
ACAV Youth Violence Prevention Project Evaluation – Phase III

FINAL REPORT 2003



by

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1.0 Executive Summary

In the spring of 1999, the Action Committee against Violence (ACAV) received funding from the Calgary Foundation and the National Crime Prevention Center Community Mobilization Program to hire a Youth Violence Prevention Coordinator position. The role of this position is to assist both schools and prevention programs to better co-ordinate their efforts to educate students about violence. Another goal for the new project was to provide leadership for children and youth agencies. The Youth Violence Prevention Project began in July 1999.

RESOLVE Alberta has been involved in evaluating the project almost from its inception. The Phase I (Tutty & Nixon, 2000) and Phase II (Cavicchi & Tutty, 2001) reports documented strengths of the project from the perspective of key community stakeholders, school representatives and a small selection of Calgary students.

In this report, we present the Phase III evaluation findings with respect to the Youth Violence Prevention Project. In Phase III, we interviewed both individuals involved with developing and maintaining the project (N=17) and the children and youth who are involved in prevention programs in Calgary (N=74). The goals of the Phase III research were two-fold:

- To collect feedback from children and youth about their responses to violence prevention, in general, and the “Turn Off the Violence Campaign” and Peace Heroes, two major initiatives of the ACAV office, in particular.
- To continue to elicit feedback about the ACAV Youth Violence Prevention Project and initiatives (as conducted in Phase I and Phase II of this research). This was deemed especially important in light of the seven-month lapse in the violence coordinator position in 2002.

This evaluation used qualitative methodology to assess the experiences of both the child/adolescents and key community stakeholder respondents and ideas about ways to improve the Youth Violence Prevention project, their role with the project, the impact of the seven-month vacancy on youth violence prevention services in Calgary, and the future direction of the project.

In the first research component, Laura Cavicchi from RESOLVE Alberta conducted focus groups with 74 school-aged children and adolescents to provide an opportunity to receive valuable feedback from children about the programs and issues that impact their lives. Given that the Turn Off the Violence Campaign received positive feedback from students, it appears that it is a popular initiative among students. The students also shared their ideas about how this and other prevention initiatives could be improved to better suit the needs of school-aged children. The Youth Violence Prevention Project may consider integrating some of the ideas provided by school-aged children and youth who participated in the focus groups. Recommendations that emerge from the student’s feedback include the following:

- Consider adding different components or options in addition to the poster and writing contests for the “Turn Off the Violence Campaign”, which seem to be working well for elementary school students. The students suggested joint projects rather than single submissions, and allowing a variety of submissions such as videos submissions

and/or plays. Enhancing such ways to engage older students would reach an audience that considers itself beyond the original campaign, but could also develop materials that could be used with the younger students as well.

- The Peace Heroes program was not as visible to students. Finding different venues to promote the project could improve its community presence.
- Engage the students, especially those from higher grades, as more active participants in the projects, perhaps as peer leaders or taking more responsibility for marketing the campaigns in their schools.
- Find other methods of integrating the messages into the school system such as identifying connections to child-friendly and appropriate web-sites.

In the second research component of the Phase III research, Nathalie Forrest interviewed 17 key community stakeholder respondents who confirmed that the ACAV Youth Violence Coordinator position is viewed as essential in providing leadership and acting as a cohesive agent in disseminating information, connecting and communicating with community members, and managing committees and member involvement. The respondents raised several concerns regarding the continuity and direction of the project over the years, noting gaps that were detrimental to their work when no coordinator was in place.

The respondents identified a connection between stabilizing ACAV and more consistency within the coordinator position. They acknowledged funding as an important component in enabling continuity of both ACAV and the coordinator position. A number of funding avenues were suggested, with the premise that for ACAV to obtain funding sources it must demonstrate stability within the organization, as well as utilizing research. Despite the challenges experienced by ACAV, the respondents agreed that the work done by the youth violence coordinator is necessary to assist the community in addressing violence against children and youth.

An overarching theme from the content analysis with the community respondents was with respect to communication and connectedness. A number of the respondents noted a lack of communication about what is happening on the various committees, contributing to a sense of disconnection. They suggested that clearer communication would address this, as well as setting a direction for the work on the committees/sub-committees. Several also expressed a need for communication and connectedness between ACAV and members of the Calgary community.

Recommendations that emerged from concerns raised by the key community stakeholder interviews include the following:

- The turnover in the coordinator position, with the exception of the extended tenure of Doris Toy-Pries in the Youth Violence Prevention Coordinator's role, has been and is a continuing concern. Since ACAV has been active in seeking continued funding and infrastructure support for the project, perhaps another way to address the issue is to make the role of the coordinator less central and more facilitative, so that even with shifts in the coordinator staff-person, the work of the sub-committees in the community would continue.

- Experiment with additional venues to provide information about the workings of the various committees and sub-committees. Since the Youth Violence Prevention Coordinator has routinely used email to inform about the community activities with respect to violence, perhaps the chairs of the sub-committees could circulate minutes or project summaries more often.
- Utilize the ACAV website to post upcoming meetings and project descriptions. Informational documents such as the Transition Report prepared by Doris Toy-Pries could be made available on the website.
- An annual meeting could be scheduled using one of the Quarterly Forum times. This could entail presentations from each of the sub-committees and provide the opportunity for questions and suggestions from those not involved in that particular working group.

The community stakeholders and students were interviewed in 2002 about seven months after Doris Toy-Pries left the coordinator position and just as Cheryl Henschel was hired as the new coordinator. Due to unforeseen difficulties in completing the data analysis, the current report does not address Cheryl's work in the coordinator role. However, as she has recently left the position (in October 2003), the issues raised by the stakeholder respondents have renewed relevance in considering how to make the Youth Violence Prevention Coordinator position more stable and viable.

2.0 Background of the ACAV Violence Youth Prevention Project

In April 1990, Mayor Al Duerr established the Mayor's Task Force on Community and Family Violence in response concerns that various forms of violence were increasing in the city of Calgary. After several months of public hearings and community consultation, the final report, which included 66 recommendations for change, was submitted and approved by City Council (Walroth, 2000).

In December 1991, Calgary City Council established the Action Committee Against Violence (ACAV) in response to one of the Task Force recommendations. ACAV's initial mandate was to implement the recommendations contained in the Task Force Report, in collaboration with existing coalitions and organizations in the city. However, ACAV has since moved beyond this, responding to emerging needs in the community. ACAV has two working groups that deal with specific aspects of violence in the community: the Calgary Domestic Violence Committee and the Children and Youth Sub-Committee.

In the spring of 1999, ACAV received funding from the Calgary Foundation and the National Crime Prevention Center Community Mobilization Program to hire a Youth Violence Prevention Coordinator. The role of this position is to assist both schools and prevention programs to better co-ordinate their efforts to educate students about violence. Another goal for the new position was to provide leadership for children and youth agencies. The Youth Violence Prevention Project began in July 1999.

The first year of the Youth Violence Prevention Project was somewhat turbulent, with several personnel changes, until Doris Toy-Pries was hired as project coordinator in January 2000. The instability of the position during the first year was reflected in the initial Phase I evaluation (Tutty & Nixon, 2000). However, Doris filled the position for nearly two years, a condition that led to more stability, an enhanced sense of direction for the ACAV Children and Youth Sub-committee, and an improved ability of each of the five sub-committees to operationalize their goals. The Youth Violence Prevention Project is supported by the Children and Youth Sub-committee as well as the Steering Committee, which provide feedback and guidance to the project itself and to the direction of the committee. The following summary of the activities of the Child and Youth Committee and the structure of the ACAV Violence Coordinator Project subcommittees is from Doris Toy-Pries' transition report (2002).

Initially, the Youth Violence Coordinator interviewed representatives from over 60 agencies to identify what agencies and organizations who were currently offering violence prevention programming. A major role of the project was developing positive working relationships, commitment and partnerships with key agencies and service providers in violence prevention. The environmental scan process also identified community concerns, perceived gaps of service, emerging trends in service and barriers to community collaboration. This information was later integrated into the strategic plan.

To ensure that the development of a comprehensive strategy was reflective and representative of the community, agencies were invited to participate in an eight-month strategic planning process during which the operational structure, vision, values, beliefs, goals and strategies for the violence coordination project were formed. Youth were also consulted in

several focus groups on the topic of violence prevention and conflict resolution. As a result, a Terms of Reference document was developed that included a clear mission statement and short term and long term goals. The document identified the following priorities:

- To build awareness and education on issues of violence to assist in the prevention of violence;
- To challenge the community and media to take responsibility to provide the necessary supports to ensure children and youth are healthy, caring, contributing citizens;
- To provide leadership in the community (i.e. stakeholders) in program planning, development and assistance in accessing appropriate resources for the prevention and intervention of youth violence; and
- To facilitate participation and contribution of community members (i.e. stakeholders) who are committed to working collaboratively toward the prevention and intervention of youth violence.

