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ISSN 1729-8997

(Online Edition)

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# Children Speak

Vol 8, No.28, February - March 2008

A Newsletter of the Organization for the Protection of Children's Rights

## Message from the President

It seems that one cannot turn on the television set or the radio or read a newspaper without being informed of one act of violence or another whether it is in the form of an ongoing war, ethnic rivalries, domestic violence, gang wars, shooting sprees at educational institutions and so on.

It is so disheartening to witness such senseless acts of violence when we know that there are so many innocent lives that are forever changed, that there are broken hearts and broken spirits that will never mend and that our world is so much poorer because of the never ending conflicts.

But, it doesn't have to be that way. There are things that can be done to promote positive change in the world. And in this issue of Children Speak we will look at two ways in which we can bring constructive solutions to the problem of violence.

First, we will showcase an organization which promotes peace by planting seeds of peace. The Seeds of Peace movement brings young leaders together and empowers them with the leadership skills which will encourage reconciliation and coexistence among warring groups. The program is successful because teenagers see that there are more things that unite them and the teenagers in the neighboring "enemy" country than there are that separate the two groups.



L to R: Ricaardoe Di Done, President, O.P.C.R.; Luciano Bentenuto, National Correctional Services of Canada Manager; Massimo Pacetti, Member of the Canadian Parliament for St-Michel-St Leonard; Eric Laporte, Member of the Quebec National Assembly for l'Assomption (ADQ); Lucie Pepin, Liberal Senator

We will also address a tremendous problem that is causing much strife to our young people all around the world – street gangs. This social ill is getting out of control and is destroying innocent lives and ruining families and communities at large. The Organization for the Protection of Children's Rights (OPCR) is supporting the recently released book, *Youth and Street Gangs*. This book is a preventive tool and encourages youngsters to turn to positive alternatives which will enrich their lives and make them successful citizens of this world. At the OPCR we believe that prevention remains the cornerstone when dealing with gangs and gang violence.

It takes patience, time and a wholehearted effort to put solid building blocks for peace into place, but the rewards will be shared by the entire community since we will have a society whose future participants will be confident, caring individuals because we all took the time to sow the seeds of peace at the appropriate moment. ■

# A Serious Social Ill: STREET GANGS

By Ricaardoe Di Done, President, O.P.C.R.

One of the most important challenges that we face in the future is the upbringing of our youth. The Organization for the Protection of Children's Rights has this issue at heart.

In particular, we want to address one of the major social ills that is plaguing our children's future – *Street Gangs*.

We believe so strongly in the serious consequences that joining a street gang can have on a child's future that we completely endorse the book on the subject entitled: *Youth and Street Gangs*.

This book focuses on prevention and constitutes the first title of a new informative collection of books for students ages 10 and up.

The alarming increase of this social phenomenon hinders our children's environment. We therefore considered it important to promote an educational book that would explain the nature of this new social reality which confronts our children. Our goal is simple: we want a tool that will inform them on certain social issues, as well as clearly demonstrate the choices they have towards them, so they may evolve in a sane and secure environment.

## What is a street gang?

The first question that we must answer is: What is a street gang?

While definitions of what constitutes a street gang can vary, the definition used by the Montreal Police in Quebec, Canada, is as follows: a street gang is a more or less structured group made up of mostly teenagers and young adults who use intimidation and violence while carrying out criminal acts in order to gain power and status or control lucrative activities (taxing, drug trafficking, prostitution, etc.)

A street gang is different from a group of friends who simply meet for sporting events or social activities. Street gang members get together to commit violent or money related crimes. They bully and intimidate, use threats, have confrontations with rival gangs, use knives, hammers, firearms. They also engage in theft, street-level drug trafficking and prostitution.

Youth gang members cut across many ethnic, geographic, demographic and socio-economic lines – so a large number of young people may therefore be at risk of becoming involved in or impacted by youth gangs in the future.<sup>1</sup>



## Why do Young People Join Gangs?

What are the risk factors that will incite a young person to join a youth gang?

There are a number of factors that may influence young people to become members of street gangs.

