



# Youth *in action*

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## **Arts and Performances for Prevention**

### **What Are Arts and Performances for Prevention?**

Through music, drama, dance, and visual arts, youth can draw attention to problems in their communities, educate others on the benefits of crime prevention, and suggest ways to prevent crime. Arts and performances for prevention may take many forms, from 10-minute skits to full-length plays, from rap to opera, from posters to sculptures, from murals to musical compositions. Youth across the Nation have produced videos and photo essays, designed T-shirts and ceramics, played saxophones and violins, and danced ballet and modern jazz—all to promote the prevention of crime and violence.

In Holyoke, MA, for example, a group of youth called New Visions/Nueva Visiones writes and performs plays that explore issues facing Latino youth in the community. Developing and performing these plays educates young theater members, their peers, and the community at large about poverty, violence, teen pregnancy, substance abuse, HIV/AIDS, and family issues. The program taps into and teaches such varied skills as acting, writing, carpentry, costume design, and management.

Ten cities and twenty National Guard sites in 23 States participate in the Do the Write Thing Challenge Program. Each student in the program, which is sponsored by the National Campaign to Stop Violence and funded in part by the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP), makes a written commitment to resist and combat violence in the community. Do the Write Thing goes far beyond writing. Participating students may form powerful connections with national, community, and business leaders. These leaders, in turn, sponsor Community Peace Partnerships that provide students with opportunities such as job-training internships. To learn more about Do the Write Thing and its exciting activities, contact the program directly. (Contact information for specific programs and

### **from the administrator**

If "all the world's a stage," the script you write for your part is very important. I hope you will play a leading role in preventing crime and violence in your community. This Bulletin shows how you can use arts and performances as an excellent way to convey your message and provides step-by-step instructions to get you started and keep you going. Thanks for caring enough to want to make a difference where you live—you are already a star on the stage of life!

OJJDP

Shay Bilchik  
Administrator

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organizations discussed in this Bulletin appears in the “Resources” section at the end of the publication.)

## How Do Arts and Performances Prevent or Reduce Crime?

Because they reach a wide audience, arts and performances are effective ways to prevent or reduce crime. By reaching new audiences with each performance or display, arts and performances increase awareness and refresh anticrime messages for those who may have heard but forgotten them. They also communicate messages in multiple ways to emphasize key ideas, allowing youth to use their artistic, musical, dramatic, and other talents to deliver vital information to the community.

By allowing youth to use their creative talents, arts and performances help youth develop a sense of identity, independence, discipline, and self-worth. They also help prevent or reduce crime and violence among the young artists and performers involved. According to research, students who participate in band, orchestra, chorus, or drama are significantly less likely than nonparticipants to drop out of school, be arrested, use drugs, or engage in binge drinking. For examples of dance-, music-, and drama-focused programs that successfully combine strategies for crime prevention and crime reduction, check out the programs described the box, “Examples of Programs That Work.”

## What Does It Take To Start?

At the heart of any art or performance activity is the talent of the young people involved. Your group’s talents should support the goal of the performance, product, or show. Depending on the type of performance planned, your group may need musicians, dancers, set builders,

sculptors, actors, stagehands, watercolorists, costume designers, makeup artists, or poets. Your group members should also agree on a central message—for example, that they want to fight drug abuse, reduce hate crimes, or discourage violence. An adult may suggest an idea, but it is the young group members’ commitment and talent that will communicate the message to the community.

As with any crime prevention project, the best way to ensure your group’s success is by planning well. The three steps listed below can help you get started.

### Step 1: Identify Your Audience and Message

Your group needs to decide whom it will reach and what it will say. Is the target audience young people? Adults? Or maybe a group of mixed ages? Identifying the age group of the audience will help you decide how to present your message. A modern dance performance presented to young children, for example, may need to be narrated and have more frequent intermissions than one performed for adults.

At the same time, consider what subject or message your group wants to emphasize. Do you want to present one general idea such as “Stop the Violence”? Or do you want to relay specific information to the audience, such as how to prevent date rape? If you want to present only one theme, you could sponsor an exhibit of different paintings on that theme at your school or community center. Focusing on art dealing with one subject may make a stronger statement than including dozens of paintings on dozens of different crime prevention themes. If you decide to concentrate on a more complex issue such as date rape or substance abuse, consider doing a play or skit.

## Step 2: Identify Your Needs and Available Resources

After you decide on the audience and message, you'll have to determine what you'll need for your activity. Will you need costumes, performance or exhibit space, rehearsal space, materials for props, music, a performance program, a way to publicize the event?

Some of these items may be donated by schools, churches, universities, or businesses. Use your school's public address system or school newspaper to ask for donations. You may also be able to obtain discounts or sponsorship from local businesses. Let them know that donations may result in excellent publicity. A local printing shop may be willing to give you a discount on printing if you agree to provide free advertising in your program.