The agencies then approved and endorsed the Children & Youth Sub-Committee's leadership role in providing support and resources to communities and schools in preventing violence in the lives of children and youth. Several concerns were identified as community priorities through the community interviews and strategic planning. Some of these included:

- Competition and territorialism between agencies;
- Need for increased awareness of programs in the community;
- Proven program models do not receive core funding
- Need for increased cooperation with school boards.
- Few programs for junior high school aged youth
- Linking diversity services and violence prevention services for youth;
- The need for a parent education campaign around violence prevention;

The structure of the ACAV Youth Violence Prevention project was developed to address these concerns (See Appendix One). The following are subcommittees of the Child and Youth Subcommittee.

Quarterly Forum: This collaborative group of community agencies came together with the common goal of preventing violence in the lives of children and youth. Partner agencies meet four times a year to share information and receive training around community identified issues and concerns. The quarterly forum also acts as the consultation mechanism whereby the initiative's work is held accountable to the greater violence prevention community.

Entry Points and Gaps of Service Sub-Committee: This committee provides leadership, support and resources to communities and schools in developing an environmental scan of current youth violence prevention services in the city of Calgary. The committee also identifies gaps of service in the current service provision system and implements strategies to address these.

Resource Implementation Sub-committee: This committee provides leadership, support and resources to communities and schools in the development of a best practices framework for youth violence prevention services in the city of Calgary. The committee also seeks to market and generate community support, awareness and commitment around these standards.

Turn Off the Violence Sub-committee: This committee implements the Turn Off the Violence public campaign in schools to raise awareness around violence prevention in the community, and to encourage a proactive response with a focus on violence prevention for children and youth.

Research Advisory Sub-committee: This committee works in partnership with RESOLVE Alberta in evaluating the effectiveness of the children and youth initiative, ensuring that it remains accountable to the goals of the youth violence prevention initiative.

2.1 RESOLVE Alberta's Evaluations of the ACAV Youth Violence Coordinator Project

RESOLVE Alberta, a tri-provincial research institute on family violence and violence against women and children was invited to assist in the evaluation of the ACAV Violence Coordinator Project in 1999. RESOLVE Alberta

RESOLVE Alberta is a family violence research institute based at the University of Calgary. RESOLVE Alberta is part of a tri-provincial research institute with additional offices in Manitoba (at the University of Manitoba) and Saskatoon (the University of Saskatchewan). Funding for the evaluation component was from the National Strategy on Community Safety and Crime Prevention Mobilization Fund. The functioning of RESOLVE Alberta has been greatly assisted by receiving external funding from the Partnership Program of the National Crime Prevention Program of Justice Canada and the Prairieaction Foundation. The research has been conducted in three phases. A summary of the first two phases follows.

In the Phase I evaluation, RESOLVE Alberta conducted two research components: (a) a survey to Calgary schools to determine how school personnel learn about violence prevention programs, what elements are important in deciding which programs to access, and what violence prevention programs they have used or are currently using; and (b) interviews with members of the ACAV's Children and Youth Subcommittee, many of whom are representatives of agencies that work in the area of youth and/or youth violence prevention.

The 605 completed school survey results confirmed what the 17 interview respondents suspected and commented upon: that violence prevention programs are not reaching all children and youth. The respondents expressed concern that not all schools have access to violence prevention programs. The interviewees described problems with respect to the ways that many schools receive information about violence prevention programs. For example, some schools are inundated, while others receive little or no information. The school personnel who responded to the surveys reported similar concerns. About one-third of the school personnel found the information with respect to both choosing appropriate violence prevention programs, and evaluating what constitutes an effective program to be confusing. A number of school staff commented that they lack the background to assess evaluation results when these are offered and

need guidelines about what components to look for that would indicate better programs and best practices.

These comments support the need for a central co-coordinating body to assist school personnel in identifying good available programs. The ACAV Youth Violence Prevention Project seems well placed to become an invaluable resource for schools in deciding what prevention programs might best meet the needs of their students and school staff.

The Phase II evaluation of the Youth Violence Prevention Project covered September 2000 – August 2001. Data collection occurred over the course of six months from May through October 2001. While the first year of the project was significantly disrupted with personnel changes, the stability within the position over the past year can be viewed as a contributing factor in much of the community stakeholders' positive feedback. Another difference between the Phase I and Phase II components was the implementation of the Community Based Strategic Plan, which had prescribed changes in the overall structure of the ACAV Child and Youth Subcommittee. In the Spring of 2000, the Child and Youth Sub-committee was divided into smaller, more formalized sub-committees with the entire Child and Youth Subcommittee meeting in Quarterly Forums. Each of the subcommittees, or working groups, has focused its efforts on various tasks in the prevention of violence. Consequently, this change was reflected in the focus of the current evaluation of the Youth Violence Prevention Project.

The Phase II research consisted of individual interviews with 26 key community stakeholders and two focus groups with children participants in Calgary youth serving agencies that offer or utilize youth violence prevention services. All research respondents were members of the ACAV Sub-committee on Children and Youth. The vast majority of participants contacted were eager to lend their support, provide feedback to the work of the ACAV Children and Youth Sub-committee and the Youth Violence Prevention Project over the 2000 – 2001 year. Given the structural changes in the operation of the ACAV as outlined above, it seemed important to focus the 2000 – 2001 evaluation on the awareness and efficacy of the tasks of the various sub-committees. As in the first evaluation, the Phase II research also sought to identify stakeholders' goals for involvement in the ACAV Children and Youth Subcommittee and to identify future focal points in the prevention of violence in the lives of children and youth. That evaluation suggested a positive follow-through, implementing the Phase I recommendations and matching the goals of the Sub-committee itself. In addition, the research results provided initial evidence that the Turn Off the Violence Campaign and the Peace Heroes Program are effective initiatives in the area of youth violence prevention.

2.2 Overview of the Phase III Evaluation

In this report, we present the Phase III evaluation findings with respect to the Youth Violence Prevention Project. In Phase III, we interviewed both individuals involved with developing and maintaining the project (N=17) and the children and youth who are involved in prevention programs in Calgary schools (N=74). The goals of the Phase III research were two-fold:

- To collect feedback from children and youth about their responses to violence prevention, in general, and the “Turn Off the Violence Campaign” and Peace Heroes, two major

initiatives of the ACAV office, in particular.

- To continue to elicit feedback about the ACAV Youth Violence Prevention Project and initiatives (as conducted in Phase I and Phase II of this research). This was deemed especially important in light of the six-month lapse in the violence coordinator position in 2002.

The Turn Off the Violence Campaign is implemented every November in Calgary to increase awareness about the impact of violence. Young people are encouraged to create solutions to prevent violence by participating in creative writing and poster contests. Schools receive curriculum packages that include information on violence and suggested classroom and school wide activities. Based on the media coverage that the 1999-2000 campaign received and the materials set out to 384 schools, the message reached an estimated 300,000 people in Calgary. The 1999 - 2000 Campaign received over 2500 poster entries.

The search for Peace Heroes schools is a co-operative effort of the Action Committee Against Violence, the Calgary Women's Emergency Shelter and Child Friendly Calgary. Calgary schools report peace initiatives that have been introduced into their schools, or new and innovative initiatives designed to create a healthier, safer environment in which children can learn. Schools registered with Peace Heroes receive:

- a Peace Heroes flag,
- information about Peace Heroes Programs in other Calgary schools and
- an invitation to celebrate their achievements through an awards presentation in the spring.

Gold, Silver and Bronze medals are given to schools that score more than 80 pathway points at a spring celebration.

The Phase III evaluation used qualitative methodology to assess the experiences of the respondents and their ideas about ways to improve the Youth Violence Prevention project, their role with the project, the impact of the seven-month vacancy on youth violence prevention services in Calgary, and the future direction of the project. The interview and focus groups were transcribed verbatim and analyzed using content analysis to identify the most salient themes. The results are presented in the following sections using direct quotations to highlight the important issues, strengths and suggestions.

3.0 Research Component I: Focus Groups with School-Aged Children and Youth

Laura Cavicchi conducted focus groups with 74 school-aged children and adolescents to provide an opportunity to receive feedback from children about the programs and issues that impact their lives.

The Turn Off the Violence Campaign plays a fundamental role in the ACAV Children and Youth Sub-committee's goal of increasing awareness of violence-related issues, and its integral focus on the prevention of violence in the lives of children and youth. As such, it seemed important to assess the awareness of and experience with the Turn Off the Violence and Peace Heroes programs. We were also curious about children and adolescents' opinions/ideas regarding other violence prevention programs directed to their age group.

The "Turn Off The Violence Campaign" is one of the longest running initiatives of the Action Committee against Violence. It has been adopted in a large number of Calgary schools and community agencies and consists of engaging children in conversations about violence in their families, schools and communities through contests such as creating posters and writing on the topic. The "Peace Heroes" project has is a co-operative effort of the Mayor's Action Committee Against Violence, the Calgary Women's Emergency Shelter, and Child Friendly Calgary, with support from the Calgary Council of Home and School Association, the Calgary Board of Education and the Calgary Roman Catholic School District. These six organizations, with broad-based community support have designed the Peace Heroes Program with the following goals in mind.

