



Lessons from the Living and the Dead

The years gradually transformed Happy into a man with high-achieving children, a fine marriage, and steady employment. I had not seen him for 15 years when a reporter for the *L.A. Reader* asked if she could interview some of the students I discussed in the first edition of this book. We went through old addresses and located parents who had stayed in the old neighborhood. This led to a conversation with Happy's mother, who informed me that they had tried to find me for his wedding and that I would be proud of who he had become.

I was proud. Happy offered to host a small reunion for the reporter at his home. I understood that part of the joy of this meeting would be that Happy could present his new house—purchased in the old neighborhood and a great source of satisfaction to him.

"This is my house!" he told me as he patted his heart with his hand. In the bedroom was a computer for his two children, and the little girl was wearing a patch from the ophthalmologist to correct a lazy eye that impeded her reading ability. Both children were in a private school. "They were having problems, getting behind, and I heard that a private school would be better. They have fewer kids there, so we transferred them. What do you think?" I thought I might as well be talking to any

middle-class parent out on the West Side, except I was in South Central Los Angeles.

How Happy got here involved hitting the mat a few times, but getting back up for another round. He went through AA and now guards his sobriety with all the care of a good AA participant. His wife stayed with him through the tumbles.

He brought out the homework I used to give him, and he reminded me that I made him read the newspaper before he could pass the year. "Now I read the newspaper every day. I can tell you about Iraq, NAFTA, the elections." As a boy, you would have thought him slow, definitely distracted, and learning disabled in some form. As an adult, Happy displays cleverness, wisdom, humor, and a fast wit that keeps me at attention.

Happy still claims the gang. To him, they and the affiliation they shared are the friends of his youth, they are his memories. They still live in the neighborhood. They have baptized each other's children, gone camping together, grieved for those fallen into homelessness or long-term incarceration, and sometimes buried each other.

Happy would think me crazy if I assumed for a moment that he would participate in a drive-by, commit a criminal act, or be irresponsible as a parent. Like all parents, he thinks this generation is worse, he lectures the local gang members, and he forgets the severity of his own misadventures. Happy understands that the problem was never the gang itself. All kids belong to some kind of group, and the gang was his. The detrimental aspects of his participation were the specific behaviors they engaged in, and which destroyed many of their lives. It is these behaviors he has risen above and overcome.

Other gang members also managed to find proper lives. Playboy became a career officer in the military. Smiley raises British Tumblers, a fine breed of bird, which he sells and enters into competition. Sad Girl, Lonely, and Tiny all finished school and attained varying amounts of higher education. Joker married and has good children and a job he enjoys. He and Happy take their kids camping together. Yogi still works on cars and

PROOF—NOT FOR DISTRIBUTION

has a family. Sleepy and Psycho moved out of the neighborhood and have given good accounts of themselves.

Others still struggle.

Sharky, after completing a bookkeeping course, did not find work. The death of his older brothers also proved difficult. He does little jobs, attempts to be a good parent to his and Juanita's children, and often has to beg and borrow to get by.

Casper died in 1995. He had recently exited prison. A few days later, while walking to Happy's house to watch a pay-per-view fight, he fell across some young gang members from another neighborhood. They gunned him down. Happy's mother shared with me how, earlier that day, he had been at her house and told her, "I'm glad for Happy. I want to try to put my life together like he did."

Popeye and Pirate struggle with addictions. They live at home, always teetering between making it and bottoming out.

Goofy is dead.

Droopy eventually killed someone and will never leave prison.

Droopy makes me particularly sad. I still picture him learning waltz steps for the *quinceñera** for one of the girls in the neighborhood. I can hear the lecture I gave him for taking my car one day without permission. I can remember his voice saying, "I'm a bad boy," in a slow stupor as Sister Natalia hovered over his silver-coated face. I remember being surprised that he could actually open a remote control, take out the transistors, solder in new ones, and make it work. A little Ritalin, a special school, and some anger management, and he would be out today, and someone else would be alive.

* A *quinceñera* is a Mexican celebration in which a 15-year-old girl is introduced to society—a coming-out party. The all-day affair involves a special Mass, attire similar to a wedding, and a choreographed waltz by the teenage escorts at the start of the evening's reception. Quinceñeras can cost thousands of dollars and often place families in considerable debt.

PROOF—NOT FOR DISTRIBUTION

Years after we closed the school, I know what decided the fates of my students: the patient resourcefulness of their parents, schools that either supported or rejected them, and the availability of people who understood how to treat their particular problems and addictions—simple, elusive stuff. If they had the fortune of finding this combination of adults, then a coherent, sustained guidance into adulthood developed for them. A few managed to find it.

Violence is not something you stop by preaching. Violence disappears as children experience success and discipline and begin believing in their own possibilities. While they were members of El Santo Niño, they got back on the track to growing up—they became part of a village with concerned adults preparing children to take a proper place among them. Those students who managed to find this again after the gang school at El Santo Niño closed are alive, sober, and enjoying this day. For those who did not, growing up stopped and they went back to wandering the periphery of this village, struggling for a way back in.

PROOF—NOT FOR DISTRIBUTION



PART FOUR

Part four offers
Nice summary of
action needed to
comb at gang activity.

Coherence and
Community

EIGHT STEPS TO A GANG FREE COMMUNITY

Note to Jenny:

Apparently, the Slasher font doesn't have a hyphen in it. Instead, in "Gang Free," above, it substitutes a slash on the screen. But that slash doesn't print, as you can see. Can you use a hyphen from another font?

PROOF—NOT FOR DISTRIBUTION



PROOF—NOT FOR DISTRIBUTION



The Gang-Free Community

My best friend picked me up on Friday afternoon, and we had lunch at Teresita's, a favorite East Los Angeles eatery. We sat for three hours and talked with many of the locals we know. The owner, Doña Campos, introduced us to a college professor in his early 50s as The Man Who Faced Down Those Cholos.

"It happened so fast," he explained. "I was at the park, and these cholos came up to two young kids and stole their bikes. I ran up to the kids and said, 'Get in the car.' Since the cholos were riding uphill, I caught up with them in a minute. I drove up to them at 50 miles an hour, then screeched to a stop right behind them. They thought they were going to get run over, so they jumped off the bikes and ran into the courtyard of the projects, the Ramona Gardens.

"I told the kids to get their bikes off the ground and stuff them into my Honda. But the two cholitos came back with their homeboys and started rushing me. I grabbed a tire iron out of the trunk and said, 'Come on!' I was pissed off. I remembered what it felt like to be a kid and have my bike stolen, and the adrenaline just gave me a rush.

"The cholo in front put his hand in his shirt and said, 'I've got a gun here.'

" 'Pull it out,' I said. 'Pull it out now and shoot fast, 'cause I'm going to kill you if you don't.' There was a crowd around, but no one called the police. The gang members must have thought I was crazy. They backed off, and I took the kids home with their bikes. I don't think I would do that again, but at the moment, you know... The crazy thing is, I found out one of the gang members was the son of a friend I hadn't seen in years. She called me to apologize."

The story had been the local buzz at the restaurant for the past couple of weeks, Doña Campos informed us. She then sat with us and said, "I go to another church now because the local one has too many of those boys. You never know when the shooting starts. Last week, the son of a neighbor came up to me and said, 'I asked you for a dollar last week and you refused me.' Poor boy, he's a drug addict. Such a beautiful family, but only God knows why these things happen. I told him, 'How could I refuse you a dollar? You know that if you need, and I am able to help, I would never refuse to.' He told me he was the leader of all the local gangs and that he had put the word out that no one was to touch my restaurant. He said I was protected. Poor, crazy boy."

We all knew exactly the kind of boy she was talking about. "That kind of protection is a deal for a dollar," I said. "Maybe you can get it for my dad's Laundramat."

I know that most of the people who read this book are not from areas with gang problems. Many of you are worried or interested in this problem, but it is one you see from afar—on television or in the papers—one which you hope never comes any closer than that. And I know the media portrays these children as an organized army of thugs holding communities hostage.

Not exactly. For those of us who live in these areas, these kids are not simply some evil militia to destroy at all costs. They are our neighbors' sons, our cousins' daughters. They are children we have seen grow up. They sit in the back row at church, they dance at our daughters' 15th *quinceñeras*, and they

PROOF—NOT FOR DISTRIBUTION

say hello to us when we pass them by the phone booth at the corner market.

They are children for whom we feel sorry, who die young before us, who stagger the streets drunk or stoned or covered in paint they've been sniffing. They disappear for months or years, come back from jail now and then, and disappear again. We talk over backyard fences about those who died walking down the street, who got shot or beaten, or who overdosed on some drug. We console their mothers and fathers, and we don't know what to do or say to alleviate their parents' shame when one of these children commits a terrible crime.

Nearly all of us as neighbors saw local gang members heading for that life at very young ages; and, like their parents, brothers and sisters, teachers, and neighbors, none of us knew what to do about it. We gave advice, like, "Send them to live in Mexico." Some parents could do this, and it often saved a son or daughter. But no one knew what to do beyond such exile.

Doña Campos told me over lunch, "You must kiss a child, but you must also discipline a child so that he knows where to stand. It takes both." Her children have gone to college. Yet her neighbor also kissed and disciplined and prayed and cried. And, for most of her children, that was enough; yet one staggers the streets asking for a dollar.

For 20 years—sometimes by coincidence, sometimes by compassion—I have found myself working with gang members. Twenty years teaches a person quite a bit. What helps gang members turn it around is no longer a mystery to me. It's pretty ordinary stuff.

When the first edition of this book came out, I spent months traveling, consulting, and helping all kinds of people with their programs to help gang members—everyone from church group sponsors to prison boot camp sergeants. What I learned in that process has made me adamant about a couple of things. I saw success in these programs, but the success lasted only while the gang members stayed in the programs. The boy in the mural project was not out vandalizing while he was in that project; the

PROOF—NOT FOR DISTRIBUTION

girl in the rehabilitation home was not taking drugs while living in the home. The boy at juvenile hall became a good student at the jail school, and the kid in the church program worked hard when helping the pastor. What everyone kept asking me was, "How do we make this better? How do we get these kids to really change, so that they're good even when they aren't here?"

