



Artwork by Jonus Castro Williams

Clark County Youth Commission
Report on Youth Violence Prevention
Presented to the Board of County Commissioners
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Introduction:

The Youth Commission was presented with the policy assignment of studying and making recommendations about Youth Violence Prevention at the start of the 2012-2013 term. The Board of County Commissioners felt that the topic was particularly important in light of recent events in schools and the community, and therefore handed it to the Youth Commission to investigate and research.

Our Process of Study:

The major categories of youth violence prevention that the commission focused on were teen dating violence and bullying. We planned this by getting together at meetings and discussing, and through research. Starting at the summer retreat, we began researching the topics and forming teams to present the information to rest of the group. In our meetings throughout the year, we periodically invited guest speakers to inform us specifically on teen-dating violence and rape prevention, as well as how to act in situations where bullying in any form is present. The speakers taught us what they knew through their own educations, careers, and experiences which gave us a more professional insight on the task at hand. We processed the information well and took their information and opinions seriously, relating them to the policy assignment effectively. Eventually we realized that that our own perspectives were most influential in the fields of bullying and teen-dating violence.

We approached our research as a collaborative effort. At our retreats and longer meetings, we would often break into teams, each with a different topic to research and read up on our specific material. We would then present the team's information to the other groups, allowing each member to speak and take part in the presentation. The audience, or the other Youth Commissioners waiting to present often asked questions to better their understanding of the topic, reiterating the original intention of the group presentation. In the evenings, we would often have large, group discussion in which all Youth Commissioners participated. The discussion topics ranged from what we thought the origins of violence are, to what emotions need to be met in order for human beings to be most successful.

During the year, the group met with Sean Chavez, who presented information about the severity of date rape, partner abuse, and teen-dating violence. Another guest speaker, Mindy Johnston from the Crime Victim Advocacy Program at Lutheran Community Services educated the group about bullying and violence in schools, workplaces, and neighborhoods, also sharing some of her conflict resolution techniques as a crime-victim advocate.

Using the information from our meetings, retreats and discussions with our guest speakers, we planned overnight work sessions in efforts to create recommendations. Having the overnight work sessions enabled the group to work for long periods of time, and have fruitful conversations and brainstorming from our many youth perspectives present.

Our Actions in the Community:

The Peace, Prevention, Prosperity and Paint Art Show:

In our efforts to gain a better understanding of youth violence, as well as involve our many members of the Youth House in a collaborative event, we decided to create an art show. This was a partnership with the Options youth program – another program in the Youth House. The Youth House programs were determined to fully understand and look at violence prevention in a new light.

While painting various pictures and hanging them on walls may seem like nothing more than freelance fun, creating art about such a pressing issue in our community wasn't nearly as easy as it seemed. During this time, members of the Youth Commission and Options youth program held subcommittees to brainstorm new ideas for art pieces with a meaningful impact. The group struggled with meshing their own stereotypical mental images of violence with representative ideas that would display understanding, promote prevention and deter violence. In a short time, a Youth Commissioner coined the phrase "Great art doesn't always depict roses," touching on the symbolic nature of the pieces. Over 40 youth artists created about 100 art pieces which were displayed in the show. It was amazing to see so many individuals put their talent into a canvas, sculpture, or other medium. Many youth with no art experience produced pieces with an enlightened wisdom.

Bully Prevention Event at Kiggins Theatre



This event happened in order to get awareness of the effects of bullying across to members of the community. This had a purpose in relation to the policy assignment because it was on the topic of bullying, which was one of the Youth Commission's focuses. We also displayed some of our pieces from the art show. The documentary film, "Bully" was shown and a panel discussion followed. The intended impact was to have people walk out of the theater with an enlightened thought about bullying and strive to make a positive change. We also established an on-going partnership with the Kiggins Theatre, a local business that supports youth voice.

Youth Achievement Awards Celebration



Our annual event, the Youth Achievement Celebration honors youth in the community. This year, as well as honoring many youth in the community, many new Youth Commissioners had the opportunity to speak as well. Many Youth Commissioners have called participation in the Youth Achievement Celebration a “win-win situation.” Whether it’s being honored in the ceremony, nominating someone for an award, or speaking in the event, all youth in the process have attested to feeling like they have made difference in the community. We feel that this celebration is an asset to Clark County, as it empowers the leaders of the next generation with positive reinforcement. The celebration also sheds-light on some youth that may otherwise not receive proper respect for their achievements. More than 300 youth were honored for their achievements in our community.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

The Youth Commission as a model of violence prevention:

Why the Youth Commission Works:

The youth commission is a group of 30 youth of different backgrounds ranging from 11-19 years old. The members are racially diverse, economically diverse, religiously diverse, politically diverse, academically diverse, etc. and we don't all identify as leaders. Still, even in a group as different as ours there is virtually no bullying or judgment. The group instead adopts a family like attitude. We hope to be an example to the community of a bully-free environment. We'd like to tell you about our experiences to demonstrate how we are an anti-violence environment.

