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School Safety

NATIONAL SCHOOL SAFETY CENTER NEWSJOURNAL

WINTER 1985



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Walt Disney's
commitment to
education
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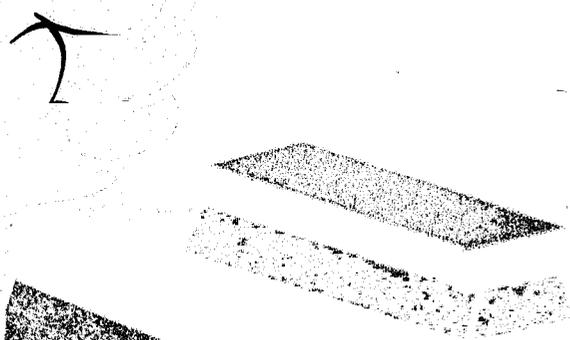


123/35 -
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Security

Discipline

Attendance



U.S. Department of Justice
National Institute of Justice

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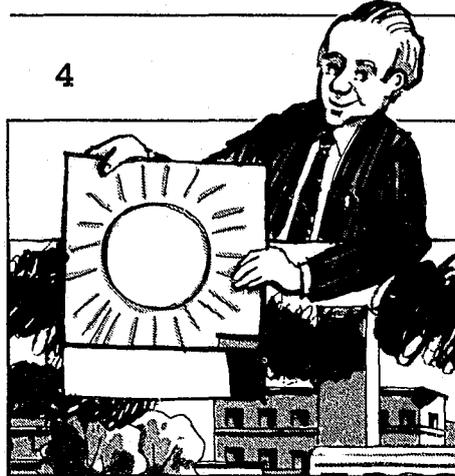
About the cover:

Donald Duck celebrates his 50th birthday this year. Throughout his long and illustrious career, Donald the entertainer has been equally committed as Donald the teacher - dedicated to safety awareness and education. With this cover, we honor both Donald Duck and his creator, Walt Disney.

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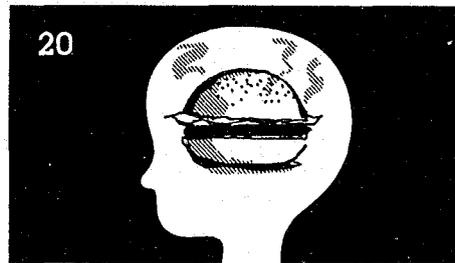
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Gangbusters!

Crisis intervention network

By Bennie J. Swans, Jr.

Philadelphia's Crisis Intervention Network has developed a successful community-based "common sense, self help" approach to preventing youth violence which involves effective interagency anticipation, communication and mobilization of community resources.

"Based on my 23 years of teaching experience, I would say that in suburban schools, 50 percent of the children are so badly behaved and to such an extent that they don't belong in school."

"Another 5 percent are redeemable with expulsion, 20 percent would respond to skillful disciplining and only 5 percent are properly behaved."

"In the city ghetto schools, the percentage of delinquency is much higher."

This is how Theresa Hale De Soubiese, a New York City teacher once described teaching in the school system in an article called "Surviving the Blackboard Jungle."

It was a bitter account of inner school violence and the lack of student discipline. It was also a graphic and tragic portrayal of what life is like for many teachers in schools across the country. Unfortunately, the statistics bear out her observations, showing that Ms. De Soubiese's experiences are not unique.

Nationally, 4 percent of the country's 70,000 teachers are attacked each year in hallways, classrooms, and bathrooms. More often than not, according to the United Federation of Teachers, the victim is a woman, the perpetrator - a student.

"The most tragic aspect," De Soubiese explained, "...is that nobody really understands the extent of rape, murder, arson and most particularly the assault going on in city schools."



Bennie J. Swans, Jr. is executive director of the Crisis Intervention Network in Philadelphia.

