

This is the second in a series of periodic messages to assist in the planning and implementation of NCVRW Community Awareness Projects. CAP TIPS are also posted on the subgrantee page of the NCVRW CAP web site, <http://cap.navaa.org/subs>. Please feel free to send your individual questions or requests for assistance to Anne Seymour at [annesey@atlantech.net](mailto:annesey@atlantech.net).

# CAP TIPS #2

## To Improve Public Awareness

### How to Engage and Involve Teens in your NCVRW Activities

#### Introduction

Many people look back on their teen years with a mixture of fondness and embarrassment. The teen years bring newfound independence, a sense of invincibility and purpose in the world, and expanded learning opportunities and communication abilities. The teen years also bring a developmental need to fit in with peers, an increased focus on body image, and the development of a personal identity.

Unfortunately, the teen years also often bring struggles to identify and cope with victimization. Teenagers are two times more likely than other age groups to become victims of violent crime and are more likely than adults to be victims of property crime.<sup>1</sup> Victimization can wreck havoc on adolescent development and may lead to developmental regression, risky behaviors, isolation, depression, hopelessness, delinquency, substance abuse, eating disorders, aggression, poor school performance, suicide attempts, and homelessness, among others. These responses can have a lasting impact on the victim's life and the community if they are not identified and addressed. Yet teen victims often encounter obstacles to disclosing crime, such as thinking no one will believe them, not knowing where to turn for help, fearing retaliation, feeling responsible for the crime, and wanting to just forget the crime ever happened. Many teen victims aren't even aware that what happened to them was a crime.

Engaging and involving teens in your NCVRW activities provide a unique opportunity to educate teens about what constitutes a crime and how crime can affect them, their family and their peers. Engaging and involving teens are key steps in establishing relationships so teens know they have a place to turn if they need help. Teens talk to other teens before even considering talking to an adult. A teen who has a relationship with a victim service organization or who has a friend who is aware of services for crime victims and survivors will be more willing and able to provide a referral for a friend in need.

The benefits of engaging and involving teens in your NCVRW activities aren't just for teens; they're for you! Engaged teens bring a can-do spirit of idealism to their work. To the adolescent mind, anything is possible. This energy can boost NCVRW activities to new levels of creativity, outreach, and fun.

#### Tips for Identifying "Gatekeepers" to Teen Participants

<sup>1</sup> Wordes, M. and Nunez, M. May 2002. *Our Vulnerable Teenagers: Their Victimization, Its Consequences, and Directions for Prevention and Intervention*. Oakland, CA and Washington, DC: National Council on Crime and Delinquency and National Center for Victims of Crime.

Teens are a unique age group to reach because they have increasingly more independence the older they get, but they are still bound by responsibilities and restrictions outside of their control (school, parents or guardians, etc.). The following gatekeepers can help you engage teens:

- *School administrators and teachers.* School administrators may be receptive to holding an assembly during NCVRW. Government or civic teachers may want to discuss the genesis of the victims' rights movement or a comparison of victims' and defendants' rights (the theme "Justice for Victims. Justice for All." neatly fits with this comparison). English teachers may want to host an essay contest on what "Justice for Victims. Justice for All." Means to students, their families and community. Art teachers may want their students to translate the theme into a visual representation. Drama teachers may want their students to perform a play that examines issues related to crime and victimization. Government, English, art, and drama teachers may want their students to work together to understand victims' rights, write a short play that addresses victims' rights, create the set design, and produce the play for the rest of the school or the community.
- *Guidance counselors and school health professionals.* These professionals are likely to encounter victimized teens on a daily basis. The better they can identify and understand victimization issues, the more teens they can refer to victim assistance organizations. They can also identify students who care about social justice and may be interested in working on NCVRW activities.
- *Youth-development professionals.* Youth-development professionals can include people who work at after-school programs, job development programs, tutoring centers, or community centers. They may want to sponsor activities or look for other avenues for teens to get involved with existing NCVRW activities. Most of all, they know how teens talk and how best to get teens engaged and involved.
- *School Resource Officers.* Some schools are staffed by School Resource Officers (SROs), law enforcement officers who have received additional training to work with teens and keep schools safe. SROs can provide referrals and encourage teens to become involved in NCVRW activities.
- *Coaches.* Many coaches take on a mentoring role and want their athletes to grow into healthy, mature men and women. Some coaches have become involved in programs to help prevent violence against women (please visit the "Coaching Boys into Men" resources available free from the Family Violence Prevention Center at <http://endabuse.org/>).
- *Fitness professionals.* Also talk with fitness professionals who coach teens outside of school programs, whether trainers at the local gym, martial arts professionals, self-defense trainers, Pilates and yoga instructors, or dance instructors. These professionals care about their clients' health and well-being and may want to advertise, sponsor, or partner with NCVRW events.
- *Go where the teens are.* Talk to local businesses that have a high volume of teen traffic: clothing stores, cosmetic stores, beauty salons, pizza restaurants, coffee shops, etc. Ask them to sponsor or partner with your NCVRW events. Even having NCVRW announcements, posters, or general information in heavily trafficked areas can be a draw for teen support.
- *Juvenile justice agencies.* During past commemorations of NCVRW, many victim assistance organizations have collaborated with juvenile probation and parole agencies to provide excellent opportunities for youthful offenders to fulfill their community service obligations. For