- To promote peaceful solutions to conflicts in the school community
- To empower youth and reinforce the belief that they are a positive influence in the community
- To turn awareness into action and celebrate efforts towards that end

Youth and children are the recipients of most prevention efforts, yet are rarely asked for their ideas about what works and what does not. We conducted focus groups with children and youth either through Calgary schools or agencies such as the Boys and Girls Club, the Child Friendly Calgary Youth Volunteer Corps and the Girl Guides. The youth were asked to describe their experiences during the campaign, what they learned and whether participating made a difference to them in understanding different forms of violence and what they could do if they were the victim of violence. The youth were asked to recommend what they would see as the "best practices" in school-based prevention. This feedback may be valuable to agencies that offer prevention programs, as well as school personnel who make decisions about which programs to invite into their organization. The research will hopefully add to our knowledge of how to assist young people in preventing violence or intervening early to avoid the development of serious long-term consequences. The students will benefit by being offered the opportunity to discuss in more detail issues related to violence prevention beyond that typically offered in the prevention program process.

The school and community will benefit by learning more about young people's

perceptions of the utility of school-based prevention programs. The ACAV Youth Violence Prevention Project will benefit by the feedback that will either endorse its initiatives and programs such as the Turn Off the Violence Campaign and Peace Heroes or will suggest revisions to the programs.

3.1 Evaluation Methodology

With input from the Research Advisory Team RESOLVE Alberta personnel developed a questionnaire to be used in focus groups with school-aged children and youth, (see Appendix I). The questions centered on collecting information from children and youth's experiences with the Turn Off the Violence Campaign, the Peace Heroes Program and any other violence prevention programs in which they had participated over the past year. The focus groups were tape-recorded and the audiotapes transcribed verbatim. Accepted practices of mainstream qualitative research data analysis were employed to identify the major themes and sub-themes.

Seventy-four children and youth participated in the school focus groups, ranging from Grades Two to Twelve. The primary purpose of the focus groups was to gain insight into their experiences with the Turn Off the Violence Campaign, the Peace Heroes Program, and any other violence prevention programs over the past year. The focus groups provided the opportunity for children and youth to offer suggestions regarding the development of violence prevention programs that may best suit their needs and interests. The interaction between children and adolescents in the focus groups allowed the interviewer to note their understanding and experience with violence, bullying, and abuse. A final consideration for this research component is that the children and adolescents' responses may contribute to an understanding of what constitutes best practices for violence prevention programming.

3.2 Results

Seventy-four school-aged children and youth from Grades Two to Grade Twelve participated in one of nine focus groups (34 girls and 40 boys). Of the nine groups, four were with children from grades two to six in elementary school, and five were with adolescents from grades seven to twelve in junior and senior high school. The data analysis was divided into two sub-sets of *children* and *adolescents* because students are typically separated into different schools by grade seven. In addition, children and adolescents differ developmentally and experientially at those stages, and therefore can offer distinct perceptions on violence and abuse issues. Thirty students participated in the *children's* groups (11 girls and 20 boys). Forty-three students participated in the *adolescents'* groups (23 girls and 20 boys). The two sub-sets were divided fairly evenly along gender lines.

Ethics approval to conduct the research was secured through the University of Calgary with the requirement to secure to parental consent for the children's participation in the research. The decision to participate in the research was entirely voluntary and at the onset of the group the children were informed of their right to leave the group at any time.

3.2.1 The Turn Off the Violence Campaign

A large proportion of the students were aware of the Turn Off the Violence Campaign, as 90% of the participants in the *children's* groups (28 of 31), and 72.1% (31 of 43) of the

adolescent group students were aware of the campaign. When asked what they liked about it, the children commented on diverse facets, while the adolescents tended to focus on what they would change. Eight children specifically commented that they enjoyed drawing the posters and one girl in Grade Five had previously won the poster competition.

I won once. I was in Grade Two. It's the one where it says 'love can change everything'.
- Grade 5 girl

I really like drawing, so I liked drawing posters. I don't know much about violence, so I just drew what I knew. – Grade 5/6 boy

Three children liked the participation aspect. Two children enjoyed the chance to help others.

It's all fun. All of it! – Grade 3 boy

I like that it might help people to be kind to each other in the world. - Grade 5 girl

I like the way that all kids in all grades are involved. – Grade 5/6 boy

Two children liked the concept of being rewarded for trying to make a difference. One girl appreciated the opportunity to express her feelings about violence:

I like that we got to express our feelings about what we don't like about violence. – Grade 5 girl

The participants were asked whether they had learned anything new from participating in the Turn Off the Violence Campaign. In the children's groups, six children noted that they had not learned anything new from Turn Off the Violence, but when further questioned, this was because they had already participated in the program in previous years and were familiar with the concepts or had learned the information elsewhere. This was also true for the *adolescent* group members. Four children commented about learning about violence directly from the posters.

My parents told me ALL about it. Like a mini-school about turning off the violence. – Grade 2 boy

Sometimes, when people really bug you and the posters are around your school, you could maybe look at one and it reminds you just to leave them alone. It reminds you that two wrongs don't make a right. - Grade 4 boy

I really think when I look at a poster it is like you can sort of picture 'bullies beware because good is here'. Because you'll never get really your way if you're mean, if you're nice you'll get good things in life, if you're bad, you won't. It's sort of like what goes around comes around. – Grade 5 girl

I like to see what different ideas people have to try to get people to stop being violent. - Grade 2 girl

I like the way that when they did put up the posters, everyone tried their best [to turn off the violence] – Grade 5/6 boy

Five children discussed what they had learned about violence related issues through participating in the campaign:

I know that violence is a really bad thing. – Grade 3 boy

I learned that the world would be a better place without violence. - Grade 5 girl

Three children in the focus groups expressed that they enjoyed learning about making a difference.

I like that everyone participated and you learn that people are all trying to make a difference, so why don't everyone just stop and let the differences develop. – Grade 5 girl

What I think is good for turning off the violence is how we could show that violence is bad and peace is good. So I try helping other people. – Grade 2 girl

The participants were asked if there was anything that they disliked about the Turn Off the Violence Campaign. The majority of the participants in the *children's* groups enjoyed the campaign, with 17 of the 32 (53.1%) stating that there was nothing that they didn't like. A number of children commented on frustrating aspects of the actual drawing and colouring of the poster. Interestingly, a number of participants from both the *children's* and *adolescent's* groups seemed to think that the competition was contradictory to the message of Turn Off the Violence.

Sometimes it kind of got a little competitive because you have to vote. I just saw a competition about getting to be a winner. - Grade 5/6 boy

One child commented that when she was initially introduced to the Turn Off the Violence, she did not understand what it was about:

The first time I did it I didn't understand what it was for because I was really little. I thought the world didn't really have that much violence. Now I understand it more. There is acts of violence in the world and now that I'm old enough to read books. – Grade 5 girl

In the *adolescent* groups, participants stated that the campaign was repetitive and encouraged too much focus on the artwork for the poster competition and less on the actual message of Turn Off the Violence.

Sometimes it is more of an art contest than a Turn Off the Violence thing, because people think it is just about the poster and they don't think about the meaning behind it. – Grade 8 girl

A lot of good artists think that it means something to them and they try to do a really good job on the poster. But they don't really think about what they are writing or what they are saying. – Grade 8 boy

Students in the *adolescent* groups were also concerned that the campaign was not followed-up in the schools. Others would have liked more violence prevention skill building and to have the campaign better advertised.

Maybe some sort of follow-up to it, some information or statistics as far as how violence is affecting the schools. – Grade 9 girl

If they actually helped us do something to stop it instead of just drawing posters. That would be more effective. – Grade 9 girl

It was not explained. It was not explained HOW to turn off the violence. – Grade 10 boy

We all went to the assembly but that was it. We discussed it for a bit in class but it wasn't like there was any real follow-up. It wasn't like we had one class where we talked about this kind of violence; it just kind of finished there. – Grade 8 girl

The participants were asked if they would change the Turn Off the Violence Campaign in any way. Eight participants in the *children's* groups stated that they wouldn't change anything about the program.

I just wouldn't change it. – Grade 3 boy

It's fine the way it is, there is no need to change anything. – Grade 2 boy

Thirteen students in the *children's* groups discussed adding different projects and/or activities. Some of these changes were with respect to the competition aspect of the campaign.

