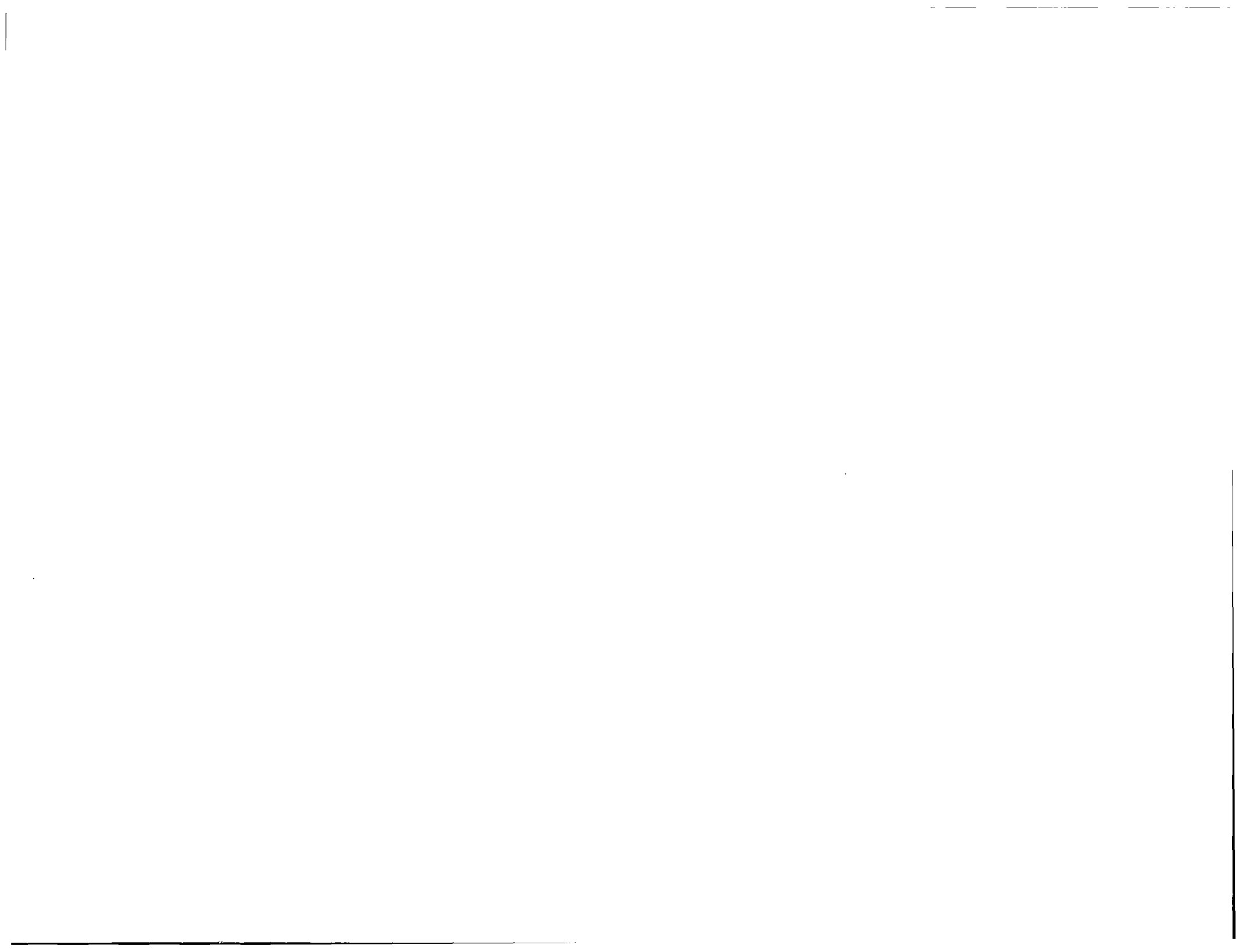
Naylor School

Mr. Woods

Naylor School

The National Campaign to Stop Violence wishes to thank ABB, the Greater Hartford Jaycees and Robert Cattell for their hard work and continued support.

Destiny Gore
Naylor Elementary
8th Grade



"Why Didn't you Hear Me"

If I had been quiet a little longer,
maybe I wouldn't be here to see, what
the abuse that I recieved was doing
to me. Wasn't I loud enough?
Didn't you hear me?!

Bruises and scratches that I tried to hide
to protect my parents from the authorities
I lied, Heart broken from the pain they
caused me, I thought it was love when
they hit me. Didn't I cry loud enough?
Didn't you hear me?!

If someone could have see the hurt
soul that was within, they would have
tried to help me, But behind closed doors
they could not see. Drugs and alcohol
controll my parents they didn't realize
they hurt me. Didn't I speak loud enough
Didn't you hear me?!

I wish someone could have helped me
But my friends, neighbors, and relatives
let me be. Questions were asked about
the marks that my shirt didn't cover,
the marks they could see. Beneath
the visual bruises, my heart hurt worse
inside of me. Maybe the abuse would
have stopped sooner only if my heart
had been seen.

So if there's ever a person you know
who's being abused, but won't let it show,
try to reach out and touch to show you
care for them so very much.

There are places that they could go
if they want more help. Later on you will
see that you can make a change. Be a friend
and help someone maybe their lives you will
rearrange.

I was lucky to be saved from the danger
of my home, I'm lucky that I had a friend I
wasn't really alone.

Wow I'm happy that my friend was always around, maybe if she wasn't there I'd be laying in the ground

Maybe there are others who had problems just like me, maybe they needed a person to help them to wake up and see.

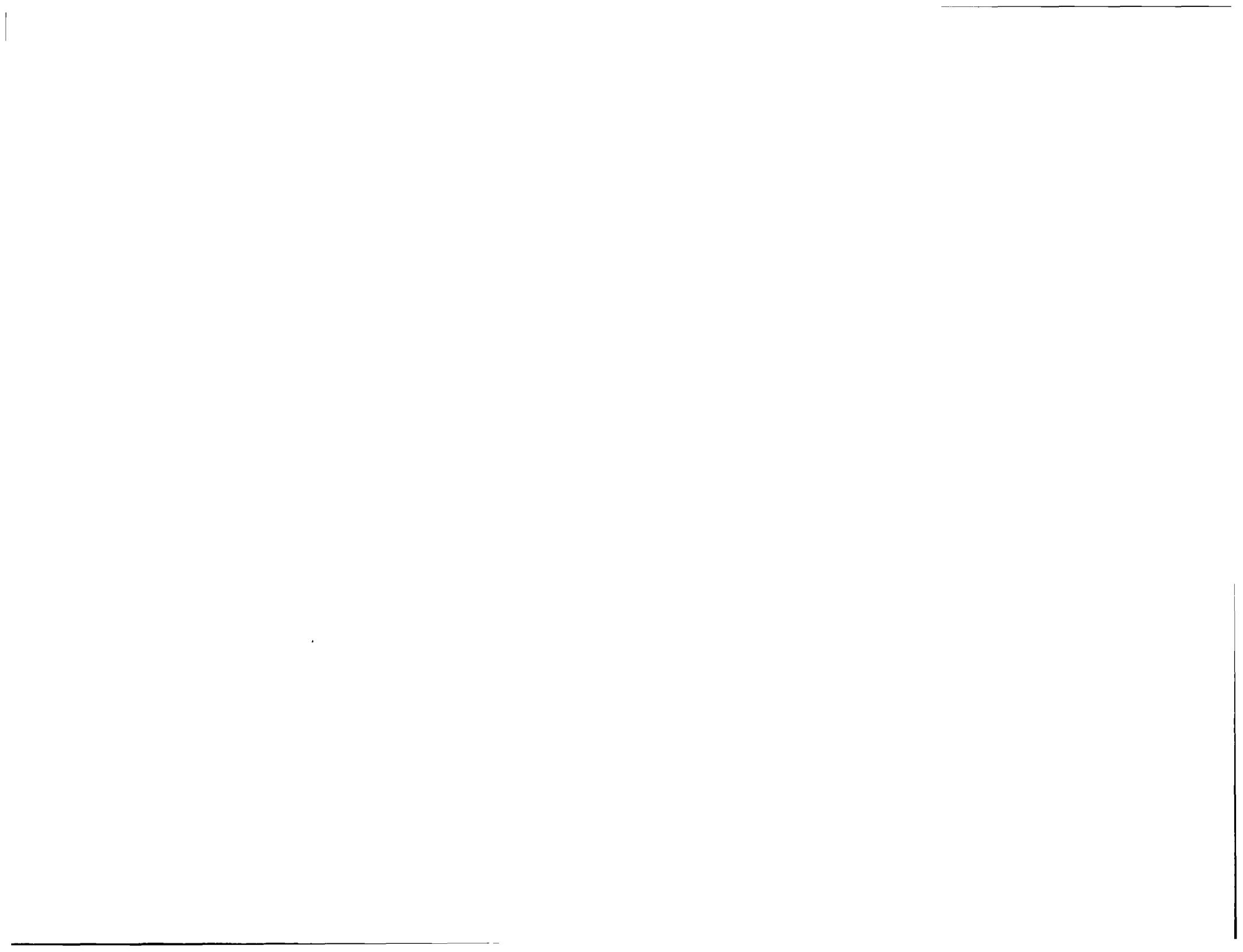
Problems could have been solved if everyone that's around gets involved.

If you can realize that there's lives to be saved, and for the hurt there's a path to be paved.

Everyday I ask myself the question what if I had been quiet a little longer. Then the answer comes to mind everyday I'm living broader and broader



Patrick Ney
Naylor School
8th Grade



What to Do

What problems do we as people face?
The worries of guns and drugs.
The problems of broken homes and race,
The problems that have affected me.
The problems caused by those in view,
and those indoors I cannot see.
Sometimes the violence I wish it would,
just go away and leave me be.

I hear a gunshot - from outside,
I hear it in the night.
Perhaps an act of vengeance,
resulting from a fight.
But their precious guns, they all must have,
those people in Washington.
They do not see the danger,
of their second amendment right.
So give and fight for gun control,
to keep them off the street.
Those killing devices play a role,
in the blood that's at our feet.

But why do people kill and lame?
It's not for fun and sport.
Perhaps it's all just one big game,
that sends people to court.
Or is it something deeper, something overall.
Some kind of driving force, behind the violent thugs.
It is a material thing, something we can see.
It surely is no surprise,
this evil thing is drugs!

But what can we as citizens do,
to make this evil go?
It's not as simple as just refusing,
or even saying no.
A dealer of drugs is a predator,
he feeds off the community.
He makes his money off kids and those,
who think they have immunity.
So when you see him standing there,
on the corner of the street,
just cross off to the other side,
and his power you will beat.

Don't let him sell you his dirt and shame,
just walk away and leave.
Don't be afraid to break his heart,
tell your friends to do the same.
Soon his profits will diminish,
and his patience you will try.
His career on your street will soon finish,
and the crime will pass you by.

But what about the violence,
that happens in the home.
Kids that come to school,
with broken heart and broken bone.
You may not see it happen,
but you may see the result.
Don't be afraid to speak,
talk to an adult.
Your friends they may have bruises,
don't stand around and stare.
Try just to be helpful,
and let them know you're there.

If violence in your life is strong,
there are things that you can do.
Ignore drug dealers and their song,
trying to lure you.
Fight guns and their cause,
they don't provide a thrill.
They're truly violent things,
all they do is kill.
Talk to the abused,
when they feel hurt.
Don't let them ignore,
the blood stains on their shirt.
Violence is a parasite, it invades with a shove.
It's easy to fight it,
"all you need is love" -John Lennon

Houston

Special thanks to all of the following people who devoted their time and effort to making this program a success.

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Mayor Lee Brown

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Gracie Saenz	Ron Stone

The committee members that served as Finalist Judges are marked with an (*). Their additional help is greatly appreciated. Thank you.

Houston Independent School District

Leslie Combs

Teachers

Bonnie Terry
Cullen MS

Norma Castellano
Stevenson MS

First Tier Judging Coordinator

Mrs. Margaret Kilgo

Tamika Thompson
Cullen Middle School
8th Grade

I Made A Difference

The silence of the innocent, endless dark night was interrupted by three single gunshots . . . bang, bang, bang. Then helpless cries of pain followed by laughter filled the air. Soon loud ear piercing sirens approached the small dark corner of the neighborhood. After that, all you could hear was the pitter patter of tennis shoes on hard concrete. Blood was running down the fresh white sidewalk when all a sudden everything went blank. I was shot.

I woke up in a small, white room. My eyes were blurry. Was I in heaven? No, I was in a small hospital room. My eyes slowly adjusted to the low light. There was a small window on the opposite side of the room. The room was hot. I tried to get up to open the window, but I couldn't. My legs, m-my legs won't move. What's wrong? I pulled back the cover. Although my legs were there, they didn't move?

A doctor briskly walked into the room, greeted me, but before he could finish, I yell as loud as I could "WHAT'S

WRONG WITH ME!” He told me to calm down, but I couldn’t. Why won’t my legs move? He sat in the chair next to me. I could tell that I wouldn’t be getting any good news. The expression on his face even changed dramatically. I listened. I tried not to hear what he had to tell me. Two of the bullets had penetrated my spinal cord, and I would be paralyzed from the waist down. I could never walk again. The doctor left. Soft tears rolled down beside my face like a small spring in the middle of the forest.

That day will haunt me for the rest of my life. My life was no longer normal because of some gang initiation. Three teenagers did something to torment me until the day I die. Why does so many bad things happen to the best people?

What Can I do about this? They told me I can’t make a difference. I can do everything within my power plus more. I started a N.P.D. which is a Neighborhood Police Department. Volunteers have been put through a simulation run of actual Police Cadet Training. They make sure all children are in by curfew, they have different shifts

throughout the day and nights to ensure the safety of everyone in the community. Last year they put 3 wanted criminals in jail, and turned in 14 juveniles. That is a lot for such a small town.

I also participate in a Community Outreach Program. We focus on getting gang bangers off of the street. Now, the streets of our town are 15% safer. We were able to turn around over 25 gangsters. Some are still in the transition. I would say our most severe case was for Kenny Jones. He was only 11 years old when he committed armed robbery. Now he is on the honor roll every time. He even participates in after school activities.

Who says one person can't make a difference? What happened to me could have happened to anyone, and what I did could be done by anyone. I have flashbacks almost every day about what has been done to me, even in my sleep, but what always help me stay relaxed is to think about what I have accomplished.

Vinh Nguyen
Stevenson Middle School
8th Grade



Vinh Nguyen
Stevenson Middle
Castellano--8 th. Grade

What I can do about Violence in my Life

I live in an apartment building and there are many gangs currently in these apartments. The members of these gang's usually carry weapons on their belts. When they meet with the other gangs in the neighborhood, they usually fight and after the fighting, some of the gang members die. Because there are too many bad things happening and too much violence around me, I have had to witness too much of the violence around me and we need to stop it. Violence is bad, whether it is serious violence or just a "little" fight. at the park or at school. Violence is wrong and it does not matter whether the violence is small or big. Following are some of the ideas to stop violence, so I hope that you read my ideas in order that we all might have a better life in our futures.

I think that a lot of the violence committed by teens is related to what they watch on television. Some of the violence is given to teens by examples from adults that are close to them. We have now started to rate our T V shows, but this has not helped much. The teens may now feel that it is okay to watch shows that have been recommended by their parents or other adults and these shows might still contain a lot of violence in them. Watching television gives teens the idea that it is okay to join gangs. Television also shows them that it is okay to get together and have fun by doing drugs or drinking or hurting people. Young adults then do what the teens do on television and they get into trouble with the police. I think one solution to this problem is to get parents to watch television with their kids to insure that the kids watch only what is okay to watch. If a particular channel has too much violence, then we should stop watching that channel. When parents are not at home, they should have they channel blocked so that the kids cannot watch it while the parents are not home. My parents already do this and it has helped us already.

About myself, I was in another country so it is easy to become a leader in the violence as if you did not join in the violence, then the others would laugh at you and make jokes about you.

Although it was hard to control myself, I tried not to get into the fights. My culture is just as good as anyone else's and although some people might think that their culture is not better or just as good as anyone else's, they need to be proud of their culture. If they are proud of their culture they can learn to represent their culture in a positive way. Sometimes, violence is started because people do not understand other cultures and if we took the time to learn more about other people, we would not have so much violence.

I believe that every school is supposed to let the student learn about the new races every month. By showing the other religions, races and cultures to the teens already in school, it won't be so difficult to understand them. This way, we can all accept one another and learn to work together. This will also help us understand others so that the other cultures will not be different to them and will create new friends and when we make friends with people, the violence stops.

Young adults my age don't know the consequences of their actions. We need a person to come to the schools and let us know what happens when we give into violence. In this way, teens will know what to expect when they get into trouble and this will help. This person can also lead by example and maybe experiment with what happens when teens "do violence" so that teens can realize that there are consequences to pay if you get into trouble. Leading by example also helps. Adults need to lead by example and show us how to avoid violence instead of leading by bad examples. We need to know about the adults who have gotten into trouble and what has happened to them so that we won't get into trouble too.

Every Sunday night, my family gets together and the children are asked to bring up a problem that they have had that week. We discuss the problem and ways to avoid the problem in the future.

What I can do about violence in my life
Vinh Nguyen
Stevenson Middle School

The children tell the adults what their problems are and the adults discuss the problems with the family. My parents usually learn to understand the child and they usually believe our problems. So they can solve the kids problems by listening to them and giving us advice. This is another way to stop violence.

You can learn a lot about yourself just by learning to like yourself and others. Working together, we can all help stop the violence that is happening in our neighborhoods.

Las Vegas

Special thanks to all of the following people who devoted their time and effort to making this program a success.

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J.D. Smith MS

Tracy Spencer
Greenspun JHS

Juliann Malais
Greenspun Junior High School
7th Grade

Violence

Darkness is a velvet blanket,
Swallowing the night.
Hearing gunshots behind me
Activates the fright.

Graffiti on the walls,
Blood staining the ground.
Speeding up my feet;
Afraid to make a sound.

I hear the chains and rattling guns
Following me home.
A warning sign that tells me
This is where they roam.

I feel their breath upon my neck,
Smelling of cocaine.
Running now to escape the fear
Of the notorious gang.

A familiar street comforts me now,
Telling me it's okay.
The "Neighborhood Watch" sign on the pole
Warns them not to stay.

Running to my own front door,
I'm caught in a wave of relief.
Thinking I do this every day
Sends me a message of grief.

Safe inside but still afraid,
Knowing it's not all right.
Crossing all my fingers and toes,
Hoping they don't stay all night.

At nighttime comes the "boogey man",
My monster is the gangs.
Thankful I made it home all right,
Escaping fear's sharp fangs.

Scared to death of tomorrow's dawn,
Wishing they would just disappear.
If they could go to a club,
I would not feel this fear.

I wish there was a place they could go.
A place where they would feel welcome.
That way they would not feel pressured
Into being society's personal scum.

If I became police chief,
I could enforce the LAPD.
Make it illegal to belong to a gang,
And punish those who did graffiti.

If it was a law to have a loving home,
There might not be so much crime.
The parents would love and cherish their kids,
It only takes a little bit of time.