First, there are family related

characteristics – such as dysfunctional, abusive or negligent homes. We are referring here to broken homes where there is no adequate supervision and support, where there is parental drug and/or alcohol abuse, where the family members are in a gang, where there is family violence and a lack of adult and parental role models.<sup>2</sup>

It is important that parents provide their children with protective factors that safeguard them against becoming involved in situations that can harm them.

A parent's role is to provide his offspring with "roots" and "wings". Parents give their children a solid foundation upon which they can develop wings if there is safety and security in the home. A home that is a haven or a sanctuary for its occupants is one that provides a place of warmth, understanding and protection.

In some situations, parents themselves need help to create a stable home and therefore we

must reach out to them and provide them with the tools so they can get on the right track and therefore better take care of their children. It is important to maximize the efficiency of parents so that they can equip our youth with everything that it takes in order for them to flourish and prosper.

Young people who are resilient because their parents have created a stable and nurturing home, tend not to be involved in risky behaviors such as underage drinking or drug use, teenage pregnancies and school failure. Unfortunately, some people fail to recognize this simple fact.

A stable home is a protective factor that will help keep youths out of street gangs. The family is one of the most important and solid building block that is needed to ensure that teenagers avoid being involved in street gangs.

Other risk factors that may influence young people to join street gangs include socio-economic factors such as poverty and unemployment, educational factors such as poor academic performance, low attachment to schools, negative labeling by teachers and educational frustration, community factors such as high crime and unsafe neighborhood, and presence of gangs in the neighborhood.

There are also negative individual and peer group factors such as prior delinquency, anti-social attitudes, aggression, alcohol and drug abuse, interaction with delinquent peers and illegal gun ownership.<sup>3</sup>

Young people join street gangs because they are looking for something that they feel is lacking in their lives. In an article that appeared in the September 2007 FBI Law Enforcement Bulletin, it was established that all the gang members who were interviewed came from dysfunctional families and each of them had been subjected to some kind of verbal or physical abuse within the family setting. Furthermore, all had been victims of at least one physical assault during their early childhoods and all had grown up in neighborhoods controlled by the gang they eventually joined.<sup>4</sup>

### Prevention

There are many things that parents can do to prevent their children from becoming involved with street gangs.

Parents must spend quality time with their children and get to know their friends as well

as the families of their friends. Parents must be involved in their child's school activities and encourage good study habits so that their child feels comfortable at school.

Being a positive role model and setting the right example is also very important for we all know that children observe our behavior and will do as we do. Children should be encouraged to participate in positive afterschool activities such as sports, arts, music, dance, etc.

In sum, parents must be there for their children.

Parents must speak to their children about the dangers and consequences of gang involvement and of adopting risky behaviors such as drugs, alcohol, cigarettes, etc. And this is why we support this valuable tool: *Youth and Street Gangs: Drugs, Prostitution and Other Forms of Violence*. We know that the more young people and those who look after their development, including parents and teachers, are informed, the more we will be able to prevent and eradicate the problem of street gangs and the various effects which result from it.

We put all our emphasis on prevention because a number of research studies have demonstrated that for every US dollar that we invest in prevention, we save between \$6 and \$13 dollars that it would cost to cure.

The children of today are the adults of tomorrow. We must do everything in our power to help them succeed in life and that is why we must reach as many children as possible with this book entitled *Youth and Street Gangs* so that we can better inform them and they can make the right decisions for their future, therefore creating a much healthier society.■

### References:

1. 2002, Canadian Police Survey on Youth Gangs, December 2003, page 2.
2. Public Safety Canada, National Crime Prevention Center, Youth Gang Involvement: What are the Risk Factors? 2007, [www.publicsafety.gc.ca/prg/cp/bldngevd/2007-yg-2-en.asp](http://www.publicsafety.gc.ca/prg/cp/bldngevd/2007-yg-2-en.asp)
3. Ibid.
4. FBI Law Enforcement Bulletin, Street Gang Mentality: A Mosaic of Remorseless Violence and Relentless Loyalty, Anthony J. Pinizotto, Ph.D., Edward F. Davis, M.S., Charles E. Miller III, September 2007, Volume 76, Number 9, [www.fbi.gov/publications/leb/2007/sept07leb.pdf](http://www.fbi.gov/publications/leb/2007/sept07leb.pdf)

**The family is one of the most important and solid building block that is needed to ensure that teenagers avoid being involved in street gangs.**

# Seeds for Peace

Often unconsciously we develop feelings of deep hatred. We begin to look at people in the neighboring country as our enemies and often completely justify death and killings by armies and civilians in a war. Not for a moment do we question the fervor of patriotism; not for once we consider that biologically we are one species distributed over a geographic region. How far are these feelings justified? Across the border, the same people, the same language, the same culture. What separates people are their prejudices and fears - that seep in from the school, the family, the media, films and other sources.

