

## The Youth Intervention Network, A Project of UrAtWork, Inc.

The Youth Intervention Network (YIN), a project of UrAtWork, Inc., is an award winning youth and gang violence prevention and intervention initiative recently recognized by Congressman George Miller and Senator Mark DeSaulnier. YIN is the recipient of the 2008 Contra Costa County Juvenile Justice Delinquency Prevention Award, and was honored by the City of Antioch, California with a Proclamation on Tuesday, May 26, 2009. The initiative is Co-Chaired by Antioch Police Chief, James Hyde and Iris Archuleta, J.D. Executive Director of UrAtWork, Inc.

### **YIN's Relationship to UrAtWork, Inc.:**

UrAtWork is funded mainly to operate the Youth Intervention Network. UrAtWork is dedicated to "the building and incubation of community collaborative models for the purpose of developing safe, well-educated, and high-performing youth and families." UrAtWork was founded in 2008 by YIN's Executive Director, Iris Archuleta, J.D., and Jim Hyde, the Chief of Police in the City of Antioch. YIN's current partners include: the Antioch Unified School District; the Antioch Police Department; the Police Athletic League; the City of Antioch; Sutter Delta Memorial Hospital; the East County Business-Education Alliance; the County Domestic Violence Unit; Opportunity Junction; John F. Kennedy University School of Graduate Psychology; East County and Contra Costa County Children and Family Services; Juvenile Probation; AJWI Consulting; Dr. Joseph Brown, Researcher, Stanford University; The Williams Group; One Day at a Time; the REACH Project; and a number of faith-based organizations, community-based organizations, youth, parents, and community members.

### **Project Overview:**

The overarching goal of the Youth Intervention Network (YIN) is to engage an entire community in providing safe places and positive activities and services that support Antioch's at risk youth in making positive life style choices and prevents them from engaging in violence, crime or gang affiliations. YIN is Antioch and East Contra Costa County's first community-wide youth violence and gang prevention initiative, and the recipient of the Project Safe Neighborhoods Grant for the 2008/2009 year.

At the heart of the YIN model is a process of early identification of youth likely to commit or become victims of violence based on a sophisticated data collection and analysis process that collected and analyzed individual disaggregated data on the 8,753 youth in the Antioch Unified School District. The process identified truancy and lack of engagement with school as the key indicators of future youth involvement with violence; in response, YIN developed an intensive support system for participating youth and their families. YIN's parent agency, UrAtWork, serves as the centralized coordinator of the

collaborative network of agencies who have signed collaboration agreements with this project. In addition, each youth and his/her family is assigned a team of 2 mediators who conduct an extensive initial mediation process resulting in the youth's individualized goal plan, and a Family/Youth Advocate who guides the youth and the family through their time in the program. All mediators and Family/Youth Advocates receive extensive training in the use of mediation, advocacy, conflict resolution and mentorship skills and techniques.

## **Youth Development: The Theoretical Basis of YIN**

The theoretical basis of YIN is the Youth Development model. Positive Youth Development reframes the "prevention" public health model strategy, which is a deficit focused or a 'glass half-empty' approach, into one which conceptually works towards what young people need and want to become - good citizens, good neighbors, good workers, and good parents. The academic and programmatic literature and numerous commissions and organizations, including the Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development, define a generic set of competencies that go beyond academic or cognitive competence to include vocational, physical, emotional, civic, social and cultural competence. (Pittman & Irby 1996).

The literature on factors influencing youth development also suggests the following seven important inputs: Young people need a stable place that is theirs and where they feel safe – ideally home – or it can also be a religious organization, a school, or a community center. Young people need access to basic care and services that are appropriate, affordable, and, if necessary, confidential. Essential also, are high quality instruction and training. Supports and opportunities offered in these settings are critical. Young people require opportunities to develop sustained, caring relationships and social and strategic networks. They need challenging experiences that are appropriate, diverse, and sufficiently intense. They need opportunities for real participation and involvement in the full range of community life. (Pittman & Irby, Ibid).