One thing I would change is that I wouldn't have individual posters because that is competitive. I would have the whole class do one together and then hang it in the gym. – Grade 4 girl

I'd change what we're supposed to do. We'd still have Turn Off the Violence. But I wouldn't do posters, I would just write a little bit and then draw a picture [about] what you think should stop the violence. – Grade 2 girl

Change the competitiveness because after that we were all working against each other but before that we were working together. – Grade 5/6 boy

If I could change anything, we would do pictures and then you'd also have to make a video of yourself and what you do, and then send it in. – Grade 6 boy

You could go in school and see a kid that is actually doing [something] that's really a good job. I would have where on a picture you write 'he did a good job because he's sharing.' – Grade 4 girl

They should have had one whole class work on one big poster. – Grade 5/6 girl

Nine children suggested that there be opportunities for more children to win, such as one winner in each class. A few children suggested that athletic activities would be a good addition to the program.

Participants in the *adolescent* groups had a variety of suggestions, a large proportion of which included adding more interactive components to the campaign such as videos, role plays, music, field trips, and class discussions.

Something that ties in the students, like music with non-violent lyrics, that kids listen to and relate to. – Grade 8 boy

Members of the *adolescent* groups also recognized the need for violence prevention to be more integrated into the school and classroom curriculum.

If it was taught more often as part of the school. If it was part of the school curriculum, the violence prevention, just have it as part of the classroom more often. If it was taught early, in elementary school, then it will show up later. So start with the young kids and keep it going all the way through. – Grade 9 girl

I think they should just integrate it more into the classroom atmosphere, as opposed to just having people talk about it. – Grade 9 girl

Some of the adolescent group members suggested that the Turn Off the Violence Campaign should be open for students to use different talents.

I think it should be open to what different talents you have. Maybe you don't have to use art as a talent, but maybe a performance in drama or something. – Grade 9 boy

The participants were asked whether they thought that other students find the Turn Off the Violence Campaign helpful. Most participants in the *children's* groups agreed that the Turn Off the Violence Program would help other students. Members of the *adolescent* groups were of the opinion that Turn Off the Violence is less suited to their age group than to the younger students.

Turn Off the Violence is geared towards younger people. More suitable for elementary school kids. – Grade 10 girl

When we did it, when the individual here won, when they made the speech, it wasn't really appealing to the students. Maybe if they did something more appealing to the students they would watch, listen, and learn some things. – Grade 9 boy

Students in the adolescent groups were also of the opinion that the Turn Off the Violence Campaign would be useful in lower-income, higher needs communities.

Maybe to schools that have more violence in their environment. Maybe it would have more effect. – Grade 8 boy

3.2.2 The Peace Heroes Program

The children were asked if they were aware of the Peace Heroes Program. Approximately half of the participants in the *children's* groups replied in the affirmative. In the *children's* groups there was ample understanding of what was involved in becoming a Peace Heroes school, and being recognized for their achievements.

It is a way to thank the entire school for doing all of the things for other people. – Grade 3 boy

We did a homeless package to the homeless company. – Grade 4 boy

We did such a good job that they gave us an award to go on the 6:00 news and sing a song. – Grade 3 boy

Among the *adolescents*, there was some debate as to their understanding or involvement in Peace Heroes. Students in a school that had won the Peace Heroes award were aware that they had been recognized as a result of fundraising for people in need in their community and globally. Students from another school that had won the award were not well informed regarding the process of becoming a Peace Heroes School. Interestingly, they did note that they did not engage in extra charity work in the pursuit of winning the Peace Heroes flag. Only two of the adolescent groups responded to the question about whether they liked or disliked the Peace Heroes program, stating that they simply did not know enough about the program to answer the question.

3.2.3 Other Violence Prevention Programs

The students were asked about other violence prevention programs that they had experienced over the past year. A large portion of the participants commented that violence prevention was built into their school curriculum. Teachers in some classes took the initiative to integrate violence prevention and skill building into the classroom environment.

In the *children's* groups, the participants tended to remember what their parents or teachers had taught them, movies and entertaining presentations on violence prevention and anti-discrimination, and activities in clubs such as Cubs, Girl Guides, and the Boys and Girls Club.

My mom talked to me a lot because at her old job she used to work with kids that got bullied or abused. – Grade 2 girl

My teacher teaches us to not be violent and to do stuff like if someone's being mean to you, walk away, ignore them, or go to the principal. – Grade 3 boy

Students in the *adolescent* groups cited a long list of programs and activities in which they had engaged over the last year regarding violence prevention. Some schools had specific courses that taught various components of violence prevention such as mentoring, relationship education, child abuse, anti-discrimination, and community activism. One of the schools identified five school values of family, trust, caring, responsibility, and respect. The classes

receive a brick each time they fulfill one of the five values, which they utilize in building a house of bricks in their gymnasium

We have eight classes. Life Skills is a class you have twice in a six day cycle. We talk about sexual education, self-awareness, healthy choices, decision making, drugs. You talk about things that apply to your life and each grade is a little different. – Grade 9 girl

Included in the externally offered programs were presentations that focused on the use of alcohol and drugs and subsequent consequences such as violence, addiction, crime, injury, and death. Students in the adolescent groups tended to remember the presentations that included real life examples of hardships that people had endured as a result of violence and addictions. Some students were also involved in extra-curricular sports and clubs that integrated aspects of violence prevention.

We have sports teams and clubs that suit everybody, so no one feels left out, or feels that they have nothing to do. So they are less likely to get involved in violence. I think that helps prevent violence. Lots of extra-curricular activities. – Grade 8 boy

The participants were asked whether school violence prevention programs help students do things differently. There was considerable debate in the focus groups about this. In the *children's* groups, it appeared that one of the central reasons why prevention programs were sometimes not helpful was rooted in the observation that many students do not pay attention to the information and consequently, they don't absorb many of the concepts.

When the people come to talk about the Turn off the Violence, I think that some people do listen but some people that don't pay attention in class, they won't hear that. So they don't know that they're supposed to do that. – Grade 3 / 4 girl.

No, and they really don't care and they're just going to do it without anybody around either. They don't care anyways. They just sit there waiting to get out of there and they don't listen. – Grade 4 boy

No and Yes. Yes to the younger children - taking Grade One and Two – probably, yeah. With the older kids they are probably just sitting waiting to get out so they can do whatever they are going to do. I say that these programs, some kids don't appreciate them. – Grade 6 boy

They tried to teach us stuff but it didn't really work 'cause people just react too fast and they turn around and start beating each other up. – Grade 5 boy

If you just came to this school, like if you were in kindergarten, it would help. Starting when they are young. – Grade 4 girl

I know somebody who changed it for a little bit. My Grade Three teacher, he has this little thing and it's 'respect people' and he has this big huge list on the wall. – Grade 5 boy

Some participants in both the *children* and *adolescent* groups acknowledged that some programs help children do things differently.

We had a program like that that came to our school. It showed a movie about bullying. If somebody is pushing you around and you have to have companions, then those companions can stick up for you. – Grade 2 girl

They took the bullies and the victims of bullies and they taught the victims how to defend themselves. Like what to do if the bully does bug them again. Kind of help the bully. It's why they beat up on other people. – Grade 6 boy

Every bit helps. – Grade 5/6 boy

We usually have a big presentation, the whole school gets together, lots of people learn stuff. I think it's good. – Grade 3 boy

With things like child abuse it helps you to be more sure. You don't want to tell somebody that you think they are being abused if you are not really sure, so you kind of back off. But with this you learn all of the signs and the different kinds of abuse. You can be a little more sure and a little more willing to get help for someone. – Grade 9 girl

You learn how to handle those different types of situations better: how to recognize it; how to go about doing the right thing without getting yourself into a giant mess, like you end up getting bullied; how to help the person; who is the victim, and where to go for help. You know how to recognize that situation and how to handle it. It really helps. – Grade 9 girl

According to the research participants, both children and adolescents see the efficacy of violence prevention programs in schools whether these are externally offered or integrated into the curriculum.

3.2.4 Improving Violence Prevention for Children and Adolescents

When the participants commented that programs were not effective, the interviewer asked how the programs could be improved. Several members of the *children's* groups found some presentations too long.

It should be a little bit shorter. If it was maybe just a short video, cause kids like watching videos. – Grade 5 girl

Some participants in the *children's* groups suggested that there could be more rewards for good behaviour, both in the classroom and on the playground, while several thought that visual cues were good reminders about violence prevention:

I think if they get the award just for being good in class, they won't have any idea of how they are being on the playground. – Grade 2 boy

It would be a good idea to have a flag hanging up on one of the school walls saying 'Turn Off the Violence, Bullying Is Not Good' – Grade 3 boy

Students in the *adolescent* groups had a number of suggestions for improving violence prevention programs and presentations which included:

- add more follow-up activities to the programs;
- decrease repetition of the same programs from year to year;
- use real life examples;
- use catchy language and phrases;
- demonstrate the results of their violence prevention efforts;
- provide examples of both the bully and victim side of bullying;
- increase community awareness; and
- include students in plays and presentations.