example, juvenile offenders can affix commemorative ribbons to pin cards; stuff envelopes; and set up and break down NCVRW events. It's always a good idea to combine community service projects with a touch of "victim awareness programming" for youth so they understand how their community service hours are benefiting victims and survivors of crime.

### **Tips for Engaging and Involving Teens in NCVRW Activities and Throughout the Year**

Teens, like adults, are more likely to get involved in issues and activities that are personally relevant. If dating violence is a growing concern, it might be wise to focus activities around identifying healthy and unhealthy relationships, and how to help a friend who is in an unhealthy relationship. Whatever topics your NCVRW activities may focus on, here are some general tips for engaging teens:

- Involve a teen representative in your NCVRW Planning Committee. Seek his or her suggestions for how to engage teens during NCVRW and throughout the year.
- Don't act like their parents or talk down to them. Because of chemical changes in the brain and body, teens begin to view themselves as autonomous people and don't want to be bossed around by anyone. They want to be treated like adults and often view themselves as comparable to adults (think of teens who sneak into clubs or drink with friends). It is, of course, true that adults have far more experience and fuller life perspectives than teens. But if teens are spoken to in a respectful manner, like two colleagues would speak to each other, they will be more receptive to what you have to say, respectful of who you are, and involved in the activity.
- Listen to their suggestions and consider them carefully. Not everything a teen suggests will be feasible, but teens are the best resource to figure out how to approach and engage other teens.
- Talk the talk. Every generation has its own terminology and lingo ("Gag me with a spoon" wouldn't make much sense to a teen today). Feel free to use some slang during activities, but don't go overboard. Your goal is to connect with teens, not try to be seen as one (they'll lose respect for you if you try too hard to identify with them).
- Walk the walk. If you say you're going to do something, do it. If you can't, tell the teens why you can't do it. It is understandable that things may come up and you won't be able to do everything you set out to do, but neglecting to explain what happened to the teens involved can severely damage their trust in you. They may be more invested in the activities and wary of adults than they let on.
- "Bribery" works. It shouldn't be anything expensive or big, but giving teen participants a token of your appreciation will let them feel valued and respected. If you present teens with a certificate or award for involvement, they can include that acknowledgement on their college applications.

Some organizations that can help you develop activities for teens include:

- National Crime Prevention Council (NCPC): [www.ncpc.org](http://www.ncpc.org). NCPC sells toolkits and workbooks to help teens and adults work together to implement safety and service-learning projects.

- Teen Victim Project (National Center for Victims of Crime): [http://www.ncvc.org/tvp/main.aspx?dbID=dash\\_Home](http://www.ncvc.org/tvp/main.aspx?dbID=dash_Home). The Teen Victim Project provides free publications that can help you implement strategies for engaging teens and developing long-term teen outreach and peer advocacy programs. The Web site also provides links to products developed by demonstration sites that have implemented teen programs.
- National Teen Dating Abuse Helpline: <http://www.loveisrespect.org/>. This Web site provides a toolkit for raising awareness among teens about dating violence, information about identifying dating violence, and an Internet portal and toll-free hotline to connect teens to peer advocates.
- The Texas Governor's Office has developed a teacher's guide of activities to raise awareness about teen dating violence: [http://www.governor.state.tx.us/divisions/women/work/violence/files/teacher\\_guide.pdf](http://www.governor.state.tx.us/divisions/women/work/violence/files/teacher_guide.pdf). The teacher's guide includes suggestions for teachers of everything from math to physical education.
- Pennsylvania Coalition Against Rape (PCAR): [www.pcar.org](http://www.pcar.org). PCAR sells resources for engaging teens in discussions about healthy relationships, sexual harassment, sexual assault, and statutory rape. "Building Healthy Relationships," "Date Rape: Rave Party Club Drugs Curriculum," and "Truth and Consequences: Statutory Rape" may be of particular interest for engaging teens.
- Love is Not Abuse offers a free curriculum to increase teens' understanding of dating violence, help teens dispel myths that "support" dating violence, and increase help-seeking behavior among teens who are in abusive relationships: [http://www.loveisnotabuse.com/teen\\_curriculum\\_request.htm](http://www.loveisnotabuse.com/teen_curriculum_request.htm).

### **For More Information**

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