Although your arts and performances program is an activity led and performed by youth, you'll probably need assistance from one or more adults. Recruit at least one adult to be your sponsor or adviser. Community members with experience in the arts—drama teachers, parents, neighbors, local community theater actors—may donate special talent or agree to act as advisers, coaches, or directors. It's important to make a thorough list of your project's needs right away and to keep adding to it as new needs arise.

## Step 3: Develop a Schedule

A third major task is developing a realistic schedule for your presentation or display. In creating a schedule, consider such things as whether you're presenting a published work or bringing a brand new play or song to the stage. A new work may take longer to produce but may be worth the wait. Likewise, if your artists don't paint well under pressure, leave plenty of time in your schedule to allow them to work effectively.

### Examples of Programs That Work

- ◆ *Bells of Love*, a children's musical group in Syracuse, NY, promotes public awareness of the problem of missing children by performing at the U.S. Department of Justice's National Missing Children's Day ceremony (held each year in Washington, DC). The group also allows other performers and speakers across the Nation to use its music, all of which deals with missing children.
- ◆ *The African Heritage Dancers and Drummers* teen program in Washington, DC, includes 2- to 3-hour dance and drum classes 5 days a week. In addition to supporting African cultural research, the program provides mentors who teach lifeskills, advise on pregnancy prevention, promote school attendance, and support preparation for equivalency diplomas. In exchange for performing, participating youth receive stipends and earn community service hours needed for high school graduation.
- ◆ *The Children's Aid Society Chorus*, a professional, performance-based choral group in New York, NY, is open to urban youth from all racial/ethnic and economic backgrounds. Participants must pass an audition, maintain a B average in school, and pay an admission fee (more than half of participating youth receive full or partial scholarships). The group provides musical training programs, performs 30 public concerts each year, and offers academic tutoring, high school entrance and social work counseling, family life classes, transportation services, and a summer minicamp.
- ◆ *The Administrative Office of the Courts/Juvenile Services* in Kenton County, KY, engages youth in role-play and improvisational theater during 10-week classes taught by professional actors. Each class ends with a final production. After completing a 10-week class, youth may enroll in training classes that prepare them to become junior facilitators or technical production staff, creative writing classes that focus on script development, or visual arts classes that focus on set design.
- ◆ *City at Peace*, a program in Washington, DC, uses the performing arts to involve young people in conflict resolution training and help them address problems in their lives. The organization's 1998 documentary film, *City at Peace*, demonstrates the potential impact of the arts by following 60 youth for 1 year as they create an original musical based on their own lives. When the year begins, the youth believe they have nothing in common. By working together, however, they develop bonds based on their shared creation.

You'll also need to:

- ◆ Find out when space is available.
- ◆ Assess how long it will take to make costumes.
- ◆ Determine how long it will take to construct and paint sets and collect or make props.

Thinking about and planning for these factors will help you develop an overall timeline and allow you to be ready for your performance or display.

### What Does It Take To Keep It Going?

Maintaining community support is perhaps the greatest challenge for keeping arts and performances programs alive. Although most program funding comes from local sources, identifying and generating new resources both within and outside your community is vital. You may be able to establish partnerships with community centers and other youth organizations. Through such partnerships, you may be able to form advisory boards or committees that will coordinate a set number of performances or displays each year.

Many arts and performances programs for youth operate in partnership with high schools, universities, youth organizations, churches, businesses, community theaters, and health agencies. Community-based arts agencies may be excellent sources of information and support. Investigate whether any organizations in your community would be interested in supporting a youth program that harnesses the power of artistic communication to prevent crime. Talk to teachers, local business owners, civic groups, local government agencies, and practicing artists to see if they would be willing to help.

Another way to maintain an arts and performances program is by sharing resources with

other similar programs. For example, your members may be able to learn from other groups or train at their centers. Mentorship programs and performance exchanges help to create networks and enrich existing programs. Fostering communication and collaboration among centers also strengthens each program.

### What Are Some of the Challenges?

Experience has shown that many arts and performances initiatives are unable to survive without sustained support and new resources. To meet this challenge, program leaders need to identify funding sources on an ongoing basis. State funding, business support, or local foundation funding is sometimes available, but identifying funding sources takes time and requires research. Successful grant applicants must show a clear mission, measurable goals, and an independent evaluation of their efforts.

In addition to financial challenges, your arts and performances will face an ongoing need for rehearsal, performance, or display space. If possible, work out an agreement with a local school, church, library, or other organization to use necessary space. Recruiting artists, performers, group members, and other volunteers is another challenge facing arts and performances programs. As members graduate from high school, move away from the area, or shift interests, your group will need to devote time and energy to recruiting new and talented members.