The answer is that you don't have to add to any particular program. The community has to put its many great efforts together in a rational manner. At that point, a community may find it has most of the resources to protect, contain, and heal its gang-involved children all day and all year. Sometimes when I say that, people respond, "Well, that's their parents' responsibility," or "Why should we have to put so much effort into these kids? Let them straighten out or rot in jail."

I really have no answer to that, except to say that in the middle of the Arizona desert I saw a people take a much different attitude. Much of this has to do with the fact that on a small American Indian reservation, most people—whether the chief of police or a local gang member—have some relationship to each other, either as a neighbor, cousin, brother, or sister. This makes it very hard to scapegoat anyone. And living on a small piece of desert, where resources are scarce, provides a mentality that nothing should be wasted. This includes children.

On this reservation, the word "community" includes the judges, principals, gang members, pensioners, and police officers. I didn't need to convince anyone that if they all worked together, they could take back their children. In fact, taking that attitude has made everyone's life easier. No one has to do the job alone, and in the long run, an expensive, disturbing problem gets solved.

This community is forming mothers' groups, establishing mentor programs between high-school seniors and freshman at the continuation school, targeting children early and following them, contacting employers about jobs for delinquents, and implementing other wonderful interventions. What is excep-

PROOF—NOT FOR DISTRIBUTION

tional, however, is that they are coordinating these efforts as a community, with a clear goal of taking back all of their children.

It's a rough road, sure, but the only one that gets us out of this mess without having to leave our children to rot in jail.

In the rest of this book, I offer a series of steps that communities can take that will eliminate the formation of gangs. As you can see, I have a wide perspective on this problem. It is a mental health issue, a child-raising issue, and an educational issue. Certain conditions bring it about, and certain responses bring it to a stop, just like any other human behavior.

The steps I suggest work best if taken in the order I present them here.

Peace.

PROOF—NOT FOR DISTRIBUTION



PROOF—NOT FOR DISTRIBUTION





Step 1: ***The Community*** ***Affirms All Its Children***

At a powwow on the Pima-Maricopa reservation, I heard something I would someday like to hear in all places that struggle with delinquent children. This particular powwow celebrated a youth conference put on by the youth gang task force. Community parents, children, and leaders all attended in a large circle around the grass arena. Later, gang members, Explorer scouts, parents, beauty pageant contestants, the city manager, and the chief of police would all join in the arena to dance together.

Before the dancing began, the master of ceremonies led the community in an opening prayer. Elected officials, elders, parents, and the whole assembly took part in this blessing:

We pray for our youth,
To make them strong,
Wise, and proud.
And we pray for those of our youth
Who sleep tonight behind bars.
Because we love them also.

It's that last line that I've never heard another community express publicly.

On the Salt River Reservation in Arizona, the Pima-Maricopa Indian Community has a gang problem comparable to that found in many inner cities. Their police force is strained, housing projects struggle, and kids engage in vandalism and violence against each other. This is a new problem for them, and plenty of agony stretches across this small desert nation.

On their side, however, is that fact that the Pima-Maricopa are an ancient and close-knit community. The people know each other well, and kinship is spread across the reservation. Perhaps for that reason, they find it difficult to scapegoat and blame. A young gang member easily is the son of a teacher, who is the cousin of the fire chief and nephew of an elder or minister. School, family, and public institutions are connected by blood and time, such that blame directed at any one of them eventually winds up back in one's own family. The result is an attitude that I don't think exists yet in our American cities, but which must be present for any community that wants to solve its gang crisis.

The Pima-Maricopa accept that they are a community, and community children are everyone's problem. They don't divide children among institutions that never talk to each other. Instead, they sit in a circle, and probation officers, the mayor, tribal elders, school principals, parent representatives, job developers, and mental health directors jointly try to decide what to do. The public institutions, the police, the parents, and the politicians all realize that they have a common concern that requires all of their cooperation and common sense.

They understand that "bad" children are no less a part of their community than the "good" children. They see the need to put as much effort into the successes of their prodigal sons and daughters as they do toward the successes of those children who have met expectations. Gang members are, first, community children to be fostered, not invading armies to be fought off.

I have one memory of my time with the Pima-Maricopa of which I am particularly fond. It demonstrates the kind of interaction that occurs when a community treats gang mem-

PROOF—NOT FOR DISTRIBUTION

bers primarily as difficult kids—meaning they are owned and directed, not feared or negotiated with as if they were adults.

I had been brought in as one of the consultants for the community's efforts to reclaim its children. Community leaders conferenced regularly on how to begin fulfilling this mandate, and I had been speaking at one such gathering. Seated against the walls were citizens of the community, including teenagers, who had come to listen and take part in the conversation. Normal questions followed about details, program costs, and logistics.

Directly facing me, at the back of the room, a teenager stood up and raised his hand. He was a tall, thin gang member, about 17 years old. "This is all good," he declared, "but you can't do anything for us unless we want you to." The challenge had been made, and I realized this would be an interaction that would either hearten or discourage the community's efforts. I had just made a speech about how we could change the forces alienating our children, and this young man had called me on it.

I have been a family therapist for many years, and such comments are to be expected from teenagers. In time, one learns to welcome them. As in family therapy, the gang member spoke from the midst of a people who obviously loved him and among whom he felt safe. I responded as I would have in my own office:

"Thank you. You're a teenager, and I think I would have no respect for you if you didn't rebel, at least a little, against this massive adult effort. That's your job as a teen. But our job as adults is to take care of you, to keep you safe, and to make sure you get the best. And it's our job whether or not you agree to that. That's what adults are for. You keep voicing your thoughts. But we will fail as adults if we think we need our children's permission to do what's right for them. You don't have to like what we come up with, but you will have to live with it. If we are afraid of our own kids, we're not going to get very far in this community."

The young Pima gang member did exactly what I had seen teens do over and over in therapy: He gave me a hard look, and

PROOF—NOT FOR DISTRIBUTION

then a small smile. Teenagers start a lot of fights that they want us to win. They'll just never admit that in words.

The beginning, the first step, in solving the gang problem, comes when a community publicly decides to reown all of its children, when its leaders are not afraid to publicly announce about those behind bars that "we love them also." As a community stops fearing its own children and instead begins to plan for them, the battle turns in its favor.

PROOF—NOT FOR DISTRIBUTION



Step 2: ***The Children's Advocate and The Child-Raising Community***

Promises are easily forgotten. Intentions often result in little more than endless talk at town meetings. Productive conversations depend on agreement about specifics. The "gang problem" is not specific enough. You are not fighting gangs. A community that decides it is going to wage war on 14-year-olds has forgotten who the adults are in this mess.

The real fight involves the community's hesitation at admitting that certain children need more and different kinds of help and figuring out how to provide that help. To start that fight, the productive one, you need information. You need the specifics that explain how the gang-involved children in your child-raising community fare in areas critical to healthy youth.

A town meeting must begin with every citizen obtaining lists describing the reading levels of gang members in their community, the numbers in juvenile hall, the unemployment rate among gang members, their levels of addictions, services available to gang members, their levels of participation in organized recreation, and the number of gang members with

access to support groups and therapeutic services. Now you have something specific to talk about and something to solve.

A community needs to get the numbers, set goals around those numbers, and then hire someone to keep track of progress. The person who does this job keeps the community honest and working. I call this person the children's advocate, because by continuously reminding a community about its promise and keeping the specifics before the community, they keep the "bad" children from being forgotten. A children's advocate will, at minimum, do this for your community. Such a person will provide the numbers that allow your community to talk, think, and plan.

What exactly is a child-raising community? In terms of the gang problem, it contains one high school and the junior high and elementary schools that feed into it. This comprises the group of adults who take a child from birth and jointly raise him or her to adulthood. This group of parents, teachers, police officers, business people, recreation directors, psychologists, ministers, and politicians is the village that raises children. It is not necessarily a geographic community: Teachers and other adults who work with kids sometimes live in other parts of town, for example, and kids are often bused to schools in other communities. But to solve the gang problem, these are the people who must call each other family.

The citizens of such a community should be able to pick up a local newspaper and find out how many of their community's children are in juvenile hall, how many are learning disabled and receiving services, and how many failed English in the local high school. A children's advocate gathers such information and makes sure it gets to the public on a regular basis. This allows the entire community to know how it is doing and what needs more attention. You would be amazed at how much more effective a community becomes when it has real information to work with.

How many of your neighborhood children read at grade level? How many are in juvenile hall this month? Are the numbers worse or better than last year? How many of those in

PROOF—NOT FOR DISTRIBUTION

gangs need help with addictions? Is this help available? Does your community need a reading center? For how many children? Are there enough uniforms and sufficient transportation, for sixth graders who want to play soccer and whom teachers think are at risk for gang involvement? How many tutors would it take to get every sixth grader into junior high with a literacy rate that would ensure they can understand their textbooks? How many mentors would be needed to serve every junior high student on probation?

You need the numbers.

Once a community accustoms itself to hearing these statistics regularly, then it becomes aware of its children in the same manner that it is aware of the record of its local sports franchise. This is happening already in terms of some school-wide test scores that are published yearly. As you've noticed, now that these test scores are available, politicians, researchers, educators, and voters take them very seriously.

Keeping track of our "bad children" makes them visible and real to us as children. And gathering this information as a community forces us to think of ourselves as people with a common cause—as a family, a clan, a village, or one big company—as a group of people who must put their heads together and figure out what to do with all of its children.

A children's advocate calls our attention back to the problem and argues on behalf of the bad apples. No one does that now—no one lobbies for the special needs of gang-involved children. Someone in the community has to make this his or her job, or we simply won't get around to those kids, and promises we make in community meetings will end up being broken.

PROOF—NOT FOR DISTRIBUTION



PROOF—NOT FOR DISTRIBUTION



Step 3: Creating and Supporting Transformative Schools

Several years ago, I participated in a version of the Scared Straight program. In this particular case, I went with the students from one of the local high schools. On this special day, the top Latino students toured a local university to motivate them toward college. The troublesome students toured the local youth camp, one of the places to which juveniles are sentenced, the idea being that this would motivate them away from delinquency.

The show delivered. Students marched through corridors and listened to screaming inmates; they looked in tiny cells with exposed toilets. One girl behind a metal door gave a haunted-house shriek and cried for the passing students to come join her. Then the inmates gave presentations.