I wish the people in gangs would think straight,
Stop being a criminal.
It would be better to praise our Lord God,
Then to be in Juvenile Hall.

Why can't they see past all their sins,
And belong to a club or church group?
They would have better activities to do,
Such as serving the homeless hot soup!

If only my fantasies were real,
The world would be a much better place.
There'd be no more frowns or tears,
But a smile upon every face!

David Laub
J.D. Smith

What Can I Do About the Violence In My Life?

Right now I am thirteen years old and in that time I have been exposed to many different types of violence such as fist fights, violent movies and shows, and very violent songs. I have dealt with physical violence in my life. Now, I stay away from violent people.

I stay away from drugs because usually where drugs are, violence is right there. It is like that old saying, "misery loves company". It's almost the same with drugs. An example of violence with drugs is a bar fight. Once one drunk starts a fight, all the drunks are fighting.

I can also talk things out when I get into a fight instead of fighting. If I see somebody that looks like they are going to fight, I can tell them some advice about why not to fight and how to talk it out.

A way I can control the violence in my life is by promoting an open non-defensive climate for communication. I can create a positive climate around me which would, hopefully, make people feel like they are wanted. I could also try to understand and appreciate people and their feelings. I can just be sensitive to others which is an important factor.

I can withhold my judgment, which does not mean that I have to give up my right to my opinions and feelings, but means that I should approach people in a way which makes them feel good and better, rather than bad or put on the spot. It also helps when I am honest.

Another way I could deal with the violence in my life is with the way I speak to people. It helps when I am specific and concrete with my words. If I say something that is not exact, somebody could take it as a sign of aggression or rejection. They could even become violent if they take it as aggression. Another way to avoid aggression is not to

use "buzz words". Loaded words such as swear words could trigger emotional and physical reactions.

Many people may not realize that violence includes arguing and yelling. It is common place in today's schools to hear arguing, not only with each other but with teachers, administrators and the staff.

One of the things I could do about the violence in my life is not to watch all the violent movies and shows. Movies like "Terminator. I and II", show ways of violence such as people being shot in the head, blown up and just the violence in the movie. Even shows like the "Power Rangers" depict violence. There has been a study which proves that children who watch the show for even an hour will run around trying to karate chop and kick each other. Instead of watching TV, I can just read a book or go outside. It would probably be better for me anyway.

One of the most blatant forms of violence that I should avoid is music. Especially the rap. They talk about shooting people in the middle of the night and having wars in the streets. Rock and roll music also has some very violent words.

Even though I am only thirteen I know that I can make a difference and change the violence in my life. I am not dumb and violence is dumb.

Los Angeles

Special thanks to all of the following people who devoted their time and effort to making this program a success.

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Emerson M.S.

Ms. Karascu
Robert Frost M.S.

Additional thanks to the City of Los Angeles Commission for Children, Youth and their Families, Elissa Glickman, Julia Parmenter and Aimee Rivers—your assistance and dedication was invaluable.

Carola Arsian-Alexander
Emerson Middle School
7th Grade

The way of violence

Winter was just arriving. Yet that night was the coldest night of my life. I stepped outside not wanting to hear the policemen anymore. I sat down on the sidewalk. When I closed my eyes I could see my father with the broken beer bottle in his hand. His eyes blazing, and my mother screaming to my brother not to fight with him. I opened my eyes in horror. I didn't want to remember the way my sister yelled at him. And the way I tried to hide from the screams of my living room. I closed my eyes again only to see as fresh as if I was there again. Coming down the stairs just in time to see my father grab my mother by the neck and smash the broken glass on her chest. I had heard a loud scream I could see the blood dripping from her chest. I could feel again the shiver that went through me. I could smell the liquor in his breath even when across the room from him. My mind kept on going back when he then grabbed my poor mother by the hair and threw her against the edge of the wall. When her body fell uselessly to the ground as if she had been merely a rag doll I knew she was dead.

Why? I now kept asking myself. Why did she have to live in fear and die in such horrible violence? For the first time in many years of going to school I regretted not listening to my teachers talk about how awful violence was. How it was unnecessary, and that things could be solved with words. I was the one that hanged around with the gang, the one that got into fights with other kids, the one that hid in the girl's bathroom with my other friends to smoke. At that moment I realized that I had always been wrong. I always thought that violence was the easiest and most efficient way to solve my problems. That by hurting somebody else I wouldn't hurt myself. I knew that I was wrong all along. I just didn't want to accept it. I lived in a home where violence was frequent and where weapons were common. I thought it was the most logical way to live.....Until it was too late.

Tears started to flood my eyes. I hated myself for always fighting with my mother, I wanted to go back so badly to that horrid hour and stop the fighting. I could have done it. But I was too scared ,and yet... if I had done anything it could have been me the one that would be dead now. After all, how can you argue with a drunk? My sorrow enveloped me like a cloak, shielding me from the eyes that saw me. Sitting on the sidewalk tears rolling down my eyes, and my clothes drenched in the blood of my mother. I didn't care what the gang thought of me if I cried for her loss. Although I knew that most of those kids had seen death come to someone they loved. I felt their eyes like knives on my back, but I couldn't move. I was paralyzed unable to move a muscle, an eyelid. As if enchanted, the only movement in me was the slow breathing and

the tears that would not stop.

I forced myself to get up unable to bear the stares of neighbors and policemen. At that moment the paramedics were coming out of the house with my mother's body. I walked to them, and along with them to the ambulance. I didn't get in but stopped dead in my tracks. I could hear the loud cursing of my father and the policemen trying to get him to calm down. Fear--animal fear overcame me. I wanted to run, to hide, to throw myself at him and beat him the way he had beaten my mother every night. But I once again could not even take a breath. Once he was in the police car I walked to the house where my older brother Steve and my older sister Rose were standing. Rose opened her arms and wrapped them around me. "There, There Claire is all over now". She kept saying. She was trembling, and I knew that it was not only the chilly wind that made her shake so violently.

What were we going to do now? I asked myself. Now that my mother and my father are gone. Where will my brothers and I live? A tall woman came over to where we were standing. "Good evening, I'm Mary Shiller chief of the police department." Her voice was sweet and sad. I knew what was coming and I braced myself to hear it. "Your father seems to need some help, and I think it would be a good idea if he didn't see you for a while. He will have a trial, but he will surely go to jail. Do you have any relatives that you could live with?" A sob escaped my lips. I had always wanted to leave that house. The house in which I heard the cries of my mother while I laid in bed. Knowing what went on in the room next to mine. I dreamt about the day in which I would be gone. Free from the cage that was in my nightmares. Free from the smells of alcohol and sounds of pain that seemed to forever haunt the house from dawn until twilight. And yet, when the opportunity to fly away from the place that had caused me so much fear I felt unbelievably sad. That house was the one in which I had celebrated victories, the house in which I was born! How could I leave a place that I knew so well and go into the unknown?

I didn't hear the rest of what officer Shiller had to say. I was too absorbed in my thoughts that it was as if I was sleeping, as if it was all a dream, a nightmare. The sounds of the police car that had my father brought me back to the cold reality. I knew that this could be no dream. Rose and the officer were gone, and Steve stood there looking all around him. Tears were in his eyes. I had never seen my older brother cry, not even when he broke his leg. This was too much for me. I felt dizzy, tired. I went inside the house, past the living room and into the kitchen. I sat on the floor, with my head rested on my undrawn knees. The world around me

was a big blur from my eyes filled with hot tears that couldn't stop. I closed my eyes, and with the sound of policemen talking I felt into a deep sleep.

A gentle hand shook me back into the nightmare that was real. Rose was talking kindly to me. I got up and noticed that it was still dark outside. "What time is it?" I asked. "It's two thirty, Claire, I need to talk to you." Her voice made me shiver, It was the voice of someone that had lost hope in life, that didn't believe in love, in faith. "Claire, I have arranged for you to go to Grandma's and Granda's house. Steve and I need to take care of some things but we will catch up with you ok?" Her voiced cracked, I knew she was going to cry. I didn't want to see her, for I knew that I would cry with her. "I'll go pack my stuff" I said quietly. I walked slowly out of the kitchen, and headed upstairs to my room.

I packed clothes that I would need until my siblings came in a suitcase. I packed cherished things into another bag. The photo of my mother, a small box that had what I liked to think were my secrets. Then I saw it, On my wall there was a poem.

*Fall leaves in the wind
Golds and reds come to dance
This night brings peace
and beauty blooms like spring.*

It had been written by my mother and made into a scroll for me. Whenever I was upset, whenever I had felt miserable. The only thing that I needed to do was to read the poem with its extravagant calligraphy. The sight of the words written so beautifully, the meaning in the poem. Hope, faith overcame my sadness. I felt that the poem told about the world, and if such beautiful things could exist...then, there was beauty in life. However, this time my eyes, as red as my father's, I felt only hatred towards the writing and it's meaning. Yanking it away from the wall, I tore it in half and threw it on the ground. At that moment I wanted to burn it, to destroy it from my memory. "There is no such thing as beauty! Its all lie! How could you betray my trust in you!?" I screamed at the torn scroll as if it could listen to my words.

I now look at myself in the mirror of the airplane's restroom. On my way to what is to be my new home. I Look at myself, and see how my dry eyes are now bottomless. How the spark of life is not there anymore. Hope, faith, trust, love, all of these were killed along with my mother. My mother is now in her grave, and I have learned what I think is the hardest lesson of my life. The way of violence does not only hurt oneself, but all the people that are part of our existence. That violence will rip away life. The way my poem was torn by my hate. I can't blame myself for what happened. But I blame myself for being part of it all.

Desmond Blair
Robert Frost Middle School
7th Grade

What can I do about violence in my life?

Violent acts have effected my life greatly. On September 26, 1994 my dad's life came to a violent end, due to gang violence. This senseless tragedy took an innocent life and emotionally crushed me. Through grief counseling and support I was able to learn how to always keep my dad in my heart and be able to deal with tragedy. My dad worked hard, served in Kuwait, yet died to gang violence. Still the violence is increasing in our communities.

Here are a few ideas I came up with to try to help stop the violence in my community. I would like to be able to have more police protection in my community by starting a community petition. I would like to start neighborhood meetings and talk about any issues that may cause violent act. I would like everyone to attend these meetings including Mother's, Father's, Aunts, Uncles, Grandparents, and Children because violence to one effects all.

I would like to be able to with community help put together a play about violence the way it effects the family of it's victim and take this play to other communities and schools. Hopefully the kids and citizens of the schools and communities will realize how much violence effects families if we can somehow make them see these violent acts take place close to home.

Another way I could attempt to stop violence in my community would be in our schools. Just like elementary schools have D.A.R.E. and each student must graduate from D.A.R.E. in order to graduate, we can put together a program in middle schools and high schools such as H.S.C.V. which would stand for Help Stop Community Violence. In this program we can help educate students on the effect of all violent acts. We could get help from our local police department, community leaders, teachers and parents. This program can be made mandatory for all students to take before graduation.

Many students do not know how to walk away from an argument. I know I have caught myself in the middle of an argument and was unable to walk away. But the times I have been able to stop and think about the consequences I was able to talk it over. These times I felt better about my decision than the times I lost control of myself. Students need to be taught this because it is a lot easier to lose control than it is to keep control when your mad or in front of your friends because of "peer pressure".

Uniforms in school helps to prevent gang violence because it prevents students from wearing gang colors or symbols. Another thing we can do is raise money by candy drives, car washes and donations. The money we earn will go to security guards at schools, security cameras and metal detectors. Although the majority of students can follow rules and instructions the few who don't are why these issues should be brought up.

These are a few good ideas I was able to come up with.
I hope in the near future some of these ideas can help others.

Miami

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Stop Violence In My Life

Violence is a verbal, visual, or physical act intended to demean, harm or infringe upon another's civil rights. Imagine a violence free world where children play without a worry of a drive-by shooting or mothers not worrying if their children get kidnapped on the way home from school! Well it's an image that I and a lot of people like me share. I try to stop violence in my life because I know if I do my part to stop it I'll be helping others that I come in contact with to stop it.

I try to stop the violence in my life by going to church because there I feel close to God. I have faith that God will help me keep his commandment of do unto others as you would have them do unto you. At church I practice his teachings by participating in car drives for the homeless and activities such as car washes to raise money for the poor in other countries.

Secondly I am active in my community by doing sports, helping my elderly neighbor down his stairs, I also avoid doing destructive things that other kids think is cool or fun like egging people and houses on Halloween.

Third, and the hardest to accomplish is to stop violence at school when some kid tries to fight with me or one of my friends. I walk away or try to talk it over and discuss why this person or persons would want to fight. Also I can stop the violence at school by not arguing with my teachers and by doing class work, because low grades leads to frustration and anger. Anger leads to violence.

Fourth, I try to stop violence in my home by doing everything my mother tells me to do and by obeying her. Sometimes I forget to respect her and this can get her angry. When she gets angry at me for being disrespectful she warns me. Then if it happens again she grounds me.

The last and most important thing I think I can do to stop violence is not to do drugs. Drug abuse causes a lot of violence throughout my community and the world. Drug abuse is an act of destructive violence against yourself. Drug abuse is a very destructive and expensive way of violence. If this practice of drug abuse among many Americans is stopped then I can assure you that this world will be a better place to live in.

In conclusion, to make my dream of a violence free world come true we need hard work and perservierance.

Katrina Ruiz
McMillan Middle School
8th Grade

STOP THE VIOLENCE!

Do you think that it will never happen in your community, or that it only happens to others, not you? Those are the identical thoughts from victims of a heinous crime called violence. It happens all around you at any time of day or night. Wherever you are, it could be the best neighborhood or the worst, but it can still happen to you. There are so many various solutions to help end violence, but I have narrowed it down to four major ideas. Two of these ideas are extra curricular activities and peer mediation. The other two alternatives are to attend classes about dealing with violence and staying away from people who use drugs and resort to violence.

The first suggestion I would make to terminate violence is to participate in extra curricular activities. Activities help everyone meet new and exciting people. If you spend the majority of your time on activities, you will have absolutely no time to be involved with wrong and horrible situations. For example, playing sports, joining clubs, or volunteering, will help you take up all of your free and valuable time. I myself, participate in clubs and help teachers after school to fill my spare time.

Another suggestion that I would make is peer mediation. Mediation is a type of counseling that the people in conflict receive from their peers. The first part is that the mediators listen to both sides of the story. Then they come up with a reasonable solution and discuss it with the people involved in the conflict. Mediation can usually be offered at your school or you can ask your counselor for other suggestions. This is why mediation is another helpful tip.

My third suggestion for extinguishing violence would be to go to a class about violence and learn how to deal with stopping the violence. These classes are offered at your local public schools or rehabilitation centers. If these classes are not offered, try and organize a committee to teach these classes in your community. These classes would not only drastically reduce violence but your neighborhood will go through changes of the best kind. Also, you can speak to your homeowners' association and see if they will organize a separate class in one of their board meetings.

New Orleans

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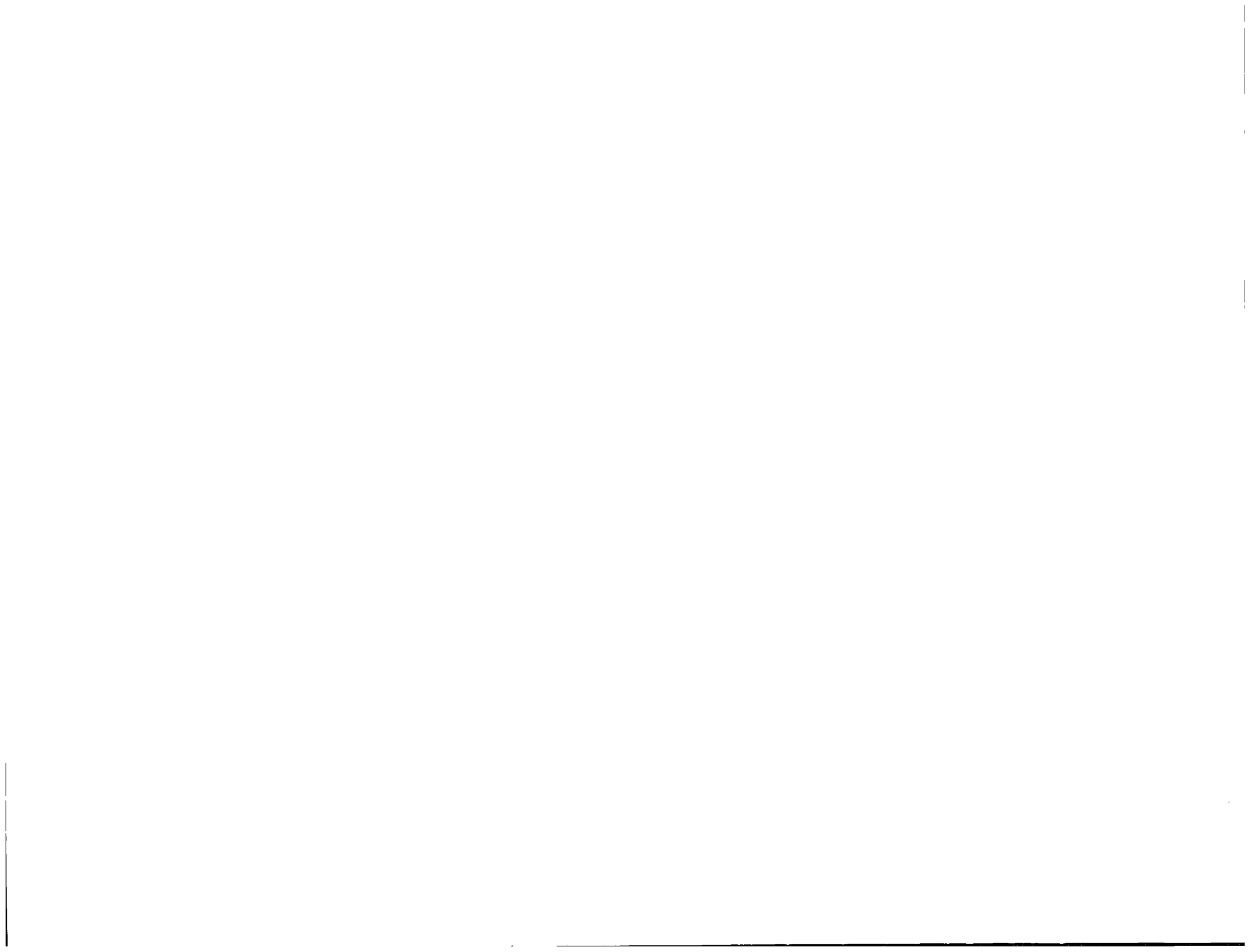
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Special thanks also goes to Lisa Stansky.

We would also like to acknowledge the *J. Edgar Monroe Foundation* for its generous contribution and support. Thank you.

Brandon McQuietor
Augustine
7th Grade



Violence : Where does it come from?

