

A municipal Announcement for violence prevention -
A call for community responsibility

'City without Violence' is a governmental program in Israel intended to aid cities and towns in dealing with violent incidents (read more about this model at <http://www.cwv.gov.il/English/Pages/default.aspx>.) In this paper we wish to describe an NVR process which our team led as external counselors to a specific city in Israel. A' is a city in north Israel which is home to some 40,000 residents, including an ethnically diverse population in which immigrants (mostly from Eastern Europe and Ethiopia) constitute some 33% of all residents. In addition, near the city are many settlements, including both Jewish and Arab villages. The object of the process is to lead to change in the perceptions of the city's inhabitants regarding community responsibility and dealing with children and youth violence.

The automatic tendency among the population is that tackling children and youth violence be done by the various municipal and governmental authorities - police, welfare, education and so on. This position is clear and understandable. The purpose of city and state authorities is to provide the residents with various services, including the provision of requisite protection, from child and youth violence as well. However, we believe that the intensification of child and youth violence in western culture also requires a community struggle which attempts to enlist supporters from among the members of the community, regardless of their role or source of authority. Our main message at the new authority center is - from individualism and isolation to support and community. In order to lead this change it is important to recognize that the authorities are often limited in their manner of dealing with child and youth violence and that community support and action is needed to lead to change on this front. This recognition can take place through the creation of a municipal pact which calls for resident involvement. In certain ways, the municipal pact is similar to the first step taken by parents in response to an escalation by their child's behavior - the Announcement. Of course there are various more complex elements, but the process is somewhat similar. In this paper we shall describe the process of creating the pact, which is currently in the final stages of ratification ahead of action geared at implementing it in the field.

In the first stage all relevant entities in the city were approached in order to enlist their support in the process. These entities included the main representatives of all relevant occupations in the city: Formal and informal educators, counselors, psychologists, welfare and police professionals, and the municipal parent council. A forum was convened which included some 50 individuals, who were presented with the principles of the new authority and to whom the need for a municipal pact, to which the city's residents are party, was emphasized. The requisite process for creating the pact was also described at this meeting and a discussion took place regarding the need for the process and the means to realize it. The decision that was reached was to establish a small team of department heads at city hall which would examine the possibilities of inter-organizational coordination and the creation of a preliminary draft for the municipal pact on child and youth violence. In fact, according to the principals of the new authority, the open discussion the decision to take part in it, informally authorized and supported a limited group of professionals to lead the process.

The "authorized" leading group, which included about 10 key people for the creation of the preliminary draft of the pact, convened about a month after the first meeting. The group gathered for a concentrated day of talks, which included three main discussions: A discussion on the importance of the pact, the structure of the pact and the wording thereof; a discussion on the common grounds and differences of the various fields, and also about intra- and inter-organizational dealing with violent incidents; and finally, a discussion on the wording of the pact's principles.

The discussions were held in a pleasant atmosphere, but soon highly charged voices began to rise from the grass roots. It turned out that the violence situation in the city is very severe. The city's police station chief explained that some 50% of all detainees at any given moment are juveniles. He described very harsh types of offenses, such as fights, stabbings, robberies, sexual assaults, noise violations, vandalism and others. Furthermore, residents of A' come from a variety of backgrounds, ethnic groups and religions, which leads to many cases of socially motivated violence, such as the stoning of minorities' vehicles, an act that has become common lately.

One of the phenomena that was most evident in the discussion on inter-organizational dealing with violent incidents, was that all officials passed the responsibility from one to

another, and mutual accusations of dysfunction and lack of regard for each other's concerns. This is undoubtedly a common phenomenon in inter-organizational talks, yet at the same time there was a sense that juvenile violence is a "hot potato" quickly passed from one organization to the next - educators pointed out the inability of welfare and welfare complained about inadequate response from police. Violent incidents among juveniles are indeed often left at the doorstep of the police, but perhaps it would be appropriate to note the reply by the chief of the police station. The station chief told of an incident where a 12.5 year-old boy was arrested for committing vandalism, such as puncturing the tires of cars in one of the city's neighborhoods. The police referred the case to the court, but according to the station chief, the court "did nothing." He elaborated and added: "these minors have long since stopped acting like minors, but the law continues to treat them like minors." In this regard, the police punt the hot potato to the legislators...

In addition, the various professionals expressed feelings of fear and anxiety. For instance, the representative of the secondary education principals related the fears of many teachers from children filing police charges against them. Similarly, the head of the psychological service fears of psychologists from parents and difficulties by psychologists in "standing up to them." Following these feelings, there were strong emotions of loneliness. It seemed that there was difficulty in reaching cooperation, and that despite the genuine will and concern that were strongly felt, each of the professionals felt to be alone in the struggle and to be carrying to great a load on their shoulders.

The main message which we stressed in the focus group was **transition from individual responsibility to community responsibility**. That is, an attempt to create a cooperative interface between the various actors in the city, in which they would back each other up, report to each other and be able to assist each other, for in the end everyone shares the same effort: combating juvenile violence in the city. During the discussion there wasn't much time to draft guidelines for the pact and at its conclusion it was agreed that the discussion will continue on a closed internet forum at the new authority center's website. This is one of the means which we use occasionally to "beef up" our presence as guides. These forums actually create a virtual presence which enables the furthering of actions in an effective manner. In this case, the special forum was created in order to form an initial

space for cooperation and discourse among the various actors in the city. The pact was posted on the forum for one week, during which the partners responded to the draft until a second draft was created on which all members of the limited team agreed.