Important to this is the need to invest in a "natural" web of community supports that strengthen rather than undermine youth and their families. This requires an investment not in short-lived, problem-specific programs, but in community organizations, in civic, cultural and neighborhood associations, and in the larger economic, physical, and social infrastructures. The National Network for Youth, Inc. articulated a concept of "community youth development" as a: "holistic, systems- and strengths-based approach to working with young people. It values and respects young people, addresses the whole person rather than one aspect, and involves families, communities and other systems of supports to create healthy youth, strong families and responsible communities." (Lane, 1996). It is this basic understanding that prompted UrAtWork to engage in the process of building high performing communities with the motto being: *UratWork, Inc. - Creating High Performing Communities, Now and Together....*

Interventions that engage youth in forming relationships with adults, mastering a skill, and contributing to their own well-being and their community's have been found to be highly effective in preventing school drop-out, substance abuse, juvenile delinquency and teenage pregnancy. These effective strategies also situate services for youth in a community context and build on the existing strengths in neighborhoods including families and community-based organizations (Dryfoos, 1990). Research findings on youth resiliency in high-risk environments highlight the need for social interventions that take a youth development rather than a youth deficit orientation. Indeed, youth development theory views youth as central actors in their lives, and defines youth development as: "... an ongoing process in which all young people are engaged and invested, and through which young people seek ways to meet their basic physical and social needs and to build the competencies and the connections they perceive as necessary for survival and success." (Pittman, Cahill, 1992).

<b>Youth Development Framework*</b>	
<b>Safety</b>	Youth live, learn, play and work in places and spaces that protect and nurture their emotional and physical safety
<b>Relationship building</b>	Youth live, learn, play and work in places and spaces that offer appropriate social supports and caring from adults and peers
<b>Youth Participation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Youth are involved in meaningful &amp; responsible roles</li> <li>Youth have input in decision making</li> <li>Youth have opportunities for leadership</li> <li>Youth have a sense of belonging</li> </ul>
<b>Community Involvement</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Youth have the opportunity to give back</li> <li>Youth have knowledge of their community</li> </ul>
<b>Skill Building</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Youth learn skills that:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Challenge their current skill set/developmental stage</li> <li>Contribute to personal growth and progress</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<i>* © Community Network for Youth Development, 1999.</i>	

YIN's strategies are all consistent with a Youth Development Framework. For its wraparound family services program, YIN's process includes (1) building and reinforcing relationships between community groups to strengthen delivery of services; (2) a youth enrollment process with two components: strong referrals from local schools and community partners, and a five-stage mediation process with the youth, family, and school, *(the reference to "school" will be incorporated once we have developed and*

*rolled out the school-based mentorship component of the YIN in Fall 2009 - currently the process only includes the youth and family); and (3) a mentoring system based on a Family/Youth Advocacy Model, which assists youth and their families in meeting their personal objectives through wraparound services. YIN has established a strategy of using evidence-based and research-based wraparound prevention services to help youth and families overcome identified indicators. These services may include mental health or psychological counseling, substance abuse treatment, faith-based family counseling, tutoring, or job training. However, in almost 100% of our pilot cycles 1 thru 3, educational service and educational advocacy training for parents has been the primary, if not the only significant service that has been required. Even so, the outcomes related to these service streams has been staggering in some cases, and insightful in all. The family/Youth advocate guides the youth and family through the process of enrolling and participating in these various services and following through on the results. The family advocate also acts as a mentor to the youth and to the family. Throughout the youth's participation in YIN, the family/youth advocate will "walk alongside" the family to keep them on track toward achieving the youth's personal goals.*

## **Psychological Foundations of YIN:**

Unique to YIN is the program's underlying psychology, which builds upon the mimetic theory of Rene Girard. According to Girard, the source of human desire is rooted in mimesis, the need to imitate others. To a certain extent, imitation is a positive occurrence, as one seeks to model oneself after others in ways that may be benign and even beneficial. At some point, however, imitation becomes rivalry and rivalry becomes hostile. The desire to be like another person, and to desire what the other person desires, leads to conflict, which itself leads to a redoubling of the effort to imitate, supplant, and become the rival. Inevitably, this cycle leads to what Girard calls the surrogate victim mechanism or scapegoating. Every culture, says Girard, achieves stability by discharging the tensions of mimetic rivalry and violence onto scapegoats. Later cultures use judiciary systems to contain violence. But even when cultures no longer practice sacrifice directly, they still continue to target certain individuals or groups as scapegoats so that violence will not overflow its banks and threaten others.