What is the world coming to when a child can't even go into their own yard to play without a stray bullet falling because someone thought they would have some fun. Where do we get guns from, look at how guns destroy our lives. The people sell guns to us, they get guns from someone else. Who do you think that someone is? Drugs play a big part in everyday violence . We don't have enough money to import drugs into this country. Who do you think does it? Why do you think that most of the drugs go to our neighborhoods?.. They do it so that we can kill ourselves. If you went to a white neighborhood, you wouldn't see as many liquor stores, crack houses, or all around bad entities that would possibly destroy their neighborhoods. Guns are no exception when it comes to our people dying. When Martin Luter King went through all those things, he did it so that we could have a better education as well as a better future. We were not born bad it's just that most people we encounter don't care at all about us or our futures and we let them alter us... To the end this story I would like to state that I'm a person that stands alone sometimes but I plan to do something to fight the violence around me!!...

Megan Myers
Lusher Extension
6th Grade

Violence

Violence is a sigh,
Of memories not forgotten.
It's a tear in your eye,
'Cause of loved ones gone rotten.
It's in a lie,
Told for childish reasons,
And the screaming to fly, away with the seasons.
Violence.
When monsters are replaced by men bearing guns,
Violence is near.
When darkness overpowers the light of the suns,
Violence is here.
It's a person's scream
At the sound of a gun.
It's done to extreme
When it's a child they shun.
It seems like a dream
When only one is killed,
But there are always schemes,
In which blood is spilled.
Violence.
When profanity on the walls is drawn,
Violence is sincere.
When children are reported missing or gone,
Violence is severe.
Violence is a fire,
It needs encouragement to stay alive.
It will tire,
If we deprive it, of what it needs to survive.
To me Violence won't spread its desire,
From the promise of drugs I will flee.
Maybe that will inspire,
Some future junkie.
If we fight it long enough,
Violence will clear.
As I fight it, no matter how tough,
Violence will disappear.

New York City

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What Can I do About the Violence in My Life?

There are many forms of violence in society today. Genocide, homicide, and gang violence are only a few types of violence. Violence, in any form is terrible. In this essay, I will concentrate on the type of violence committed by kids like us. Teen violence is on our minds so much nowadays. What happened in Arkansas is a grim reminder that we are indeed far away from ending teen violence. I know someone who had her chain ripped off from her neck by a teenager on the subway.

There are many ways to help end teen violence. One way is after school programs. In that way, kids will not have time to go fool around and get hurt and get into bad company. After school programs would stress academics, sports and values to help us stay in school and also get a chance for a good education. These programs get started by kids like us.

Another way of helping kids that need help is by leaving school open later. Many inner-city kids have nowhere else to go after school. Instead of going home, they have to settle for the streets. This is where they meet gang members and drug dealers. Soon, they will start committing crimes.

Another way I can help is by supporting mentor programs. Mentor programs like Big Sisters and Big Brothers are a great way to keep kids off the streets. The kids learn simple, basic values that were never taught to them. In addition, mentors can help the kids with their academic subjects like Math, Social Studies, English and Science. In this way, both the students and the mentors benefit. The student gets a chance at life and the mentor gets the satisfaction of knowing that he made a difference in a kid's life.

So you see, there are many ways that we can help end teen violence. We can only make it if we all pull together. One thing we should keep in our minds is that it is not impossible.

Matthew Kaufman
Booker T. Washington
8th Grade

Violence is a problem for everyone because it is a part of everyone's life. You may not be involved personally in a fight or in a violent crime, but evidence that it happens is all around us. For instance, if you turn on the T.V. all you hear about on the news is violence. Many of the programs we watch on T.V. for amusement also contains scenes involving guns, fights, even murder. Have you read the newspaper lately? You can't turn a page without reading about some awful violent act that has happened. There are bad things happening all around us in our own neighborhoods. I know this because there is never an end to the police sirens that you hear living in New York City.

In my own personal life the violence I am exposed to usually has to do with fights that happen at school. Kids gang up on other kids and lots of times someone ends up getting hurt. From personal experience I know it is hard to walk away when someone is pushing you around. The desire to punch them out is really strong. But, that only makes matters worse for everyone involved. Trying to ignore others is not easy. It makes you tense and on edge. So, in order to help yourself you have to end up helping others realize that there is an alternative to being violent.

I think that it is each person's responsibility to try and do something about violence in our lives. I don't expect that a thirteen year old like myself will be able to change everything but there are ways of trying to make things better. First, I think the best way to deal with violence in my life is in school. Fights usually happen between two or more groups that are arguing over something. It is hard to think clearly when you are having an argument. It seems to me that a third impartial group could be formed to help kids talk out their differences. I would try to get involved in a conflict resolution program in school which would train me to be a mediator. Also, I think conflict and fighting has a lot to do with self-esteem and how you see yourself. I think building self-esteem should be a major part of any conflict resolution program. I also think that kids need to learn how to listen to each other. So many times conflicts arise because kids misunderstand

what some other kid has said. It would help reduce violence if we stopped and took some time to really listen to others so we could understand their position as well as our own.

Next, I would try to reduce the amount of fighting that happens at home with my sister. As the older brother I would have to be the one to set the example and not fly off the handle. If my sister and I could learn to talk things out, and compromise I'm sure we wouldn't have half so many fights. Hopefully this would rub off on the rest of the family. We might even devote a certain time of the day for listening to each others's complaints and problems. If we talked things out we might even avoid fighting altogether. I would hope that the members of my family could take this idea and use it with their friends, or at work. That way talking things out could become a habit that could benefit others.

People need to take time out to think things through. We always seem to be in a rush in this great city of ours. It would take work, and lots of people willing to work at it, but I think violence could definitely be reduced. People need to understand that in order to make the world a more peaceful place we all need to do our part.

Philadelphia

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WHAT CAN I DO ABOUT THE VIOLENCE IN MY LIFE?

by Khristopher Allison

What can I do about the violence in my life? This is a question that I have asked myself before, and I always found an answer. My strategy is to look inward at myself. What am I doing? Am I the cause of any violence? I strongly feel that I am not a violent person because I have self-control. If someone wants to fight me, I know talk calmly to them. I never hang out with people who fight. I also know how to reason with people who are about to fight, especially if I know them. This is called conflict resolution.

I would like to quote a poem from Crystal Allison, my mother:

**“You put your hands up,
You put them up to fight.
You put your hands up,
You think your out of sight.
You put your hands up,
You think everything's all right.
You put your hands down,
And you walk away.
You show them your bad in another way.”**

Another way that I can help stop the violence is not to create it myself. I can accomplish this by not starting or instigating fights. I would never join a gang, or become involved in criminal activities. I can help people through a community outreach program. I can be their friend and help them with their homework.

More importantly, I can be someone to talk to and be a good listener. Being a good listener is very important if you want or need to avoid violence. Talking and not listening causes more fights than I care to talk about. If more people listened to one another, they could solve their problems in non-violent ways.

Another way that I can help prevent violence is not to allow my friends to get involved with drugs. If I let them, I would not be much of a friend. If they become addicted and need drugs, violence can come from that. Addicts are willing to go to kill people to get the money they need for their drugs.

I can also help stop the violence by developing new after school programs for kids. I can even hold family meetings with people in school, and I can ask the counselor if they will help.

Finally, I can go to the school board and try to make school more fun, so that more kids will come to school ready to learn. If they know that school is a safe place, they will not bring the streets in with them. These are the things I would do to stop the violence in my life.

Kharma Lundy
Beeber Middle School
8th Grade

What Can I Do About The Violence In My Life? The Question, The Cause, The Reality

Can I try to ignore what's going on?
No, nor can I sit back and yawn.
It's my life. Who shall live it for me?
Not you, her, them, she nor he.

What can be done about these acts of violence?
Don't accept a code of silence!
Violence is just like a stain,
Our population has slowly waned.

Do they really care about us?
If so, getting rid of violence is a must.
There is blood all around me.
Is this how it has to be?

A struggle for the mortal race,
Earth has such a violent face.
Must I be afraid to leave my house?
Chancing towards a lethal joust.

What does violence do for me?
It doesn't give guidance or much glee.
Crack vials and beer bottles litter the street,
Is this a neighborhood you'd gladly greet?

Must I live my life in pain?
Knowing someone else will soon be slain.
Is this what we really chase?
Violence within the human race.

Disorder, vengeance, slaughter galore,
Souls are forced from heaven's door.
Because of violence, take a guess at what you'll hear,
You'll hear the medic chanting, "She's a goner", in your ear.

Peer pressure and loneliness are common causes,
Violence is the effect.

The Solution, The Effect, The Hereafter

Isn't it easier to say No! to drugs,
Then have your life taken away tug by tug.
What does violence do for you?
Does it make your feel brand new?

Against violence, shall I take action,
Helping others make the same transaction.
Telling kids to join a club,
Don't go visit bars or pubs.

You don't have to be smart to not join a gang,
You know you run a high chance of getting hanged.
Avoid cocaine, weed, and drugs,
You know it's a path that leads to thugs.

Positive influences aren't hard to come by,
You'll know when you've found that special guy.
By encouraging peers, students, and youths,
They will soon know the horrible truth.

Positive influences will make you strong,
They'll show you ways to never go wrong.
Thinking before you act is no crime,
By doing so, you won't do time.

Your accomplishments can be great,
Great enough to be of weight.
Go do things voluntarily,
You don't have to make mischief necessarily.

Listen to the voice inside your head,
And you won't be sooner dead.
All people have many faults,
You won't have many once you are taught.

The Question: What can I do about violence in my life?
The Answer: Succeed in the world. Teach others against it. Tell people of the causes and the effects. Don't ignore it. Take Action. Heal the Earth!

Washington, D.C.

Special thanks to all of the following people who devoted their time and effort to making this program a success.

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WHAT CAN I DO ABOUT THE VIOLENCE IN MY LIFE?

Dear Journal,

Yesterday the police were at our complex. There had been a triple homicide. Three people had been dead for two days. One person was a teenager. Why? Why did this happen? The police found out from one of the victim's children. He broke into the first level apartment after not hearing from his mother for two days. He said he had called at least fifty times between the two days and she never picked up. When he broke in, he found them dead; two were gaged by duck tape and the other was handcuffed. I am so scared for my family's life. I don't want to live here anymore. Why did this happen in such a quiet neighborhood? Why?

I have experienced lots of violence in my life. I have been in an armed robbery, I have heard of people close to me dying because of what someone else did. Why should I be subjected to something like this I asked, but, my mother could give me no answer. I can't change other people's minds if they want to destroy themselves and others, but, I can try to help my peers understand it's not the right way to go. I understand that people may do things out of hate and greed, but, I can't understand why people have to destroy others right along with themselves. African-American people are always saying that whites are the problem, but they never stopped to think about how they hurt each other. Druggies and winos is what people think about us but its not me.

As you can see in my Journal Writing I was scared. If you think real hard, you could see the fear in my eyes. I am but a child. Why should I be scared that someone will kill me or my family when we are in our own home? Why should I be scared that they will break into my home? It should not be. I pray a lot though, I do believe it helps. Sometimes, I think I have seen too many family members die to be scared of death anymore but I know deep down in my heart I still am.

What can I do about the violence in my life, you ask? I can be all that I can. I will do the best I can, because, I want what's best for me. I can stay in extracurricular activities to keep me busy, so I won't do anything that I will regret. I can speak to my peers and tell them to do the same. I can also witness to them about Jesus Christ, who can save you from any sin that you have done.

I can do a lot to stop violence in my life. I don't know about others but I want what is best for me. I have hopes and dreams of becoming something, but I'm not going to throw it all away trying to prove that I am tough.

Mark Parker
Stuart-Hobson Junior High
School
7th Grade

Do the Write Thing...

...to stop violence

No question about it, violence is an evil force in society. What does it accomplish? What's so good about it? Why fight somebody? Uhhh....I don't know. So why even start violence? Uhhh....I don't know.

Well, do you know what violence can do to a person's life? It can end it. **GAME OVER**, permanently. It doesn't stop there. What about the families? Your mother finds that you were killed because of a pair of shoes. Or something you said. Maybe you didn't "fit in". Perhaps somebody was jealous for some reason? So, someone was shot, strangled, or stabbed. Over almost nothing. Will that make the mourners feel better?

There is a place in the city. This place is ugly, dirty, neglected. There is a king. Actually, a lot of kings. Their names are guns, knives, needles, money, drugs. They rule over many people, these kings. As soon as a person starts using one of the kings, he becomes its slave. The king will control the rest of his (probably short) free life. You can beat the kings, though. You can resist. Want the secret? Just Say No.

Why get involved with violence? What do you get? Nice cars, good money, right? Two weeks later, you're in a morgue. Or in jail. Where are your nice cars? Where is your money? Not with you, that's for sure. How about this: open your newspaper, or watch the news. You'll see a story about the successful millionaire who has it all. Do you ever see a story about a successful drug dealer? A successful thief? A successful gang member? No. You will find them if you look hard, though. They're either in the story about overcrowded jails, or, the obituaries.

Say no. Newspapers have dozens of pages just for listing jobs. YOU can have one of those jobs. A steady job, a chance to move up. You won't end up behind bars, or dead. You'll end up happy. The law does not hunt you down like a bloodhound when you have an honest job. You don't have to constantly run, and be afraid when you have an honest job. Your co-workers will not shoot you down when you have an honest job. They will if you go on the path of violence.

What can you do to stop violence? First thing: keep yourself out of it. Don't get involved in any way. Speak out against violence. Nobody will hear your thoughts unless you say them. Provide a good example for others. If somebody sees you, successful and violence-free, they will follow your example. You, one person, can make a real difference in people's lives. You can make a difference in the lives of their families too.

Violence is... Ugly. Twisted. Nightmarish. Bloody. Dark. Filthy. Confusing. Fear... that is what violence is. It is not a song with a good beat. It is not fun. It is not anything but hellish. You come to a fork in the road. One fork is peaceful and happy. The other is silent, and dismal. The choice is clearer than your window. Which path will you take? Do the Write Thing.

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Challenge Program
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Special thanks to all of the following individuals for their support and participation in the *Do The Write Thing* Challenge Program.

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What is the Purpose of Violence?

What is the purpose of violence? Every person has their own perception on why there is violence, and how it can be used to solve issues. Though the person never realizes that violence does not solve anything, but instead makes issues harder to control. How can the country help itself and lower the amount of teenage violence? The media has the habit of recognizing the terrible things that teenagers are doing in this country -- from fighting to murdering their peers and mentors. Teenagers have received a bad rap for many of the things that are going on and it's not necessarily the public's fault for the amount of publicity, though it is not purely the teenagers' fault either. Teenagers have grown up with the idea murder or violence for that matter could make them known in the public's eye; that violence and drugs are all right, as long as they don't get caught, and can help them become "cool".

Teen violence has become extreme and overwhelming in the past ten years. And teens hardly ever received the chance to realize there are positive things they can do within their communities, without drugs and violence. Noticing things that are positive seems to be harder for our society particularly that anyone can be good and only a few can be bad. And as they recognize all the terrible things that teens are doing in this country, teens end up getting stereotyped. After being stereotyped as the "at risk youth", teenagers start to lose their motivation to make a difference in the world. I have friends who would "stream up" on drugs, then slash each other's wrists or beat one another over the head with a bat, hospitalizing someone with their misguided actions.

From my early years, violence was in my family. I never felt accepted for neither who I was nor the choices I made. As time passed, I met a "friend" who introduced me to illegal drugs and alcohol. I made the decision to use them resulting in stupid behavior and denial of the problem. I recall an occasion where my "friends" were attempting push each other out of a moving car and realized I could be next. It was a friend named Amanda whose life I watch, which led me to search for a healthier outlet. A local ABC affiliate, KIMO 13, developed a "Spirit of Youth" approach to the matter of teen violence hoping to motivate teens into doing positive things for their community.

The "Spirit of Youth" committee is made up of teenagers from local Anchorage high schools, whose purpose is to have teenagers recognizing teenagers. The stated purpose is: *"to motivate teenagers throughout the state so that they can be cool with their peers if they didn't do the drugs and violence scenes."* A portion of the committee is comprised of teens who had drug and violence troubles of their own, and came to the meeting to help other teens get out of slumps they were in. Detaching from my "friends", I got more involved to the extent the anticipation of each meeting gave me something meaningful to look forward to.

Every month the teenagers would meet with an adult advisory committee to decide which stories would run on the news every Friday at 6PM and 10PM. The catch was that these stories have to be about teens helping their peers, the environment, and the elderly - stories associated with and based on teens.

Many teens have had problems with the law and drugs, problems that they may not wish to share. Then again, there are some teens out there that are trying to reach others. "Spirit of Youth" has given those teenagers the chance to reach others with a more expanded population, than if those teens went door to door. Showing teens alternatives to drugs and violence, is a positive suggestion towards the problems in our nation.

Emmitt Hill
Alaska Challenge

We Need God in America Again

If there is a reason why there are people looking for a way to put a stop to the violence in their life, they need not look any further. The answer has always been right there in front of your eyes. The answers to all your questions are in a book. That's right, a book! It's not a book on some new age philosophy on peace, but a book that has been on the best seller list for over a hundred years. Yet some people have chosen to ignore it and it's teachings when it's convenient. For those of you who don't know which book I'm referring to, it's the Bible, the written Word of God.

I was raised by a Pentecostal mother who took me to church every chance she had, by will or force. It did me a lot of good whether or not I chose to admit it. It wasn't until I was about sixteen that I wanted to see what else the world had to offer me. I thought I was king of the hill after getting my driver's license because I wasn't called "the fat boy" or "loser" any longer. As long as I had my mother's Suburban, or later on my truck, everyone wanted to be my friend.

When my truck was taken from me because of bad grades, I started doing drugs. By that time, I had more friends or so called friends who took me for all I had. I went against everything I had been taught as a child, turning my back on my parents, loved ones, and worst of all God. Night after night there were constant fights with my parents for some stupid reason. I recall one of the most common conflicts centered on their reluctance to my staying out until one or two o'clock in the morning. I told my mom I was just cruisin' around with my friends, but for some reason she didn't buy it. Because my parents wouldn't let me stay out late, I decided to simply walk in and out of my house whenever I wanted.

The best thing that happened was when I was caught with drugs on me. If I weren't stopped then, I would have eventually found myself in a much worse place than the Alaska National Guard ChalleNGe Program. A Christian singer named Carmen said, "We need God in America again. Stop handing out condoms and start handing out the Word." I agree with that more and more as the days go by. When prayer was banned from the schools, sometime back in the sixties, I believe that the morals of America's youth has been on the decline. The numbers of violent and drug related crimes, however, has steadily increased.

I think we have a problem when our youth are more worried about when they will get their next high rather than getting an education. The worst thing about my last statement is that I was one of those people. I began skipping school and running away from home to do things with my “buddies”. After a few nights of fun, and believe me that’s all it takes, I had a man in blue telling me I was looking at a possible 17 years in prison and \$15,000 dollars in punitive fines. Being that I’m only sixteen, I didn’t get in very much trouble. Some people might say I’m lucky, but I believe I was blessed because God had something else in mind for me.

Timothy Schutt
Arizona Challenge

What Can I Do About the Violence in My Life?

