

## **Resolving Youth Conflict in Ethnically Diverse Rural Settings**

Global Action takes seriously the need to listen to and partner with youth, anti-poverty and conflict prevention professionals in diverse cultural settings. The policies for which we advocate at the UN have direct connections to local problems, opportunities and strategies for change. It is these choices and challenges that give life and context to our own, often abstract, work at the international policy level.

On March 30, GAPW was pleased to lead a workshop on 'youth violence' in Robeson County, NC – one of the most ethnically diverse (home to native Lumbee people) and economically challenged counties in the US. Robeson County agencies, especially the Center for Community Action (CCA), are now partnering on a grant with the University of North Carolina Academic Center for Excellence in Youth Violence Prevention to provide interview-based data on countywide youth violence that can help set policy for local schools and civic agencies seeking to roll back rising levels of youth violence.

Our workshop affirmed the value of data gathering, but also explored how the data could be used to build a culture that was context-appropriate and that can more effectively and fairly address youth violence. Some of the insights from the session included the following:

- The importance of emphasizing positive aspects of community life rather than always dwelling on the negative. If problems are too pervasive or stubborn to solve, most people won't try.
- The importance of launching adult initiatives to resolve their own conflicts rather than putting the burden for cultural change on 8<sup>th</sup> graders. Kids are more likely to participate in solving problems if they see adults making the same efforts they are expected to make.
- The importance of not over-reacting to incidents of youth violence, especially in rural areas. Adult discomfort with youth often causes us to become more fearful and concerned.
- The importance of keeping violence prevention efforts in perspective. It does no good to promise what we can't deliver or raise expectations beyond what our strategies will bear. At the same time, we should not postpone for a later time what we can and should address in the present.
- The importance of paying attention to personal happiness. Young people are more inclined to commit to our educational and behavioral agendas when they are surrounded by adults who exude hope and connection. Being around unhappy adults undermines for kids the values and tasks of preparing for adult living.
- The importance is not defining things in rigid categories that keep people (whose skills and talents we need) from participating in our projects. Building a culture that can reduce youth violence cannot be confined to self-defined 'peacemakers' and 'social justice' advocates. There is work here – educational, mentoring, etc. – in abundance for people across the political, religious and cultural spectrum. In the same way that data alone will not solve this problem, neither will narrow ideological lenses.

These tangible collaborations between ordinary citizens, schools, civic agencies and academic centers are inspiring to behold. They remind us that there are many sound strategies and robust commitments on display far from our own policy bubbles. GAPW will stay in close touch with

this project – as well as the Philanthropy of Community and Women's Project initiatives of CCA – and seek new pathways of mutual engagement and support.

To find out more about the Excellence in Youth Violence Prevention project, click here.

[http://ssw.unc.edu/about/news/youth\\_violence\\_prevention\\_center](http://ssw.unc.edu/about/news/youth_violence_prevention_center)

To find out more about the Philanthropy of Community project, click here.

[http://ncgives.org/uploads/resources/PoC%20Presentation--Tools\\_for\\_Transforming\\_Giving.pdf](http://ncgives.org/uploads/resources/PoC%20Presentation--Tools_for_Transforming_Giving.pdf)