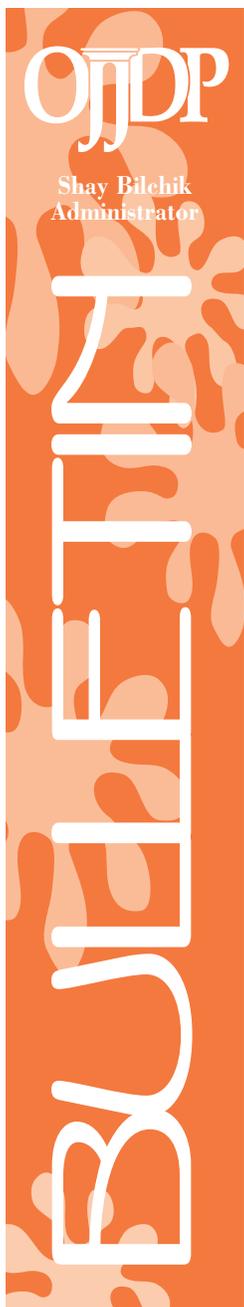


Youth *in action*

January 2000 NUMBER 12



Raising Awareness and Educating the Public

What Is a Public Awareness and Education Project?

A public awareness and education project is a way to bring a certain issue to the attention of a group of people. This type of project can take many forms, ranging from a poster contest to a fair at a local mall or a program on one of your town's radio or television stations. A public awareness and education project is a great way to highlight the need for crime prevention in your community. The important thing is to get key prevention information out to your target audience (youth, adults, or children) and encourage them to take action in preventing or reducing crime.

How Does a Public Awareness and Education Project Prevent or Reduce Crime?

Educating the public is one of the most important strategies for preventing crime. People who know what actions they can take to reduce their risk of crime and how they can enhance neighborhood safety are the core of a safer community. By reminding people that a problem exists and showing them

how they can address the problem, you enable them to take action.

In Chicago, IL, youth ages 16 to 21 worked through their community center and created an informative resource packet that was distributed to youth throughout the neighborhood. They also performed role-plays and skits about crime and drug prevention to increase prevention awareness among their peers and sponsored youth forums on crime and crime prevention issues.

What Does It Take To Start a Public Awareness and Education Project?

A lot of planning goes into organizing a public awareness and education project. Your group

from the administrator

Too often people don't know what they can do to reduce crime. You can make a difference by learning the facts, developing a message, and getting the word out about solutions. This Bulletin provides ideas about how you can do that. It will help you raise public awareness about crime prevention in your community.

will need to consider some basic planning issues and make some initial decisions. These may change later, but you will need a platform from which to begin. Ask your group: What topic do we want to focus on? How can we make people aware of this? What educational information do we want to present? The answers to these questions will go a long way toward framing the kind of project or campaign you will plan and carry out.

Determine Your Audience

Next, you will need to determine your audience. Doing this and choosing your topic are closely linked. Some topics may not be appropriate for certain age groups. Consider your topics and audiences carefully. Date rape, for example, is not likely to be an appropriate topic for youth younger than 12. Auto theft and alcohol-related driving offenses are more applicable to people of legal driving age. Prevention of bicycle theft and education on curfew laws may be good topics for younger audiences.

To help determine who your audience will be, do some research at the local library and contact the local police or sheriff's department

and your school administration. Ask other youth if they would be interested in the topic. Ask yourself the following questions: Who can take action against this problem? Who can benefit most from information on the topic? Whom can I reach through various kinds of media? You might want to reach people in one neighborhood or students in a particular school. Perhaps you'll decide to focus on all youth ages 7 to 12 or on all people over age 60.

Choose Your Topic and Develop a Message

The first thing you need to do is choose the topic about which you want to make others aware. Some good topics for education and awareness projects are:

- ◆ The prevention of auto theft.
- ◆ The dangers of drinking and driving.
- ◆ The effects of vandalism and graffiti on the community.
- ◆ The consequences of shoplifting.
- ◆ The benefits of a Neighborhood Watch.
- ◆ The dangers and prevalence of date rape.
- ◆ The benefits of home security.

After you have chosen a topic, you will need to focus your information on a central message or theme.