YIN's curriculum of conflict resolution and violence prevention tactics, developed by the international network of Dialogue for a Peaceful Change, expands upon Girard's theory by adding the belief that we can overcome the scapegoating and the violence that persists in our contemporary communities. Change, YIN teaches, begins with dialogue and a commitment to allowing all parties the opportunity to recite their stories, experiences, and viewpoints. Reconciliation, YIN suggests, is the (re) incorporating of the vulnerable and the scapegoats; it is a tactic for undermining exclusionary behavior and expulsive mechanisms and a way to challenge the things which alienate and separate us.

All YIN volunteers are required to take the initial 40 hours of DPC's training. This Level 1 training is principle-driven, skills-based, experiential training that allows participants to develop the good judgment and sense of timing needed to move the conflict resolution process along. Participants learn that emotions are formed from universal needs that are threatened and satisfied in ways defined by unique backgrounds and experiences. Power imbalances, scapegoating and other familiar strategies can influence emotional reactions to create conflict. The initial training provides participants with the skills to guide a process by which parties in conflict identify the underlying cause of conflict and, thereby, begin to develop solutions. Through role plays and conflict scenarios, participants learn:

- To remain objective and not take on the burden of conflict;
- To listen and not be judgmental or reactive;
- To be flexible and change their roles as the conflict resolution process evolves;
- To use conciliation, negotiation techniques, mediation, facilitation, dialogue and other group processes to assist conflicting parties in finding mutually acceptable solutions to their problems.

To date, YIN has provided conflict resolution training to more than 100 community volunteers and key stakeholder individuals; this training was delivered by founding members of Dialogue for a Peaceful Change, imported into Antioch from Belfast and other project training sites (such as Africa and Bosnia) by the Vespers Society Foundation. The training has been critical to the continued development and improvement of YIN.

### **Potential Community Impact:**

Antioch, California is located in Contra Costa County in the San Francisco Bay Area. The cost of living has steadily risen in the core cities of the Bay Area in recent years, and as a result, the City of Antioch has had a rapid increase in population and a large change in demographics. In Antioch, children under age 18 living in poverty is 17% and unemployment rose from 4% in 2005 to 9.3% (February, 2009) in the county. The demographic change is also reflected in the student population of the Antioch Unified School District (AUSD). Between 2000 and 2007, the percentage of students eligible for free or reduced price meals rose from 31% to 49%, and the English Learner program rose from 6% to 15%. Between 2003 and 2007, the high school graduation rate for AUSD fell from 95% to 86%, with a four-year cumulative dropout rate of 29%. AUSD truancy rate is 47%, doubling the county and the state averages (28% and 29% respectively); One quarter of the expulsions in the county occur in AUSD schools (only enrolls 12%); and less than 50% of AUSD students test "proficient" in any core academic category.

The rapid population growth and changing demographics in the county and city have led to increased social problems, unemployment, decrease in school academic achievement, an increase in youth gang activity and the violent crime rate. Antioch Police Department's (APD) gang-related police reports increased 118% over this same time period, from 158 in 2005 to 344 in 2007. The proportion of homicides that were gang-related rose from 30% in 2006 to 50% in 2007. APD has identified 443 validated gang members in the Antioch community since 2005; many gang members are juveniles. Of all individuals arrested by APD officers in 2006 and 2007, 41.5% were ages 11–17. Antioch's rate of violent crime is 61% higher than that of the state of California, with large differences seen in murder and non-negligent manslaughter (Antioch's rate is 58% higher) and robbery (Antioch's rate is 109% higher).

The YIN design is built upon a public health perspective for reducing risks and preventing disease, illness and injury. Instead of focusing just on the individual who is at risk for, or who engages in, a particular behavior such as violence, the public health approach considers the individual's relationship to his or her surroundings. YIN services and activities have been developed with this in mind.

Community participation is critical to YIN, as community volunteers fill all mediators, family advocate (case managers), and mentor positions. All of these positions require candidates to successfully complete the DPC Level 1 training. However, as mentioned above, currently YIN depends on resources to import the trainers from Belfast and beyond. It is imperative that YIN develop local capacity to deliver this foundational training in order to continue to extend its programming to the youth in need both in Antioch and surrounding communities.