The first, a huge Mexican boy, looked at our males and asked, "Are you from Santa Barbara?" They answered by nodding slightly. "Good. The last boy from Santa Barbara turned into my toy. I'll be waiting for you." Another inmate described the toilet situation and told the group that here their humanity would be lost. They would have no privacy, wipe themselves in front of other prisoners, never be able to do one thing without

permission and observers. A young woman talked about missing her friends and mother and how she wished she could do it all over again.

What effect did this have? On the students, no more than a good, scary movie. They talked about it at McDonald's in the same excited voices they would use if they had attended a gory slasher film. It was theater, and they knew it. But that's not the point.

The tour did have a powerful positive effect, but not on those students it was intended to impress. The real value resided in what this project did for the inmate team that produced the program. To be a presenter in this effort, juvenile inmates had to show exemplary behavior and be role models to other inmates. They had to memorize their scripts and go over them critically with the officer in charge of the program. After each presentation, the officer and the other volunteers rated their delivery, gave advice, and offered congratulations.

This program involved a lot of extra work for these incarcerated volunteers, yet they received nothing in return. Absolutely nothing. They did not get time off their sentences, extra goodies, money, or a chance to go home. Nothing. Instead, they were actually scrutinized closer than other inmates and punished more severely for infractions. But they loved the program, and they loved the officer in charge.

For these incarcerated youth, the opportunity to be special, to accomplish something, to have a coach and mentor, to be part of a winning team meant everything. It also provided a structure, supportive peers, skills, a caring mentor, recognition and reprimands, and continuous feedback. It provided all of these daily, and right where the kids lived. Combined with the regular schooling provided at the youth authority, the addition of this program gave these adolescents the training, support, and direction they needed as kids becoming adults.

The youth authority camp was not having this powerful impact on the other delinquents. The other juveniles did not experience the attentive eye of an adult with a plan for them,

PROOF—NOT FOR DISTRIBUTION

they did not have a peer group that felt like a team, and their victories were not celebrated.

Just as the first step is for a community to see these children, so the second must be to support and create places that provide the daily education, mentoring, direction, encouragement, and help that these kids require. This community place must be where the kids belong, it must be close to home and part of the neighborhood, and it must be a place with a plan. For the Scared Straight inmate team, they found a place with a plan inside of the youth camp.

But what happens back in the neighborhood? Who takes the torch? Where do these teens go to control their addictions, get support and references when applying for their first jobs, learn to read, have hyperactivity or a learning disabilities diagnosed, or find athletic teams to participate in? These inmates are still teenagers; they have miles to go, and unless the local community has a plan for them, they won't make it.

"Bad Kid" Schools

Once a community has taken a vow to acknowledge, support, and keep track of all its children, including the "bad ones," then it must acknowledge, support, and keep a keen eye on the places where these "bad kids" will be served and transformed. Gang schools, opportunity rooms, or wherever else a child-raising community decides to gather its wayward children, must be at the center of the community's attention if the gang problems are to go away.

I know it irks people to celebrate the accomplishments of "bad kids." Read the Bible and the story of the prodigal son. The "good kids" will do well in this world. They receive our praise, our trophies, our financial aid packages, our trust, and our jobs; everything we have is theirs. But the "bad kids" come home to us with nothing, and we have to let them know that they count. We have to let them know that we are glad they are home. This means a few fireworks and a little extra attention.

PROOF—NOT FOR DISTRIBUTION

We do want to solve this problem, right? Then we need to provide "bad kid" schools with

- small student-teacher ratios, with well-trained aides;
- ties to the business community to provide each delinquent a chance to learn how to apply and interview for jobs and how to work;
- weekly support groups—led by teachers, probation officers, or counseling interns from local colleges—aimed at meeting individual goals, such as sobriety, attendance, getting to work on time, and not breaking probation;
- ties to cultural and athletic opportunities, both with local high schools and with recreation centers and other sponsors;
- visits from local court judges who sentence these youths, to encourage them and let them know that everyone is working together to keep them on track;
- parent support groups;
- field trips to colleges, junior colleges, training centers, and other places that we want to make familiar so students feel at ease visualizing themselves attending there;
- access to specialists who can diagnose learning problems and emotional difficulties and suggest remedies and resources;
- well-publicized rituals and ceremonies marking the small, but important accomplishments of these students. A newspaper group photograph, a certificate, a good word to a parent could all acknowledge such accomplishments as attending class 80% of the time, meeting important academic goals like reading

PROOF—NOT FOR DISTRIBUTION

improvement, maintaining sobriety for a certain number of months, not breaking probation, or obtaining a job and keeping it. Each brick counts. Celebrate so that it sets well.

There are many examples of schools that currently try to do this, and they succeed with little funding and scarce attention. I am familiar with the Soledad Enriched Action Schools of East Los Angeles, The Expeditionary Schools of Santa Barbara County, and the Desert Eagle Charter School on the Salt River Reservation. There are probably hundreds that I don't know about. The impediment is not that these schools are rare; the problem is that they are invisible and seen as peripheral to the job of educating a community's youth.

The small "bad kid" schools that most school districts sponsor don't have football teams or booster clubs. They are seen as transitory places. This is wrong. They must be schools that are alternatives for kids—many, many kids—who need the intimate structure of such schools to succeed. We need to be as aware of what these schools do and the resources that they need as we are of our regular secondary schools.

All of this takes money, but not much more than we already spend. The most significant difference will be that, instead of these schools being invisible and without much respect, they will become sources of attention and pride in their communities.

In your community, how many kids need this kind of a school? What does your local "bad kid" school need to educate every gang member on probation, every gang member who is feeling defeated in regular school? What do they need to successfully make every such student a confident, competent adult?

Imagine if they succeed in this task.

PROOF—NOT FOR DISTRIBUTION



PROOF—NOT FOR DISTRIBUTION



Step 4: Parents as Partners, Not Patients

In Ventura County, California, one of the public schools decided to put together a program for the parents of gang-involved students. This turned out to be a weekly event in which parents received instruction on better parenting strategies. To her surprise, the coordinator found that the parents of gang members differed substantially from each other. It became difficult to know what to teach them. Some needed basic ideas about parenting, while others could have taught the coordinator some lessons on the subject. There was no stereotypical "gang parent" to target and fix.

The program proved very helpful, however, to parents in a way the school hadn't envisioned. After the program, parents began having frequent conversations with each other that went something like this:

"Are you Shorty's mother? My son says he was at your house last night."

"No, the boys didn't come over. I don't know where they were."

And then a third mother would overhear and offer, "They came by my house with beers and then went to a party on 32nd Street. They said. . . ."

Eventually, the mothers exchanged phone numbers and agreed to call each other when in doubt about their children's whereabouts. These conversations also helped locate whose house was being used for ditching parties during the day. Soon, certain mothers who were home during the day made it a habit to check other homes to find out if the kids were sneaking out of school and partying.

The Soledad Enriched Action School in East Los Angeles organizes mothers into a phone tree. They call each other if any of them hear of fights or other trouble. This allows mothers to call police, keep their children home, and intervene in other appropriate ways.

The key to using parents is seeing them as partners, not patients. If we are going to solve the gang problem, we must stop scapegoating parents and start consulting them. I travel to communities all over the country that are trying to develop programs for helping delinquents. At meetings, I see police officers, teachers, psychologists, activists, ministers, and even gang members. But I never see the parents of gang members. Surely, if they can round up gang members, they can also invite their parents. But no one does this. They prefer talking to the kids and asking them to solve problems, rather than talking adult-to-adult and coming up with coordinated strategies to get the kids in check. That has to stop.

It's easy to talk to a gang member. The gang member is a kid and is going to tell you how horrible his or her parents are and that you never want to talk to them. The gang member is never going to say, "Yes, my parents are worried about me, and you all should get together with them and figure out how to help me and keep me in line." What teenager has ever uttered those words? No, a teenager wants to keep you as far away from his or her parents as possible. Communities that buy into that fall into a very dysfunctional pattern.

You don't solve the gang problem by talking to gang members. You solve it by getting the adults together—teachers, judges, probation officers, civic leaders, and parents—and deciding how to help, direct, and properly raise some very difficult

PROOF—NOT FOR DISTRIBUTION

children. If the conversation among these parties is honest and nonblaming (a good mediator helps), then everyone will have advice to offer, insights to contribute, and areas in which they feel they could use some help. I assure you, everyone in this picture can use some help.

One of the interactions I most frequently experience in visits to communities is an encounter with a parent who pulls me aside after a meeting and desperately wants to talk to me. On one American Indian reservation, one such parent was an important local minister. After a community meeting, he met me by the punch bowl and, in a very pained voice, told me, "I have almost killed some of my boy's friends. I think you're wrong about culture—he was doing well in the city school. It's when he started hanging out with reservation boys that he started giving us all this trouble. I told his friends if they come around here, I'll shoot them. My blood pressure isn't good. I'm just so angry. I'm a minister, people look at my family, and I can't even control my own boy."

I asked him, "Is he doing drugs, missing school, or getting arrested?"

"Not yet. He's not that kind of boy. But he wants to be tough, and he just has become disobedient and full of attitude. I think he's more of a wannabe, but its driving us crazy."

After more punch-bowl talk, it became apparent that this minister really needed to talk to other parents in his same situation. This good man and his wife were living with shame, fear, worry, and anger. They had no one with whom to share this and whom they felt would not condemn them. They also had much to offer. Their parenting skills appeared fine by the looks of their other children, and as clergy, this man could be an example to others that even ministers struggle with their children—something in which other parents in a support group could take great comfort.

What would most benefit this man, and most parents of gang-involved children, would be contact with other parents with whom they could share the burden and from whom they could take a bit of encouragement. What would most benefit

PROOF—NOT FOR DISTRIBUTION

community leaders would be to have the parents of gang members involved as respected partners—not disregarded as scapegoats—in this difficult task of raising children in hard environments.

PROOF—NOT FOR DISTRIBUTION



Step 5: Supporting Transitions Between Institutions

A few years ago, the probation department referred a 15-year-old gang member to counseling at a clinic I managed. Guillermo had been arrested for the first time, and this occasioned the referral as part of a diversion program.