On the Youth Commission we are put in leadership and role model positions with our peers and younger members of our group.

“Often my adult advisor, Elizabeth, would ask me to help someone feel comfortable or included, and it made me want to show her that I could. I would include everyone, and try and act as a role model. As a role model my actions and attitude could leave impressions on our group, especially on younger members, so I try to be a positive influence, just like all of the other leaders of our group. We treat everyone with the same respect we want, and I think it's why out of the 15 years of Youth Commission Bullying has never been an issue. We work hard to maintain a compassionate and fun setting to get our work done.” ~ Jonny Norton

On the Youth Commission tolerance feels natural, we don't think about it. It comes from our respect for each other, but also our long term group setting, our goal orientation, our common grounds, and real passion for the group. Even though we are different we still share the same values, value in each other, value in the work that we do, value in ourselves. Jonas Castro, a fellow youth commissioner, explains that we get along so well because “Youth commission is not a place to fit in, it's a place to stand out”. We embrace ourselves and we embrace each other. We create specific rules for ourselves to follow based off what our group standards are, and always there are priorities on listening to each other, assuming good will, and enjoying ourselves. Meanness is generally unheard of, mostly because when we hear something controversial we step back, assume goodwill, and work through it if we need to. The Youth Commissions group dynamic is probably most successful because it gives our members the chance to be open, honest, and really a chance to be ourselves. We really value the individual's voice; we wholly believe that **every** voice is needed. One youth commissioner describes it as a **social hierarchy of kindness**, where the people who are seen as leaders generally have more social power without knowing it and people naturally listen to them. When a person or persons who have this power use it to keep the peace, you'd be looked down upon in a way if you went outside of these norms.

Even though usually we get along, we still have disagreements and conflict. Disagreement and conflict is really important to the group because it allows diversity in ideas, in groups, and understanding. Conflict definitely happens to us, but how we reconvene after serious conflict

shows our real talent. When talking to our group about how we handle issues we agreed that we handle tension maturely, relaxing the situation without making things worse so that we can resume working smoothly, keeping a happy-peaceful atmosphere.

Here is a break-down of some of the qualities of the Youth Commission as a program that supports a bully-free environment.

- **In the youth commissions we feel that we can make a difference.** The youth commission works towards common goals. We all know we have leadership roles as representatives from our respective schools. This gives us a sense of responsibility, so we all know to work together to achieve our goals.
- **We are a tightly knit group.** Developed through retreats, meetings, overnight work sessions and events. New members are welcomed with open arms. No one is left out and everyone feels that their voice is being heard. Group members never feel alone because there are people of all ages and varieties who make an effort to be inclusive. We are around each other about 300+ hours a year. When we spend time together in the Youth Commission, we gain a common respect for everyone, leading to less overall tension, decreasing the likelihood of conflicts.
- **Youth Commissioners don't fight for attention.** There is no need; we are all given a chance to be heard. We are a small group so we don't have to talk over on another to get are point of view across. In the Youth Commission every one is treated equally; there is no hierarchy except a hierarchy of kindness.
- **Assumption of good will.** Even is we disagree we try to understand where the other person is coming from.
- **We join the Youth Commission with common goals.** There is a point where we realize we are all here from the same reasons, even it it's not immediately obvious. Even if we don't start out with leading roles we all work on developing them (often this is mentored by older members.) Being a leader for this group is not always stepping up every time its knowing when you need to do something or act and you do it. We seek ways to help each other out even beyond what we were originally asked; we seek to help in whatever ways we can.
- **Disrespect isn't tolerated.** Everyone has each others back. There is an unspoken social hierarchy of kindness. It goes back to the assumption of good will. We try to understand even if we disagree personally with another opinion.
- **We have an honorary job and that creates a high standard for behavior.**
- **The things we do require cooperation.** We often assign roles or delegate tasks. We are raised to have an individualistic approach and seek things to be done by a single person and for that person to get credit. We need to create a system in which not always is it a single person. It takes a group to get some things done and it creates confidence in the entire group. It also seeks to strengthen the people individually and be able to rely on other people but still know that he or she can get the job done. We each have a

responsibility in the Youth Commission to uphold our common goals, because of a singular common goal, it requires precise cooperation. By cooperating, we find ways to efficiently solve our common goals.