To develop a message, ask what two or three main points the audience should learn from your efforts. Resist the temptation to communicate the whole range of potential issues. It would be great to teach the community everything you know about your topic, but studies show that people only take away one main message and that they need to see or hear it several times (as many as a dozen) before they will clearly recall and understand it. For example, if you've decided to begin a campaign on auto theft prevention and the target

Planning a Successful Project

For more information on how to plan a successful project, see the National Youth Network's Planning a Successful Crime Prevention Project. This 28-page workbook explains the five steps of the Success Cycle:

- ◆ *Assessing Your Community's Needs.*
- ◆ *Planning a Successful Project.*
- ◆ *Lining Up Resources.*
- ◆ *Acting on Your Plans.*
- ◆ *Nurturing, Monitoring, and Evaluating.*

The workbook includes six worksheets for you to take notes on. You can get a copy of this planning workbook from the Juvenile Justice Clearinghouse, listed in the "Resources" section. Good luck!

audience is new drivers ages 16 to 21, you might want to convey these messages:

- ◆ “Lock your car even when you’ll be gone just a minute. It takes a thief only a minute to steal your car.”
- ◆ “Take the key [out of the ignition] so thieves won’t take your car.”
- ◆ “Take control; take the keys; use the locks. Don’t let a thief leave you carless.”

These messages basically state the same theme—that many cars are taken because they are unlocked or because the keys are left in them—in different ways.

Be sure to talk with people in the intended audience. Listen closely to their responses as you ask how they see the issue or problem, what they already know or believe, what they think they can do, what they think others can or should do, and what appeals to them. Responses from the audience will tell you what aspects of your main theme to emphasize.

Learn the Facts

Once you’ve selected a topic, you should learn the facts regarding that topic. Obtain the most current data. Find out about new technologies, new research discoveries, and prevention approaches that have been tried. You can learn about your topic from libraries, local law enforcement officers, professional organizations that deal with your topic, and the Internet.

In the search for information, find out:

- ◆ What causes the problem in your community.
- ◆ What prevention strategies present the best chances of reducing crime.
- ◆ Who in your community should receive this information.
- ◆ What resources exist for the general public.

Get Your Message Out

Now that you know the topic you want to focus on, the audience you want to educate, and the most current information on the topic, you need to decide how to get your message out. Will you use TV, radio, or newspapers? Will you create a Web site, brochure, or poster? Don’t limit yourself—be creative. While TV, newspapers, and radio ads may reach a lot of people, they can be quite expensive. You also need to consider your audience. Second graders probably won’t read an ad in the newspaper. They might, however, read the comics section or a special kids’ page in the newspaper. A brochure that can be read quickly is more effective for some audiences than a 10-page newsletter, no matter how much information it contains. A poster in a school hallway that’s seen four or five times a day can have a more lasting effect than a one-shot television news story.

Older people often gather at senior centers and enjoy programs that bring them useful information; a series of presentations at these centers may reach more of your audience than any booklet, report, or newsletter. In addition, adult civic, social, and fraternal groups often welcome speakers on important subjects; why not a youth with helpful news to share?

Your peers listen to specific radio stations and look at specific publications, such as the school newspaper. An on-air interview or letter to the editor can spread the word about your program. A shopping mall may provide a perfect site for a community crime prevention fair, a 1- or 2-day event with some key messages for adults, youth, and children.

Ask yourself and your group how you get your news, where you learn about new trends, and how you find out useful information. Ask people in your target group these same questions. Develop a strategy based on the forms

of communication you have available and the resources you can tap. Pick several ways to reach the audience and rank them by priority.

Recruit Volunteers

You will need plenty of volunteers to make your public awareness and education project successful. Develop a list of experts you can call upon: artists, announcers, public relations specialists, teachers, activists, distributors, speakers, writers, designers, and others. Solicit volunteers from your school, other schools in the area, youth groups in the community, businesses, and professional organizations. Explain the talents you're seeking and the opportunity the volunteers will have to be involved in an exciting activity that will help the whole community. Don't forget to recruit communications professionals, business people, and others who can lend equipment, ideas, and experience. See the "Resources" section at the end of this Bulletin for organizations that can help with recruitment and other parts of your program.