Maybe you could publish a monthly newsletter that you send out to each school about programs that are happening in their community where they can help out to stop violence. – Grade 8 girl

Seeing the pictures, the movie, the slogans, it all just stays in your head whereas if someone is just talking, we hear talking all the time, so it is kind of pointless. When they do the assemblies they could have someone who had gone through a real life experience and have pictures or something. I think that would stick with students better. – Grade 8 girl

I think it is most effective when you see what people have lost. If they are bullying, what they have lost. They no longer have pride, they have guilt. People who are victims [may] no longer go for their dreams because they may be injured. – Grade 9 boy

Adolescent students demonstrated insight into the economic stratification between different school districts.

It is important that they make these programs easier for school that have less money, so that they can help. People that go to a school that doesn't have as much stuff and they don't have as much money at home, they probably are not very likely to be able to bring money [in charity events or fundraisers]. Some people can't bring money and they probably are not recognized, even though they probably do try to promote non-violence in their school. It's nice that our school gets all these awards, it's great that we have a fairly non-violent school, but other schools that can't do the things that we can, they should be rewarded for different things. That would probably try to help them stop violence even more. – Grade 8 girl

The schools that don't have as much money, if they are really trying to prevent violence, maybe they could get some recognition rather than the wealthier schools, so they could contribute more. The poorer schools should get recognized so they could get motivated. – Grade 8 boy

Maybe if you could put someone in those schools and study the problems that they have, then give them suggestions as to how they could change it. If one person comes and gives examples to the school and then a little while later they come back and see if those examples have been worked on, then they could be awarded for that. – Grade 8 girl

Participants were asked whether they knew other ways to help students help prevent violence. In the *children's* groups, the answers focused around bullying. Three children suggested telling the teacher or principal more often. Another three thought that children should tell friends when they are being bullied. An interesting discussion in one group suggested using students as supervisors on the playground:

Maybe they should get student supervisors. Interested students to go and try to help. – Grade 3 boy

They don't have to wear a jacket or anything. They can just walk around being normal and if they see someone bullying then they can go [and tell someone]. – Grade 2 boy

Yeah, they could dress normally and play normally, but just keep an eye out.

Because then bullies don't know that you are a supervisor. Kind of like those police cars that don't have the stuff on them – ghost cars. - Grade 3 boy

One boy proposed that bullies be asked to think about the consequences of their behaviours.

They [bullies] could think about the future. Like if they were bullies and for the rest of his years he wouldn't have any friends and all of his family would be mean to him and stuff because he's mean. - Grade 3 boy

Suggestions from both the *children's* and *adolescent* groups brought violence prevention back to simple communication.

Maybe we should talk about it more at home. – Grade 5/6 girl

It is really important to keep it open so that people feel comfortable talking about it, thinking about it, and they feel comfortable enough to ask questions. – Grade 9 girl

3.2.5 Understanding Violence and Abuse/Bullying

While the interview questions did not specifically ask participants to describe their understanding of violence and abuse, in all nine groups the participants offered their insights and comprehension of violence and bullying. In one group, the children shared that sometimes bullying occurs because of observable differences such as race or ability.

I remember my mom told me about this kid who came to the school from another country and he got bullied. [Interviewer: So sometimes bullies pick on kids that look different, or talk different?] Yes. Or they are new. -Grade 2 girl

Because they don't have any friends to stand up for them. – Grade 3 boy

All that they have to stand up for them is their feet to run. – Grade 3 boy

Another interesting conversation involved a tactic to use when dealing with a bully:

If someone ever tries to do that to me [bullying] what I would do is turn around and leave. – Grade 3 boy

And ignore them. – Grade 2 girl

And not get hit, unless they chase you. I know one that chases me all the time. – Grade 4 boy

Just chase them all the way to the supervisor. – Grade 3 boy

That's what you do. Run to the supervisor, tell her, and he comes running right into that. – Grade 2 boy

Interviewer: *Did you learn that in a bullying program or somewhere else?*

Just from experience. – Grade 3 boy

Students in one of the *children's* groups suggested that it would be helpful to include students in violence prevention presentations.

I have a good idea of who could talk – students who have been bullied. – Grade 3 boy

They could have students talk about the whole school, and the bullies could listen to this. Students could tell them what it feels like and how it hurts. Then the bullies could think that they are not going to do that anymore. – Grade 3 boy

Several participants in one of the *children's* groups shared their experiences of when an adult did not believe that they had bullied or did not approve of them disclosing:

I've seen a lot of people show not very good honesty. Like if I tell a supervisor that he was bullying me, and [they bully said] 'no I wasn't'. I've gotten in trouble for lying once, or attempting to lie, and which I didn't. I was telling the truth. – Grade 3 boy

The supervisor thinks you are a tattler. – Grade 2 boy

She think that you are just trying to get someone in trouble. – Grade 3 boy

And then you can get in trouble. – Grade 2 boy

Interviewer: *What do you do when somebody doesn't believe you?*

My mom told me just to go on and on about it and tell all the details about what happened. Then they might believe you. If they don't then just go on to the next person, or someone else the next time. – Grade 3 boy

That is why you should have students who have actually experienced bullying [as supervisors] so that if someone comes to them and tells them that someone is bullying them, they'll believe them because that has happened to them. - Grade 3 girl

3.3 Summary and Recommendations from the Children and Youth Focus Groups

The children and youth that participated in the focus groups were well acquainted with the “Turn Off the Violence” campaign, but less so with Peace Heroes. The Turn Off the Violence Campaign received positive feedback from the students, appearing a popular initiative especially among the elementary school students. The children also shared ideas about how this and other prevention initiatives could be improved to better suit the needs of school-aged children. The Youth Violence Prevention Project may wish to consider integrating at least some of the ideas suggested by school-aged children and youth who participated in the focus groups.

Recommendations that emerge from the student’s feedback include the following:

- Consider adding different components or options in addition to the poster and writing contests for the “Turn Off the Violence Campaign”, which seem to be working well for elementary school students. The students suggested joint projects rather than single submissions, and allowing a variety of submissions such as videos submissions and/or plays. Enhancing such ways to engage older students would reach an audience that considers itself beyond the original campaign, but could also develop materials that could be used with the younger students as well.
- The Peace Heroes program was not as visible to students. Finding different venues to promote the project could improve its community presence.
- Engage the students, especially those from higher grades, as more active participants in the projects, perhaps as peer leaders or taking more responsibility for marketing the campaigns in their schools.
- Find other methods of integrating the messages into the school system such as identifying connections to child-friendly and appropriate web-sites.

4.0 Research Component II: Interviews with Key Community Stakeholders

With input from the Research Advisory Team, RESOLVE Alberta personnel developed an interview schedule for key Calgary community stakeholders who have been involved in some way with ACAV or the Violence Prevention Coordination project (see Appendix III). We utilized qualitative methodology to assess the experiences of the respondents and their ideas about ways to improve the Youth Violence Prevention Project, their role with the project, the impact of the seven-month vacancy on youth violence prevention services in Calgary, and the future direction of the project.

Nathalie Forrest, a research assistant with RESOLVE Alberta, conducted the interviews primarily by telephone using a semi-structured format. The interviews were audio-recorded, with permission, and transcribed verbatim. The choice to be involved in the research was entirely optional and confidential. Those who chose not to participate were notified that this would not affect their involvement with the project, the subcommittees, or the Youth Violence Coordinator position in any way. The information was analyzed using mainstream qualitative research data analysis techniques.

4.1 Results

All seventeen interview respondents had been involved with the Youth Violence Prevention Project in some manner. They represented diverse sectors, working either peripherally or directly in the area of youth violence. They included representatives of agencies that provide services for children and youth who may be affected by violence, community-based violence prevention programs, two Calgary school boards, a funder, and the Coordinator of the Action Committee Against Violence.

4.1.1 Involvement with the ACAV Youth Violence Prevention Project

The majority of respondents had been involved with the ACAV Youth Violence Prevention Project and/or the Child and Youth Sub-committee for more than two years. Eight stakeholders had had long-standing involvement (two years or more) with the project, three had been involved for less than two years and two had limited involvement (one as a funder; the other had only attended a few meetings). One respondent was an ACAV staff member, and six did not elaborate on their involvement. Involvement with ACAV was often multi-faceted, with eight respondents having participated in three or more committees and/or having three or more roles.

Thirteen had participated in various committees or sub-committees during 2001-2002, while four had not. Of those who were more involved, six participants were on the Child and Youth Sub-committee, six on the Turn Off the Violence Committee, four attended the Quarterly Forums, and two each were on the Parent Education, Gaps in Services, Steering, and Research Advisory Committees. Finally, one was on the Best Practices committee and one was a Child and Youth Sub-committee representative from Safer Calgary.

4.1.2 Awareness of the Activities of the Other Sub-committees

With respect to the activities of the sub-committees in which they did not participate, ten respondents admitted being aware of this work: four expressed general awareness, four knew about the Diversity committee, three were aware of the Parent Education committee, two had heard about the work of various sub-committees through the Quarterly Forums, and two were aware of the Gaps in Services committee. One each was aware of the work of the Best Practices and Research Advisory committees.