- **We know our determination will lead to other peoples' futures.** We get a lot done without even realizing it and while having fun this motivates us and our participation. We aren't just doing this for the community we do it for ourselves because we know we are an important part of the community.
- **Youth Commission is a fresh start; we can be ourselves here.** First impressions from the group let you know it is okay to let your guard down. Everyone can see and hear each other. We get a better understanding of each others points of view. People make you feel included right away.

Recommendations for other youth programs based on our experiences:

In many places or groups that have up of youth, like neighborhood or youth groups, kids are often bullied for being different. Like many of these places, the Youth Commission is made up of various and diverse youth from all backgrounds. However instead of being harassed and tormented for being unique, we are encouraged to stand out. Here, we came up with some attributes that make the Youth Commission different, and how other environments with youth could make their members feel safe and included too:

- We hope that our example of a Social Hierarchy of Kindness can be replicated and used to make the expectations in schools, youth groups and clubs more caring and inclusive.
- Establish the importance of each individual so that everyone feels significant and valued.
- Make sure everybody knows of the importance to come together as a team. Team building activities can be helpful in allowing people to bond.
- Shared goals and group orientation creates common grounds that help people come together, putting aside differences, to work on projects and connect with each other.
- We share many snacks and meals together. Research shows that eating and having meals together help people bond and connect.
- Unlike many social places, at the Youth Commission younger kids look up to older youth, and older youth set an example and guide younger youth. Having a big sister, big brother type of program would allow this behavior to be fostered in other environments.
- Even though it may seem like it may be uncomfortable, it is good to encourage open conversations that address offensive behavior. Having a culture of being heard and having healthy conflict resolution skills is important.
- Making clubs outside of school helps people who don't normally have a voice be heard and allows youth to feel like their voice is valuable.
- Sometimes we have discussion disagreements and during those times instead of having a "I'm right you're wrong" argument we listen to our other peers idea's.

Recommendations related specifically to bullying:

Bullying. Everyone has been touched by bullying, whether it is a friend, a relative or even oneself being afflicted by bullying. What we have failed to notice is its grasp in today's society, and how big the problem really is. We brush off bullying as "an event(s) that builds character", however what we fail to realize is that this "event" can really be detrimental to kids and can affect more than just one person.

What is bullying? We perceive bullying as a kid being beat up, thrown in a trash can, stuffed in a locker, submerged in a toilet; it is all this and more. Bullying has evolved from this type of physical intimidation into words and name-calling. We have all said that "sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me", in reality, these words are the very opposite.

Bullying has changed from the physical humiliation to the use of both physical and psychological humiliation of a person. Things such as harmful name calling, gossip and physical beating are all elements of bullying.

Most sources claim that bullying is: when one's behavior hurts or harms another person physically or emotionally, when one cannot stop hostile behavior directed at them, when one is intimidated because of their status including physical status, emotional status and social status.

It boils down into one theme: someone is being hurt. Bullying comes in different sizes, shapes and forms, but we must realize that anything that involves hurting someone can potentially be considered bullying. The bottom line is, bullying takes happiness away from another person, and it instills fear and sadness. We have to let people know that bullying is bad, and it shouldn't be allowed just as harassment isn't allowed.

According to our research being a bystander in a bullying situation is a very powerful role. Bystanders have the ability to stop the bully and help the victim or to make the situation worse. Even one bystander who looks for help or discourages the bully can make a world of help. However, many bystanders don't interfere because of the fear of being bullied themselves. According to our research on the bystander effect, people are more likely to act if they are alone because they feel the responsibility of getting help is solely theirs. If two people are present the chance of that same person helping goes down significantly. Educating youth in schools of the bystander effect could possibly counteract this problem. Teaching bystanders to intervene could stop 50% of all bullying situations. Education of these effects on bullying to youth through school, parents, or other youth could have an eye opening effect on youth and lead to a stop of bullying.

Preventing Bullying recommendations:

Bus: We recommend having adult supervision implemented on school grounds and buses. Also having someone come in and scope out questionable situations.