In a small suburb of Chicago, three young boys from the same home were playing together, one of them adopted. David, the adopted child, who was five at the time, threw a toy at Peter the fourteen-year-old. Peter and his nine-year-old younger brother, Paul, decided to take the punishment into their own hands. They took the young five-year-old boy, tied him up and began to beat him with his own belt. They beat him until he lay completely unconscious in the chair, blood pouring from his mouth. David was found later by the mother. Across town, a young man is beaten almost unconscious. Why? Simply because he was wearing a blue shirt in the wrong part of town. Tucson, Arizona, a man is arrested for chasing down and knifing a man inside of a local bar, because of his skin color. These are just some of the examples of hate crimes that happen everyday.

The hatred that occurs everyday in the United States is phenomenal. It seems that everywhere you turn there is always someone that has a problem with someone or something. Maybe this problem will never change, maybe we were meant to argue and brutally beat and kill each other. I on the other hand want to stop the violence, I don't want my children to witness death and brutal beatings over a dollar or two. I want my children to be able to walk down the street in peace without someone waving a gang sign to my child. I don't want my child to get a bullet in the head for something I dressed him in. Some of the ways that I can reduce violence in my neighborhood and city is by involving myself with the youth, helping people realize the effects and dangers that violence results with everyday, and keeping myself from contributing to arguments and help to resolve other arguments that I witness.

A lot of are youth are involving themselves in gangs because they are either taught that way or have nothing better to do. When I was getting in trouble it was mostly because I wasn't involved in any kind of positive program. When I would come home from school my parents would be at work, so I had pretty much nothing to do during that time period. It then was my choice to cause trouble. Once I got into that kind of negative pattern it just kept on getting worse and worse. If I would have had a program in my life I think it would have pulled things together a little bit more. If we could do that for other kids maybe their life could be pulled together also. I believe that programs should be set out for kids who are in their pre-teen stage, because that is when I started my disruptive behavior.

I also believe kids need some kind of consistency in their life, if we always tell them one thing and do another, it won't exactly be teaching them trustworthiness. If we are always cheating, stealing, and fighting what kind of morals do we believe we are setting. I also believe that is one of the biggest reasons why we have the violence in are world, the morals are parents are sending to are children.

If I get involved in some of the programs that we are offering to are children or even just sit down and talk to a kid about some of the troubles he is facing, and share some of the ways he can deal with them. I believe I can change not all, but at least some of our troubled youth. Some of the situations and experiences I have had would help out someone who is experiencing the same things I did. Sure we read about violence in the newspaper everyday, we see partions of violence on the evening news. After we read that little section in the newspaper. How many people actually get up and fight back? How many people figure as long as it is not me, why should I care? We should all care because someday you or me could be laying on that street corner bleeding to death. Sure I can't stop all the violence, but I'm willing to try. Maybe if we all get together and try, we could plug up most of it.

If the public is educated on how bad the violence really is these days. People would get involved. Most people these days watch a little section on television on a hate crime that happened that day. Most of them just figure that there is nothing that can be done about it. That they have no saying in what goes on in the world.

There are programs such as the block watch, and community meetings about the violence that is going on. These programs find ways to solve are problems. I believe that we as a whole have to deal with this problem. Obviously the police are trying their best, but even for them there is too much. How can I get my community to help out against the violence? I can start with speaking at my own neighborhood meetings. Maybe sending out flyers around the neighborhood talking about the programs that are offered. I could go door to door personally, and talk of the violence that is going on in our neighborhood, and some of the ways we could stop it. There are several ways that you and me could help the public relies how big violence actually is. That, I believe would start the defeat of are worlds violence problem.

There is violence in my life, and obviously to start the fight against violence, I have to start with myself. Today in my life it seems violence is everywhere. When people curse at me, I will be the first to admit that it is hard for me not to retaliate towards that person. That is why today I am trying to better myself, trying to learn the skills that I need to deal with the people that like to wave gangs signs at me or wave guns towards my direction.

In my life before, I thought it all was just a game. That I was meant to die when I was a kid, in some cases I wanted to die. Now I have come to relies that life is a beautiful thing and it shouldn't be taken for granted. Not only do I want to have a wonderful and fulfilling life, but I want my kids to live that life also. I know if we don't do anything about this problem, my kids may not even have the opportunity to live a full life. I want to stop the violence for everyone, but most of all, I want to stop it for my children and grandchildren, so they may have a future too.

Vita Ruiz
Arizona Challenge



Violence

Violence is a game made by the devil that young people play in today's society. They don't realize that their life is in danger. Violence is a serious crime that young people do time for. Why are these young people so violence? Colors, drugs, dysfunctional families, and role models are the major reasons why young people are so violent. My essay today is going to be about the reasons young people today are so violent and how people can help.

In today's society there are too many young people killing and hurting one another. Two reasons why are because of the environment they live in and their family. Today a lot of kids come from a dysfunctional family. They see all the violence in their house and they think it okay cause their family is like that. That is when they become violent towards the world. They seem not to care because their family does not care, and what goes through their mind is why should they. That is one of the many reasons why there is so much violence.

So what happens to these young people when they hit this point? They turn to gangs and drugs because that is the only place they have to go. This is when they start being so violent towards people their own age. Killing one another over colors in gangs, and skin color. Red, blue, black, white, and brown are the five colors young people get hurt or killed over. They do not realize their life is in danger or they do no realize the seriousness of the crime and the fact that they will have to pay for it. All they are trying to do is be there for the people they love. They are hurting themselves through their actions and by doing drugs, but they don't see it that way. They see drugs as more like medicine to make them stronger and better.

Role models are another reason young people turn to violence. Half of these young people look up to somebody in their life that is in jail for violence, or out selling drugs, doing drugs, or gang banging. They look up to these people and they want to do everything they are doing because they think it is so cool they want to be just like them. They end up following in their footsteps.

How can we help these young people out is the question a lot of people want to answer. In my opinion I think that they should have more programs out there for kids. They do have programs out there for teens, but how are they suppose to know about it if they don't go to school or have no contact with the people who know about any program. We should go out to the street and talk to these kids. Kids talking to kids is also good because often times they won't listen to adults. They want to hear from kids who came from where they came from and have them tell about the program, and how it help. I use to be so violent and I know that I can go out and talk to those teens and tell them about these programs and also about how I use to be. More important to talk to homies about this program, the little that is left of them.

Amanda Casey
Arkansas Challenge

In Loving Memory of My Mother

To whom it concerns,

Violence has had a big impact on my life ever since I was eleven years old. My memory keeps flashing back to that fateful day when my mother and father were screaming, hitting, and cursing at each other. They finally decided to get a divorce, which made my life even more confusing. I was young and did not have anyone except my older brother. He was the one that was always there for me; he was the one who dressed me in the morning and tucked me in at night. He was basically everything I had.

One night I was staying at a friend's house when I received a phone call at 3:00 a.m. I wondered to myself, who could that be at this hour? It was my father commanding me to get my clothes together and be ready in ten minutes. When my father and brother showed up, my father sent my brother in to get me. He walked up to the door looking very upset. With tears in his eyes, he said, "Let's go." I became extremely worried. I had never seen my brother this upset before. I asked my brother what was going on. He told me to just hurry up and he would explain everything to me later. He was speaking to me very forcefully which was very unusual. At that moment I realized something was terribly wrong. I got scared inside and started crying. I didn't want to go but my brother carried me to the car anyway. I sat in the car with my brother and father. The alcohol fumed from my father's breath. I clutched the dash as my father began to drive very fast. "Slow down," my brother yelled. This thought had also entered my mind.

We finally arrived at this strange house where my mother was inside. My father got out of the car and slammed the door. We knew better than to get out. With heavy steps, my dad walked up to the door and knocked forcefully. No one answered. My father paused for a moment then proceeded to kick the door down. He found my mother lying on the floor unconscious and not breathing. My father picked her up and carried her outside. He was crying so hard that he could barely breathe. My brother got out of the car and called "911". The ambulance showed up about ten minutes later. The paramedics had to pry my father away from my mother. We met the ambulance at St. Mary's Hospital around 4:00 a.m. that morning. We waited, hoping for the best, for about an hour. The doctor slowly walked over to my father. We could tell it was not good news by the look on his face. My mother was pronounced dead on arrival. She had overdosed on illegal drugs.

Violence has changed my life and the lives of my family members. I was given a true reality check on life. I have had to become an adult way too fast. I believe violence cannot be stopped completely, but I believe that if the teenagers do their part it could help save lives in the long run.

Samuel Summers
Arkansas Challenge

Violence

Every day many people are involved in violent acts or are the victims of violence. There are many types of violence. It affects many people differently. Some types of violence include conflicts between races or even friends. Drug abuse is a huge factor among gang violence. The following paragraphs will hopefully convince people to do the right thing, which is being positive and helping others.

There are many situations where violence is the end result of conflicts between individuals, races, and countries. Meeting new people can be healthy; on the other hand, some people feel uneasy or anxious when meeting new people. Fights, riots, stabbings, and shootings can end up being the untimely conclusion to some young man or woman's life. When a situation gets out of hand, people get hurt. In some cases people even die.

When I was a young boy my father had an alcohol problem. He always inflicted mental and physical abuse on my mother as well as my brother and me. He would get drunk and belligerent with anyone, no matter whom that person was. He had the mentality that people couldn't understand words. He thought his fist against my mother and our family was the answer to his problems. I was too young to understand violence, and the quarreling that was going on in my life. One night my mother had enough of the violence. She took me in her arms and we fled in her 1969 Volkswagon Beetle. My father, being highly intoxicated and unstable, pulled his 357 magnum and fired three shots at our car. Two of the bullets penetrated the rear; luckily we were not injured during the hostility.

When I reached my adolescent years, my only ambition at the time was to actually get to know my father. I convinced my mother to let me find out for myself how my father really was. I moved into his house soon after that. I soon realized he was a great father as well as a war hero until he went out drinking. My father has no thought or reason while he is intoxicated. I left the violent scene before I was injured or lost my life. People with alcohol and drug problems don't realize they are not only hurting themselves but others as well. No one has the ability to control emotions while he or she is under the influence of drugs or alcohol. Violence hurts people in many ways.

Controlling violence is very important, especially in a hostile situation. Self-control can help you think problems through. During a situation think to yourself, is this the best possible action, or will I go to jail or even get killed for my actions? Ask yourself how the choice that you make will affect people involved in 5 minutes. Thinking past 5 minutes can save your life. Another way to stay away from violence is to stay cool, calm, and collected. People can learn a lot from or about a person by just listening to them speak. Anyone can make an assumption in the first couple of minutes of meeting someone.

It is often that friends have conflicts with one another. These feuds are small and usually nonviolent, although, in some cases tragedies can occur. When you are having a disagreement with a friend, it is better to give each other some time alone. Usually both sides will analyze the situation and see where the other person has his difference. In the end friends will still be friends. Sure they have disputes. There is no reason violence should be a means of solving problems. It is better to agree to disagree than it is to continue arguing and letting violence come between friends.

There are people who choose to join gangs all over the world. Gang life is a very violent way of living. Everything gangs are involved in is in one way or another violent such as the initiation or jumping in of someone. The newcomers are told to fight everyone in the gang for seven minutes to prove how much heart they have. There are two places violence leads a gang member. Those two places are prison and or the cemetery.

My brother is an exceptional example of what violence can do to people. As well as not thinking past 5 minutes and not making rational decisions, he has a 17 to 25 year sentence for attempted murder. A drug addict stole a rather large amount of drugs and money from my brother. My brother felt his only choice was to kill the man for stealing from him. So what we have now is one man letting violence influence his decisions negatively. Now a man is in a wheel chair and my brother is in prison. I was grateful neither my brother nor the thief was killed. My brother has had adequate time to realize his problem with vicious, unlawful, irresponsible acts. The following is one of the many poems I've received from him behind those prison walls:

TIME

Seeing a light.
But surrounded by darkness.
Hearing the wind howl through the razorwire,
A chill shudders through my body.
Even though my soul is on fire.
Away from the ones I love.
I regret all of the bad things that I have done.
Why did it have to be this way?
Remembering all the good times,
that I thought would never end.
Wishing I never took for granted
the presence of my good friends.
Now I stand alone
In the place where time stands still..
Don't feel pity for me though!
Just understand the way I feel,
As your eyes follow the words of another prison poet
You don't want to walk in my shoes

or live in my world.
As I reach one person
To stop them from doing crime
I know that I have done my part
to stop my brothers and sisters
from doing any time.

A.C. Summers

After reading this poem from my brother, it helped me to realize how important it is to keep violence down. I've made a firm decision to learn from the past and proceed to succeed in the future. Free as a bird in the great blue sky.

In conclusion, many people have been hurt because of violence. Please help me and others keep violence out of our lives. I want to help those who still have to live in the violence. Violence is not the answer to any problem. It causes too many problems that could have been resolved by thinking positively.

Amanda Cordova
California Starbase

What Can I Do About the Violence in My Life?

Violence is around us, everywhere we look. An act of stupidity is an accurate definition for it. There is almost never a need for violence. To me, the only way violence is acceptable is in self-defense. If you are being attacked and it is the only way to save your life, then you really have no choice. Stand strong. Never be violent intentionally unless your life is in danger and you are unable to run away or find help. There is almost always another solution without being violent.

Violence is frightening no matter how old you are or what you look like. We all fear it basically in the same way. There is nothing fun about it. Ever since preschool I have constantly heard mothers and fathers telling their children, "Violence does not solve your problems." At the time, I did not realize how right they were. Violence will never solve your problems, only make them a lot worse. Don't let violence influence you -- talk to someone, tell them your problems. If someone you know or love needs help with a problem, even if they don't realize it, talking about their situation could help them. Never, ever be afraid to talk to someone who can help such as a parent, counselor, teacher or trusted friend.

Violent acts not only hurt others but you as well. No one will respect you, but will only fear you. Friends are very important but if you are violent, even your best friend may leave you in an instant. How would you feel? Violence is not good and is something that can be avoided.

There are other solutions to violence. You can control yourself. You possess the will power to do so -- everyone does. In the long run you will have a more peaceful and happy life. You have an important job as a role model because younger brothers and sisters, cousins and neighbors look up to you. Don't ruin their future and yours with violence. Set a good example, explain to them how wrong it is and how it hurts millions of people everyday.

Help your friends avoid people and groups who are violent. Gangs are an example. Tell them they will regret joining a gang and may get hurt or in trouble with the law. You would feel guilty if you joined a gang and participated in violent acts because inside everyone is usually a good person. Guilt is like a silent alarm going off telling you, "This is bad, this is wrong." Leave the gang, find some way to fix your problem and never do that again.

Your conscience is another thing not to ignore. Like Jiminy Cricket says in Pinocchio: “Let your conscience be your guide.” It always knows the right thing to do. You must trust it. Also believe in your heart that your goodness will shine through. You will have a better chance of being immune to violence. Practice and share these tools with others.

I promise you, committing an act of violence is one thing you will never forget in your whole life. Help people learn about violence and get help for yourself, friends and family who need it. Do whatever you can to prevent violence in your life and the lives of others, and you will feel happier about yourself and your world.

Alexander Chan
California Starbase

Violence and What Can Be Done About It

Violence is sprinkled into our everyday lives although we barely even notice it; however, it is a major problem in our communities. Most of the daily newspapers and television are cluttered with violent happenings. There are many different types of violence, but just as many different ways of solving them.

Violence comes in many different forms. The most common and most damaging type of violence is physical violence. This consists of robberies, killings and war. So many people are desperate and will do almost anything besides work to get money. They resort to stealing and robbing other people. Robberies may seem small when heard of from the news, but when you experience one firsthand you realize it is more serious than you thought. I have had firsthand experience because my family was robbed. One day I was at school, and my mom came and to take me home early. She wouldn't tell me what had happened until I was in the car. She said that someone had broken into our house and taken some precious jewelry. It was a terrible sight. The front door of our house was shattered to bits.

Killing is also a very terrible thing in our society. A lot of people kill to get revenge. Revenge is almost always a bad idea. It is the cause of a lot of the crime and violence in this country. Drugs also cause killing. People influenced by drugs are more likely to do violent things than people not on drugs. Racial prejudice and discrimination can also promote killing. Because people do not try to understand each other, they are afraid of and violent toward people who are different from them.

Most major crime and violence is reported in newspapers and on television. But many smaller forms of violence escape the media. Violence in television programs can be considered one of those. Violence on television can influence children. Children's shows that have fighting in them are one type of programming that promotes violence in small kids.

Even though there are so many different types of violence, many things can be done to prevent and reduce violence in the community. The first thing you can do is safeguard your family. You can protect your house by installing burglar alarms and storm doors. This does not reduce crime, however, it only protects your own family from it. One thing I have noticed about human nature is that people do not do much about a problem until it directly affects them. For example, people do not try to reduce violence and crime until it is too late and has already affected them. To reduce violence and crime in the community before it happens to you, you can help set up a neighborhood watch in your part of the city. Then when people see something suspicious going on, they can report it and get help for each other.

A lot of violence begins at young ages. If we can stop violence where it begins, it will greatly reduce the number of crimes committed. Imposing programs that encourage kids to not resort to violence is a solution for that problem. Programs can be alternately brought into different schools from time to time. These programs could include teaching kids to accept different races and beliefs. This will reduce racial conflicts.

Getting rid of illegal drugs can also cut down on crime. Drugs influence the body in many ways that are not good and often encourage violence. Reducing drugs means reducing crime. Guns are also very violent. Banning illegal guns would greatly lessen violence. Guns are very dangerous and there should be more control placed upon guns. Making guns harder to get will be a disadvantage for criminals, and will help reduce violence.

Violence is still a big problem in the United States and everybody must do his part in trying to reduce it. Violence is sometimes hidden and sometimes not. People must do their best to find violence and reduce it. I have and many other people like me have been greatly affected by violence and it must be cut down in our society.

Tiffany N. Brown
Georgia Challenge

What Can We Do As Youth To Reduce Violence in Our Lives?

In today's society, we as youth are surrounded by violence. It's in our neighborhoods, our schools, and continuously in our presence. It brings negativity to our minds and we tend to think that this is the right way to solve our problems. However, it is not. There are many things we can do to correct this problem. We must first be very sincere in wanting to make a difference. My ideas to help reduce violence include changing our environment, thinking before we act, and becoming more spiritual.

Our environment and the activities we participate in play a major role in what occurs in our lives. The negative things won't lead to anything good. Therefore we need to make a change. I know that it is not easy to get out of all negative situations, but if change is what we want, then we must give our best effort. Some good examples of negativity are participating in gang activities or the "dope" game. Gang activity is on the rise and is becoming more and more violent, especially when drugs are involved. I can say this because there are times I can recall being in the area where these activities were taking place. We know that these problems aren't easy to get rid of. What I would suggest to youth that are trying to suppress the problem, is to change their setting or try to leave the area, being determined not to return. One way a person can change his or her setting is by attending a program such as Youth Challenge. This program enables one to focus on positive goals and takes away negative distractions. Another way to change from a negative atmosphere is to pack up and leave the setting, if possible. True enough, these opportunities may not be available to everyone. However, there's always a way to fix a bad situation. My motto is, "If there's a will, then there's a way."