H.G. Wells wrote in the early twentieth century: "Violence has made headway against the world's peace, and the level of civilized life is visibly sinking. . . In the face of the challenge of our time it no longer suffices merely to disapprove of war and of the freedom of egotistical recklessness in the private exploitation of natural resources...we have to accumulate the definite will for a new order."

Seeds of Peace is a movement for a new order. It is about bringing people together and giving peace a chance to prosper. Founded in 1993, Seeds of Peace is dedicated to empowering young leaders from regions of conflict with the leadership skills required to advance reconciliation and coexistence. It started in 1993 bringing together 46 Israeli, Palestinian and Egyptian teenagers.

The model begins with a Camp in Maine, followed by international youth conferences, regional workshops, educational and professional opportunities, and an adult educator program. The well-drafted comprehensive program allows participants to develop empathy, respect, and confidence as well as leadership, communication and negotiation skills - critical components that will facilitate peaceful coexistence for the next generation.

Following the Middle East experiments, Seeds of Peace earned international recognition as an effective model for resolving conflict worldwide and, in 1998, it branched out into other conflict regions. Seeds of Peace now hosts a Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot delegation each summer as well as participants from Albania, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Macedonia, the former Yugoslavia (including Montenegro, Serbia and Kosovo) and Romania. In 2001, Seeds of Peace began its South Asia program with Indian and Pakistani youth and in 2002, Seeds of Peace expanded welcoming an Afghan delegation to the Seeds of Peace International Camp.

Seeds of Peace also runs a domestic program called "Maine Seeds" to address ethnic and racial tensions between the diverse communities that have settled in the camp's home state of Maine. In addition, in 2004, Seeds

of Peace launched "Beyond Borders" which brings teens from additional Middle East countries including Iraq, Saudi Arabia, and Kuwait to participate in a cultural exchange program between American and Arab youth. Since 1993, over 3,500 teens from 25 nations have graduated from Seeds of Peace

In 2001, Seeds of Peace launched an unprecedented coexistence program for Indian and Pakistani youth. Since its inception, over one hundred Indian and Pakistani teenagers have graduated from this program. Dialogue sessions at the Seeds of Peace International Camp challenge the youth to open the wounds of history and delve into the religious, political and territorial battles that have sown so much mistrust and bloodshed. Over the course of the camp program, insults, tears and rage are gradually replaced by words of compassion, understanding and sincere attempts at reconciliation. Weekly facilitated discussions, school presentations, video messages and homestays are part of their ongoing coexistence work when they return home.

For Indian and Pakistani teenagers, Seeds of Peace International Camp in Maine is the only place in the world where the enemy has a name. Back home, they simply refer to one another as "the enemy" or with a disparaging term. When they meet for the first time, they eye each other warily, and to their surprise, soon discover that they cannot differentiate a Pakistani from an Indian by appearance alone. This is the first

of many discoveries that begin to erode the stereotypes and prejudices that have built a wall between the two peoples. The Seeds of Peace program in the two countries operates with tacit governmental support.