The boy's parents were older and had a strange and time-consuming burden. Their oldest son, who had just turned 20, had experienced a sudden onset of schizophrenia his senior year of high school. He now required therapy, medication, and vigilance. The oldest daughter was in her mid-20s and autistic. She sat in the living room, unaware of her surroundings, and required help in basic tasks.

Unlike most gang members, Guillermo had a rather ordinary experience in the primary grades, with only minor academic difficulties. After his older brother's change, however, he became distracted in the classroom—understandably, as his home life became chaotic, his parents became challenged for time to spend with him, and he began to feel guilt about his brother's condition. In the seventh grade, Guillermo's behavior worsened. He progressed into a chronic truant, became a discipline problem in the classroom, and befriended gang members to hang out with when not in school.

But someone at Guillermo's junior high had a thinking cap on. Beginning in the eighth grade, a mentor assigned to him began making sure he attended classes and completed assignments daily. This intervention improved his attendance remarkably. The real genius of the plan, however, occurred when the junior high school held its end-of-the-semester assembly. Standing before the whole school, the principal asked Guillermo to come forward from his seat. When he arrived at the podium, the principal honored him as the most-improved student academically and gave him a special certificate for dramatically improving his attendance. The second semester, he had perfect attendance.

The summer after graduating junior high school, however, a probation officer recommended him for therapy. He had been caught running through the L.A. River bed with another boy. They had a gun and were apparently chasing someone. No one got hurt; no shots were fired; and, since this was a first offense, the judge felt diversion would be the best intervention.

I asked Guillermo about the incident, where he got the gun, and what he had planned.

"My friend got it. Some guy said something to us, and we were chasing him."

"Would you have shot him?"

"I don't know. Maybe. We were just running. I don't know what I'm doing. I know I'm going to mess up from now on."

In therapy, he often referred back to the assembly where he had been honored. Even several months later, the memory of being applauded before all his peers gave him a strong shot of pride. But he felt scared now, and he started to sabotage himself. I think he actually looked to the emotional safety of a juvenile hall school.

"I'm going to get lost," he said when he talked about entering high school in the fall. "I don't think I can keep myself working there [when he would enter high school in the fall]. I just don't think so."

The recognition, the mentor, the principal's acknowledgment, all of these had given him a sense of belonging to the

PROOF—NOT FOR DISTRIBUTION

school and the motivation to be his best self. But going to high school terrified him, in the way an alcoholic dreads being in a bar. He felt he would be alone there, unknown, and without the support that had given him the courage to change his habits.

Sure enough, he fought another student within two weeks of the semester's start and received a three-day suspension. Guillermo told me that the halls were packed so tight he couldn't breathe, that courses moved too quickly. In a word, he panicked.

Fortunately for Guillermo, the new school cooperated once I called them and gave them some background. They asked him to try out for basketball, and the coach made a point of befriending him; one of the counselors decided to make a personal effort to become Guillermo's mentor for the year. His parents kept bringing him to therapy even after the diversion program stopped paying.

Guillermo proved luckier than other boys. A supported transition from one institution to another patched itself together long enough to get him set and succeeding again. But it was really just luck. The institution itself had no mechanism for this, and it just happened that some good people decided to take it upon themselves. Because of that luck, the good work at the junior high did not get lost, and the support by the high school made it possible for him to readjust and get back his motivation and nerve.

I am sure, however, that there were quite a few other Guillemos at that school for whom these things did not happen.

After El Santo Niño closed, I kept up with some of the students, especially the ones I worried about. I took Sharky out to lunch that September to see how he had been holding up in public school. I told him that I had asked administrators to look after him.

"I know, Homéy," he said, his face a bit serious and looking to the side. "I can feel, like, people, teachers, know what I'm doing." He enjoyed this sense of importance, and it made him optimistic about doing well. The surveillance he felt soon ended,

PROOF—NOT FOR DISTRIBUTION

however. It really consisted of one administrator taking a bit of time out every week to see him for a few minutes. But the administrator had 3,000 other teens to care for, and this ritual diminished in frequency until it disappeared.

Sharky had serious reading disabilities, an addiction to glue, and years of failure behind him. Although he had progressed considerably in reading and had gained considerable academic knowledge, this had occurred within a very controlled and safe setting. Going from El Santo Niño, a one-room schoolhouse with 30 friends and an empathetic staff, to a junior high with 3,000 students, seven periods a day, and a strange, year-round schedule, simply overwhelmed him. He got thrown in the deep end without anyone to swim beside him for a few laps.

Without the handrail of supportive adults, he faltered. Unlike Guillermo, no therapist made phone calls for Sharky, no counselor found time to monitor him, and no one volunteered to get him involved in special activities at school. He had nothing to hold onto, so the transition from one institution to the next slipped into failure. Within two months, he had dropped out. Sharky drifted for several years until being placed in the Job Corps by a probation officer.

I compare this story with my friend Jacob's experience with his daughter. He is a junior college professor and a highly paid consultant. Jacob's ex-wife is a licensed psychologist. Their oldest children went through puberty unscathed, but the youngest daughter had a tumultuous adolescence.

Jacob sent his daughter to therapy, then drug rehabilitation, then family counseling, and to various private schools. They went through tough love, and still she declined into greater drug use, running away, and continuous disregard for parental curfews. Jacob's bright daughter did well in school when she wanted to, and found work easily when she tried.

"You don't know what it's like to see your daughter stoned all the time, completely unavailable to you," he told me wearily. "I hate wondering where she is, if she's coming back tonight or tomorrow."

PROOF—NOT FOR DISTRIBUTION

After a final round of rehab and ultimatums, Jacob decided he would do anything to help her. He didn't want to turn her loose, as the tough love approach required, so he found a program in another state. It cost \$21,000 for six months. Jacob put up \$7,000; his ex-wife, another \$7,000; and the grandparents mortgaged a house for the final \$7,000.

The intervention worked. Not only did Jacob's daughter not relapse into old behaviors upon leaving the program, but she became a youth mentor to other girls and has gone on successfully to college.

To help one girl with an addiction took \$21,000, countless hours of therapy, special schools, parent seminars, and continuing peer support groups. Everyone I have talked to in the middle class finds this unsurprising, and many have stories of family or neighbors who have invested similarly in troubled teenagers. That being the case, how do we expect an addicted teen—with problems compounded by learning disabilities, school failure, poverty, and other difficulties—to transition into public school from incarceration, in the middle of the year, and hit the ground running? How do we expect a troubled sixth grader to enter a junior high school and not get lost? How do we expect a boy or girl to leave a group home after a two-month recovery program and go back to his or her neighborhood without any support and think that he or she will do well?

One constant about gang members is that they shuttle between institutions—juvenile hall, to youth camp, to group home, to special school, to regular school, then back to juvenile hall, and so on. The reason they move so much is that they fail; they mess up; they stop showing up; and, in the end, a probation officer or judge has to find another placement for them. If we can get them started well, however, the likelihood of negative experiences diminishes greatly.

All child-raising communities—and here, children's advocates could streamline the process—need to create mechanisms in their schools that allow gang members to get good starts upon entry. Some ideas:

PROOF—NOT FOR DISTRIBUTION

- Establish a liaison at the high school and junior high school who visits inmates at juvenile hall who belongs to that public school. The liaison lets incarcerated students know they are not forgotten and also prepares for their return by informing teachers, contacting mentors, and arranging for welcoming orientations along with probation officers.
- Establish a mentor program for students on probation.
- Have a special aide or volunteer check in during each class to verify attendance, observe behavior, and collect reports from teachers. The information gathered from observation and teacher input can be used to determine what supports students will need to keep up, or if students need a continuation school, fewer classes, or different classes.
- Create an ongoing support group for students on probation that meets during school hours.
- Create a system of ceremonies and rewards at the school for returning students—for example, after two months of good attendance, a special lunch. At the end of a semester, arrange for acceptance into a school-community business program that supports after-school jobs for teens on probation.
- Save the last period for a special class in which students present teacher signatures confirming that they have completed the day's work in each period. This class should also have several volunteer college students as aides who can help with homework assignments that can be completed at this time.
- Require participation in a school activity or sport, and assign a mentor to encourage students in this endeavor. Such activities promote contact with new peer groups for gang members.

PROOF—NOT FOR DISTRIBUTION

As I complete this book, I am a counselor at one of the finest urban public schools in California. Yet even here, with an excellent administration and fine staff, there is no one to do all these things. In fact, as we aggressively pursue higher standards, wayward kids become harder to serve and maybe less welcome in our regular programs.

Yet a little awareness goes a long way.

Several of the students I counsel are on probation and have come to my attention as they enter our school after months in various forms of detention. José played football one semester but was expelled after he tried to break into a car with friends. His last years of school have been chaotic as he bounced between schools and juvenile detention. When he arrived at our school, his mother and sister both said they would be available for any kind of help I needed. José knows how to weld and do construction from working with his father. He is bright, yet does poorly in school. He also has a temper and an attitude that prefers failure to backing down.

I asked José to check in every morning and before leaving every day. I worked out classes that he could handle, with a morning study period he could be late to, and with a teacher who was willing to mentor him. He immediately began doing better. At the end of the semester, he had a B average. I brought this to the attention of the principal, who congratulated him in person. It was a small gesture, but large in his life.

The interesting thing is that even after he no longer had to check in with me officially, he still did. There he was every morning and before going home. If I got too busy to take notice of his progress, he began to miss classes. This was a bright kid who, for reasons of his own, needed much more attention and encouragement than most kids his age. When he received it, he did well. There are lots of kids in juvenile hall just like him.

Three weeks ago, a girl came in from juvenile hall and told me, "I don't belong here. I haven't been in a regular school since I was 12 years old. I don't know a thing about school." She had been arrested at 12 and had spent the last couple of years moving around the system. I gave her a pep talk, got her into

PROOF—NOT FOR DISTRIBUTION

selective classes, found her a service position in an office with a secretary with whom she could bond, set her up for tutoring, and told her to check with me twice a week. So far it looks good.

As a guidance counselor, however, I have nearly 800 students, all of them deserving of my attention. This kind of intense attention for one student is not the job of the guidance counselor. It is really no one's job to do all this. And that's what has to change if we are serious about the gang problem in our communities.

A convention in psychology says that the best way to predict what someone will do in the future is to see what that person has done in the past. Another defines insanity as doing the same thing over and over but expecting a different result each time.