Another thing we can do to help stop the violence is by taking a look at the persons with whom we associate. What types of attitudes do they possess? If they are negative, then that will only bring us down and we won't progress. Do our peers influence us to make bad or violent decisions? We need to think about the consequences that we would have to deal with if we perform these violent acts. You could be arrested for illegal activity or you could be physically hurt. More importantly, hanging out with the wrong crowd could interfere with your education or other promising opportunities. Is it really worth it? No. How does being violent help us? When we do bad things, someone always get hurt. But you need to remember that what goes around comes around. To eliminate the negative, we must stay away from them. We need to find new groups with positive outlooks. If we look for positive then we'll find positive.

Finally, we can solve the violence by developing some form of spirituality. We can do this by engaging in some type of devotion or meditation that is good for the mind, heart, and soul. Doing this could prevent us from being violent. It could possibly change our personalities if we let it. Dedicating ourselves to a certain religious activity will eventually soften our hearts and open our minds. Through continuous participation, by choice of course, we will eventually withdraw from the evil that has corrupted us. Spiritual involvement will help people to understand themselves and their oppressions. They will feel free of their problems and pressures as they allow themselves to lift their burdens. Things will eventually start to turn around. People will be so amazed at how much of a difference participating in spiritual activities can make.

To sum it all up, these are my suggestions that we as a people can do to become less violent. We must abstain from the negative environments and try to find new ones with positive people. We need not let our peers influence us to do wrong. We need to think about the future and the consequences that could result if we do negative things. Would it all be worth it? Making the right decisions and practicing in some type of spiritual activity is guaranteed to bring blessings. We must stimulate the mind with positive influences that are enjoyable. Also, ignoring those who intentionally upset us is imperative. Stopping the violence isn't easy, but we must, make an effort to try.

Matt Anderson
Georgia Challenge

Violence

It seems like everywhere I go, I run into crime. Where I live the crime isn't as bad as say a major city, but we still get more than people think. Our house and my car have been broken into numerous times. Drugs were probably the reason. It seems like no matter where I go drugs are put in the picture. It's hard not to give into the temptation of drugs.

Something needs to change in the community I live in. One of my personal goals would be to make the neighborhood I live in a better place for everybody. I believe the community needs to start a neighborhood watch to show others we are tired of crime and are doing something about it. We need to have programs that will give in the society we live in our children something to do to keep them out of trouble. I want my children brought up in a clean and nice environment.

The neighborhood watch is probably the most important program we can have. My house might not have been broken into if there would have been somebody keeping an eye out for trouble. We need to help each other keep an eye on each other's children playing in the streets. Watch for people who might be selling drugs or just look suspicious.

My sister is now 12 years old. I see her starting to talk about some of the same experiences that I had when I was her age. I want to start some programs such as clubs for small children even for teenagers. Just something to keep them off the streets and away from negative peer pressure. I think our children should grow up in a nice neighborhood.

As time goes by the problems in society just get worse. Everyday more drugs are sold as a result. Everyday another child smokes his first joint or does his first line of cocaine. Even though it seems like we are fighting a losing battle. We cannot just sit by and watch kids waste away their lives.

Paul Yancey
Georgia Challenge

What Can I Do About The Violence In My Life?

In my lifetime the pains of society have imbedded themselves within the walls of my mind. I now know how to avoid violence, but I have never been asked to help cure the problem. The problem, violence, is known worldwide. It is like a disease. Its victims are not chosen according to wealth, race, or social standing. In life we have either been the predator or the prey of violence. Can we evolve to a peaceful world?

My mind, now a lighthouse to education, once traveled the weary paths to alcoholism and violence. At the age of fifteen I was drinking a case of beer a day. It took an IceHouse to get my day started. Not only was I the image that statistics employed, but so were my peers. I wanted them to be like me. I was the voice in the back of their minds telling them to cut class and act according to the moment regardless of the consequences. I lead them in circles. When they wanted to excel, I unconsciously broke them down. I was surrounded by the pollutions of poverty and I dared to think of prosperity. I always envisioned myself becoming a ward of the state. But as fate would have it, the prayers of solemn worshippers descended upon me, turning my dreams into reality.

To prevent my generation's downfall from their self-endowed securities of violence, the drug availability must be decreased and intense penalties must be enforced. I have watched the elders in my community set a standard that prohibited drug activity for a five-block radius without the help of the police. This was done by controlling the tenants allowed to rent in the community. The "Three strikes you're out" law in Georgia teaches my generation one thing, "Don't get caught committing a crime over and over again." My solution to this problem would be to provide a person convicted of a felony with counseling and a mentor once they were released from prison. The mentor would have a legal respectable social status in that person's community. He would be a volunteer instead of a probation officer and would have a profound effect on that person. He would also help install this person as a positive image in society. Positive mentoring will help convicts get their lives back on the right track.

I would like to see an age limit enforced on shotguns and rifles. Setting the age limit at twenty-one could reduce the chances of another incident similar to the tragedy in Jonesboro, Arkansas. Two boys, ages eleven and thirteen, shot into a crowd of school children, killing four students, one teacher, and wounding twelve others when they rallied outside for an assumed fire drill. This act was senseless and could have been prevented. There is no acceptable reason why children this young should possess a firearm.

Since drugs are so prevalent and are available in such pure quantities, almost any person can obtain them. In order for people to protect their investments, guns, an active element in the majority of violent acts, are brought into the picture. The presence of this easily obtained power to bear-arms, for some, entices an ego booster. To protect their finances, reputation, and illegal goods they will kill. But, under no circumstances should a man have the right to take another man's life.

From New York to Los Angeles, the same problems are occurring and the same questions are being asked. What can we do to stop the crimes that are leading to unnecessary violence? This question cannot be completely answered by any one person or even a group of people. Violence and crimes are consistent everywhere. There has to be a universal effort to stop it. If there were absolute peace, then the world as we know it would come to an end. We will never be able to control all conflicts simultaneously, but we can cut them to a minimum. In the King James Version of the Bible, it is stated in Ecclesiastes 3:1, "To everything there is a season and a time to every purpose under the heaven." Now should be the time for peace. But, we should also remember that peace is not only the absence of violence, but it is the presence of justice too.

Violence has spread like a disease. It is not only in my life but also in the lives of everyone, no matter who they are. A prime example is in the life of Michael Jordan. Through the eyes of the public he is a superb role model, and he is. But out of envy and greed, his father was killed. Another example is the child, seven years of age, caught in the crossfire in Atlanta's Capital Homes housing complex due to a drug deal gone bad. These acts of violence see no color and judge not on wealth or prosperity. At one time or another everyone has promoted some form of violence. From watching a boxing match to verbally expressing an opinion or a disagreement, simple activities can escalate and become violent.

Again the question is asked, "What can we do to stop the violence?" Everyone must play a role. In a society, everyone's actions will affect each other when it comes to violence. I once read a sign that said, "There are three kinds of people: one makes things happen, one watches things happen, and the other wonders what happened." When it comes to stopping the violence, what kind of person will you be; The mentor making things happen or, just another critic.

Junie Smith
Georgia Challenge

Today

Afraid, afraid I say.
Living in this world victims in society, lost souls of crime.
Survivors through time.

We live in a cycle of disguise
hiding the true self with a mask of anger and false pride.

Gangs lead to murder and wars of hatred.
I ask, "What they are hiding and running from?"

Drive by shootings prove those cowardly
and weak. Why use a gun to prove a point
when it's the mind and soul that show true strength?

We live in a cycle of disguise hiding true self
with a mask of anger and false pride

Drugs and alcohol all play a part numbing the
pain and hardening the heart. Not knowing
if you'll live to see tomorrow and call today yesterday.

We live in a cycle of disguise hiding true self
with a mask of anger and false pride.

Asking myself, what can I do about the violence in the world?
I'll reach out for the hurting; I'll show I care;
I'll take time to listen; I'll tell them it's okay to feel and to be real.

I'll acknowledge each of us play a part. I'll pray to understand before I'm understood.
That's the beauty from my heart.

We have choice to love ourselves, and a choice to live or to die.
Are we able to face the truth and conquer the cycle?

Let's kill the war of hatred and realize it's a battle within the
mind, and break the cycle of disguise hiding true
self with a mask of anger and false pride.

Lisa-Marie Fuamatu
Hawaii Challenge

Taking Charge

I was once in a violent environment. I grew up in a place where violence was a part of life. Mostly every neighborhood near where I live had families that were violent. Every night when it was time for me to go to bed, I heard my neighbors yelling and arguing, and children crying.

My family was also in a situation of violence. Actually, the violence was caused by my father's behavior. My father was a heavy drinker as well as a drug user. My father would always come home from work drunk, and he would expect my mother to cook him a fine dinner. If his dinner was not good enough, he would make my mother do it all over again, until he was satisfied. My father was very cruel to my mother. I couldn't stand it. It wasn't that he physically abused my mother, but he did verbally abuse her. He used to say the meanest things to her and treat her like a slave. I didn't think I could take the risk of saying anything because I was in fear.

By the time I was fourteen I was so tired of my father's behavior, and I knew that someone had to stop this violence. I also knew that I could stand up for what I thought was right; and I did. How did I do it?

My father would continuously do the same old things over and over again, but one time it got especially bad. My father and mother were arguing because he had come home all drunk. My father ordered my mom to do his food--my mom refused. I was in shock at that moment because usually my mother would listen. I became scared because I knew that the argument would get out of hand. My father became so upset that he was about to strike my mother; in fact it was very close, until I ran in front of my dad and told him, "You mess with my mother, you mess with me first!" My dad looked at me and told me to get out of his face or else he was going to hit me. "Here is my face," I told my father. "Do it." My father walked away, went straight to his car, and drove off.

The next day, my father came home. He was sober, but he had a hang-over. I called for a meeting. My mom, my dad, and I had a talk about my father's behavior. I made my dad talk about his anger, then I told my mom to talk about how hurt she feels when my father comes home drunk and picks on her. Then I talked about how I was feeling and why I thought my father's behavior was wrong.

Within a week, my father joined Alcoholics Anonymous. I was surprised how his behavior changed. They did a really great job. He became the father that I really wanted and the one for whom I had waited for such a long time. I can now communicate with my father a lot better. Whenever I have problems, I can go to my father rather than just going to my mother. My father has also found the Lord and is now an officer for our

church. Perhaps the best thing about my dad is that he is a great supporter of my family.
Thanks to God.

Jamey Jackson
Hawaii Challenge

Put Possible Prevention in Perspective

Violent behavior rage began the war
Bloodshed in battle this becomes predicted and foreshadowed
Violence is noise erupted through silence
Peace forever some don't buy it
I heard some noise like rapid beats from a drum
Where's trouble?
Here it comes
Gunshots shatter
People began to scatter
Rushing crowds stomping
Bodies began dropping
Description of the place where I'm from
Not to brag just to relate
From the heart pure in state
Fist fights became trigger brawls
Get in one and you'll be in the line-up
Against the wall
My feet held like traction
As the road of life twists
A boy became a man through enlightenment
And options I've never forgotten
Listen--this isn't stopping

Rule 1

Think of instigators as player haters
Where's their love at?
They're your real enemy
Know that

Rule 2

Drugs and alcohol affect your judgment
Sober up and see where the grudge went

Rule 3

You're a product of your environment
If you're violent
Try changing it
Take a vacation--get away from the occupation
Breathe a little
Let off some steam like that kettle

Rule 4

Give your mind time to debate
Too much--huh--need to isolate
It's a simple remedy
When stress triples heavily

Rule 5

Take up a hobby or a sport
Work off that energy but possibly
Spin it positively

Rule 6

Did I forget to mention
Anger and rage cause tension?
Too much and you might say, "What's up?"
Now you're fighting
Oh well
Licking your wounds in the jail cell
Rules 3, 4, and 5 can assist you with this
They prevent it

Rule 7

Seek a higher power
God helped me through my darkest hour
Choose your own faith
The choice is yours to make
Whatever you do--don't hesitate

Rule 8

Kind of like rule 7 plus 4
I said it before--but
Find time for prayer while alone
Looking for a piece of the zone
If you have problems
God will help you solve them

Rule 9

Talk to a senior
They've seen war
Mention options that you've never heard before
Teach you tolerance and patience
For every situation

Rule 10

What happened to sucking up pride and letting things slide?

This is the hardest

But it needs to be done

Regardless

Ohavyah Goodlow
Illinois Challenge

What Can I Do About Violence in My Life?

In this world today there is so much going on, which makes it very hard to concentrate on the important things in life. One of the most important situations going on in society today is violence. Violence has taken so many dreams, goals, and loved ones, that it has taken over and affected our younger generation.

We as the younger generation need to start focusing on what's important in life, which is life. There are too many irresponsible young people in society that walk around without a care in the world. What I mean by that is that they have no goals, no dreams, and most of all no self-respect, which gives them the "I don't care" mentality. The older generation has to set the standards so that the younger generations may follow in their footsteps as the older brother would with the younger brother.

Violence has become a day-to-day routine, whether it's in the homes, the neighborhoods, or by peer pressure. Peer pressure is one reason why violence has overcome so many of our youths. A lot of young people are talked into violent acts in order to fit in, to be accepted, for protection, or just to impress someone. Sometimes violence is an act to get back at someone, whether it is a loved one or someone off the streets. Another reason why I think peer pressure has been a cause of violence is because of the role models the youth pick. When parents ignore their children, it makes the children feel as if they are not wanted, or as if no one loves them, which I think triggers the child to fall into the wrong crowd and onto the negative path of violence.

In order for this problem to be solved the older generation must show that they care. The younger generation must also pull together, be strong, and show respect and unity toward one another. We must also be considerate and lend that helping thought, idea, and hand to those that need and want it. Unfortunately, there is a mass majority of young and older people that could care less about giving someone a helping hand.

Working together as a team and setting motivational groups, as well as talk sessions, can bring a lot of young people together so that they may focus on something positive. By something positive I mean things such as setting goals, making plans to move themselves from that environment and giving them the opportunity to make a change in their lives. It will not be an easy task, but with perseverance and self-motivation anything is possible.

If we can get positive adults, or even positive young people to reach out to the young people and hold their hands in the right direction, it would make a whole lot of difference in their lives. A lot of young people need that type of attention and guidance.

The military youth programs offer at-risk young Americans a chance to make a difference in their lives and give the youth a chance to make decisions in life that they weren't able to make when in the violent environment. An outstanding program such as the Lincoln's ChalleNGe Program provides the opportunity for youths to set goals, make career choices, and learn tolerance and discipline, which are needed most of all.

I myself have overcome a lot of things in life such as drugs and violence. All it takes is for an individual to believe in them and show that they can accomplish and achieve whatever they want to in life.

If we can start out with making goals and changing our acts, we will see a change in society, such as more high school graduates. This will cause a decrease in the crime rate, and will result in more young people making adult decisions to make the best out of life. The youth in America have demonstrated that it is impossible for them to unite as a group and agree on a common goal; however, unity remains the most powerful tool on earth to change the condition of something or someone.

**Jessica Ryniec
Illinois Challenge**

What Can I Do About Violence in My Life?

There are many things I can do about violence in my life. First of all, I can try to be a good role model to my younger brother and sister. Secondly, I can make smart choices. Lastly, I can try to help others make smart choices in their lives.

To begin with, I can be a good role model for my younger brother and sister. My mother has always told me that my younger brother and sister look up to me and whatever I do they learn from. I can listen to my parents, do what I am told to do, and not get an attitude when I disagree with something. These things are positive things that I would like my younger brother and sister to say they learned from me.

Secondly, I can make smart choices in life. I alone can decide if my future will be a good one or a bad one. For example, I can choose not to do drugs, not to get involved with gangs, to listen to my parents, to try my best in everything, and not give up. Those choices will help make my future a better one.

Thirdly, I can try to help others make smart choices in their lives. I can talk to people and help them see that they deserve more in life than drugs, gangs, and all the negative things that those examples would bring on. I could help them stay in school. For example, if they have problems with school, I can help them study. If they feel that they need to be involved in a gang, I could try to show them that gangs only bring on negative effects.

There are many things that I can do about violence in my life. First, I can try to be a good role model. Secondly, I can make smart choices. Lastly, I can try to help others make smart choices in their lives. These choices, I believe are the most positive ones I can make because I am helping everyone. I am helping the younger generation, my generation, and the older generation. I am doing this by making myself a good role model for all younger generations, I am helping myself succeed and I am helping the older generation by making sure the younger generation does good and the older generation will not have to worry as much.

What Can I Do About Violence in My Life?

There are so many things
I wish I could change
Like the need for drugs
And the popularity of gangs.

I wish I could help
The younger generation
To walk towards their goals
And never to run.

I wish I could show people
How to be all they could be
To not settle for just anything
But go for the highest possibility.

To be able to walk down the street
Without watching over your back
Not being worried about drunks
Or hypes strung out on crack.

No more riots
No more fights
No more gangs
Or gun shots at night.

If we all come together
And have the passion to strive
We can all be a part of
Stopping the violence in our lives.

Angie Goleman
Louisiana Challenge

Stopping the Violence

One late night
While I was asleep
I heard a bang
And ran to the street.
I fell to my knees
When I saw him lying there
My baby brother
With golden brown hair.

With tears in my eyes
Trying not to cry
I said, "Baby brother, please hold on.
Please don't die."
He said, "I love you, Sissy,
With all of my heart
And I am sorry
But now we must part."

I looked at his face
With nothing to say
Just thinking he will never see
Another sunny day.
As he closed his eyes
And laid so cold
I wondered how could this happen
To someone so bold.

He was just a baby
Trying to act like a man
Who was killed
As he took his final stand.
I asked myself
How could this be?
Why did this violence
Take my brother from me?

I told my parents
What had just taken place
They just stood and cried
With a sad lonely face
They fell to their knees
Looked up at me
And said, "Lord how did all of this
Come to be?"

My parents looked up
With frowns on their face
And asked what could they do
With what had just taken place
I knew the answer it came right then
So I said we could start loving each other
So this will never happen again.

Violence is a big part of everyday life in today's society. I urge people to start standing up for themselves and take actions to see what we can do to help prevent a lot of the violence going on in the world today.

I am 17 years old and I have already seen violence play a big role in my life. When I look back through the years to try and think of happy moments in my life I can't think of any. I now know why. From the age of 12 to 15 years old I was hanging out with gang members who said they would always be there for me and drug dealers who said if I ever needed anything to turn to them. I really never realized how bad violence was until my boyfriend was killed in a bad drug deal.

I think to prevent violence in today's society people should start taking responsibility for their own actions and then worry about other's actions. I also believe people need to try and help themselves before they try to help others because if one person without the right knowledge tries to help someone else without the right knowledge nothing is going to get accomplished. I think that if people would try to learn the real meaning of life the way God intended it to be instead of the way society intended it to be we would have no problems.

Violence has become more than just a little problem, it has become a major crisis. I think that if we all pulled together and learned the real meaning of life the way it was meant to be we would be so much better off and happier with ourselves. I believe as long as we all pull together and put forth our best effort we can do anything.

Jesse Bateman
Louisiana Challenge

What Can I Do About Violence in My Life?

Violence plays a major role in people's lives these days. Everywhere you look somebody is getting shot. I think a lot of the violence has something to do with drugs. I wonder what I can do about the violence in my life.