De Soubiese continued, painting a picture of helpless teachers trapped in a web of student violence and community insensitivity to the plight of educators. She established an "us versus them" scene where teachers are losing out to disruptive students. A scene where learning is put on the back burner and school, at its worst, becomes nothing more than a highly complex and expensive babysitting service.

"Recent research has shown that many (I would say all) teachers suffer from 'combat neurosis' - they display the same symptoms that soldiers show on the battlefield; which means that we are actually fighting an unrecognized war in the classroom," De Soubiese concluded.

Violence breaks the teaching process

Clearly when teachers, who are the cornerstone of the educational process, feel that they are fighting a daily battle with little or no help from administra-

tors, or more importantly, support from the community - there has been a breakdown in our nation's educational system.

De Soubiese suggests that apathy will work best for teachers who must deal with hostile students. For example, she advised, "When a fight breaks out in your classroom, take your time about breaking it up. Let them (students) hurt each other a little bit. It takes two to make a fight, and they'll think about it harder the next time."

"If the principal complains, tell him you were afraid of getting hurt yourself. If you do get hurt, take a vacation for three months - society has decided that workman's compensation will cover you and you paid your taxes."

It is important to tell the story of De Soubiese precisely because she isn't unique. Increasingly, an alarming number of teachers feel they are fighting this losing battle, trying to curtail school violence. In search of a solution to make a bad situation tolerable, they turn towards apathy.

Apathy, however, doesn't work as a long term solution to controlling school violence. At best, it is a temporary stop gap measure. Too often it makes a bad situation worse.

In working to alleviate youth violence in Philadelphia, Crisis Intervention Network staff found one of the greatest misconceptions is that school violence is somehow distinct from the general problems of the community. In reality, a spillover of hostility and violence is a frequent occurrence. Gang or organized youth crime, interracial conflicts, and family disputes fluctuate between schools and their communities.

Crisis Intervention Network

Crisis Intervention Network was launched as a pilot program in Philadelphia in 1974, to deal with the rising number of gang fatalities and injuries. Very quickly, we realized violence doesn't end or begin with the schools.

We had observed incidents spill onto campuses, continue on public transportation or school buses, and draw still more attention and participants on the streets of the neighborhood. To control such incidents would require the involvement of teachers, administrators, public transportation safety officers, police officers and residents of these neighborhoods.

Clearly apathy isn't the answer. Rather a constant, well-integrated and coordinated effort must be made to monitor and curtail these types of incidents and keep them from snowballing.

C.I.N. was originally planned and organized through a process of community meetings held in neighborhoods where gang warfare was in epidemic proportions. The key program principles were "anticipation" of community crisis situations, "communications" (information sharing) and "mobilization" (the networking of resources) - all combined to effectively prevent and intervene in situations of youth violence.

What made C.I.N. unique was our flexible approach to preventing problems. Specific programs and strategies were tailored to meet the specific problems, needs, and demographic qualities of each neighborhood target. The com-



mon sense self-help approach derived from the original planning processes became the basic tenet of the program and remains in place today.

C.I.N. and team approach

C.I.N.'s mission is a total commitment to preventing death and injury caused by youth violence. We found the need to apply immediate front line efforts to manage youth violence before longer term strategies could be fully effective.

Outreach, crisis intervention, and intervention services as carried out by the C.I.N. Field Operations Department are essential to the primary and secondary effectiveness of all other C.I.N. program initiatives and strategies.

Covering the front line are the crisis teams which include a city-wide interracial conflict resolution team and a five member probation unit. A crisis team is comprised of a team leader, an assistant team leader, and four youth workers who are assigned to a specific target area.

These teams patrol their areas in two shifts during 7:00 a.m. and 11:00 p.m. each day. The C.I.N. communications center is open to receive calls 24-hours a day and crisis teams are on call to settle and handle crisis situations.

The crisis teams work in mobile units with established sector patrols. These vehicles are equipped with two-way radios and beepers allowing teams to respond to crisis situations immediately. Calls for help come from private citizens, recreation centers, and, of course, schools.