It oftentimes isn't enough for teachers to assess school situations on bullying. Professional counselors who can recognize the signs of bullying should be available at every public school. These counselors can interview all of the participants in the situation and create a safe environment for teens to express what bullying has occurred. This would often be considered "tattling" or "ratting out" another teen; safe school settings can diminish this idea by providing one-on-one consultations with licensed counselors.

Bus: Drivers should take action when they see bad behavior, or report it to the school. Teens are often too scared to report to the school. Plus, each bus should have a camera in the back of the bus.

Parents should be encouraged to volunteer and become more involved with their child's education. This can be a very small thing yet create a world of difference. Supervised bus stops are something that a neighborhood can have control over. If parents of the community take turns supervising these bus stops, bullying might be prevented.

Clubs and Community Education:

- **Allow the creation of clubs** through which the school can "charter" clubs and they have the availability to reserve rooms for use and such and they can get with a peer group and just hangout this is just a good idea.
- **Work with community education classes** to create a sort of every other day or every week at this time on this day there is some sort of physical activity and it changes every month or so. Such as have P.E. teachers from the school just go and monitor and help kids from a range of age groups play a game of the week like hockey or flag football or something like that.
- **Teach conflict resolution** pre k-12/ bully awareness programs. This would be very great to begin at a very young age for kids to learn how to work through problems with other students or just to be able to help others get through something from a non-violence type of standpoint. Now it is also good for students to know the consequences of bullying and how it affects other kids. By teaching kids about what bullying is, how you can prevent it from happening you can prevent a problem before it begins.
- **Student run assembly on awareness and prevention.** Students often have the highest impact on other students versus adults or teachers. A student-run assembly on violence prevention can speak to large audiences of students in a way that they understand. Hearing the prevention strategies and awareness information from their peers is a much different and sometimes more impactful situation than listening to an adult speaker.
- **County- Public safety campaign.** Create packets/ information pamphlets for parents and concerned citizens about bullying. (How to identify it, stop it, teach kids responsible communications skills, how to support prevention.)

Recommendations about creating healthy neighborhoods that prevent violence:

These ideas could be shared with neighborhood associations and groups.

Some of the bullying and relationship abuse that occurs in young people's lives happens in a youth's own neighborhood, or even house. We came up with some ways that would help neighborhoods be a part of the solution. To us a healthy safe neighborhood looks like this:

- Access to outdoors can give youth a place to hang out beside in their house.
- Welcoming atmosphere that encourages individuality and social growth.
- Having zero tolerance for bullying in a neighborhood lets people know that harassment is simply 'not acceptable here.'
- Two Youth Commissioners described a park they had been to in New York City that could provide a great opportunity for people to bond here as well. Many activities were at the park, from ping pong tables to tennis courts. Not only did they have fun, but they found themselves playing and bonding with youth and adults they knew nothing about previously.
- Community/Recreation centers provide many opportunities for any nearby neighborhoods. Not only could clubs and activities be held there, information on bullying and teen dating violence could be made available. We thought it would be nice if it was an attractive center was stationed right in the middle of a neighborhood, with maybe even a fountain placed in front of it.
- Neighborhood meetings not only help people bond, it lets neighbors be able to address problems too.
- Making activities such as block parties easier to have would allow people to easily connect in their own neighborhoods.
- Creating activities such as community field trips.
- Neighborhoods youth groups allow youth to bond together in a safe environment, while knowing what's going on in the community.
- Neighborhood community projects allow neighbors to bond while getting something done. There could even be a daily activity like 'pick-up trash Tuesday.'
- Parent/child or family activities, such as community family camping trips, allow parents to bond and became more informed about their children's lives. We agreed that is important for parents to know and meet their child's dating partner. Neighbors could also know who a youth's partner is.
- When neighbors have each other's numbers, not only can they keep one another safe, youth are less likely to harass or hurt someone if they know their neighbors, who know their name and number, could be watching them.