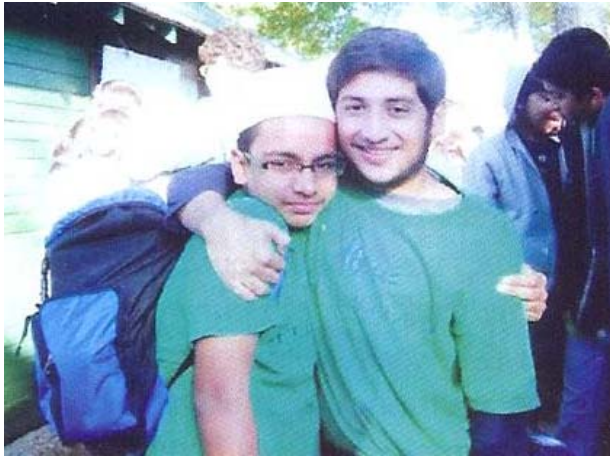
Because of the great geographic distance separating Indian and Pakistani Seeds, regional activities rely in part on technology to bridge the divide. IPnet, a designated list-serve, fosters daily dialogue on serious issues like the nuclear arms race, terrorism, elections and leadership. School presentations, a speaker series in both countries, meetings with local officials and press keep Seeds and their message of coexistence in the public eye. In addition, workshops that teach Seeds the skills necessary to engage their peers and communities, help them in their efforts at outreach. To supplement these various projects, Seeds of Peace organizes cross border visits that give the teens a chance to experience each other's culture and family life first-hand. International conferences and leadership programs sponsored by Seeds of Peace are another important vehicle for sustaining their interaction.■

([www.seedsofpeace.org](http://www.seedsofpeace.org))

## Profile

## Not Enemies But Compassionate Neighbors

By Jigar Shah, India, 2007



On the 25<sup>th</sup> of June 2007, I reached Boston airport and then, I was heading towards my mission – a mission to bring peace in this world. This was my first step but a sense of fear in my heart kept on troubling me, as I headed towards the Seeds of Peace International Camp. I was scared because people had told me that the Pakistanis were our enemies. But my heart told me something different and I wanted to meet them.

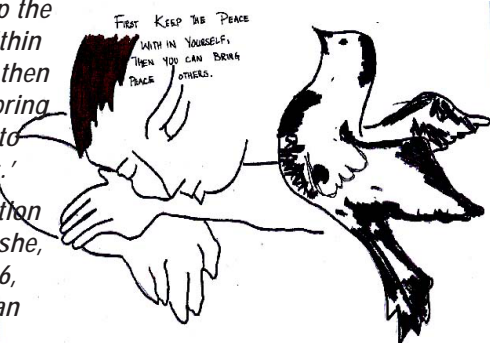
After meeting the Pakistanis and spending around 21 days with them, my views changed completely and I could prove that Pakistanis were not at all enemies and that they too wanted peace. We were fairly similar and nobody could decide whether I was an Indian or a Pakistani. We discussed many issues from Kashmir to Mahatma Gandhi to nuclear power plants. We laughed, joked and often ate together. I never knew that my neighbors were so friendly and so cooperative. We were at times, dependent on each other and worked as a group to complete group challenges and won many games and overcame all sorts of difficulties. We used to sleep in the same room and be together for all our Camp activities.

This experience has changed my life and also gave me the opportunity to answer all the people who thought that Pakistanis were our so-called enemies. I think that if we work together and cooperate with each other, then we can achieve everything. We have to look at the future, care for the present and forget the past. .

*(Seeds of Peace, South Asia Newsletter, February 2008)*

*'First keep the  
peace within  
yourself,  
then you can bring  
peace to  
others.'*

*- Illustration  
by Palwashe,  
Grade 6,  
Pakistan*



## One Third of India's Youth Illiterate

India's economy may be booming with a growth of 9% but according to a research paper released last week by the Tata Institute of Social Sciences (TISS), one third of the country's youth are illiterate and therefore, have little chance of entering the organized labor market. The study covered 593 districts across the country.

The study shows that "illiteracy" rates for 27 districts are two out of three and in 182 districts, it is between 35 to 50%. Female illiteracy is double that of males and the condition is higher in rural areas rather than urban localities.

## State of the World's Children 2008 launched

The UNICEF's annual flagship report The State of the World's Children 2008: Child Survival was launched on 20 March 2008 in Guinea Bissau during a ceremony at which the UNICEF Country Representative called on all the officials present to take responsibility for child survival in the country. "It is unacceptable that 200 of every 1,000 children do not reach their fifth birthday. We are dealing with one of the highest under five child mortality rates in the world," said UNICEF Representative in Guinea Bissau Jean Dricot.



The State of the World's Children 2008 provides a wide-ranging assessment of the current state of child survival and primary health care for mothers, newborns and children - issues that lie at the heart of human progress, serving as sensitive barometers of a country's development and well-being and telling evidence of its priorities and values.