A very important aspect of the crisis teams is involvement of the indigenous street worker. Since team members are former gang members and community leaders, as well as current residents of their assigned patrol area, the benefits of this approach are numerous.

Crisis teams, for example, are able to relate to youth from their own standpoint while serving as positive role models at the same time. They are familiar with the surrounding and the residents, thereby creating a sense of trust. In addition, they are able to identify key areas in their assigned patrol area which are potential trouble spots.

C.I.N. impacts on school violence

Schools are vital components of a neighborhood, not distinct entities. To best deal with school violence and safety issues an ongoing, integrated program is needed which coordinates all the vital organizations of the community and offers a coordinated response to violence.

Reports of incidents from school administrators during the academic year comprise a significant amount of the reported incidents for C.I.N. For instance, during the final months of last year's academic session, approximately 30 percent of our reported incidents were from schools across the city.

An important factor in the success of the C.I.N. program has been the development of specific roles and responsibilities with each interfaced agency. Relationships and linkages with these agencies have been developed to provide clear turf delineation and support systems.

In schools, daily contact is made with the designated liaison by the crisis team on patrol. These liaisons may range from a principal to a non-teaching assistant (N.T.A.). The liaisons have their fingers on the pulse of the school and keep the crisis team constantly abreast of potential conflict.

Instead of apathy, we encourage teachers to report brewing incidents to their school liaisons or to call our communications center directly. Often, a small incident reported early, and skillfully handled can alleviate the underlying problem. Ignored, it won't go away, but could escalate into a full scale crisis.

Teachers develop a very good sixth sense for detecting problem situations. They can often feel discontent and discord in their classrooms; they overhear rumors of brewing problems from their students; and they observe changes in routine student behaviors. These are signals of possible problems which should not be ignored.

For example, Carl Franklin, (*all names are fictitious*) a math teacher at Madison High School in Philadelphia, remembers once overhearing a boister-

ous argument in the third floor boys' bathroom as he hurried down the hall to his first class of the day. Franklin never thought that the argument would follow him to class - but it did.

Calvin and Eric, members of rival gangs, had been having a running argument all weekend. Apparently, Calvin accused Eric of trying to steal his girlfriend. Charges and countercharges flew when the two met on the third floor as they both headed for Franklin's class. The argument in the bathroom did nothing to solve the matter. The N.T.A. who entered the bathroom while the heated exchange was in process, never reported the incident and simply cleared the bathroom. Tempers flared, and by the time the two made it to Franklin's classroom, they were inches away from a fight.

The students in the class, feeling the tension and expecting the worst, ignored Franklin's frantic raps for attention. Learning had taken a back seat to Calvin and Eric's heated squabble.

Feeling helpless, Franklin insisted that Calvin and Eric report to the principal's office. But as the two stood up, they began to fight. A desk was hurled across the room in the process, injuring a student and panicking the entire class. Other boys rushed in to aid their respective friend and ultimately, a gangwar broke out in Room 303. The result: one stabbed and in critical condition, two hospitalized with head injuries, and one homicide later that evening in retaliation for the stabbing.

This example graphically portrays a rule of thumb that we maintain at Crisis Intervention Network - *For school violence to flourish, the only thing needed is for good school officials to do nothing.*

Under the direction of C.I.N. management, the teams use outreach investigation and dispute resolution techniques to quell incidents of violence. More serious community incidents are communicated to the proper city agencies' heads who collaborate with C.I.N. management in deploying appropriate staff and developing a joint strategy by involving all needed agencies.

When not responding to actual crisis

incidents, crisis teams patrol neighborhood settings where youth congregate; meet with parents; and work in sectors which include recreation centers, special youth events and street corner haunts.