I have been describing kids who have failed consistently and who will probably fail again. If we are to be successful with these kids, who come to us regularly from the juvenile justice system, we must have people who are designated to shepherd them along and who can make sure something different happens this time around.

Isn't this obvious?

PROOF—NOT FOR DISTRIBUTION



Step 6: *Identifying Disabilities*

I teach a psychology course at East Los Angeles City College. Many of my students are teacher's aides (TAs) in the local elementary schools. One of these, a very bright and motivated young man named Sergio, approached me one day after class: "I have this 7-year-old I think is like the kids you were telling us about."

"What does he do, Sergio?"

"Nothing. He won't work unless I'm sitting by him. The moment I leave he just sits."

"How much does he remember at the end of the day?"

"I don't think he remembers anything. When the teacher asks a question, he just answers with part of the question, but it doesn't make any sense."

"Has he been tested or referred to anybody?"

"No."

"Why don't you ask the teacher to do this?"

"I'm just a TA. I don't know if she would appreciate me telling her what to do."

"Does she think he has a problem?"

"She has a lot of students. I don't know."

"If you're afraid it's inappropriate to say anything, I'll show you how to teach this student, but it's going to take a lot of

patience. Teach this student as a personal project, and it will teach you something as well about working with disabled children."

The Making of a Gang Member

No one description applies to every person in a youth gang. But most share a recurrent problem. Most have difficulty in school, and at least half of them, when tested, have learning disabilities. *At least half.* Many studies find much higher numbers than this. Apparently, we have something to deal with here, and if it could impact half of our delinquents, that would obviously make a dramatic reduction in the scope of our gang problem.

Let me explain, from my experience of following kids in school for the last 20 years, how many kids become gang members.

You begin with a child who, in kindergarten, has trouble with the names of colors, letters, and figures. In first grade, he has difficulty remembering numbers and syllables, and he falls into the lowest reading group or becomes the least able member of a cooperative, mixed group. The effect is the same. The child might be a slow learner, or he might be an average or even bright student, yet he appears spacey, impulsive, introverted, disorderly, hyperactive, angry, or bored. The reasons are many, but the result is the same: He doesn't keep up with the others.

Sometimes this child is held back, but usually not. Either way makes no difference. Second grade goes similarly, and by the third grade, the child is significantly behind the other students. This is a critical year, because it is here that kids go from basal reading ("See Juanito run.") to content reading in academic areas.

The parents get called to meetings. In the early grades, teachers give suggestions, depending on the experience of both the teachers and parents, on how to help. These usually don't help much, and the parents begin to get frustrated and to frustrate the child. In the later grades, these meetings become mostly nagging sessions in which the parents are told to keep

PROOF—NOT FOR DISTRIBUTION

the child in line, make him do his homework, and so forth. If the parents try hard to enforce the teachers' desires, then home also becomes a punitive place for the child.

The student begins to struggle with academic subjects. Historical information, geography, science facts, these mostly go by him. Very little seems to stick or to be meaningful. The texts are cryptic to him, tests are dreaded, and reading aloud is embarrassing.

The youngster begins to learn how to hide and how to distract the teacher and the class. He either bullies or disappears. The teacher isn't sure what to do. She tries not to embarrass the child, to give some work he can do; usually, this means dittos, fill-in-the-blanks, or cooperative group work where the kid can do some task for the group but in reality is learning very little. The student learns to follow a direction, how to fill up space. When I ask this kind of student what he did in school today, he answers, "We did work."

"What kind of work? What did you learn?"

"We did work, school work."

By fourth grade, the child begins to get a little bolder in his dissent. He might attempt to mimic gang attire if his parents are not wise to it. The student is now a problem in the class and has usually formed friendships with other such "problem children," both in class and on his block. Other children are aware of him and know he doesn't do his work, can't read, doesn't know his multiplication tables, and is always in trouble. The kid internalizes this description of himself easily, since he lives it daily.

Some schools try to shield kids from this by eliminating grades or using cooperative groups where individuals aren't tested. Some schools mainstream, others separate. None of this makes a difference, as kids will compare themselves anyway. Child psychologist Erik Erikson (1968) tells us that the elementary school age is the age of "competence," and children are constantly competing to see who measures up. They don't fool themselves. If a kid can't keep up, all the others know it, and he knows they know it, no matter how teachers may try to hide it. The importance of this cannot be minimized. A teacher may

PROOF—NOT FOR DISTRIBUTION

speak of alternative literacy, of every child having worth. What the kid perceives is, "Everyone else can do things I can't. Everyone else receives awards I never get, no matter what I do."

As fifth and six grade come upon him, he has now experienced several years of school as a place of failure; a place where he just gets through the day, a place where he is last in everything. He has learned to hide well or to get attention through mischief. He is used to the parent meetings and the principal's office and doesn't fear them much. A me-versus-them feeling begins to generate within him.

Puberty kicks in with its self-consciousness, and this makes his situation more apparent, more felt. Up to now, he has taken failure as children do: They feel failure, but the world is still small, and one feels somehow it is about play, while adults take care of the world's business. But as adolescence approaches, the need to have a place for oneself, a group of friends, an identity separate from others and from adults, begins to push at the child.

What this kid knows is that he is not one of the competent people, that school is painful and shameful, and that he is not a "good boy" to the adult world outside his home. Even at home, where he may be helpful and still a decent son, parents struggle to understand and deal with his growing rebellion and inability to act in school like "good" children do.

Seventh grade comes around, and the kid is moved to a huge school with hundreds or thousands of others, with many teachers. If he was struggling before, he is now completely lost. He quickly gravitates to others like himself—others who can't stand class, who can't read the books, and who live from threat to threat from parents and teachers and every adult they know to please behave and please try.

Teachers in our student's junior high school have 30 or 40 students per class. They must teach children who read from a second-grade level to above average, plan several lessons a day, and correct a load of papers each evening. Teachers immediately spot our student as one of the hyperactive, sullen, angry, unmotivated, or unprepared. They find it difficult to either

PROOF—NOT FOR DISTRIBUTION

contain or motivate this kind of student on a daily basis. For the good of the class, this child spends a lot of time in detention, writing standards, or just sitting in his seat doing nothing, but at least being quiet under threat of punishment. This kid will seldom turn in homework or complete assignments, and the teacher feels she can do nothing to force him.

Our student quickly discovers by accident, and by tutelage from older friends, that in this big school, nothing happens if you don't go to class. He figures out the system: In only one of the six periods does the attendance office count to see if the student is at school. He shows up only for that class. He intercepts notes and phone calls from teachers and administrators. He hides report cards, forges signatures, and changes grades or lies to parents about their meaning. He quickly discovers that a teacher with six different classes, a homeroom, and 150 teenagers to deal with doesn't have time to call his home if he isn't in class or hasn't completed an assignment. The easiest trick he learns involves giving the wrong phone number when filling out registration forms. This simple maneuver frustrates the first few attempts to contact his parents.

Eventually, someone does find our escape artist. They call or visit his home and arrange a meeting with his parents. The teacher nags the parents, who nag the child. Eventually, too, the parents stop showing up for these meetings, but not before having made the child aware that he is a source of shame to the home, so that the street is now the only place with any source of reward.

Our student occasionally attends a class, and the teacher hates it. It creates another dilemma for a teacher who is already struggling to make the class work for the students who attend regularly. Now there is this kid who has no clue what's going on and no book, pencil, or paper. The kids makes a fuss if ignored, yet the teacher only hopes he doesn't create a problem, and searches for some way to keep him busy. At all inner-city schools I taught in, teachers looked forward to the passing weeks, as these students would eventually stop coming altogether, and then the teacher could relax with a smaller, more

PROOF—NOT FOR DISTRIBUTION

consistent class. This sounds negligent, but in their shoes, you would feel the same way.

Our teenager joins with other teens like himself, and they begin to spend most of their time at the local park, at a house where they have ditching parties, in an abandoned building, in arcades. They roam the streets and get high with cheap drugs like beer, paint, glue, and marijuana. As they wander around neighborhoods, it becomes routine to pilfer things, climb in open windows, take a stereo from a car, or go for joyrides. Occasionally, they'll meet up with boys from another neighborhood and have a scuffle. Why? Because claiming a park or street and fighting for it is a source of accomplishment to kids who have no other trophy to put on their mantles. And when you are 14 and not feeling very good about yourself, it's easy to be self-destructive.

If there was no gang in the neighborhood before, they have formed one now. If this neighborhood and its schools have a history of generating children who fail, then there will be many friends to find on the street, and these friends will have a history as the local gang.

Sometime in junior high, this youth will get caught and spend a few weeks or months in juvenile hall or some special detention camp. Here, he will run into other gang members, students that went to his same elementary school, old acquaintances from his neighborhood. He gets three meals, they make him go to the prison school, and he enjoys it because all the kids are like him and there is discipline here, which he interprets as caring. He sees that it isn't a bad place. And most important, he notices that when he gets released, nothing in his life has changed. Nothing has been lost or gained. This is the fundamental lesson pivotal to emerging gang life.

He gets a probation officer who sees him once a month and nags him for five minutes, tells him he has to go to school. A judge tells him the same. He tries for a few days and then goes back to what he was doing before. Eventually, he gets caught at something else or for breaking probation and gets sent back to juvenile justice, where a judge gives him a railing about how bad

PROOF—NOT FOR DISTRIBUTION

it's going to be from now on. He goes in, gets three meals, works, talks to other gang members, comes out in a few months or a few years, and nothing has changed.

The neighborhood school won't take him back at this point, so they tell him he has to go to a special school or another school, usually further away and across other gang territories. He seldom even tries to attend. The parents are pressured but can't do anything. The kid has developed such a phobia to school at this point that he would rather live on the street or go to jail than go to school.

By the time he is 16, he has a long record of usually petty crimes; of course, some have done much worse. He has not been to school consistently since the sixth grade. The little he learned is forgotten. He has developed addictions and acquired tattoos and social skills—mostly learned in jail—that mark him to any potential employer or school official as a gang member.