We also had these regular forums where we were kept in touch with what was going on and how we were connected with the others arms.

I hear about the reports when I'm on the Steering Committee. So I know that there was a research committee. And there was a diversity committee, and a parenting committee. Now it's been a long time since I've had an update... I couldn't tell you what they're doing (laugh).

Five respondents admitted little awareness of the work of the other sub-committees and five respondents were confused about the names of the sub-committees. Two noted that the turnover in the Youth Violence Coordinator position significantly affected the work of the sub-committees. One respondent was concerned about lack of productivity and another expressed confusion due to overlap and the number of meetings because of multiple community projects.

Each time there was a new coordinator I would meet with her and go over my programs and nothing seemed to be passed on...everybody started from scratch again. I became frustrated. We didn't seem to accomplish too much. The meetings were well attended, but often they wouldn't be the same people that were at the last meeting. All we did was meet people.

It's been a very kind of a busy time cause there's been a lot of overlap between Homefront as well as ACAV. There was a lot of confusion at times about what was for what, and what meetings were occurring and things like that. It was a fairly complicated process... it's not that many people meeting, so people meeting together continually.

4.1.3 The Seven Month Vacancy in the ACAV Youth Violence Coordinator Position

Since the ACAV Youth Violence Coordinator position had been vacant for over half a year when the interviews were conducted, respondents were asked whether they had noticed differences in the community, their work, prevention programming in the city, or in any other areas. The majority of respondents concurred that the Youth Violence Coordinator provides a valuable service and that the period with no coordinator was problematic. Twelve stakeholders noted a decrease in motivation, leadership and coordination of committees, six had noticed a decrease in communication, and six more commented about a loss of direction. Four participants noticed a decrease in opportunities to build on and maintain connections, three each said that some of the sub-committees had stopped meeting and that they had noticed reduced attendance at meetings, while two mentioned that employees of local agencies cannot take time from their own jobs to take on the coordinator's duties.

People just do not have the time to give from their own positions to keep this going...there's been a huge gap.

Oh, tremendous [differences]. The leadership is gone. It provided the incentive, the motivation, the coordination.

I've noticed some substantial differences. Many of the sub-committees have stopped meeting. As a result of that there's less coordination, less collaboration, and I don't think that the agencies are feeling as connected as they were when the position was filled. There has been a significant impact on service delivery in the sense of agencies being connected to each other and the work.

The membership has completely declined, people weren't even aware that the meeting was still going on. We decided that we would not hold those meetings any longer until the position was filled...nobody was showing up, there was no direction to the meetings. In terms of how those committees worked, yes, there was a difference. The whole thing kind of fell apart, especially with the Child and Youth Steering Committee. We didn't even know what we were doing there anymore. So there's not one person sort of leading it. So we're coming together and wondering are we meeting for meeting's sake? Certainly that was a huge impact. Whatever work that committee was doing completely came to a halt.

Definitely, that position being vacant for such a long period of time has left a gap in terms of organization and structure, even just in the hosting [and] scheduling of meetings, taking minutes, all of the routine types of activities that are required. Because that person hasn't been there, I myself have not been attending a lot of the meetings [due in part to] the lack of organization, because that position has been vacant for a long period of time.

Six respondents noticed a decrease in communication or in the flow of information because the coordinator provided a service that they relied on.

The biggest difference for me was in the communication. Doris was very good at keeping us informed and always inviting you if you had a desire to be part of one of these other sub-committees, you could be. She was very good at networking.

One respondent who believes that ACAV is instrumental in raising awareness about the systemic issues surrounding violence had noticed a decrease in engagement.

I think that because of ACAV, we do have a better sense of what kinds of issues there are around violence in Calgary. [We] needed to deal with systemic issues around how that all happens. We were moving towards that. That awareness is really what a lot of the work was and then engaging people also. I don't think that there's been that engagement.

When asked whether they had noticed differences in the community because of the lack of the coordinator, five respondents answered affirmatively.

I've heard in the community that any time you take a key position out of a coordinating body, for that many months, people are going to feel that. I'm sure there's been a sense of

lost ground, that some of the work that they were doing, which my understanding is it was good work, [that] there would be slippage because the coordinator really is there to manage, and micro-manage all the different activities of that sector. So, yeah, you take a coordinator role out and the coordination piece is bound to suffer. It was a long absence.

I think the profile of ACAV has dropped a little bit in the last few months. It just seems that there's significantly less awareness amongst people that I talk to of the workings of ACAV.

Four stakeholders noticed no differences in the community. However, one commented that it was only a question of time before differences would be felt.

It didn't affect me in any way. I certainly didn't have any awareness of it within the community because the work that I did with the Action Committee Against Violence carried on. We did it with fewer numbers of people, but we did a great job. Could we continue to do that without having a coordinator? I don't think so. We all knew it was sort of a one-time thing, cause Karen Walroth told us that they were hiring.

Two respondents were ambivalent, while five participants did not notice an impact on their own work:

I can't say as I have. It didn't have any impact on me or on what I could see in the schools that I dealt with.

4.1.4 The Need to Maintain the Youth Violence Prevention Coordinator Position

When asked about the absence of a Youth Violence Prevention Coordinator over the last seven months, the vast majority of stakeholders (sixteen) were committed to sustaining the coordinator's position.

I think it's very necessary to sustain the position if Calgary really wants to be seen to be making some progress in the area of violence, especially violence connected with youth. You can't expect to just have things done within a short time frame. It does take a long time, it takes a concerted effort, and it takes having one individual who's really focused on that specifically, as opposed to lots of different agencies, different programs.

Certainly! We are all different agencies that come together. There needs to be one person that does the coordination of the meetings and getting people together and ensuring that information is dispersed. Because I think otherwise the whole thing falls apart. It's exactly what was evident over the last seven months. There's a huge void.

I would say yes. The advantage of having more coordinated work and having that level of connecting to each other and a process that is effective, it's hard to have that without that position. The coordinator position [then] becomes very helpful and useful, making sure that people are doing what they need to do.

I really do. [Karen] Walroth probably can't do it all. To focus on youth is very important, [it is] supposed to be sort of a city coordination of everything. So without a person in that

job it's not going to happen. They wouldn't put out this [compendium of services], which is a very positive thing. And I think that the schools totally rely on this [compendium].

Respondents noted that the coordinator improved focus and sustainability. Four respondents commented that individual agencies cannot coordinate youth violence prevention services for the entire city. Further, such coordination is important as it improves collaboration, networking and connections, resulting in improved communication and flow of information.

We are all different agencies. There needs to be one person that is at the forefront of that.

Oh, absolutely critical! My sense from the youth-service-providing community is that in the last few years we started working together a whole lot better than we were in the past. The connections that were built through that position and through the committee brought us stronger and made people more aware of what each other was doing, [made] sure that the activities that were being coordinated through ACAV met more needs.

One participant noted that the coordination reduces the duplication of services, and another commented that it increases awareness and ease of referral as well as enhancing opportunities for partnerships.

Yes [it is necessary to sustain the position]. Having someone who has an awareness of the provincial programs that are in the city, having a one-stop shopping sort of place in order to make referrals to other individuals or agencies was very helpful for me. Also, there's potential in that position for people to see opportunities for partnerships as well.

Yes, I think that it is great value to have someone coordinating all of the resources in the city, that can help other agencies; a person that can provide you with the forum to get together. Maybe we can attempt to not reinvent the wheel, offering programs that are already being offered, that we can find programs that complement each other, that we can work collaboratively, find funding opportunities that will work better toward fulfilling mutual goals. [The] coordinator can provide us with that kind of continuity that we need. When we start working in our own individual agencies, it's a silo effect. Ultimately, I think that that hurts the youth that we're trying to serve.

Although the majority of respondents consider the coordinator position to be invaluable, two stakeholders noted some problems, commenting that it can at times be inefficient and hindered by bureaucracy:

I don't think there was value there for the cost of the coordinator. I think that there's a definite need for coordination, there're so many duplications of service within the city, and it's unfortunate because everybody is after the same dollar to run their programs. But such a duplication, there's no coordination. The last coordinator I think made the best effort or seemed to get the best results, but unfortunately she left.

I did find it was a little bit bogged down in bureaucracies. There were many bureaucratic things that had to be considered, and there was insurance and it's a really hefty administration. Their [the coordinator's] hands are tied to some extent.

4.1.5 Ensuring the Gains Achieved through the Youth Violence Prevention Project

There were diverse responses to the question of what could ensure that the gains achieved through the Youth Violence Prevention project are maintained. Seven interviewees mentioned the importance of maintaining consistency, continuity, or commitment.

There needs to be consistency in regards to who is facilitating or maintaining the actual focus of the Action Committee Against Violence. Some consistency in the future, [to ensure] that those gains will be recognized [and] sustained within the community.