Gather Resources

Figure out what you will need for your project. Are you counting on local TV and radio stations for air time or on a major local daily newspaper for print space? If so, talk with public service managers and public affairs directors. Do you need printing services? Check with the vocational education staff at your local high school about whether this can become a printing class project. Will you have to enlarge photos or design displays? Find out whether art or photography students at the high school or local college might help. Many campaigns can be carried out with a remarkably small amount of money, drawing on donated goods and services and borrowed equipment. For instance, national organizations (such as the

National Network for Youth, the Advertising Council, Inc., and the Office of National Drug Control Policy) and local affiliates of national organizations (such as Mothers Against Drunk Driving and Students Against Destructive Decisions) may have printed materials available on issues such as drinking and driving, runaway and homeless youth, and drug abuse prevention. See the "Resources" section for contact information.

What Does It Take To Keep a Public Awareness and Education Project Going?

Fresh ideas, eager new volunteers, and new ways to communicate are the fuel that will keep your public education effort an ongoing activity. Repetition is a major benefit because people need to hear and see messages several times. Messages, however, need to be freshened or given new twists to make sure they capture and hold the public's attention.

Handing out brochures, distributing posters, or calling television and radio stations and newspapers requires a substantial amount of volunteer energy. Training that lets volunteers share lessons they have learned helps provide fresh energy for everyone. Sometimes, switching jobs among volunteers can renew their energy.

Support for the activity should come from both outside and inside your group. Remember that your goal is to get the community to take action—in other words, to try to put yourselves out of business eventually. As people begin to hear your message, recruit leaders to help drive it home—the principal, school board members, local religious leaders, business executives, hospital administrators, doctors and dentists, and many other people can teach, preach, post, promote, and confirm your anticrime message.

What Are Some of the Challenges of a Public Awareness and Education Project?

A major question facing any public education and awareness effort is whether the message is the right one for the audience and the purpose. Testing messages with members of your target audience can help you find out whether there's a mismatch. Evaluation, discussed below, also provides important feedback on this point.

A public education campaign targeting the entire community will take a lot of effort. You may want to start on a small scale—for example, with your neighborhood or student body. Once you learn how to get your message across, you can send it to larger areas.

Being turned down for publicity or getting no acknowledgment from major communicators can be a disappointment. Don't give up if the news media or other organizations don't respond immediately. It may take several tries before you get the response you want. Find out if members of your group know adults with contacts at the organizations in question. Sometimes a personal introduction makes the case when a paper presentation falls flat. Organizing events that focus attention on your project and are “good copy” (interesting news stories) can get your education message out to millions.

What Are Some of the Rewards of a Public Awareness and Education Project?

Imparting knowledge that will make someone safer will give you a sense of accomplishment. Finding out that people actually changed their behavior because of your message lets you know that you have the power to persuade and change

the community in a positive way. For example, knowing that because of your work, a small child now understands how to get away from a threatening stranger can be very satisfying.

Participating in a public education project also gives you skills—in areas such as leadership, teamwork, public relations, communication, management, and negotiation—that you can put to work right away in school or work settings. You'll learn more about how your community works and how you can help your community change—knowledge that some adults may never acquire.

How Can Your Public Awareness and Education Project Be Evaluated?

Evaluating your project can help you learn whether it has met your goals, but only if you decide up front what to evaluate and how to do so. The purpose of any evaluation is “to answer practical questions of decision-makers and program implementors who want to know whether to continue a program, extend it to other sites, modify it, or close it down.”¹

The best way to start evaluating your project is to reflect on your original goals. Did you bring your issue to the attention of a group of people? Did they learn from it? Be sure to include an evaluation step—such as a questionnaire, suggestion box, or formal survey—in your overall plan. Ask yourself what you can do better to reach your goals, to involve more people in your project, and to spread your message to a wider audience. Then, make adjustments to your activities to strengthen your project.

¹ National Crime Prevention Council, *What, me evaluate?* Washington, DC: National Crime Prevention Council, 1986.

You will probably want to examine how well you were able to communicate by answering the following questions:

- ◆ How much coverage (in column inches) did your message receive in the local newspaper? In the school paper? On bulletin boards? On posters in stores?
- ◆ How many minutes of coverage did your program receive on radio or television?
- ◆ How many people were reached through each medium?
- ◆ How much was donated in advertising services, compared with dollars and volunteer hours spent getting the message out? (Local advertising agencies can help you put a dollar value on much of your publicity so you can determine this.)