Finally, the identity that began to peek at him around the sixth grade is now firmly entrenched, and as he looks at the future, he understands that it will be more of the same. Time on the street, time in jail—a routine. He has no hopes of ever owning a home, earning a driver's license, or having a credit card. These are faraway ideas he associates with that world he was never able to fit into and of which he is now the enemy. He has nothing and believes he will always have nothing. Whatever he makes in occasional profitable thefts or drug sales disappears quickly. There is nothing to lose or gain of any permanence, and so he lives this life on the margin day to day, with little thought of the future. He does not think of consequences, because for his life, there are none that make a difference.

Learning Disabilities and Poverty

A theme throughout this book is that most gang members have histories of difficulty in school, usually from the early grades. Here are a few facts.

The average reading level among kids in juvenile hall is between third and fourth grade. This is true of delinquents in

PROOF—NOT FOR DISTRIBUTION

the United States as well as in other English-speaking countries (Berger et al. 1975).

The average rate of learning disabilities in the United States is about 3% of the population, 12% if you include conditions like attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). The average rate for juvenile delinquents, however, is 50% for learning disabilities and 90% if you include ADHD and other emotional disorders. That means that 9 out of 10 kids in juvenile hall display some learning or emotional disability. This has been found true in scores of studies conducted on delinquent children (Lorsbach 1992, Morgan 1979, Murphy 1986, O'Connell 1987, Perlmutter 1987, Stanley 1981, Swanstrom 1981, Waldie 1993).

The obvious question is why do so many delinquents have these kinds of disabling conditions? Researchers have uncovered a disturbing phenomenon. If you take 10 babies who are born prematurely, 5 of them from low-income families and 5 from middle-income families, usually all of them will show signs of developmental delays in the first year. Five years later, however, the children from the middle-income families will likely have normal IQs, whereas the children from the low-income families will usually still be delayed. Poverty has adverse affects on the ability of many children in terms of developing their cognitive capacities. This is unfortunate, but true (Beckwith 1984, Begab 1978, Reschly & Jipson 1972, Wilson 1985).

Poverty means poor nutrition, limited health care, and a greater number of prenatal problems. It also means that children are not exposed to learning games, ballet lessons, pre-schools, and other activities that are available when parents have time, money, materials, and education. Dozens of studies show the benefits of early exposure to learning activities, books, stories, and adult attention in the form of questions, conversations, and play (Jennings & Connors 1989, Kagan 1973, Kagan 1979, McGowan 1984, Roberts 1992, Seki 1985). Such an enriched environment is normative once urban parents have at least middle-income resources, which include such things as education, soccer leagues, health insurance, transportation,

PROOF—NOT FOR DISTRIBUTION

and day care, as well as access to children's books and games—all of which are expensive.

Poverty also means that children are not diagnosed early; that problems fester; and that, in overcrowded schools, the psychologists only see the extreme cases. Poverty means that even if parents and teachers know that a child is having difficulty, there are no specialists in the local community who can treat the student.

Most mental retardation and learning disabilities occur among low-income people (Beckwith 1984, Begab 1978, Reschly & Jipson 1972, Wilson 1985).^{*} This is true not only in the United States but in every country that monitors these concerns. This is the reality. The mind, like all other parts of the body, responds to nourishment and stimulation. Time, money, and know-how simply work together in creating environments in which enriched experiences are more likely to occur daily.

But if low-income children are more likely to have intellectual and emotional problems, then why don't they get help in the public schools? Why are they not diagnosed and referred for therapy, vision treatments, medication like Ritalin, and other methods of managing these problems?

Again, the answer lies in time, money, and know-how. It's one thing for a first-grade teacher to have one or two kids who present some difficulties that need testing. A teacher will notice this because the problem children stand out. Since she has only one or two such children in her class, she has time to write the referrals and follow through on the process. The school psychologist, who usually spends only a few hours each week at a particular elementary school, also has time to attend to the referral within a reasonable time frame.

In low-income neighborhood schools, a first-grade teacher may have 5 or 8 or 10 students with difficulties. When a teacher has that many students with problems, however, the students all begin to look normal, and the teacher simply cannot tell

* These studies include rates of retardation among differing economic classes.

PROOF—NOT FOR DISTRIBUTION

when or where she should start the referral process. She knows that the school psychologist will not respond to 10 referrals; and the school budget cannot pay for special services for one-third of her classroom.

Because the rate of learning disabilities is only about 3% in the general population, schools are funded with that number in mind. But no one addresses the fact that the rate is much higher in low-income neighborhoods such that most learning disabled kids in low-income areas never receive adequate treatment.

The outcome is that many low-income children with untended deficits will have difficulty in school, low self-esteem, and high drop-out rates. And kids who have little to lose and who are in need of success and approval will find that approval anyway they can. This might include getting pregnant; becoming adept car thieves, or recognition as the most dangerous, callous kids on this side of the freeway.

Solutions

So what do we do? Unfortunately, nothing that is easy or cheap. The necessary response, if we want to deal with learning disabilities in a way that reduces juvenile delinquency, requires that we plan the following in areas with high gang activity.

This intervention has two parts. First are five considerations necessary for working with individual children who experience learning difficulties of whatever sort. The second set of guidelines are for school districts that wish to adequately deal with large numbers of these children.

For Individual Children with Learning Difficulties

Flexible definitions. There are no exact descriptions of what constitutes a learning disability or how many kinds of learning disabilities exist. Human beings are complicated creatures, and they seldom fit exactly in the boxes we design for them. Legal definitions are necessary for funding, but psychologists know how to work around these. The point is to remain flexible and

PROOF—NOT FOR DISTRIBUTION

attend to obvious problems when they present themselves, even if you can't find the exact diagnosis for a child. Use the one that gets closest for the grant, placement, or federal aid, but don't ignore a problem because you cannot label it.

Individualized attention. Regardless of the program in which a child ends up, what matters in the end—and what will prove most effective—is how much individual attention the student receives. Having a high-school senior sit with a slow student and read aloud an hour every day is more effective than hiring a highly paid specialist to work with the student once a week or buying a fancy reading program for the classroom. The more unmotivated, hyperactive, withdrawn, angry, afraid, frustrated, slow, inattentive, or forgetful a child is, the more likely it is that only large helpings of daily individualized attention will make a difference.

Time and pace. Learning and emotional difficulties take years to manage, and nothing can change that fact. You have to plan across years, not weeks, to make a permanent change. In addition, to build a base, a student who is slower or distracted has to master information before moving on. That takes time, and you can only go at the student's speed. No other strategy makes sense.

Priorities and goals. Because students with learning difficulties take longer to master material, need more repetition, and usually have knowledge gaps that must be remedied, you can't throw the entire curriculum at them. Pare it down to what you think will be most beneficial to the students' futures, set goals, and concentrate on meeting them. Setting priorities and establishing goals makes it much easier to coordinate with other institutions to which the student may transfer. A school can inform juvenile hall or a new school about specific academic progress that needs to be continued.

Sharing medical and psychological expertise with parents. Have access to specialists who can prescribe medication such as Ritalin or who know about available therapeutic approaches. Make sure parents are well-informed and that their

PROOF—NOT FOR DISTRIBUTION

concerns are attended to, which means follow-up visits and good rapport. Minority parents often tell me that a doctor recommended Ritalin for their child two years ago, but a next-door neighbor said it would be addictive or evil or whatever, so the parents decided to table the doctor's prescription. Parents need someone to talk to, usually more than once, about such concerns.

For School Districts with Large Numbers of Children with Learning Difficulties

Class size. Class size should be no more than 20 students throughout elementary school, and no more than 25 in secondary schools.

Flexible curriculum. Free elementary school teachers from curriculum mandates if students are having trouble with basic reading and mathematics.

Elementary classroom aides. Elementary classrooms should have college or high-school student aides who work consistently with small numbers of students.

Secondary classroom aides. Secondary school classrooms should have college-level aides in sufficient numbers to work with kids who need more explanation and encouragement. In choosing to both mainstream and avoid tracking children, we have created classrooms in which one teacher cannot possibly attend to the great variety of students' learning needs. We need more adults in those classes. It may be wishful thinking, but, again, this would work best in a context of 25 students per class.

Special study period. Develop a program that provides something like a study hall, but with a teacher trained in working with kids who have learning difficulties, and with college students to assist as well. This program should be the last period of the day and should be used to settle kids down, motivate them, provide extra explanation, make sure homework is complete and assignments for the evening are neat and noted, and teach other study skills and aids. Of course, this means that a school might have to eliminate a couple of

PROOF—NOT FOR DISTRIBUTION

requirements to accommodate this. This does not mean diluting the curriculum, but a school could eliminate one year of physical education and one elective requirement, for example.

Who pays for this? We all do. But we pay anyway if we don't do anything. I would rather have my taxes fund college aides and small classrooms as opposed to jails and more police. Remember, at least half of our gang members are children whom kindergarten teachers could have warned us were heading for trouble. We saw them coming; we knew of the difficulties that would drive them to the streets instead of schools. These are kids who, as teenagers, have little hope for any of the good things that keep most of us working for the future.

Let's keep that in mind, because it is very difficult to punish a kid who feels he or she has nothing to lose.