- Neighborhood Watch can help reduce physical and verbal abuse. Not only will someone get reported if they are seen hurting someone, people are less likely to hurt others when they know they are being watched by their neighbors.
- Community gardens brighten up neighborhoods and allow people to get outside and bond. Bright, flower-filled gardens feels safer than dry, gray landscapes.
- Having a local library is not only a safe place to socialize, it is a place to ideal place to study and relax.
- Having shops or clubs to go to can help keep youth from doing other dangerous activities. For example, in one Youth Commissioner's neighborhood, there was nowhere to socialize, especially in the evening. Youth started to go to a Fred Meyers parking lot to connect. But when they got kicked out, they would go to socialize in areas that were not open, like the back of a store, or go to parties instead. When the frozen yogurt shops Yo Factory and Limeberry opened, youth no longer had to go behind stores or to parties, because they had somewhere not only fun, but an open and safe environment to socialize.
- Skate parks should not be near empty, old building/shacks to prevent drug use and trouble. A good example of one that feels safe is the Ridgefield skate park. It is stationed between a fire department and police station.
- A bus stop that stops in front of someone's house or yard is much safer than one hidden away where youth can bully or hurt other youth without being seen.
- A neighborhood with street lights allows neighbors to see what is going on outside at the dead of night.
- A curfew for people under a certain age could keep some youth away from violent partners at night.
- When younger, parents should accompany their kid at the bus stops in order to protect them from bullying or other forms of youth violence

Teen Dating Violence Recommendations:

- People often don't recognize when dating violence is going on, so it is important to teach people how to recognize the signs.
- It is important to teach youth how to get out of violent relationships.
- Many times, parents do not realize when their children are in abusive relationships. Information about how to recognize the signs when youth are in violent relationships educate parents help parents know if their child is experiencing dating violence.
- Every community should offer free classes that teach citizens how to recognize signs of violence in a relationship. Since parents often-times have the strongest connection to their teenagers (possibly through strong communication, constant interaction, etc.); parents need to be able to recognize changes in their teen's behavior that could represent the presence of violence in their relationship. Abuse victims don't walk around with a sign identifying their issues; community classes can inform parents on what exactly to look out for in their teen's behavior in order to make sure their relationships are violence free.
- Schools- communication classes- make teens aware of warning signs to teen violence. Arguably the strongest influence in a teenager's life is their friends. Teens should be required to take communication classes in order to learn what to look for in their friends' relationships. Teens may be too afraid to speak out about their situations, but teens will almost always speak out about situations that could be dangerous to their friends.
- Monitoring in school hallways: Cameras are a great way to have a way to prove what happened really did happen. While this is good to have, its better to also have people in the hall ways to actually watch and monitor things, work with schools to create in leadership class nominate people to be the hallway monitor and assign people to certain time periods between class to act as peacekeepers. Students will take this person much more seriously than an administrative person because they are an active member in their peer group. Now this person of course will not be acting alone they will be able to send students to the office for punishment and should seek teachers help in certain situations. But a student hall monitor will be able to dissolve situations before they become worse.
- Random acts of kindness awards. Every week post something about a student or multiple students to show off what they have done, this does not have to be crazy things like saved 10 children from a burning building, which is great, but it could be simple things like picked up garbage that was not their own.
- There could be something along the lines of a school wide game that tries to get everybody involved in some way like spirit week but maybe a get to know your class or something like that. Schools- "if you see something say something" campaign for reporting.
- County/community organization- create a program encourage healthy teen relationships. Could try couples classes for youth in the community. These could be as simple as just doing some small activity to help strengthen the bond between the two in the relationship

but also building team skills if working in a group. Work with community education classes to be able to offer some sort of activity each season to give something fun to do, even things as simple as pottery can help.

- Educate to help reduce fear of helping. We need to find a way to make people not scared of acting to help another person.

Conclusion:

Over the past year, the Youth Commission has spent hundreds of hours devoted to educating ourselves to the highest level of proficiency on the given topics. Through fruitful conversations, overnight work sessions, informative presentations to our peers, and many other methods of rigorous studying, we have obtained the knowledge to which we have presented to you today. Through our youth-driven events, the Art Show and the Kiggins Theater event, we have reached out to other youth beyond just our group to combine efforts in creating methods and visual aids to help educate the populace.

Our group code of conduct or how the group interacts and treats one another is likely a reason for the respect everyone has for another, as well as the homey, comforting environment the Clark County Youth House creates. The products of this report are solely developed from the information we have acquired over the course of our study, including the recommendations which are written by youth and portray the perspective of the youth.

The Youth Commission would like to recognize your cooperation, and thank you for giving us some of your very valuable time. We hope that this report can be a resource in building a more peaceful, non-violent, friendlier county where all people, and especially the youth, feel safe.

The Youth Commission consulted many different sources during the development of their recommendations. For a complete list of sources referenced, please contact: Elizabeth Hill, Program Coordinator for the Clark County Youth Commission at (360) 397-2130, Ext 5133, or Elizabeth.hill@clark.wa.gov