Evaluation of public awareness and education campaigns needs to be built in at the start.² A survey of a sample of your target audience at the beginning of your program can show what people knew or believed just before your campaign began. Conducting that same survey after your campaign has been under way for

²For more information on evaluating projects, refer to *Does Your Youth Program Work?*, a Youth In Action Bulletin available at no charge from the Juvenile Justice Clearinghouse, listed in the “Resources” section.

a while (perhaps 6 to 12 months) will show whether people’s knowledge or beliefs have changed. Look at whether people have encountered other messages or news stories on the same issue, and consider what community developments might have affected your messages. It’s difficult to prove that your campaign, on its own, is completely responsible for the desired change, but it’s possible to show that your efforts helped. This kind of evaluation needs up-front help from someone trained in evaluation design; it can require a sizable amount of work.

In evaluating your awareness project, also consider whether and how it meets the following more general crime prevention goals:

- ◆ Reduces crime or fear of crime in your community.
- ◆ Is cost effective.
- ◆ Has a lasting impact.
- ◆ Attracts support and resources.
- ◆ Makes people feel safe and better about being in your school or community.

Learning to evaluate the things you do is a good skill, one you can apply to all aspects of your life. Good luck with your project and—Learn to make a difference!



Resources

For more information, contact one of the following organizations or visit the U.S. Department of Justice Kids Page Web site at www.usdoj.gov/kidspage. This site includes information for kids, youth, parents, and teachers.

The Advertising Council, Inc.

261 Madison Avenue
New York, NY 10016
212-922-1500

Internet: www.adcouncil.org

American Advertising Federation

1101 Vermont Avenue NW., Suite 500
Washington, DC 20005
202-898-0089

Internet: www.aaf.org

Boys & Girls Clubs of America

1230 Peachtree Street NW.
Atlanta, GA 30309
404-815-5700

Internet: www.bgca.org

Juvenile Justice Clearinghouse

P.O. Box 6000
Rockville, MD 20849-6000
800-638-8736
301-519-5212 (fax)

Internet: www.ojjdp.ncjrs.org

Mothers Against Drunk Driving

511 East John Carpenter Freeway, Suite 700
Irving, TX 75062

Internet: www.madd.org

(Check your telephone book for a local chapter in an area near you.)

National Clearinghouse for Alcohol and Drug Information

P.O. Box 2345
Rockville, MD 20847
800-729-6686

National Crime Prevention Council

1700 K Street NW., Second Floor
Washington, DC 20006-3817
202-466-6272

Internet: www.ncpc.org

National Network for Youth

1319 F Street NW., Suite 401
Washington, DC 20004
202-783-7949

Internet: www.nn4youth.org

Office of National Drug Control Policy

Information Clearinghouse
P.O. Box 6000
Rockville, MD 20849-6000
800-666-3332

Internet: www.whitehousedrugpolicy.org

Public Relations Society of America

33 Irving Place
New York, NY 10003-2376

Internet: www.prsa.org

(Check your telephone book for a local chapter in the nearest metropolitan area.)

Students Against Destructive Decisions

P.O. Box 800
Marlboro, MA 01752
508-481-3568

Internet: www.saddonline.com

Washington, DC 20531

Official Business
Penalty for Private Use \$300



Youth in Action Bulletin

MCJ-178926

This Bulletin was produced by the National Crime Prevention Council as part of the National Citizens' Crime Prevention Campaign under a cooperative agreement with the Bureau of Justice Assistance (BJA), Office of Justice Programs, U.S. Department of Justice. The National Crime Prevention Council is a nonprofit organization that conducts demonstration and youth-based programs, produces publications and training materials on a variety of subjects, and manages the day-to-day activities of the National Citizens' Crime Prevention Campaign.

Points of view or opinions expressed in this document are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official position or policies of the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, BJA, or the U.S. Department of Justice.

The National Youth Network, founded and managed by the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, consists of diverse youth leaders from across the Nation who are sponsored by youth-serving organizations. The goal of the Network is to recognize and build upon the power and importance of youth leadership by uniting young people and adults, through communication and action, to enable youth organizations and nonaffiliated youth to have a positive, formidable impact in our communities and throughout our Nation.

The Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention is a component of the Office of Justice Programs, which also includes the Bureau of Justice Assistance, the Bureau of Justice Statistics, the National Institute of Justice, and the Office for Victims of Crime.