Here is one example of how violence has affected my life. Five of my friends and I were hanging out at another one of our friend's house. All of a sudden two people who we thought were our friends walked in with guns. They demanded that we give them all our drugs and money, and when we told them that we didn't have any, they started shooting. Two of my friends died and another one was paralyzed from the waist down. One of the ones that died was my best friend, he got shot in the head and died instantly. The other one that died got shot in the chest and he died the day after. The one that was paralyzed was shot in the stomach. I was so close to being one of the ones that got shot that night, and I thank God every night that I wasn't.

One of the things I can do about the violence in my life is I should pick my friends more carefully. A lot of people don't believe their moms whenever they tell their kids that they are hanging around the wrong crowd, but I am here to tell you, nine out of ten times whenever your mom tells you that, she is telling the truth. Even if you disagree with her, find new friends anyway. I wish I had listened to my mom whenever she told me that, instead of finding it out the hard way.

Another way I can change violence in my life is change some of the places I go with my friends to hang out. Common sense tells you if you don't want to be around violence then don't go places that you know is a bad place to be and is known to have a lot of violence. I know you can't always avoid violence, but most of the time you can.

Drugs also play a big part in violence these days. I have done a lot of stupid things while I was on drugs. I would get into fights with my friends for no reason at all. I quit school because drugs had me not caring about anything. I went crazy one night and started punching holes in a coke machine and slashing people's tires on their cars. I went to jail for that. The bad thing about drugs is that you don't think about what you are doing. The next day you think about what you did, and how you can't believe you did that. Drugs and violence really messed my life up. I have been trying for the past year to change my life and stop the violence in my life.

I have realized that drugs and violence is not the way I want to live my life. Violence has made a dramatic change in my life. When I saw my friends get shot like that, I knew I was doing something wrong and had to change my life around, or maybe next time it could be me. A couple of ways to stay away from violence is to pick your

friends carefully, don't go places known for violence, and last but not least stay away from drugs.

Joung-Hyun Ahn
Maryland Challenge



Do the Write Thing

The sounds of gunshots. The sound of bullets slicing through the polluted air. The sounds of police sirens cruising up and down the streets. These are just a few of the sounds many adults, teenagers, and children living in inner cities hear. As much violence as there is in the United States, it seems almost impossible to improve on this growing epidemic. But if everyone, political leaders, communities, individuals work together to make their town a 'better place to live', then there is no telling what the United State could be like.

Being a seventeen-year-old teenager living in the suburbs, I have not witnessed the most violence or the worst violence, but I have seen some violence. Violence is violence no matter how big or small. In my point of view, someone beating up someone is the same as someone shooting someone. Both acts make our beautiful country ugly. Both acts will have citizens live in fear, and both acts are violent.

No one is perfect either. No matter how good or how patient someone tries to be, at some point, that person will get ticked off and explode in rage. That's where people get beat, jumped or shot. We all need to learn how to control our anger and use it in constructive ways or find a hard wall to punch it as long as you're angry. Sooner or later, you'll forget about your anger and concentrate on how much you are in pain.

There are many ways to control violence. I say control because no matter what you do, violence will be there in one form or another. Communities can set up recreation center where the youths can congregate and instead of battling it out with guns they can battle it out with a basketball. There can be mandatory classes for juvenile offenders that will teach them to control their anger and the consequence for their actions. Lastly, laws can be stricter on violent law offenders. In my opinion, everyone should have a second chance, just as I'm having a second chance being in the program. So I believe that juvenile offenders should be given second chances on the minor crimes.

All in all, we are all human beings. We all need to stop the killings and beatings and all the violence to conserve the human race. No matter what color you are, we are all of the same race, the human race. Also, violence is violence no matter how big or small. So let's all live out of fear and in peace.

Kimberly Wood
Maryland Challenge

How to Stop the Violence

How to stop the violence is a question many people ask but the answer is in the individual's hands. You have got to want to stop the violence before you can stop it completely.

Stopping the violence is not a one step program. It's going to take time and dedication to stop but with the help of everybody, I feel it can and will be stopped.

The first step in stopping the violence is to teach it to all children both elementary and high school. Teach them that violence is not the way to work out your problems – you should communicate. Also, they should have guest speakers come in and talk about the effects of violence because everyday hundreds or even thousands of people are seriously injured or even killed because of violence.

The second way to stop the violence is to have all types of weapons banned without permits. I do not feel as if anyone should be able to carry a handgun unless they are working toward the stopping of the violence. The only kind of handgun should be guns for recreational sports like hunting and then you should have to wait 90 days and have a full background check on that person.

Also, another reason there is violence is people who are in jail and get paroled and screw up again. I don't think they should have parole until after they serve $\frac{3}{4}$ of their sentence and in some cases should not have parole at all.

You are never going to be able to stop all violence completely but if everybody does his or her part, we can make this world a better place.

Violence is everywhere you go but more in big cities, but you still have it in small towns. You have to start somewhere so I say start in the big cities and work from there. You could set a curfew where everybody has to be in by a certain time, and if there are people out past that time, that's breaking the law so you can arrest them. Also, you can clean up the trash and graffiti from you neighborhood. This isn't going to end the violence, but it's a start so please help out your community so it's safe for your kids or grandkids.

How would you feel if violence was so bad that your kids or grandkids couldn't even play outside and the only time you were outside was to and from work? Also, what if it was so bad you were scared to go out before and after sunrise? Just think about that then decide whether you want to stop the violence or not.

Amanda Blackwell
Mississippi Challenge

Stop the Violence

Everyone knows what violence is. Most of us have experienced it in one form or another and we all agree that something must be done to stop it. The statistics on rape, murder, and domestic and child abuse are sky high. The reputation of our society and the welfare of millions are at stake should we choose to ignore this tremendous problem.

I can't stress enough how important it is that we value and respect the lives of our children, our neighbors, and ourselves. We must bond together and unify all nations in order to work toward a solution.

I've seen my share of violence. My childhood memories are scarred by acts of extreme violence. My past has motivated me to speak out for the victims, some who no longer have a voice.

We don't need a television set to witness all the fields of blood created by acts of violence. For some of us, our own living rooms set the stage for the violence in our lives. Others need only look outside their window and they see the corruption that is ripping our world apart. We can no longer hide from it. We can't ignore it and pretend it doesn't exist. We can't even shelter our children and bring them up with the values we want to instill in their minds. It's too close, too widespread. It's time to stop watching and start acting.

We're all so quick to participate, we want to follow the crowd and be like everybody else. Our instincts have become brutal, but it is up to us to reprogram society. Be the example. Don't be afraid to stick out for doing what's right. Mercy, kindness, and compassion are the key to a successful change.

The Golden Rule, biblically stated is, "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you." It's become almost a cliché, something we all learn in kindergarten and forget the meaning as we are taught otherwise by the world. We should have paid attention in class. I wish we would all relearn this statement and teach it to future generation with sincerity and promise.

I've been to plenty of funerals not those of elderly people, who died peacefully in their sleep, not even those of people who died in freak accidents or from one disease or another. The caskets I've looked into held the lifeless bodies of school-age children. The skillful hands of a mortician cleverly hid the scars on their faces, small reminders of endless torture and abuse. I looked at their closed eyes and wondered what used to be behind them. What made them bright? What made them glow?

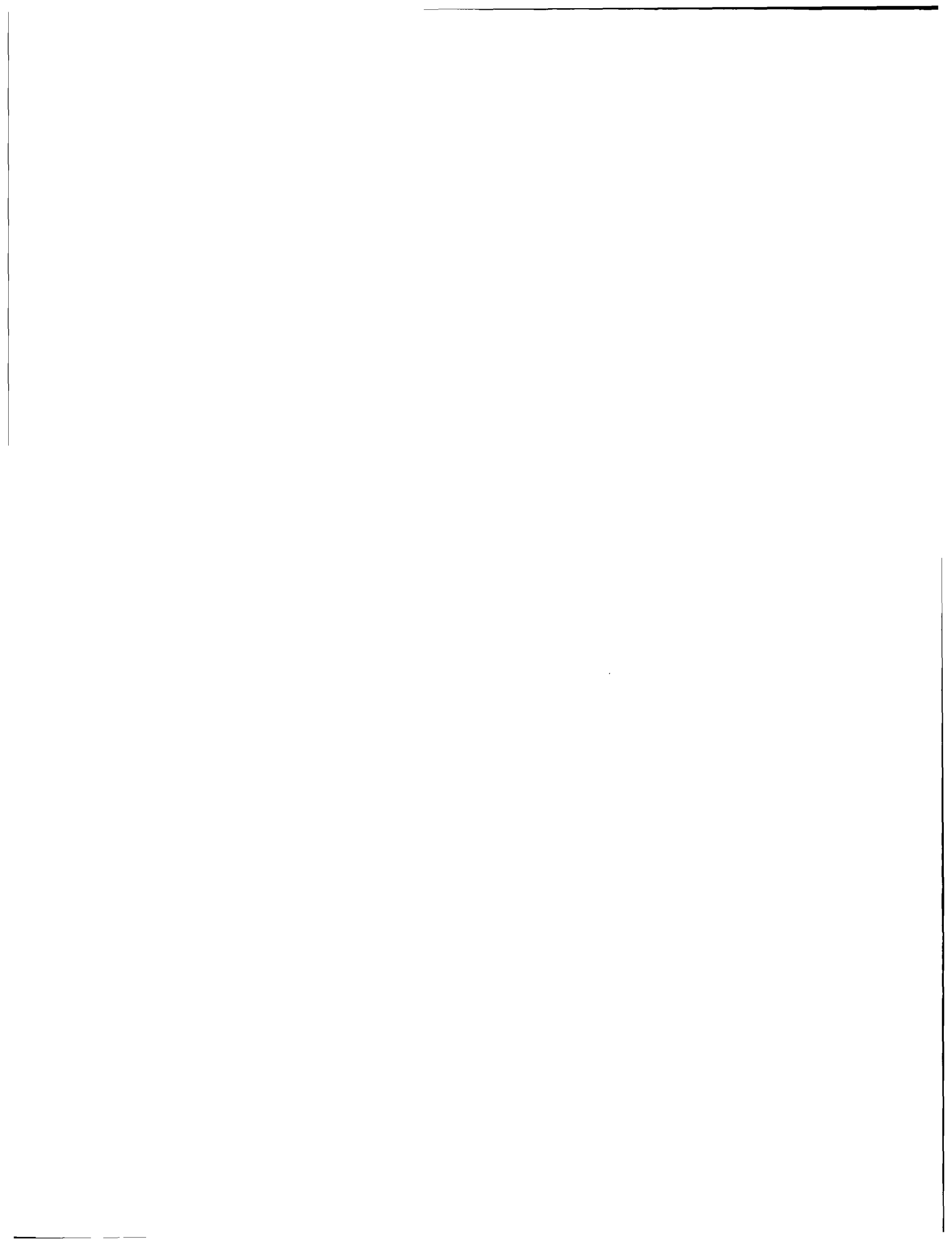
Their wounds went deeper than all the cuts and bruises, deeper than the bullets embedded in their hearts. These children were dead before they were murdered. This world never offered them security or protection.

This will continue. People will die day after day as the result of needless violence, until we are willing to stand up and say, "No more."

Yes, we know what violence is. We could all paint a picture of what it has done to our lives. The time has come to turn our swords into plowshares and reap the rewards of a bright tomorrow and a positive future for our children. Only you can do it. One voice at a time, all voices together.

STOP THE VIOLENCE.

Robert Wildes
Mississippi Challenge



Violence

Screams are heard throughout the house, fighting, arguing.

"You always have something smart to say!"

The older man grabs his grandson by the head and hits it into the wall several times, hitting him either in the eye or the lip in between head-bangs. The young gets away from his grand dad long enough to run across the street. A young woman opens the door to see a beat-up, half-dazed boy with a swollen and bloody lip. There are tears running down his cheeks.

Some people observe violence as something that won't ever happen to them, or they just ignore it completely. It can and most likely will happen to everyone in some way. The story you just read is a personal experience of mine from when I was younger. The situation was handled, but sometimes the conflict can be more serious causing injuries or even death. For example, in September of ninety-seven, one of my friends I'll call Billy was shot and killed in front of a gas station. No one knows the whole story of the situation, but I know the situation could have been avoided.

What is violence? To me violence is plainly and simply an indecent act of physical force. Violence is a plague in today's society. People have adjusted their minds to one way to resolve their conflict, and that is to use physical force. Fear is a natural reaction, and courage to control it belongs to the mind. We cannot control our fears, but we can control our reactions to these fears.

How do we as humans control or conquer our fears? There are many different ways to handle conflicting situations; unfortunately the most popular way among humans is to resort to violence. Some people are raised in a violent home, neighborhood, or school. The only behavior they are accustomed to in handling certain situations is a violent behavior.

One form of knowledge is knowing how to handle certain situations. I have heard the analogy that people's minds are like file cabinets. Whenever a conflict arises, some people don't have much reference in handling the situation. One way to increase our wisdom is to learn different ways to handle conflict, or in other words, "Add more files to our cabinet."

What are some different ways to resolve conflict and avoid violent outbreaks? There are many different decisions we can make in a violent situation. One of the hardest but most efficient ways is to just walk away. Completely avoiding a violent situation helps to prevent conflict; although, the problem of violence still exists. After giving time for the situation to "cool down", go to that person and try to talk through the situation. If that is not possible, bring in someone you completely trust to observe the situation and mediate for all parties involved. These are a few examples of what we can do when a violent situation arises. I have had many personal experiences with violence, growing up in the Memphis, TN area but my grandparents have taught me different ways to resolve conflicts.

There are many different factors that can lead to violence: drug use, domestic disputes, stress at school or work, abusive environments, and many other circumstances. Drug use plays a major role in violence. Some people use violence in order to obtain drugs or money for drugs. Also, violence can occur when perception is altered from drugs or alcohol. Some elements we can control. If drug use and weapon distribution were controlled, violence would drop in the neighborhoods mainly involved with these circumstances.

One way to help control violence in our lives is to find a positive influence or role model. If we look up to someone who works to prevent conflicts, maybe we could change our attitudes about violence. We can also use this to help prevent violence in other people's lives. We can provide a positive influence for the younger generation or even our own peers.

Violence has a major control over our world. Can our world have a major control over violence? There are many different solutions to our problems other than violence. The decision is ours to stop violence in our lives and influence positive attitudes in the lives of our peers.

In the long run, the greatest weapon of all is a kind and gentle spirit. The situation has become our responsibility. We have to make some important decisions in our lives to control the violence before it becomes our children's responsibilities.

Laverne Finley
New Jersey Challenge

What Can I Do About the Violence in My Life?

Hello. My name is Laverne Finley. I am a cadet from the New Jersey National Guard Youth ChalleNGe Program. I would like to take this time to point out one of our nation's greatest threats; violence. It was once said to me that violence is woven in our culture. But what can I do about the violence in my life? There is always a start, but will we ever accomplish a finish?

Many young people buy drugs. They get strung out on a hard substance. Their drug tolerance becomes so high that they can no longer afford the amount of drugs their body demands. Therefore, these minorities steal from friends and families. In some cases, they will mug innocent old ladies, break into our homes, kill our families and take our most prized possessions, just so they can support their habits. Drugs do play an important role in today's violent society. Drug lords resort to violence when a runner comes up short with his/her money. This results in ugly wounds or could even end in death; the possibilities are endless. I figure that it's envy. Envy in our government's green, this is also a cause for violence. We as Americans are tempted by greed.

We as the children of America need positive influences. A positive influence that I am overwhelmed by is acting. The ability to act makes me feel that I can do anything. Acting takes me to a different world, to a world where there are no drugs or violence, unless it's written in the script. May I remind you that a script can be erased, but violence and drugs can not. The people of America know it and I know it. I always knew that the world's problems couldn't be erased or simply solved.

If drugs and violence were eliminated in my neighborhood, my life would drastically change for the better. If the drug use in my neighborhood stopped, I would be able to go to the park without being scared of being battered by drug addicts. If the violence ceased to exist, I would be able to walk outside without the fear of someone shooting at me for no apparent reason.

When Patrick Henry said, "Give me Liberty, or Give me Death" I believe he was expressing that he wanted America to be free from tyranny and free from violence. I believe that if one person stops being violent, other people will follow their example. And hopefully the finishing process will proceed, and the nation's peace will eventually prevail.

Ayesha Miller
New Jersey Challenge



What Can I Do About Violence in My Life?

What can I do about violence in my life? There are three major things that I would do about violence in my life. The first thing would be to encourage my community to start a neighborhood watch program. I would also talk to the local police and have them patrol the neighborhood. I would report any kind of problem or altercation in my community. I believe that every community needs to come together and help with the violence because one person can't be a hero for everyone.

The reason why relatives and friends get into conflicts is because they are not close with each other. They don't know how to work problems out. If I were to have a conflict with a friend, I would just walk away from him or her. I have personally been in conflicts with friends that have ended up in fights. I try to avoid problems; but I would try to talk to that person instead of fighting or killing someone's brother, sister or mother over an ignorant situation. Those kinds of resolutions are uncalled for and foolish.

There are a lot of situations that I have been through personally. In my community there are a lot of young people around the ages of 14–18 selling drugs. They are living on the streets. They're either robbing or killing people because they have so much anger inside of them, and they don't know how to express it. I don't like it when I see our fellow young people in those kinds of situations. For myself, I'm 17 now, I was a chronic runaway. I started running away when I was 13. I had a stepfather who used to abuse me for no reason. I had a mother that was trying to keep me away from my biological father.

When I was 15, I started running away. On November 13, 1996, my mother put me out of her house because she was tired of my running away. I left Inglewood, California, and went to Oakland, California. I met a 27-year-old man. Although I didn't really know him, I thought he wanted to be my friend. I was convinced that he truly wanted to help me, and I had no place to go. I soon learned that he was a pimp and a drug dealer. He had women prostituting for him. At first he treated me well; he didn't make me do anything. On January 28, 1997, this man decided that he was going to kidnap me. He took me to a wooded area in Oakland Hills. There was no one for me to call for help, no phones or lights. I still have the scars to my soul. I returned home, almost a year later on 28 January 1998. This man didn't do any time because I was too scared to go to court. Everyday I do the time, but I have and will survive.

I get offended and upset when I see men abusing women. I also get upset when fathers abuse their children. I don't like it when parents neglect their children. I try my best to help the young people the best way I can. I wouldn't want anybody to go through the pain and suffering that I went through.

I feel that drug use plays a major role in violence. The majority of people that sell drugs have also been in and out of jail for numerous other reasons. But these drug dealers have an addiction worse than drug users. The drug dealers get mad because they credit drugs out to people. Sometimes people do not or can not pay these dealers their money. Often these situations result in violence.

I seriously believe that if we didn't have drugs in our neighborhood that would cut violence down around the community. Our neighborhoods would be cleaner and safer for people to live. There also would be certain businesses that would stay open longer hours. Businesses cut their hours because of the violence and drug problems.

The two things that provide a positive influence in my life are my church and my pastor. My pastor and church are very supportive of me. My church does a lot of things for the community and children.

Now my father plays a major role in my life. He is a very strong, intelligent, African American man. I'm glad that I have a father like him. He has always been supportive of me, even when I made past mistakes. My father and my late grandmother are and were supportive of me. I have a stepmother that I consider as my mother. She has been there through thick and thin. I love her with all my heart.