References

- Beckwith, L. (1984, July). Parent interaction with their pre-term infants and later mental development. *Early Child Development and Care*, 16 (1-2), 27-40.
- Begab, M.J. (1978). The major dilemma of mental retardation: Should we prevent it? *American Journal of Mental Deficiency*, 78 (5), 519-529.
- Berger, M.; Yule, W.; & Rutter, M. (1975, June). Attainment and adjustment in two geographical areas: II. The prevalence of specific reading retardation. *British Journal of Psychiatry*, 126, 510-519.
- Erikson, E. (1968). *Identity, Youth, and Crisis*. New York: W.W. Norton.
- Jennings, K., & Connors, R. (1989, June). Mothers' interactional styles and children's competence at three years. *International Journal of Behavior Development*, 12 (2), 155-175.
- Kagan, J. (1973, November). Cross cultural perspectives on early development. *American Psychologist*, 2 (11), 947-961.
- Kagan, J. (1979). Issues and evidence in daycare. In W. Michelson & S. Levine (Eds.), *The Child in The City*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

PROOF—NOT FOR DISTRIBUTION

- Lorsbach, T. (1992, Summer). A comparison of learning disabled and non-learning disabled students on five at-risk factors. *Learning Disability Research and Practice*, 7 (3), 137-141.
- McGowan, R. (1984, June). The mother-child relationship and other antecedents of childhood intelligence: A cultural analysis. *Child Development*, 75 (3), 810-823.
- Morgan, D. (1979, Fall). Prevalence and types of handicapping conditions found in juvenile correction facilities: A national survey. *Journal of Special Education*, 13 (3), 283-295.
- Murphy, D. (1986, May-June). The prevalence of handicapping conditions among juvenile delinquents. *Remedial and Special Education*, 7 (3), 7-17.
- O'Connell, J.C. (1987, September). *A Study of the Special Problems and Needs of American Indians with Handicaps Both On and Off The Reservation*, Vol. 2. Tucson: University of Arizona, Native American Research and Training Center. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 294 343).
- Perlmutter, B. (1987, April). Delinquency and LD: Evidence for compensatory behaviors and adaptation. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, 16 (2), 89-95.
- Reschly, D.J., & Jipson, F.J. (1972). Ethnicity, geographic locale, age, sex, and urban-rural residence as variables in the prevalence of mild retardation. *Annual Progress in Child Psychiatry and Child Development*, 612-624.
- Roberts, R.N. (1992, July-September). "Let momma show you how": Maternal-child interactions and their effects on children's cognitive performance. *Journal of Applied Developmental Psychology*, 13 (3) 363-373.
- Seki, M. (1985). *Eating Behavior in the Family and the Development of 4-to 5-year-old Children*. Osaka, Japan: Research and Clinical Center for Child Development, 63-71.
- Stanley, S. (1981, April.). *The Relationship Between Learning Disabilities and Juvenile Delinquency*. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 21 765).

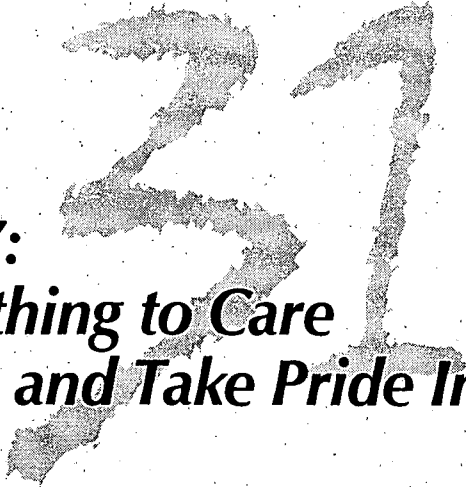
PROOF—NOT FOR DISTRIBUTION

- Swanstrom, W. (1981, September). The frequency of learning disabilities: A comparison between juvenile delinquents and a seventh grade population. *Journal of Correctional Education*, 32 (3), 29-33.
- Waldie, K. (1993, June-July). The relationship between learning disabilities and persisting delinquency. *Journal of Learning Disabilities*, 26 (6), 417-423.
- Wilson, R.R. (1985, September). Risk and resilience in early mental development. *Developmental Psychology*, 21 (5), 795-805.

PROOF—NOT FOR DISTRIBUTION



PROOF—NOT FOR DISTRIBUTION



Step 7: Something to Care About and Take Pride In

Ed Thrasher wrote a book on gangs in 1927. It's still the best book available on the subject. He took a good, long look at 1,300 gangs in Chicago and came up with some reasonable conclusions.

He observed, among other things, that gang members are a playful, energetic bunch. He also reached an important conclusion about keeping them busy. He said that if you put a gang member in a boxing gym for two hours, then you've kept him off the street for two hours. That's a nice idea. If you give this delinquent a pair of gloves and a trainer and put him in a tournament, however, you have given him a serious hobby and maybe a career. He will now exercise; watch what he eats; get to sleep earlier; and have something to think, talk, and read about. You've now kept him off the streets most of the time. Thrasher knew the importance, even in the 1920s, of developing a teenager's personal interests as a method of reducing delinquency.

Gang members are children. They like to play, they get bored, and they get into mischief when they have nothing to do.

A crucial element in the success I had at El Santo Niño involved finding things for kids to do after school. I tried basketball, soccer, football, boxing, camping, the police Explor-

ers club, speech tournaments, volleyball, car clubs, theater arts, music, bowling, photography, drawing, church groups, and after-school jobs for the older gang members. We even had a movie club. Any interest they showed, or any that I thought they might grow to like, I pushed them into pursuing.

Here's the rub: These kids bring baggage with them. They get frustrated easily, lack discipline, have addictions, compulsively graffiti, have no money, and have intense fears of being shamed before other kids. To successfully introduce these kids to new activities, you have to prepare your expectations. It's the difference between swimming lessons for kids who aren't afraid of the water and swimming lessons for kids are terrified of the water. It takes a special kind of coach for the second bunch.

If your gang members go to school every day because the school attends to their special learning and emotional needs, that takes care of the day's mischief. And if your gang members are busy in the evening with jobs or hobbies, all under adult supervision, then you've had a whole day without violence or vandalism. Essentially, your community's gang problem has been solved.

So how do you accomplish this? A community must have the following in place to be successful in this endeavor:

- A policy explicitly stating that kids who are on probation, or who have come in contact with the law, must be involved in some structured activity.
- A means of recognizing at-risk children and connecting them to activities. This may have to include expenses such as paying for team uniforms and such.
- A communitywide parent education program about the importance of activities that promote self-esteem and competence.
- Changing school policies so that students in continuation or "bad kid" schools are strongly encouraged and eligible to participate on athletic teams at their communities' regular high schools.

PROOF—NOT FOR DISTRIBUTION

- Developing recreational and artistic activities in detention facilities, and a systematic means of continuing these once kids return to their communities.

Once again, we are talking about gang members as adolescents and planning for them as such. Communities that come together, make these kids visible, and plan for them systematically will regain control of their children. As the guy on the suit commercial says, "I guarantee it."

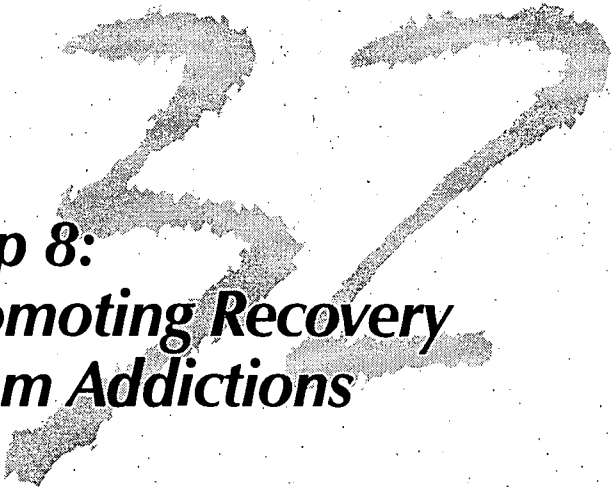
References

Thrasher, F. (1927). *The Gang: A Study of 1,313 Gangs in Chicago*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

PROOF—NOT FOR DISTRIBUTION



PROOF—NOT FOR DISTRIBUTION



Step 8: Promoting Recovery From Addictions

Chemical abuse brings about and exacerbates much of the violence, crime, and personal degeneration among gang-involved youth. I think this is obvious to all of us. The reason I have included this as the final step rather than the first step, however, has to do with what we know about overcoming addictions.

Fortunately, those who work with recovering addicts have developed their field into a mature and useful discipline in recent years. Certificates are now available in chemical abuse counseling, 12-step programs exist in most neighborhoods, support groups are available for all ages, and a variety of rehabilitation programs offer services. The problem at this point is not that we don't know what to do but rather that recovery takes time, continuous support from family (and school, for teenagers), testing, education, and work on strengthening addicts' self-esteem and self-support. For this reason, effective work with addicted gang members will occur only after the community has put into place the previous seven steps in the program I've outlined.

Many gang members are sent to group homes and recovery programs. Many do well while in those programs, but a few

months after coming home, old habits begin to resurface. Difficulties at school, failure to find employment, boredom, temptations from friends who still use, and other typical stressors begin to eat away at whatever convictions the gang member has tried to hold onto. As anyone in Alcoholics Anonymous will tell you, no one recovers alone. It takes mentors, meetings, new friends, continuing education, and other methods to sustain recovery.

The pieces are all out there, but they have to be coordinated, and they must follow the gang member from juvenile hall to group home to alternative schools in the community. Support groups must be available at public schools, as well as information and seminars for parents. Recreation programs, employment opportunities, and schools where the youth feels a sense of belonging must be part of an integral recovery program.

Do not be overwhelmed by what I am suggesting. The pieces exist in most communities, and where they do not, a bit of dialogue with local universities, corporations, and government agencies can usually create them. But someone needs to be in charge of this for the community, and someone needs to gather these community resources and coordinate gang members' participation.

Plan carefully. Psychologist Carl Jung believed that when one person attempts to fix another, the first one internalizes the trouble of the latter. The therapist absorbs the anxiety, depression, or despair of the patient. It is easy to do. Jung taught that successful therapy results only if the therapist has an inner comfort that can be passed back to the client.

I learned this in early in my training. In a student clinic where low-income people came by referral, a young Salvadoran woman asked for help. On her first visit, she sat before me and immediately began a tale of abandonment at age 7, then years of living on the streets—in slavery, in forced prostitution, numerous rapes, beatings, and other traumas. One story followed another, followed another, followed another. I listened and listened. Her face talked, frozen in a permanent expression of despair.

PROOF—NOT FOR DISTRIBUTION

I told my supervisor the problem. "She tells me the same stories over and over and over, and I don't know what to do."

"No," he answered. "She's not telling you the same stories. You're just having the same reaction over and over. She's overwhelmed, and now you're overwhelmed. Tell her to stop. And let her know it's because you need to slow down and take this at a rate that allows you to deal with it. This will allow her to slow down and do the same later. But first you have to be able to slow down and not get as overwhelmed as she is."

A community usually attends to the gang problem after an innocent person is killed in a drive-by shooting, or when something horrendous has occurred and politicians have to scramble to meet public demands for action. A frenzy of publicity, talk, promises, and grants surface to attention for a few weeks. Then the attention ebbs, and the gang members remain. We know gang problems won't be remedied by going into emergency mode continuously. Otherwise we are just reacting to the craziness, absorbing it, and dealing with it in a manner that is itself just as crazy.