C.I.N. crisis teams are frequently asked to provide a variety of community support services which encourage harmony in the community and strengthen the community institutions needed to help reduce youth crime. The teams work in conjunction with C.I.N.'s Parent Council Network and other concerned groups to alter environmental and social conditions which foster youth violence. They also work with community residents to operate a comprehensive information and referral system, which is needed to expand the positive alternatives available to youth and communities.

When there is no intervention: a case study

Does early intervention work? The proof is in the pudding.

Prior to the creation of Crisis Intervention Network, organized youth gangs were the cause of many of the Philadelphia school system's violence problems. Students feared traveling to and from school, random violence was on the rise, and weapons in schools were a way of life. This created an intolerable situation where teachers couldn't teach and students couldn't learn.

Over the past decade, Philadelphia's problem has decreased dramatically while the opposite is taking place in nearby communities. Despite the fact Philadelphia has more organized youth gangs, the inner-school youth violence is escalating more in such places as Chester, Pa., a small rural township 30 miles southwest of the city. The Chester school district, which has no formal intervention program, is suffering from school violence reminiscent of Philadelphia in days before C.I.N.

Before the school term was a month old, several incidents had already occurred including an on-campus clash between rival gangs from different sections of the city which resulted in six arrests, a teacher being assaulted, and

the arrest of a student found carrying two knives and a starting pistol in his gym bag.

In response, teachers staged a sick-out to protest what they called an increase in violence at Chester High School. "We've returned to the black-board jungle," explained Charles Oakley, president of the teacher's union.

"Something should be done about it," added student body president Anita Warner, 16. "It's dangerous for the kids who aren't bad and for the teachers."

With the problem at a feverish pitch and attracting press attention, frustrated officials looked for swift answers. "We want to create an atmosphere conducive to education. If they (disruptive students) don't like school, let them try jail," said Chester's mayor, Joseph Battle.

"The problem shouldn't have gotten this far," complained a parent who added that school security should be tightened and students caught with weapons should be thrown out. "Under pressure like this, there's no way they (students) can sit in class and learn."

Clearly, Chester School District waited until the problem exploded before they decided to address the issue of school safety. What they need now is to take the first step and implement an effective intervention program to ensure that future potential disruptions and violent clashes are carefully monitored and alleviated.

Neighborhood mobilization is the key to alleviating school violence

When teachers feel they are alone in their attempts to fight and quell youth violence in the schools, they will often fail to impact upon the problem feeling overwhelmed by its magnitude.

According to the Cultural Learning Theory, youth become socialized to delinquency in disorganized communities. The solution, therefore, lies in creating the impetus for organizing and mobilizing the community around positive social values and hands on support of youth at all stages of their development.

C.I.N. takes its program beyond direct prevention and intervention, by deploying staff specialists of the C.I.N. Community and Volunteer Services Unit who work to strengthen self-help crime prevention groups, i.e., Town Watch, etc. and resource generation for community groups.

C.I.N., beyond just immediate dispute mediation, is able to offer school administrations the support of an organized community which is essential to curtailing youth violence. Those administrators who work closely with C.I.N. have found they have fewer incidents of violence, a safer campus, and teachers who feel safer and better able to teach because they are not alone.

Our nation's public school systems are experiencing major problems of violence. Both large and small towns and cities across the U.S. are experiencing the unnecessary pain of organized and sporadic student violence which threatens the very fiber of education.

The C.I.N. Program has been extensively researched and determined effective by both governmental and private evaluators, as a successful venture in preventing youth violence in urban neighborhoods.

With this experience and know-how, C.I.N. has been able to play an active role in providing needed youth violence prevention consultation to other cities including Los Angeles, Miami, Phoenix and Chicago. In addition, C.I.N. is also gaining an international reputation for its work in controlling youth violence in local communities; The C.I.N. concept was recently explained to a group of practitioners at the Second Tubingen Seminar of Mobil Street workers in Tubinger, West Germany.

As a veteran program, C.I.N. will continue to play a leadership role in asserting the merits of this approach in its future consultations on problems in other urban communities. □

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