## Science for Street Children

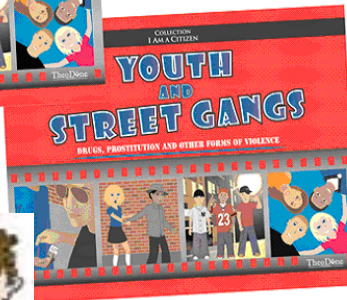
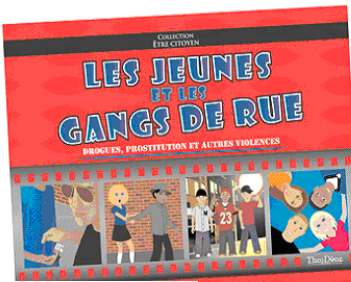


NSS (National Social Service) Volunteers of Kirti College, Mumbai organized a visit to the Nehru Science Planetarium for the street children of Project Kiran, a program initiated by OPCR Mumbai

# Book Launch on YOUTH & STREET GANGS

The Organization for the Protection of Children's Rights (OPCR), Canada in collaboration with Theo Done & Associates is launching a book: 'Youth and Street Gangs' on 21 April 2008 at the Laurier Macdonald High School, Quebec

Canada. Published by Theo Done and endorsed by the OPCR, its mission is to offer prevention and education to children. The book is relevant for everyone concerned with this social illness and would like to eradicate this social phenomenon. A



**True or false?**

Street gang members are only boys.  
Street gang members only come from underprivileged social classes.



number of distinguished regional and national guests will attend this event.

With eye-catching illustrations and cartoons, the book unfolds the phenomenon of Street Gangs - the issues, the members, how to recognize a street gang and the activities that it is engaged with. There are small definitions as well as footnotes on each page. For example, Bullying is described as 'intimidation where someone or a group of people forces an individual in rendering their money or objects of value. This act of theft is often accompanied by threats. Bullying is a form of violence.' ■

## Events

## A Successful Book Launch for Youth & Street Gangs

It has become an increasing problem in many countries of the world: youth that are involved in street gangs. On April 21<sup>st</sup>, 2008, Mr. Riccardo Di Done, Founding President of the Organization for the Protection of Children's Rights launched a book that is designed to inform and steer children away from the influences and activities of street gangs. Here is what some individuals said about the book *Youth and Street Gangs*.

**Eileen Kelly** (Principal of Laurier-Macdonald High School): "Education is the key to prevention and prevention is the goal. Street gangs is an issue outside the school and the kids have to be aware of it."

**Ricaardoe Di Done** (Founding President of the Organization for the Protection of Children's Rights): "I hope all the kids get to read this book, along with their parents and teachers. Most adults don't know how the gangs work."

**Harry Delva** (Street Patrol and coordinator for Youth Projects at the Maison d'Haïti): "The book's simplicity is its most attractive trait. What I really like about the book the simple way in which the street gang phenomenon is presented, with the right words, and I think that they found a good way to open youngsters' eyes. This book could also be an invaluable tool for parents who are often too busy to notice signs that their child has joined or being actively recruited by street gangs."

**Guy Ouellette** (Member of the National Assembly of Quebec for the riding of Chomedey and Parliamentary Assistant to the Honorable Jacques Dupuis, Minister of Justice and Minister of Public Security): " This book should be in the hands of the greatest possible number of people."



(From L to R) Éric Laporte, Member of the National Assembly for l'Assomption, Ricaardoe Di Done, Michel Bissonnet Member, National Assembly for Jeanne-Mance-Viger & President of the National Assembly; Lucie Pépin, Liberal Senator (Canadian Parliament) & Guy Ouellette Member of the National Assembly of Quebec for the riding of Chomedey and Parliamentary Assistant to the Honorable Jacques Dupuis, Minister of Justice and Minister of Public Security

**Luciano Benteuto** (National Correctional Services of Canada Manager, Organized Crime/Criminal Gangs): "The research shows that the individuals that are between six and 17 are definitely the ones we have to reach out to, if we're going to talk about prevention. What I saw in this book, and not only what I saw but I've lent it to children and watched them react to it, and the way it's done...makes it something that the kids are actually going to use. It allows parents to get involved."