In order to broaden the support circle for the pact it was also decided that the draft pact, along with the "letter to residents", would be sent by mail to every household in town, and the residents would be invited to send responses, comments and clarifications regarding the pact! The decision to send the pact to the residents was not a simple one, both practically speaking (since the act requires resources and systemic preparation) and in principle. On this matter various positions were voiced, some of which claimed that the residents "wouldn't forward any comments anyway". However, we fortified the message that engaging the community in this early stage - while we were still at the draft stage - is critical. This being so since we view them as full partners in the process of implementing the pact, and that the pact belongs to the community and not only to the professionals who created it. That is, it is important to us even at the preliminary stage to broaden the scope of support for the pact. In accordance with the New Authority metaphor as a net of support from people, we tried to broaden the net as far as possible - in this case for whole citizens of the city. Furthermore, one of the principles of the new authority is an authority cognizant of the limits of its own capabilities, and not an "all-knowing" authority, and therefore it was important to hear the voice of the people. In our experience, engaging supporters in the creation stage of an Announcement facilitates its implementation and their enlistment in the effort later on. The citizens will feel more like partners in it, and not as though it was "dropped" on them from on high. Practically, we deliberated on whether to send the draft to the residents by e-mail or by post. Eventually, despite the practical complexity involved, it was decided to send it by post, which constitutes a more direct approach to the residents. We believe we will manage to reach more residents in this way.

After receiving feedback from the residents regarding the pact a meeting of the wider initial forum (including some 50 people) will be held, in order to ratify the final pact draft. The end of the process of creating the pact will be marked by an official signing ceremony, headed by the Mayor and attended by the key personnel mentioned above.

This ceremony will indeed be the end of a process but also the opening of another - that of action and implementation. In the course of implementing the pact parental patrols will be established in the city, and we also plan to create joint action interfaces for professionals to work together in. For instance, it has been proposed that we create a forum of school principles in town, in order to "translate" the principles of the pact into practical tools for the schools. In addition, we wish to create a voluntary organization, to include parents, professionals, and involved citizens in town, in order to leverage the community effort. We hope that in our next paper we shall address this significant and important act of implementing the principles of the new authority in the community. Enclosed are the letter to the residents and the draft pact that was created.

Letter to Residents

Dear resident,

In recent years we have witnessed a troubling increase in the occurrence of violence, vandalism, and juvenile delinquency in our country. This disturbing social phenomenon obliges us to act in a manner which will enable us to better care for our children. We have no doubt that one of the central causes of this social phenomenon, which does not spare our city, is the collapse of parental and educational authority.

As part of our city's participation in the "City Without Violence" program, and in order to combat this disturbing social trend, we, senior representatives of the various authorities in the city, have convened in a decision to act together. The committee convened on Nov.11, 2010, for a full day of discussions with the representatives of the "New Authority Center" and in the presence of school representatives, psychological and social service representatives, law enforcement officials and so on.

The committee has consolidated principles for a municipal pact, as a consensual document which expresses our belief in the importance of this matter and our commitment to a persistent and continuing struggle for a more tolerant and pleasant society. We call upon the residents of the city to come together to invest a new authority - a community-based authority, which shall be based upon presence, belonging, transparency and mutual support. An authority deriving from the shared belief and action

of education, law enforcement, treatment and welfare professionals in the city and be based on community involvement by parents and residents alike.

This pact is but one layer in a variety of efforts and activities which are and will be implemented in the city, in the course of the "City Without Violence" program in order to struggle against juvenile violence in our city.

This letter constitutes **a call to the community to make its voice heard** - we extend our hand to you, parents and residents of the city, and call upon you to enlist for joint action with us.

Enclosed is the municipal pact. On Dec. 28, 2010, the pact signing ceremony will be held. We see you as full partners in our struggle, and as a first step in this partnership we call upon you to read the pact and send us responses, comments and insights. We promise to take your comments under advisement and incorporate them in the final wording of the pact.

For comments, insights, suggestions and to volunteer for community action in the struggle against violence please write to...

Municipal Pact for Prevention of Violence

"Protecting our children and youth is our duty"

We residents of A' declare a struggle against youth violence, strive for a more caring and tolerant society, committed to human dignity and a person's right to be protected in body, spirit and possessions. A society in which residents act together out of a sense of belonging for the creation of a safer and more protected environment.

We shall not ignore the matter any longer, and we shall struggle together against any incident or expression of violence - Physical violence, sexual violence, verbal violence and vandalism.

Therefore we, education, law enforcement, welfare and treatment leaders in town, commit and call upon resident to undertake:

To be part of the process of change - a process accompanied by joint thought and
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mutual backing of authority figures for one another. To distribute the pact, discuss it and uphold it in practice. Most important - to place the struggle against juvenile violence, which hurts them most of all.

To respect all people - to recognize the value any person. To be aware of interpersonal and cultural differences, to accept the other, and to protect the weak and the needy.

To avoid the use of any sort of violence and to condemn any expression of violence - physical, sexual, verbal, social, noise and vandalism.

To act transparently - Not to hide, not to remain silent and not to ignore expressions of violence, to report them to the proper authorities, to share with one another, and to act in a public and transparent manner.

To display public involvement - to show care and responsibility towards the community and to show a personal example. To back up and empower any professional, parent and/or resident who enlists for community activity in the struggle against violence.

We invite you all to be part of our struggle. Our children are important to all of us!