We as a community must control the drug and violence problems in our society. I believe everybody in America needs to come together and put an end to this problem.

Sadonna Hill
New York Challenge



Cries from the Ghetto

With faith that's strong your greatest goals
You'll conquer by and by.

Though disappointment threatens now
Don't be afraid to try.

It really doesn't matter if you fail or don't stand tall,
The only 'real losers' quit, or never try at all.

So give it everything you've got
And keep your courage high,

And if you do, you'll win the prize that money cannot buy.

You'll always walk with honor, as there is no greater prize
Than knowing, whether win or lose, with all your heart you tried.

Our youth today should 'keep trying' to stop the violence. We have too many of our youth contributing to the violence in our neighborhoods, cities, and towns. This is my anthem and I try to 'live it down'. This next poem is one example of violence that should not have happened.

I knew a young woman
By the name of Susan.
She was very timid.
Not a very pretty woman,
Actually, she was very horrid.
Not a beauty at all,
But in her earlier days,
She had it all.

She wasn't very smart.
She got caught up with her boyfriend
Which caused the death of her.
Literally speaking.

She made him her world,
When all he did was abuse her.
He'd smack her; he'd punch her

And continued to use her.

Then he made her smoke reefer.
First pot, then dust,
Then she started to use cocaine.
She died of an overdose,
We say, there was no one to blame.
Her father blamed her boyfriend.
Her mother blamed herself, saying,
"How could I teach her to love someone more than herself?"

This is a story
Of a young woman I knew.
She died at the early age of 22.
If she had had more guidance
And came in from out of the rain,
No one would have to suffer such loss and such pain.

Violence in my life, what does it really mean? The violence in my life has been very distorting. From the poem above, people can get an idea of what one person in my life went through. One question that I will always have in my mind is, what could I have done to help her?

Something I think that I could have done is warn her. If she did not want to hear that, then I could have gotten her out of her boyfriend's house. She could have stayed with me until she was able to get back on her feet and out on her own. But, now it is too late. Everybody, from her mother to her worst enemy, misses her. Something could have been done. Something should have been done.

Another type of violence that affected me has been with guns and drugs. In this poem I tell what happened and what could have been done.

She saw the boy get shot.
She ran towards the falling boy.
She wept and cried, mourning for him.
"He's dead, he's dead," is all she kept shouting.
He was only fifteen, why did this happen?

She picked him up and carried him to her building.
He was a good boy
But got caught up in the wrong game.
He sold drugs and guns to the local street gang.

He didn't have to die.
He could have avoided it.

If only he listened to the words that she told him!

If you wonder who she is,
She is his mother.
The one who nurtured him, like no other.

She called me up, to tell me the news.
I wept. I cried.
He was like my brother.

I warned him about the street game.
I told him it was all the same.
But, all he saw was fortune, glory, and didn't listen all the same.

People warned him about what he was doing,
Not just his mother,
But me, as well as others.
I guess all that glitters ain't gold.

Now he's dead, leaving just his memory to hold.

In the poems that I have written I have emphasized keep trying to make youth strong and make them see the light. For if they do not see the light, we will have no future. If we do not help them now, there will not be a next generation, and violence will kill us all.

In this last poem I tell how I would feel if violence were to take over my world.

When I am alone I feel like
One lit candle.
When someone ignores me I feel like
One lit candle.

I am the one lit candle
When my life is dark.
I am one lit candle
When my friends need me.

When people put each other down
I am that one lit candle.
When my mother can't help me anymore
I will be that one lit candle.

We need to stop fighting one another. We also need to increase the peace and have more love for another in the world. If we do, violence will fade away. Hopefully it

will never return to see another day.

John Sheak
New York Challenge

Violence in School and What I Can Do About It

"Schools are intimately connected to their local communities. Typically schools are geographically nestled within the community, depend on economic and other support, and often act as a measure of a community's quality. Consequently, there's an intimate relationship between the school and the surrounding community."¹

Today, as the violence in our communities steadily climbs, we look to find the reason why. Is it because of the drugs on the streets, or violence in the media...or maybe its the parents' fault...society? I believe the violence starts in school. Schools tend to be a measure of the problems that face a community and the values and morals of those who live there. Violence is a non-discriminative action...it cares not for race, religion, or social class. It affects us all. It's up to each of us to find ways to prevent the violence we experience and to educate others on how violence affects us all.

Many of my first experiences regarding violence occurred on or around school, whether it was a fight in the lunch hall or a threat to meet after school. But the event that affected me the most (mainly because I didn't think that it could happen in my community) was when the school erected metal detectors at all the doors. Now my school was a pretty easygoing place, seemingly it had no more fights than other schools. The day before there had been a large fight involving about eight or nine kids over a basketball game which turned into a little more. Two kids pulled out a knife and a box-cutter on another student and injured him very badly, which caused blindness in one eye. Upon seeing this occurrence one of the others pulled a gun. This was the first time I had seen a gun pulled on someone other than in the movies. I thought that only happened in places like New York City or Los Angeles, not a small town like mine. The metal detectors became a symbol of fear for me, knowing that I was not safe from danger and that this could happen to me! Many others in this country feel the fear I had that day, everyday.

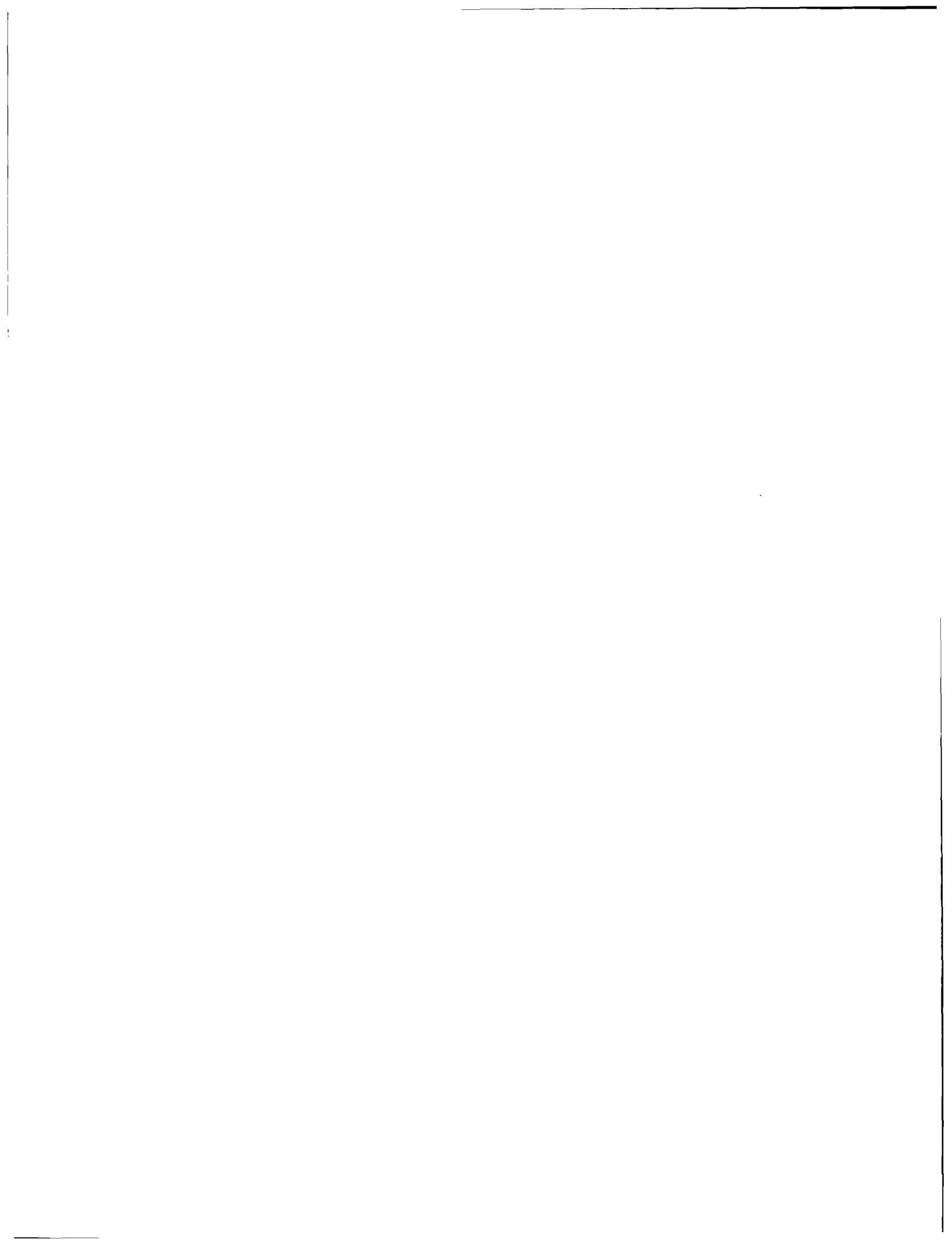
Press release by the Department of Education, Justice, and Health and Human Services, August 11, 1994: every school day more than 150,000 students stay home because they are "sick of the violence and afraid they might be stabbed, shot, or beaten".¹

¹from <http://www.schoolnet.org>

I think that there are many things that I can do to deal with the problem of violence in my life. I can, and will, promote discussion groups and classes in my community on life-coping skills, conflict intervention and preventive measures, and peer mediation. These subjects are good because they would center on finding the signs of potential danger, teach students anger-management, and how to avoid conflicts before they become dangerous. I believe that it is necessary to learn about new ways to deal positively with stress and frustration. These steps would have to be a cooperative effort on the part of students, parents, schools, community groups, and other youth organizations.

I believe these things are essential if we are to stop the violence in schools. Trying to deal with a problem after it has already happened does not work. We need to help students deal with their problems before they happen. I think that if these skills are learned then we will be able to do something about preventing violence.

Brandon Bennett
North Carolina Challenge



Violent Ways

I regretfully admit I've lived a life of sin.
If I could turn back the time I'd try it all again.

Stealing, smoking, lying to myself.
Knowing all that nonsense wasn't good for my health.

Not wanting to live in this life I love so well.
Just another prisoner without a cell.

Doing things that made my mother ashamed.
Wanting to be someone else or even be renamed.

Wanting to speak out but forced to silence.
That's the way it is when you've seen such violence.

Losing mad youth more and more each day.
If only they knew they could've made it all the way.

Who will spread the word, who will stop the madness?
Who will break away from this life of sadness?

Everyday kids fighting for their last chance to survive.
Remembering dead friends who'll never again be alive.

Back in the day you didn't need a gun.
Now kids are killing each other just for the fun.

Jealousy, envy, and poverty are at hand.
When is it time to stop, when is it time to make a stand?

Not knowing what you've done till you've seen the tears in his eye.
Baby boy shot dead and everyone asks "Why?"

Twelve-year old raped with a single tear you can't see.
Ashamed to tell the truth, asking how could this be?

Children growing up not afraid to die.
Crack heads on the corner killing kids for a high.

Gun shots ring out like silent thunder.
Drivebys laying kids down six feet under.
Forced to hustle or forced to steal.
It's a shame when the good got to catch a raw deal.

Throw down your guns and pick up a book.
Turn back the time and take a long look.

Enough walking the streets looking over your shoulder.
You have to realize that we are all God's soldiers.

Forget what you heard, violence doesn't pay.
Like they say, it takes a bigger man to walk away.

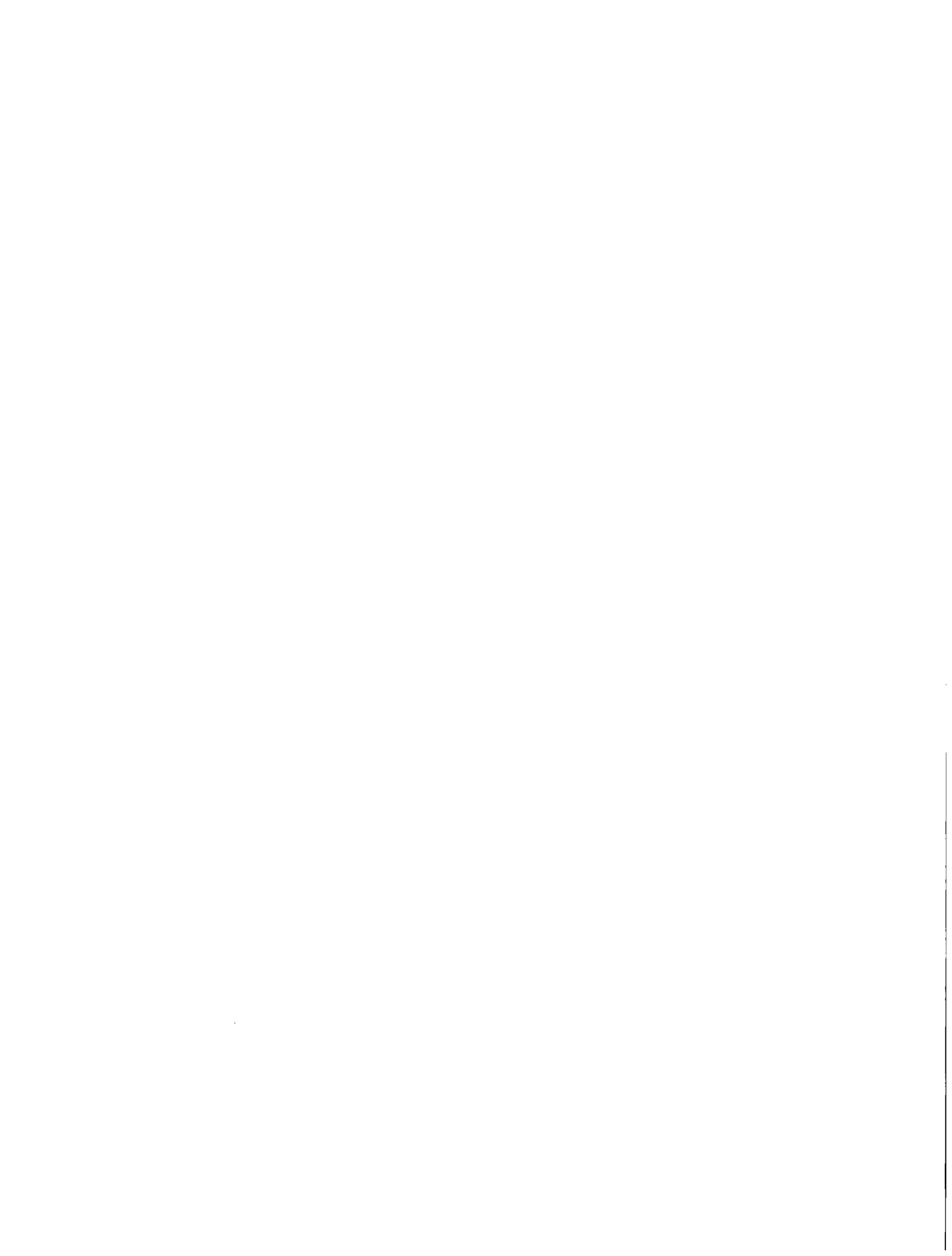
Black or white, it doesn't matter, we all bleed red.
Love thy brother that's what the Bible said.

Stop the killing and complete your destiny.
If not, you can believe, you'll pay for all eternity.

Praying to God that it's not too late.
Give up the killing and give up the hate.

When will it stop, tomorrow or today?
When will we stop these violent ways?

Amy McCauley
North Carolina Challenge



Forgetting and Remembering Violence

Forget the drugs that were abused,
Forget the smell of beer and booze,
Forget the weapons that they carried,
Remember how they'll pay dearly.

Forget the blood that was shed,
Forget the brace that was on his head,
Forget the eyes that showed the fear,
Remember how he's gone from here.

Forget the nose that once was broken,
Forget the neck that had been chosen,
Forget the bullet that went in her head,
Remember now that she is dead.

Forget the screams that were for help,
Forget the promises that were never kept,
Forget the curse words that were used,
Remember the words often abused.

Forget the tears that once were shared,
Forget the heartaches that were bared,
Forget the blood that was on the floor,
Remember now they're gone forever more.

Forget the shots that rang through the air,
Forget the cars that drove by there,
Forget the whispers in the wind,
Remember this, they'll never win.

Forget the fights you parents use to acquire,
Forget the threats your dad always desire,
Forget the times your mom fell apart,
Remember it was never your fault.

Forget the love that once was there,
Forget the way she brushed your hair,
Forget the way mom always made you laugh,
Remember now it's all in the past.

Forget the time you tried to help,
Forget the times you got the belt,
Forget the yelps for mercy and pain,
Remember there was really nothing gained.

Forget the lights that flashed around,
Forget the loud and creepy sound,
Forget the jail door that came crashing down,
Remember now the right faith you've found.

Forget those who hurt and stick with the ones who helped you heal,
Forget the losses, old tight with the father's appeal,
Forget the loss of faith you had, keep the dogma that you gave,
Remember life is given and take it like a little wave.

Forget the drastic part of anything you change, it's all for the better to keep you sane,
Forget about keeping it in, the more you tell the less stress you gain,
Forget the attitude that you have, stay on track of that new path,
Remember to keep your convivial and stay away from the devil's wrath.

Forget about the ways of how violence starts,
Forget the past and help show some impressionable marks,
Forget that violence is a thing of the pass,
Remember education will help us be apart of the class.

Forget the action of the ignorance of the other,
Forget the fall, this is all you need to make it further,
Forget the mistakes that you've made, learn from them and you will have a road to pave,
Remember to stay strong and stand up for yourself and be brave.

Jason Williamson
Oklahoma Challenge

Gang Violence We Are Killing Our Own People

Gang violence has caused many deaths and has hurt many people. It has caused gang rapes, which have lead to unwanted pregnancies and AIDS. There are also drugs being sold to gang members and teenagers. Many people have died from drive-by shootings, some just innocent people.

I feel there are a lot of rapes. I believe that a majority of them are caused by gang members. This causes a higher unwanted pregnancy level. Rape victims must decide whether to have an abortion or put their child up for adoption. Gang rape causes physical and mental pain. The rape victim has to live with a memory of being raped for the rest of her life. They also may have scars or bruises from being raped.

These days gang members, thugs, and innocent people are killed by drive-by shootings. Gang members kill other gang members because of what they believe, or because they are in a different gang than them. Some gang bangers will kill others because they owe them money for drugs. They might even kill you if you look at them wrong. Some are killed these days just for their clothes. Drive-by shootings are deadly for anyone in today's society.

In gangs today there are more drugs than ever before being used. Drugs put people's lives at stake. This is because people could overdose; they could get caught by the police which would result in being arrested. Which means you could spend the rest of your life in prison just for one little mistake. Gang members are now selling drugs to anyone and everyone. Teenagers on the street are buying drugs from gang members. This leads to kids dropping out of school to do drugs, and joining gangs. This is how gangs and drugs increase in the world today.