Five stakeholders emphasized that continued funding is essential to maintaining the gains achieved thus far, while four respondents believe that clarity of goals, purpose and direction are paramount.

There needs to be a very clearly defined set of goals, a set of directions or guidelines that also committees are aware of, and that needs to be refreshed as members of those committees change.

Four respondents noted the importance of collaborating, networking, and making connections:

Just to be there for encouragement and networking is very important. Minimize the meetings, but you do need the [coordinator] to do the connecting with all the city and things.

One can't make the assumption that the community that existed a year ago is the same community today, because people and organizations change, and organizations change their priorities and their interests. It's very important that personal interviews be held with a variety of agencies and key stakeholders who are primarily in the youth violence sector as well as people who do some youth violence work but [for whom] working with adults may be their primary focus.

Four respondents suggested making structural improvements to ACAV to help maintain the gains, while one interviewee noted that structural changes in the larger society are needed.

We need to be doing other things that really address the issue of violence. Education [is] really important, but we also need to be looking at our justice system with really an intention of making some changes around how we treat children and women. Our courts do not see persons [as] important as property. I would like it to be really more driven towards a systemic change in institutions, in programs.

Look at not only the committee structure, but membership on the committee, and perhaps having co-chairs rather than a chair. There's a need for the chairs of all of the sub-committees to sit on the larger Steering committee so there's a greater connection and sort of accountability. If all of the knowledge is concentrated in one person, then of course if that person leaves, that knowledge is gone.

This youth violence piece is not being in disarray in isolation from a bigger issue, and that is ACAV. So the Youth Violence coordination piece won't get back on track until the bigger ACAV issue is resolved.

Three respondents noted that evaluations, research and needs assessments are important to maintain the gains:

Continued evaluations of the programs. It's not up to ACAV itself to do the programs, it's up to them to identify and support the programs via Leslie Tutty's research for the community. Everybody's looking for results and benefits of any program and when there's solid research, I think that helps.

Three respondents suggested that media or public relations could help the project maintain its goals:

There's still work to be done in the next couple of years. Special events are critical, cause it's a P.R. and promotional piece.

Three participants mentioned the importance of communication:

Communications between all the groups... It's good to have this information that's been gathered available to all groups.

Two respondents suggested the importance of adopting a more positive approach, including using positive language:

[Need to] change to more effective ways. There needed to be a more positive aspect to [the Turn Off the Violence campaign], which is evident in the fact that they've gone to the Peace Heroes on the more positive side. So it's coming from a more negative approach to a more positive approach. I think the extent to which the programs do that will be to the betterment of all of the programs in that Action Committee Against Violence.

I have a problem with the title of "Action Committee Against Violence" because the focus is still violence, rather than peace. When we think about trying to work with the media, it would be more support through [positive messages] even "problem solving" is a focus on the negative. So 'to create a peaceful community' would be [the] kind of messages that I think the media could help promote with the Action Committee. Editorials could [promote] peaceful resolutions to things.

Two respondents commented that in order to ensure sustainability, it is important to put the committees' work into action:

We need to regroup and continue to look at the gaps in services that have been identified and fill those gaps. It needs to go beyond paper. There has to be action associated with it. That's where a coordinator can really help.

Two respondents noted that solid leadership is necessary to maintain the gains:

Strong support from those who guide the work of the group, [a] strong board, support in the governance realm, as well as the advocacy realm, strong leadership from within ACAV itself. All employees need to be good leaders, to generate good fellowship, and to be good motivators. It needs political participation [on the board] at least [at] the municipal level, perhaps at the provincial and federal level[s] as well. It should also involve voices from the community that have been affected and/or who are providers of services that fall kind of within the purview of ACAV.

One respondent mentioned the importance of agencies supporting their staff's participation within ACAV.

The will of the agencies involved to support this [is] important so the people who are participating in the committees get support from their agencies to continue to participate and to be able to put in whatever time and effort is required to keep it going.

When asked what is required from the youth violence coordinator, five respondents noted that the coordinator must be familiar with the community and its needs, as well as the status of ACAV.

Having somebody who understood where we had come from, who was able to identify the clear goals of the committee.

I think a stable coordinator with breadth and depth of experience in the community, and who has skill in working with people with different interests, demands, and [program] orientations. I think the coordinator is also important in bringing people together and identifying people that need to be at different tables, but that person also needs to have a good understanding of community. It will be critical to the person fulfilling this role to get to know all the community players.

Two respondents suggested that the coordinator should be a contact or resource person.

You have to have somebody that people can call upon when they have questions or [are] looking for resources. Somebody that's going to take all that information and coordinate it,[to] be able to identify where there are gaps, and what new initiatives need to be looked at.

One respondent mentioned that the coordinator should be energetic and able to engage the stakeholders.

Hopefully they've hired someone that can hit the ground running and can pull up those pieces that have fallen off the plate. I hear good things [about the new coordinator]. Hopefully that person is going to be able to re-energize and re-engage the people that have been off the radar screen for six or seven months.

4.1.6 Establishing Sustainability and Long-Term Funding

When the community stakeholders were asked how this project can establish longer-term sustainability and funding, the responses centred around obtaining government support and

tapping into funding from a variety of sources, as well as using research and evaluations to strengthen ACAV's position in this front.

Five respondents suggested that various levels of government should fund ACAV.

The City should help pay Karen Walroth's position, but I wouldn't want the whole thing coming from them. It's a lot of work (laugh) asking for grants and funding. We sure need long-term stuff though. Every one of these groups is going from year to year. [Go to] Heritage Canada, there's provincial money and there's federal money. And this is all for something that every government really believes in and supports.

Four respondents suggested approaching charitable foundations for funding. Notably, though, four stakeholders commented that continually applying for funds is not an efficient use of the coordinator's time:

Long-term sustainability [is important] cause it's a waste of time for us to be re-applying for funds over and over again.

Four respondents provided concrete suggestions with respect to secure funding; three including the pros and cons of approaching corporations for financial support:

They have to build their case as to why they should [fund]. They have to document clearly what they've done in the last three year with United Way funding and other sources. They have to build a case as to what work remains to be done in the community and why funders should invest in that process. And they have to definitely link their work to the larger ACAV work and the larger domestic violence community. They have to rebuild what ground has been lost in the last few months with the absence of the coordinator. The new coordinator reported back on the work she's doing, and I think she's on definitely the right path. She's working hard at re-establishing connection and relationships, reformulating the committees.

One always thinks of corporate sponsorship, but it takes a lot of effort to get corporate sponsorship and to make it long term.

Partnering with other organizations was suggested by three respondents, in addition to maintaining communication and building connections.

We have to, as a community, combine our efforts together and say, instead of applying for little pieces of money all over the place, we need to do something larger than that for Calgary and it could be coordinated through that project. A coalition to actually get the money into Calgary so that the project can maintain itself [and] not have to fundraise every year.

It'll be sustained if we can continually find a reason to have people work together, if there's always something that we're working towards and having some kind of impact. Doris, at least part of her job (laugh) was just to make sure that she had funding. It's a good position because it has the ability to keep people communicating. That's the key, make connections and communicate it to a whole group, and it's a resource. Even things

like minutes, coordinating tasks, there's a need for enthusiasm [and] someone a little bit outside of the day-to-day for each service. I think that's when it becomes effective.

Three respondents noted the importance of clear direction in establishing longer-term sustainability and funding.

If there's a coordinated vision, or an agreed-upon kind of direction it will sustain itself.

To reinforce ACAV's youth violence coordinator position, six respondents suggested that research and evaluations could help secure funding.

In this day and age outcomes are huge. They [the funders] want to know what you're doing, how you're doing it, are you doing it effectively, are you doing it efficiently, are you doing it cost effectively.

[Funders want] outcomes that are measurable [but] prevention work [is] very hard to measure.

One respondent summed up the difficulty that organizations face in securing long-term funding.

The old strategies aren't working. The old strategies of doing a good job, being clear about your objectives, making sure you have buy-in in the community[don't] seem to be enough to ensure long-term funding.

4.1.7 Proposed Goals for the Youth Violence Prevention Project

Once considerations about ongoing funding had been addressed, the focus turned to the goals of the Youth Violence Prevention project in the next year. Most respondents (11) agreed about the need to re-engage the stakeholders and establish goals for the project, particularly goals that would build on past work, and keep the networks and connections going. In addition, several respondents noted the need to increase and improve coordination.

Continuing to build on the connections and supports that youth programs have for each other. So maintaining and enhancing that network that already exists. We still need to get to the kids, the community.

Create a vision for the needs of youth and youth-serving agencies in Calgary in the domain of domestic violence. Do a needs assessment, revisit work that was previously done to see what progress we've made and what areas we still need to work in. Do a check-in. It would be a mistake just to pick up where we left off.