YIN has currently trained more than 100 community members; however, the project's goal is to add 35-50 additional youth each year for the next four years. To do this, YIN plans to offer a minimum of 4 Level 1 trainings per year for approximately 30 individuals per training. YIN has also received inquiries from several neighboring Contra Costa communities and from Oakland in Alameda County about helping to launch a similar initiative in those communities whose own violence prevention methods have been unsuccessful. YIN will be impacting not only the Antioch community but a number of surrounding cities as well.

In addition to its role in recruiting new volunteers, the DPC training serves an important role in building community networks and connecting both organizations and families with one another. For some time now, criminologists have noted a correlation between communities lacking in social networks and high levels of crime. Numerous studies have documented that there are common neighborhood or community characteristics that result in an increased risk of crime and violence. These include: a)

anonymity and sparse acquaintanceship networks among residents, b) unsupervised teenage peer groups and attenuated control of public space, and c) a weak organizational base and low social participation in local activities face an increased risk of crime and violence. (R. Putnam, 2000). This is why, there is no risk of over-recruiting community volunteers, because even if volunteers are not immediately assigned cases, the intensity of the 5 day training experience has proven to be a powerful tool for bringing community together in a significant way. We have so far maintained a 99% retention rate with our volunteers.

The explanation for what differentiates safe and organized cities from unsafe and disorganized ones has increasingly been found in the concept of “social capital”. “Social capital refers to connections among individuals—social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them.” (R. Putnam, 2000). At first, criminologists were merely speculating on the tie between increased safety and highly connected communities. However it has since been proven that the connection between social capital and safe streets is very real. For example, one 15 year study between 1980 and 1995 looked at the relationship between homicide rates in various cities across the nation and documented the corresponding levels of social capital. The study concluded that social capital is as important as poverty, urbanism, and racial composition as a determinant of homicide prevalence. In fact, social capital was more important than education level, rate of single-parent households and income inequality in predicting the number of murders per capita during the 15 year study period. (Putnam, 2000).

The DPC training is YIN’s tool for building social capital. Among those who have already completed the Level 1 training, YIN has noted a surge in organizational partnerships, an increase in individuals volunteering, and growing number of reciprocal relationships between the individuals who participated in the trainings. Thus the requested support will not only serve to expand the capacity and reach of the YIN initiative, it will also increase the supply of social capital in the Antioch community to the betterment of all community residents.

Level 2 Training examines the deep-rooted nature of value-based perceptions that lie beneath the surface of disputes. This ‘train the trainers’ course is a critical transfer of the psychological processes and philosophies at the core of the YIN training, and will allow for the continued growth of the project within Antioch and surrounding East County areas.

### **Sustainability:**

One of the challenges to sustaining the YIN model is the maintenance of a trained volunteer base. All volunteers, whether they are mediators, family advocates or

mentors, must complete the DPC Level 1 training and be certified. Currently there are only two U.S. trainers. By certifying an additional group of core trainers, YIN will be able to train other communities, cities, organizations etc around the county and throughout the state. YIN is currently recruiting potential trainer candidates from the more than 100 current DPC certified mediators here in Antioch and East County, to become certified Level 2 DPC trainers. This will be a challenging but exciting opportunity for potential trainers because in addition to the formal training, there will be opportunities to do the mandatory practice portion of the certification process in countries all over the world, then bring that wealth of experience back to our region.

## References

- Dryfoos, J. (1990). *Adolescents at risk: Prevalence and prevention*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- R. Lane (1996). *On the Journey to Community Youth Development*. In *New Designs for Youth*, Vol. 12, No. 3 (Summer): pp. 14-18.
- Pittman, K.J., & Cahill, M. (1992, January). Youth and caring: The role of youth programs in the development of caring. Paper commissioned by the Lilly Endowment Research Grants Program on Youth and Caring and presented at the Conference on Youth and Caring in February 1992.
- Pittman, K. and M. Irby (1996). *Preventing Problems or Promoting Development: Competing Priorities or Inseparable Goals?* Baltimore: International Youth Foundation.
- Putnam, R. (2000). *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*. New York: Simon and Schuster: pp. 306-318.
- Richardson, F. and K. Frost. (2005). *Girard and Psychology: Furthering the Dialogue in Critical Thinking About Psychology: Hidden Assumptions and Plausible Alternatives*. Washington, DC: APA Books.