This gang violence needs to be addressed daily. I think we can help the gang violence, but we must pull together. We must work with the authorities to get drugs off the street. We must preach to the gang members and tell them to stop all the hatred crimes. I believe that if we can only get one gang member helped that is better than none. I know that there are programs out there to help teenage gang members and drug users. I know this because I am at one. I am at Thunderbird Youth Academy ChalleNGe Program. It gives you discipline and education, but most of all it gives teenagers a second chance at life. Most of the teenage gang members don't know there is another way to go. That is why we need to tell them. We could advertise for ways to get another chance at life on television and billboards. I believe we could try to get them mentors so they can have someone to talk to about their problems, instead of them going out and causing more violence.

I think gang violence really affects a lot of people. There are families hurt by people dying from drugs, drive-by shootings, and other gang violence. I feel that we, the people, can help these gang members if they could just see that their life is in their own hands. There are many people that want to help, just to make a difference for the better. I feel that there are many ways to help that I have addressed. I am hoping that maybe someone who needs help will read this, and it will make a difference in his or her life for the better.

Janie Samuel
Oklahoma Challenge

Fallen Rain

Every day too many children are victims of violence. Most of the time it is not intended to happen. I say that because sometimes babies die due to their mother's addiction to drugs during pregnancy. In some cases, the baby never sees the light of day. The question still remains in my mind, "Why do the children have to suffer?"

This is For The Kids

This is for the kids,
The babies that sometimes die-
Because their mother won't stop getting high.
Some people ask the question,
"Why do innocent souls have to die?"
I sometimes want to cry
When I sit and think about
All the children getting taken out-
It's really something to think about.

Some are killed for simple reasons-
Reasons we really can't explain,
Because nobody wants to take the blame.
I still don't understand
Why the children have to go through so much pain...
Children are dying like the falling rain.

They play with guns because they think it's fun
To see each other on the run.
Kids killing kids because of a color...
They don't know how to love each other.
Adults with sick minds, there are plenty.
Common sense? I don't think they have any.
Killing children for personal thrills-
Don't they know, children dying is painful and real?
So, please, don't provoke this deal.
People killing kids for money?
Don't they understand?
Killing babies is nothing funny!

Why do adults make it so easy for children to get guns? I ask myself that question everyday. I feel like the children are being cheated, because their parents are not thinking about them. If they were, they wouldn't leave guns unsecured in their homes where their children could get to them. Parents are not always to blame, because sometimes their children can buy guns right off the street. That is scary. Children buy the guns with money they get from parents as an allowance. They buy them from underground dealers. Some pawnshops are guilty of this sin. I don't see why we don't have stricter gun laws. You can buy guns at the age of 21 and you don't have to do or have anything special to get one.

Children are being killed by adults just for personal thrills. Why do they do this to such innocent souls? They do things like this I think, because they don't have any common sense. They get away with it the majority of the time. When they do get punished, it is sometimes only for a few months and they are back on the street to do it again. We know they are going to do it again because they are not punished well enough for it.

I don't understand why the children have to go through so much pain.
Children are dying like the falling rain.
Each droplet, another lost soul.

Darilyz Mendoza-Rodriguez
Puerto Rico Starbase

What Can I Do About the Violence in My Life?

What is violence? To talk about the violence we have to know the meaning of the word violence, it means: aggressive conduct toward another or toward yourself, here you have two main aspects, the intent of the act and the act itself.

We see violence in many places and many ways. Some places as close as our neighborhood, even as close as our school. We see violence in TV programs, in movies, even in cartoons. We see violence in newspapers.

In the Bible we see the first act of violence, when Cain kills his brother Abel. Through the centuries we have seen many acts of violence. In this days we can see how violence has spread through the world like an epidemic illness.

How does this problem affect our lives? What can we do to solve this problem? Is there something I can do to find a solution or at least make things better?

I don't think about this all the time, but suddenly something happened and made me realize, how this world is so full of violence. This problem has not affected my life directly but has affected the life of people and relatives close to me.

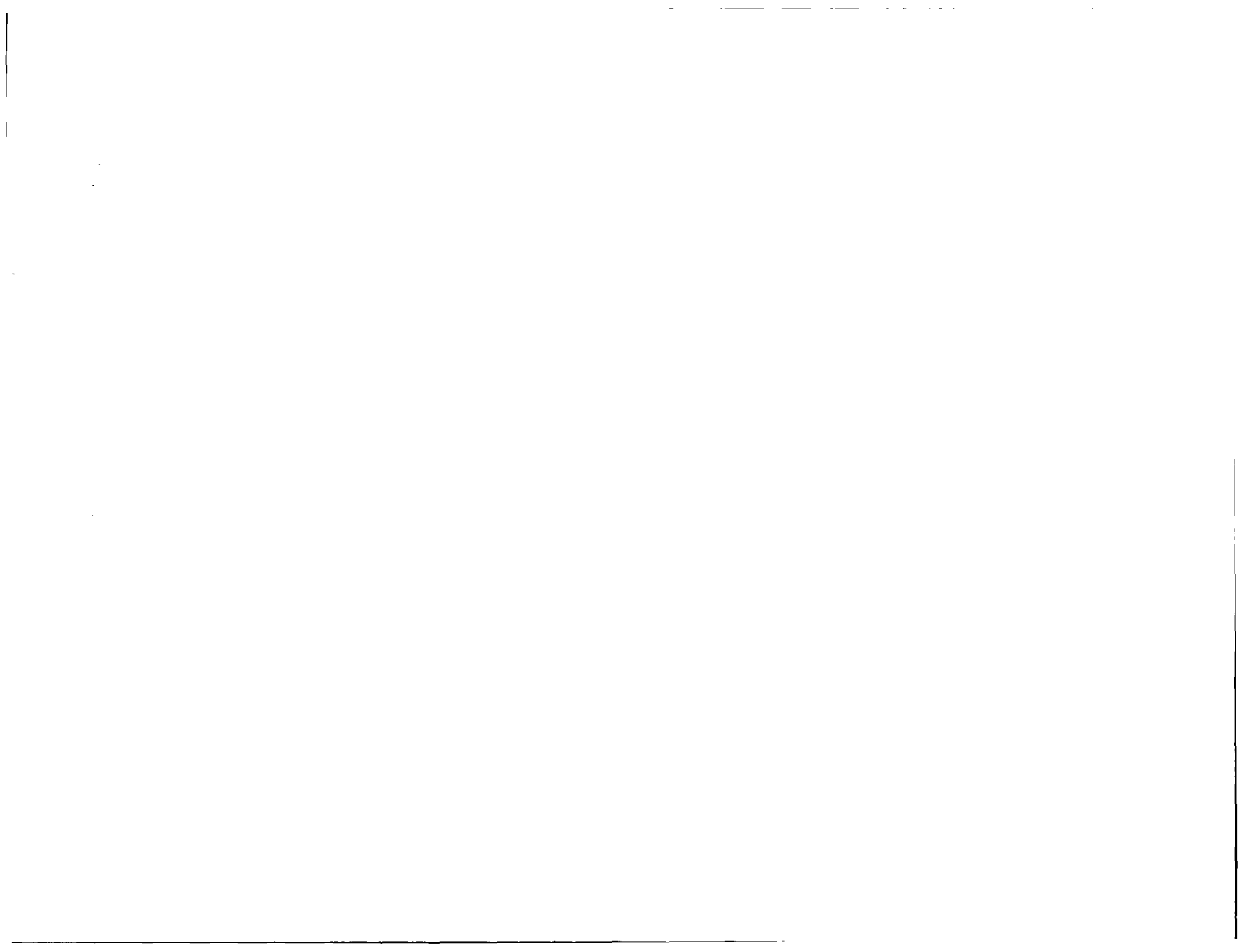
We can see how this problem is affecting our children. We see it all the time, when children hurt other children and teachers and their own family. It is horrible to see how a kid could open fire and kill children and teachers. We might think it is a horror movie, but is a real event.

Maybe we can blame to many causes, but this could not help in any way. Very often the government spends money studying the causes for violence, but doesn't spend enough money in programs to prevent violence.

In many occasions violence is like a chain reaction, starting in the nucleus of the family. We can see the most of the children with problem come from a dysfunctional family. Poverty and ignorance are also causes of violence. Other causes are drugs, alcohol, and tobacco. I think that if we can have more school programs that can integrate parents, children and community, we will start doing something to stop the violence in youth.

Many things can be done. I know that there are many good programs, but there are not enough. If we let God help us, many thing can be done. We must pray everyday for God's help and guidance. And in God we trust.

Gilberto Moran-Olmedo
Puerto Rico Starbase



What Can I Do About the Violence in My Life?

I am a young man of fourteen. I love going to the beach, attending school and specially playing basketball. At my age, I am very worried about family violence. It is the reason why I want to thank STARBASE. The STARBASE program has allowed me to express my concerns over this great problem which prevents us from developing our full potential as human beings.

I believe family violence occurs when the rights of the family members are not respected; when parents act without caring for their children. Parents may react with indifference, lack of interest or concern over what their children are feeling, thinking or saying. Sometimes they argue in front of their children, unpreoccupied by the fear and pain they may be inducing.

It is my belief that violence exists more within the family than in any other sector of society. Many women suffer in their households, beaten by their husbands, as do children and old people, too. Even if these older people are not physically abused, they suffer emotional abuse by the constant ridicule, degradation and criticism received of those who care for them.

Family violence is more prevalent in young marriages, poor families or families in which one or both members have an alcoholism or drug-addiction problem. These abusive family relationships leave their mark since it is likely that children of violent and abusive parents will become abusive husbands and parents as well.

Young people who grow-up in violent family relationships view violence in the family as normal. They do not realize the harm they may cause their own children later in life.

Lack of communication, the inability to sit down, to speak and listen when a problem arises can also lead to family violence. A parent may resort to physical abuse as a means of control in the household, erroneously believing that violence is the best solution. This could have drastic consequences resulting in the death of the abused person who is often a defenseless child.

I think that if parents would find the time to sit and talk, as well as listen to their children, instead of ignoring and arguing with them, a lot of family abuse could be avoided. If parents instruct their children in religious beliefs and the teachings of God, they would have more respect for themselves and others. Children would grow-up more confident and secure, avoiding the vicious cycle of family violence. They likely would become better family leaders.

It would be beneficial as well if children were some how taught to seek help if they are being abused. Abuse results in feelings of isolation and loneliness. If more children were aware that there are people who care, places that they can reach out to for help, either for themselves or for others, then some abuse could be avoided.

My parents divorced when I was barely three years old, yet both taught me the importance of a home free of violence and abuse. My mother chose a new spouse who has helped me grow in a happy household, as did my father. I now have two fathers, two mothers and two homes. I am equally happy in both. From my two families I have learned that dialogue and understanding are the key to a healthy and nourishing home environment. Besides, I know my parents want healthy, happy grandchildren. If my home is safe and full of love, the home of their grandchildren will also be safe and full of love.

We can't allow family violence to continue to grow. Let us unite as good Christians and join hands in the hope that family violence will end.

Again I thank God and STARBASE for allowing me the opportunity to express my thoughts. I hope my message reaches many homes and will in some way contribute to a decrease in family violence.

Christian Leseberg
Virginia Challenge

Violence

Some people consider violence a natural reaction caused by a surge of angry emotion. I agree with this to a certain extent. For example, animals that kill and injure other animals for protection or for food perform natural violence. Humans tend to take this too far, which makes our violence more of an uncontrolled action, than a natural instinct. Most violence caused by humans is because of hatred towards another person, or just simply a lack of patience. Personal opinions are formed by certain individuals, which eventually interact with opposing opinions. This in turn causes conflict, which usually ends up in a violent exchange of physical contact.

Violent thoughts enter our minds at an early age. When kids see their parents or elders arguing and displaying forms of violence, it gets planted in their young easily influenced minds. Television is also a major influence on a young brain. Large portions of children's cartoons and shows have some form of violence in them. These kids, when done watching their favorite show, may try to act out what they have seen, which is normal behavior for a child. A solution to this problem would be to produce more educational programs that teach kids right from wrong. However, it is not an easy task to make a show appealing to kids now a day without putting some form of violence in them. This is a hard fact to handle and it seems the moral standards of today's society promote violence and incorporate it in our every day lives.

These same kids that are introduced to violence at an early age tend to continue their violence throughout most of their lives. They either perform direct forms of violence, like domestic disputes, rape, or acts that can result in violent actions, such as robbery or drug dealing. They start with small things like fighting in school and then progress to more serious crimes.

Gangs are responsible for most of the violence on the streets. Kids usually join a gang to feel accepted as if a part of a family or because of a lack of protection. If parents would do a better job raising their kids and giving them the attention and protection they need, then the forming of gangs would probably diminish dramatically.

As long as there is money and a certain form of power, then I feel there will be violence. People have always fought for the highest position of authority. Different countries trying to win complete rule over the world often start wars. Violence, to an extent, can be an instinct, but in most cases it's a form of revenge and anger. If people would simply discuss things before acting upon them, then maybe violence would begin to decrease. Humans need time to cool down and think about the situation before confronting the one they have an altercation with. Patience is a difficult but valuable trait to obtain. I think it is a necessary tool in helping control violence. If you have a confrontation, back out of the situation until you have an open and clear mind to hear the opposing party's complete opinion. Violence can't be completely stopped, but we can prevent most of it from happening. If we practice patience, then peace will begin to follow.

Melissa Durham
Virginia Challenge

Violence in My Life

Violence is a growing epidemic in today's society. It is evident in our homes, in our schools, and within us. It comes in various forms with various tools to help accomplish its purpose.

Violence was not that much of a problem for me growing up. Of course, I got the occasional spanking when I misbehaved, but it wasn't until I was about 12 that I encountered violence with my peers. I talked about someone behind his or her back and after many story changes she confronted me and proceeded to beat me up. This only made me realize that the confrontation wasn't so bad. So I thought, why not next time fight back? Well, I started to get into fights more often. I guess I was trying to prove something to myself and to my peers. Consequently, I found out that violence breeds violence.

I continued to fight until I was sixteen. I will never forget what made me change my views. My best friend, whom I used to jump people with, was stabbed to death. I really started to think about the effects of my actions on others. I mean, he didn't think that when he punched this guy in the face, that he would pull out a knife and stab him in the chest. He just thought that it would be a simple brawl, like the countless others that he had participated in. The sad, unfortunate fact was that it was not. I thank God that I wasn't there to witness this gruesome sight, for it could have just as well been me. I realized how stupid and petty violence is and how you can prevent yourself from becoming involved in it by choosing your words and with whom you associate.

Violence will continue for generations to come. I can't stop that. What I can do is tell my story to people who are in the same situation as I was in. If I can help to stop violence with one person, then maybe I am helping my community. If the community works together, then maybe we can abolish senseless acts of ignorance. Why let differences of opinions continue to kill our friends, brothers, sisters, and parents? I really hope that no one else will have to go through what I went through, just to realize that violence is stupid. I do know that I will never fight again.

Jimmy D. Bailey
West Virginia Challenge

Reducing Violence Starts at Home

Violence, unfortunately, is an everyday occurrence. Children and teens today are subjected to fights and murders everyday. Whether it is on television or in real life, it still has a dramatic effect on our youth. We need to reduce the amount of violence shown on TV during hours when children are awake. Children should be taught violence is not the answer at an early age. Adults should work out their problems through discussions---not fighting. Parents shouldn't hit their children either. This teaches them that violence is okay. Most of all, we must get drugs and guns off the street.

The adults of today are one of the reasons kids are so violent. They make movies that show and encourage fights, robberies and murders. Unfortunately, our children are watching these movies. If our kids learn violence, they will more than likely live and accept it. Parents should monitor what their children watch very closely.

By teaching our kids early in life that violence is not the answer, we stand a much better chance of them growing up without thinking they have to kill someone because they wore a color they didn't like. The youth of today need to know it is okay to walk away from a fight. If we can instill this in our young children, teen violence would decrease immensely. Kids need to know as long as they are happy with themselves; it doesn't matter what other people say or think.

Many times parents will have two different opinions and an argument begins. Sometimes these arguments develop into physical fights and verbal abuse. Children think, "Hey, Mom and Dad yell and fight, so I can too." Parents need to discuss their problems calmly, so their kids can see problem solving without violence. This is especially important when they are young and easily influenced.

When parents hit their children, this teaches them that violence is acceptable. Children should not be beaten or slapped. Taking a child's toys, timeouts and grounding work better than physical violence. Parents must realize that violence isn't the answer if they expect to have their children believe this.

The largest cause of violence in America is drugs and guns. If what we instill in our children is going to do any good, we must get drugs and guns off the street. If we could accomplish this, violence would become less of a problem in America.

To reduce violence today, we need to begin with the future---our children. They need to be taught at an early age that violence is wrong. Responsible adults need to monitor the amount of violence our children are subjected to by reducing the amount of violence they are watching on television. By solving our problems with physical and verbal violence in front of our kids, we only teach them violence is okay. We need to teach them violence is not the answer. Finally, by getting drugs and guns off the streets, we would decrease the amount of violence in America greatly.

Everyone has a role in keeping violence to a minimum. The next time someone tries to start a fight with you, what will you do? Will you walk away, or will you add to the problem?

James C. Davis
West Virginia Challenge

Violence and Today's Solutions

Violence is spreading across America. Today many people are so afraid they bring weapons with them; some carry them for protection and some for intimidation. There are many forms of violence such as rape, abuse, murder, robbery, and on and on. But there are ways of protecting yourself from violence such as knowledge. Knowing what is causing such an increase in the number of violent acts can prove to be a useful tool against it. Another way of keeping yourself from becoming a victim would be knowing ways to protect yourself and loved ones from violent people.

What has caused the increase of violence? Over the last few years the number of violent acts committed has grown immensely. Here is a list of the major reasons for the violent acts:

1. easy access to guns
2. drug abuse
3. the lack of positive role models
4. excessive violence in the media
5. serious family problems
6. the lack of education about right and wrong

All of the reasons above join together to form one large onslaught of violence in today's society. So knowing why the rate of violence is increasing and its causes can play an important role in protecting yourself from violence.

What can you do to keep yourself protected from those situations listed above? Here are some steps to help you stay safely away from violence.

1. Stay away from places where there might be drugs or weapons
2. Don't walk alone at night or in an unsafe area
3. If you find a gun, don't touch it. Notify a police officer.
4. Avoid people who use drugs or alcohol.
5. Don't hang out with people who have a reputation for fighting or other types of violence.
6. If you see anything violent occurring, leave the vicinity.
7. Pay close attention to your surroundings.

With these seven steps in mind, you should be able to avoid violent areas.

Your last, but not least, objective should be putting a stop to violence in your schools and community. First, learn non-violent ways of controlling your anger. Remember to set a good example for your peers. You could also help promote programs for young adults which motivate them and keep them out of trouble. These could include picnics, Sunday school, and even contests. Another way you could stop the spread of violence to young children would be to organize buddy systems that pair children up with responsible, young adults for safe travel to and from school. Each community should work with each other to establish drug-free zones around their neighborhood and schools. Use classmates for conflict managers. Even these simple ideas can help stop violence in your community. Practice them in your every day life.

Yes, violence is spreading across America; however, there are ways of stopping your community from becoming the next victim of violence. Know what causes violence, avoid places where violence may occur, and also help your community create and promote ideas which will "stop the violence."

Albert Einstein once said, "Peace cannot be achieved through violence; it can only be attained through understanding."

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