Our communities need to settle down, take account of their resources, set their objectives, and start working toward them rationally and honestly. In time, each of our communities will come to understand the particular conditions that allow children to become marginalized and out of control. Each community will find its own method of counteracting them. I've given you some ideas in that direction.

Recovery from addictions remains elemental to eliminating violence and to the health of gang-involved children. But maintain your perspective, and take your time. It's a tough job, and if our efforts are to succeed, we have to do some ground-work first.

PROOF—NOT FOR DISTRIBUTION



PROOF—NOT FOR DISTRIBUTION





Coherence

And

community

Final Thoughts

I had coffee one recent afternoon with a senior rabbi in Los Angeles. He told me that, as a child in South Africa, his father had died. He did not remember a funeral, and he was never taken to the tomb. He was dead, and the subject of the father became taboo in the house.

Within his orthodox community, all children had fathers, and he credits the absence of his own father for his decision to become a rabbi. If he could not have a father, nor even be allowed the memory of one, then he would become the ultimate father, the rabbi of the congregation.

Years later, when the rabbi's mother died, he went to the hospital to receive the death certificate. But the certificate read "divorced," not "widow," as it should have. The rabbi told me he then embarked on a long quest to find anyone alive who could explain the discrepancy.

The journey took him back to South Africa, to an old aunt who reminded him that, within the orthodox community, divorce brought shame on a family and almost never occurred. It was better to be dead than divorced. So for the sake of the family name and the children's reputation, it was decided that his father would disappear, the divorce explained as a death to the young children.

But the aunt also told him one more secret. The night he left, his father sat on the floor with his baggage and wept for hours. He would disappear from their lives because he knew the stigma

PROOF—NOT FOR DISTRIBUTION

divorce would bring. But he loved his children profoundly and continued to support them, although he would never see them again.

The rabbi told me that this revelation healed a wound he had carried his entire life. Even as an old man, the question of whether his father loved him still mattered to him.

All people hunger to know that they are prized. We want to hear the words, open the gift, receive the trophy in our hands. We crave the markers of acceptance, belonging, and approval. Like the rabbi, we all have a small child inside us who needs to know we are loved by those that are supposed to love us.

Gang members watch the news. It's on at six o'clock in their homes, just like in everyone else's. They know the world has decided they are the source of all its problems, and politicians are elected to fight a war against them, the violent gangsters. They respond with resentment to the hateful stares, the stack of trouble notes from teachers, the reprimands of judges and probation officers, the anger of parents who must constantly fetch them from detention. That's a lot of information telling a 15-year-old that he or she is no good.

And maybe, for the moment, this boy or girl is no good. Unfortunately, these gang members are still kids, and they still want us to love them. We're the adults, and we're supposed to. That's how kids tend to think. Rivera and Short (1968) conducted a study in which they observed the way in which community members talked to gang members and non-gang members. Their team found that adults in the community talked to the latter about the future: what their plans were, how school was going, if they had found jobs, what sports they were interested in. To gang members, community adults talked only about the immediate present: What are you doing here? How long have you been out of jail? What kind of trouble have you been causing? They never asked gang members about the future because community adults assumed they didn't have one.

The point is important. Yes, gang members are dangerous, yes the destruction they cause makes us angry. It is not rational,

PROOF—NOT FOR DISTRIBUTION

it is not something to be talked out of, and it is certainly not a condition to be shamed out of.

Like other psychological difficulties, gang members' behavior can be changed, but only in the same way that alcoholism, codependence, and anorexia are dealt with: Time, patience, support, containment, monitoring, and the teaching of new skills. Maybe it makes you mad that it has to be that way: It's always maddening when people around us keep doing stupid things and we wish they would just stop. Stop drinking, stop starving yourself, stop going back to that awful husband, stop being so nervous all the time. Just stop it.

It doesn't work that way.

What I suggest, and the reason I have spent seven years writing this book, is that a solution to gang violence is possible and practical. People destroy themselves in lots of ways and for lots of reasons. But what works to halt that self-destruction tends to be the same no matter how one dresses up his or her particular form of suicide. Poor, minority children are human beings, made of the same stuff as the rest of us; and all we have learned about the difficult process of bringing psychological wellness to people applies to them as well.

One of the newer fields in psychology is the study of why some children are able to survive difficult environments while others perish. This is generally called the study of "risk and resiliency."

Researchers have found what one would expect: The more you have against you, the tougher time you're going to have. But Michael Rutter and Emmy Werner, two of the most prominent researchers in this field, have reached interesting conclusions. They have found that children who survive have visions of the world as a coherent, meaningful place. Life has a direction, and they understand their place in it (Rutter 1976 and Werner 1982).

Viktor Frankl's work (1959) on the concentration camp experience said the same: The survivors were not the strongest physically, but those who were able to make sense of the day.

PROOF—NOT FOR DISTRIBUTION

Psychologist B.F. Skinner's work with rats implied this in reverse: A rat would receive a shock as it sat still. The rat would jump, and where it landed it would receive another shock. When it moved back, it got another shock. The little rat soon discovered it had no place to go where it wouldn't receive pain, and what followed was self-mutilation, degeneration, and depression.

Children must have a sense of a coherent world. This can only come from an adult world that is truly coherent and has a direction for them that is clear and insistent. I was able to convey to the kids at El Santo Niño a sense that they had a mission, that what they had to do was important and shouldn't be shortchanged. Their work had real value in a real world, and its completion would be noticed, important, and celebrated.

The powerful words in all of this are *plan, direction, coherence*—and one that Frankl, Rutter, and Werner all use in their own conclusions—*hope*.

We must remember that adults can sometimes muster hope by calling upon their reservoir of life experiences, but children do not have that luxury. They are still dependent upon us and cannot be talked into hopefulness when the adults who plan their future provide no basis for it.

We have created children willing to kill others, filled with addictions, looking forward to their own deaths. This is neither normal nor inevitable. It is a sign of severe neglect and of a breakdown in communities' functions as conduits to adulthood for their children. This is not a parental problem, but a parent-school-corrections-community problem. When, as a community of adults, we finally commit to seeing all our children to productive adulthood, and we are willing to stop blaming and instead start creating and collaborating, then we will take back our children.

Sugar Ray's advice will never fail us: It is always *how*, never *if*. There is always a how if you insist on finding it.

PROOF—NOT FOR DISTRIBUTION

References

- Frankl, V. (1959). *Man's Search for Meaning: An Introduction to Logotherapy*. Boston: Beacon Press.
- Rivera, R.J., & Short, J.F. (1968). Significant adults, caretakers, and structures of opportunity: An exploratory study. In J.F. Short (Ed.), *Gang Delinquency and Delinquent Subcultures*. New York: Harper and Row.
- Rutter, M. (1976). *Cycles of Disadvantage*. London: Heinemann Educational.
- Werner, E. (1982). *Vulnerable But Invincible: A Longitudinal Study of Resilient Children and Youth*. New York: McGraw-Hill.

PROOF—NOT FOR DISTRIBUTION



PROOF—NOT FOR DISTRIBUTION

A Message from the Author

The Salt River Pima-Maricopa Indian Community borders the cities of Scottsdale and Phoenix, Arizona. Their reservation was mandated in 1879 by President Rutherford B. Hayes, providing a buffer between white settlers in Phoenix and the Apache, but the Pima and Maricopa have lived in this desert since time immemorial.

The Pima-Maricopa had ancient agrarian cultures, and the community supported itself through farming on the Salt River Reservation. This continued until the Colorado River was diverted to feed growing cities such as Los Angeles and Phoenix. This dried the Salt River and left the reservation without a means of sustenance. The Pima-Maricopa were not consulted on this matter of self-preservation, and drying the river not only eliminated farming but also impacted the culture that had grown around it.

In this century, in addition to the diversion of the Salt River, a lack of employment, policies of the U.S. Bureau of Indian Affairs, European religions, and the forced education of tribal children in off-reservation schools have formed an onslaught that the Pima-Maricopa culture has not been able to withstand.

Currently, the Salt River Reservation is experiencing a gang problem severe enough to have attracted the attention of the national media. The most significant cause of this problem is

the absence of a comprehensive education system on the reservation itself.

In an effort to change this, the Pima-Maricopa have opened a new charter school to serve the Salt River community. But Desert Eagle High School can accommodate only 75 students, which means that hundreds of Pima-Maricopa children must be bused daily to the Mesa school district in Phoenix.

The key to any gang problem is an educational setting in which children feel valued and where viable adulthoods and identities become possible for even the most difficult students. What has impressed me most about Desert Eagle's efforts is reflected in the sentiments expressed by its students—gang members and those who are not—that here they feel at home, valued, and educated in a manner that instills pride in who they are and Native Americans. Many, particularly the gang-involved youth, have told me that Desert Eagle is the first school in which they feel truly wanted.

The Salt River community's goal is to enlarge and enrich Desert Eagle High School, allowing more tribal youth to be educated within their own community, where they can receive its values and attention. Although this is an expensive and difficult goal, especially in light of recent cuts in funding to Indian tribes, the Pima-Maricopa Indian Community is seeking and developing creative solutions.

For more information on the Pima-Maricopa Indian Community and its efforts to reown its children, contact the Pima-Maricopa Indian Community, c/o Desert Eagle High School, Route 1, Box 216, Scottsdale, AZ 85256; or send e-mail to saltriver@hotmail.com.

If you would like to contact me, you can do so through CWLA Press, 440 First Street NW, Third Floor, Washington, DC 20001-2085; 202/638-2952; FAX 202/638-4004; or send e-mail to books@cwla.org.

PROOF—NOT FOR DISTRIBUTION

About the Author

Arturo Hernandez began working with gang members in his early teens when he joined a detention ministry so he could visit friends in juvenile hall. Since then, he has worked as a public school teacher, a school guidance counselor, a family therapist, and a consultant on juvenile delinquency and youth gang intervention, and has founded two experimental schools for gang-involved youth. He has lived and worked in East and South Central Los Angeles, Compton, and Watts, and among the rural gangs of the Salinas Valley. Currently a counselor at Granada Hills High School in Los Angeles, he is nearing completion of a doctoral degree in educational psychology.



PROOF—NOT FOR DISTRIBUTION