Six respondents mentioned the value of the Turn Off the Violence campaign. Although it was recognized that some ground was lost during the absence of the coordinator, it would be useful to identify reasons for the turnover of coordinators.

You have to wonder when we have such a turnover, what the problems are. Is it only money? Or is it difficult working conditions? Or is it total frustration with

[expectations]? That should be done fairly quickly. I don't think you can do it by committee. There has to be decisions made by a small group of people who are knowledgeable in what they feel the goal should be.

There needs to be a greater highlight of the Turn Off the Violence campaign. It's been getting a great deal of recognition in the last years and I believe that there's a number of areas where it could be improved, where it can become sustainable when [coordinators] leave. [The Turn Off the Violence campaign is] quite visible, the community sees this as a product of the Action Committee Against Violence; it's appreciated and well-received by the community. Over the last year, that program [Turn Off the Violence] has had a great deal of struggles because of [the] change in leadership and the vacancy of the position.

One of the longer-term goals should be looking at how we can impact more of the youth with the effort. We're certainly looking at that in the Turn Off the Violence campaign. We've noticed a reduction in the number of entries to the two contests.

The goal of working on gaps in youth services was also identified as important, particularly diverse youth.

There's a whole population of kids in care, on the streets, in jail, that really aren't touched by a lot of prevention work in the community. Their story of violence is more than just bullying. They may be not connected to regular adults, may not have services that fit them. There're schools that aren't part of the [Turn Off the] Violence campaign, and older kids [for whom] prevention looks different than just talking about violence or saying no to violence. It's more complicated.

4.1.8 Better Protecting Children and Youth from Violence

The question of how to better protect children and youth from violence raised varied responses from the stakeholders. These tended to reflect the trends apparent throughout the interview questions; that community members need to work together using best practices to identify gaps, increase access to resources and advocate for organization that work with children and youth, as well as the children and youth themselves. There was also the acknowledgement that violence is part of the larger society and needs to be addressed on that level as well.

A majority of respondents suggested the importance of adopting a holistic approach in increasing awareness of children and youth with respect to violence. It was also deemed important to integrate a holistic approach in addressing the systemic factors that impact children and youth, including violence on television.

Kids are stuffed in front of the TV [so] working on that media violence would be significant. Youth is the hope of the future. What are we feeding them?

Violence is NOT an individual thing, it's a social problem and it's a societal issue. Overall the City of Calgary should be consistently addressing on a larger scale, through communications and through programming and anti-violence messages to youth and to families, issues of racism, sexism [and] abuse of power and control in relationships.

Violence against children is rooted in their vulnerability as children who live in poverty, in chronic violence, excluded from full participation, bullied, [victims of] schools [and systems] that don't protect them. We just had a two-year old killed in this province because the systems protected the mother and gave the father rights but they did not protect the child. We have huge gaps in our social justice, in our justice program, in our Child Welfare system. Children are still very much at risk. We have to make our environment safer. We have to build stronger, healthier communities where children who do live in risk factors have some insulation and protection from those. We need to continue doing the work that we're doing, work away on a common front to address the larger determinants of well-being. All the anti-poverty work, [the] declared commitments to improving the lives of children and families, the provincial children's initiatives, the federal action for children, we need to probably [be] doubling and tripling that in the most vulnerable and at-risk kids. We need to have a filter on our policymaking that asks the question "is this in the best interest of children?"

The stakeholders also perceived education as important, both at the individual and community level.

More education and awareness is really, really important for youth, for educators, for community service providers, parents, the community as a whole.

More hands-on, experiential learning for the youth [on] how to use skills that they already possess to empower them to choose to prevent violence themselves, by having youth-directed initiatives and peer mentorship and peer-support programs, conflict resolution skills. Educate them on an ongoing basis. Get them to participate in the process. We have to learn to work and live in the environment that we have. You have to provide them with the skills so that they know how to cope.

Funding and advocacy, along with resource availability, were seen as important.

Strong advocates at the provincial level. We need to be putting political pressure on the people who have the funds some of it is political will.

Several participants suggested using more positive language and a more positive approach in violence prevention.

A key for the sub-committee is to create voices for people to come up with solutions, and what fits for them. To have impact, we have to find ways to challenge [our values and beliefs around youth violence] and give people other alternatives. Challenge those through the way we] coordinate our services. Create language, create understanding, creating conversation and creating ways that make sure that that voice gets heard. Challenging the media to report on positive youth events and alternatives stories. A lot of kids are not violent or [have] changed their lives.

Several respondents mentioned the need to identify and fill the gaps in services, particularly those affecting diverse communities:

Perhaps some communities may not feel comfortable going to certain agencies for help because of the stigma. Multi-cultural agencies are trying to do a lot of work [around conflicts between Canadian and home country values]. [We need] more multi-cultural understanding and support.

Larger structural problems contributing to violence were mentioned, such as living in a more violent society, poverty, and governmental cutbacks:

Kids living in poverty, it shouldn't be happening. [We think] if parents did a better job, the kids wouldn't be like that, so let's blame it on the parents and just let the kids stay where they're at without taking a look at how is this affecting children and future generations. Any kind of prevention work seems to be so short sighted. In our province, it's absolutely appalling that the number of children living in poverty still exists, and the number of children living on the streets is increasing. And people are just not aware... Prevention [and] treatment programs need to be supported. We're not doing a good job at protecting kids, the have-nots still have nothing, and the kids that have things get more and more.

4.2 Summary and Recommendations from the Key Stakeholders

The majority of key stakeholder respondents confirmed that the ACAV Youth Violence Coordinator position is essential in providing leadership and acting as a cohesive agent in disseminating information, connecting and communicating with community members, and managing committees and member involvement. The respondents raised concerns regarding the continuity and direction of the project over the years. They noted that the gap during which there was no coordinator in place was detrimental to their work

The respondents recognized a connection between stabilizing ACAV and more consistency within the Youth Violence Coordinator position. They acknowledged funding as an important component in enabling continuity of both ACAV and the coordinator position. A number of funding avenues were suggested, with the premise that for ACAV to obtain funding sources it must demonstrate stability within the organization, as well as utilizing research. Despite the challenges experienced by ACAV, the respondents agreed that the work done by the youth violence coordinator is necessary to assist the community in addressing violence against children and youth.

An overarching theme from the content analysis was with respect to communication and connectedness. A number of the respondents noted a lack of communication between committees about what is happening on the various committees, contributing to a sense of disconnection. They suggested that clearer communication would address this, as well as setting a direction for the work on the committees/sub-committees. Several also expressed a need for communication and connectedness between ACAV and members of the Calgary community.

Although the need for enhanced communication and coordination was a key theme, it is not that the Youth Violence Prevention Coordinator hasn't attempted to address this goal. The Quarterly Forums were created to attempt to provide ongoing feedback to members of the various sub-committees. However, as coordination is one of the major goals of the project,

finding better ways to communicate the workings of the various sub-committees should continue as a central goal of the project coordinator.

The majority of stakeholders believe that the ACAV Youth Violence Coordinator position is important for a variety of reasons. In essence, this position enables the stakeholders to work in a more collaborative and interconnected way, leaving them more effective in performing their jobs, ultimately being better able to better protect child and youth from violence.

The respondents and students were interviewed in 2002 approximately seven months after Doris Toy-Pries left the coordinator position and just as Cheryl Henschel was hired as the new coordinator. Due to unforeseen difficulties in completing the data analysis, the current report does not address Cheryl's work in the coordinator role. However as Cheryl has recently left the position (in October 2003), the issues raised by the stakeholder respondents have renewed relevance in considering how to make the position more stable and viable.

Recommendations that emerged from concerns raised by the key community stakeholder interviews include the following:

- The turnover in the coordinator position, with the exception of the extended tenure of Doris Toy-Pries in the Youth Violence Prevention Coordinator's role, has been and is a continuing concern. Since ACAV has been active in seeking continued funding and infrastructure support for the project, perhaps another way to address the issue is to make the role of the coordinator less central and more facilitative, so that even with shifts in the coordinator staff-person, the work of the sub-committees in the community would continue.
- Experiment with additional venues to provide information about the workings of the various committees and sub-committees. Since the Youth Violence Prevention Coordinator has routinely used email to inform about the community activities with respect to violence, perhaps the chairs of the sub-committees could circulate minutes or project summaries more often.
- Utilize the ACAV website to post upcoming meetings and project descriptions. Informational documents such as the Transition Report prepared by Doris Toy-Pries could be made available on the website.
- An annual meeting could be scheduled using one of the Quarterly Forum times. This could entail presentations from each of the sub-committees and provide the opportunity for questions and suggestions from those not involved in that particular working group.

5.0 References

- Cavicchi, L., & Tutty, L. (2001). *ACAV Youth violence prevention project evaluation- Phase II*. Unpublished research report. RESOLVE Alberta. Available at www.commonsworld.org/ucalgary/resolve/
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Appendix I: Structure of the ACAV Child and Youth Subcommittee