### What Are Some of the Rewards?

Many benefits result from using arts and performances to help prevent crime. In addition to the satisfaction of creating or performing, you'll have the pleasure of knowing that you've communicated about a subject of vital interest to your community. As a result of your

work, young children may learn new ways to settle arguments peacefully, adults may learn how to help establish a crime-free community, and your peers may realize that they need help with personal problems or recognize the importance of taking a stand against drugs.

Because dance, music, photography, and other arts transcend language, they often help to bridge cultural, racial, and ethnic barriers. A photography exhibit, play, or recital can also generate real enthusiasm for your group members' abilities and provide much-deserved recognition from adults and your peers. After all of your work, you'll see that you've had a good time and probably made or strengthened friendships!

## How Can Your Project Be Evaluated?

Evaluating your project allows you to find out whether it has met its goals. Evaluation works, however, only if you decide up front what you want to evaluate and how you'll do so. The purpose of conducting an evaluation is "to answer practical questions of decision-makers and program implementors who want to know whether to continue a program, extend it to other sites, modify it, or close it down."<sup>1</sup> When evaluating your group's performance or display, you will want to show that your project does one or all of the following:

- ◆ Engages the talent of local youth in promoting a key crime prevention message.
- ◆ Provides opportunities for youth to use and develop artistic ability.
- ◆ Educates and raises community members' awareness of the problems or issues that your group chose to address.

<sup>1</sup> National Crime Prevention Council, *What, me evaluate?* Washington, DC: National Crime Prevention Council, 1986.

## Planning a Successful Project

For more information on how to plan a successful project, see the National Youth Network's Planning a Successful Crime Prevention Project. This 28-page workbook explains the five steps of the Success Cycle:

- ◆ Assessing Your Community's Needs.
- ◆ Planning a Successful Project.
- ◆ Lining Up Resources.
- ◆ Acting on Your Plans.
- ◆ Nurturing, Monitoring, and Evaluating.

The workbook includes six worksheets for you to take notes on. You can get a copy of this planning workbook from the Juvenile Justice Clearinghouse, listed in the "Resources" section. Good luck!

- ◆ Uses creative expression to transcend language and cultural barriers.

You can evaluate your effort in two ways. First, you can assess your audience's response. Did the audience enjoy the performance? Did it understand the anticrime or antidrug message you intended to convey? Applause, encores, and positive comments in guest books are good indicators of audience enjoyment. A survey asking audience members about the theme(s) of a performance or display also can help you check on their learning. In working with children, you may want to ask simple questions to probe their understanding and see how well they are able to apply your message to their own lives.

Second, you can consider your program's effect on the group's participants. Are they more confident? Have they learned valuable information about crime and drug abuse prevention? Survey group participants and those involved in developing your performance or display; ask them how the program helped them and exactly what they learned.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> For more information on evaluating projects, refer to *Does Your Youth Program Work?*, a Youth in Action Bulletin available at no charge from the Juvenile Justice Clearinghouse, listed in the "Resources" section.

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In evaluating your arts and performances program, also consider whether and how it meets the following more general crime prevention goals:

- ◆ Reduces crime or fear of crime in your community.
- ◆ Is cost-effective.
- ◆ Has a lasting impact.

- ◆ Attracts support and resources.
- ◆ Makes people feel safer and more positive about being a member of your school or community.

Learning to evaluate the things you do is a good skill, one you can apply to all aspects of your life. Enjoy your project and—Be creative!



## Resources

For more information, contact one of the following organizations, or visit the U.S. Department of Justice Kids Page Web site at [www.usdoj.gov/kidspage](http://www.usdoj.gov/kidspage). This site includes information for kids, youth, parents, and teachers.

### National Organizations

**Americans for the Arts**  
1000 Vermont Avenue NW., 12th Floor  
Washington, DC 20005  
202-371-2830  
Internet: [www.artsusa.org](http://www.artsusa.org)

**Juvenile Justice Clearinghouse**  
P.O. Box 6000  
Rockville, MD 20849-6000  
800-638-8736  
301-519-5212 (fax)  
Internet: [www.ojjdp.ncjrs.org](http://www.ojjdp.ncjrs.org)

**National Assembly of Local Arts Agencies (NALAA)**  
927 15th Street NW., 12th Floor  
Washington, DC 20005  
202-371-2830

**National Assembly of State Arts Agencies (NASAA)**  
1010 Vermont Avenue NW., Suite 920  
Washington, DC 20001  
202-347-6352

**National Crime Prevention Council**  
1700 K Street NW., Second Floor  
Washington, DC 20006-3817  
202-466-6272  
Internet: [www.ncpc.org](http://www.ncpc.org)

**National Endowment for the Arts**  
1100 Pennsylvania Avenue NW.  
Washington, DC 20506  
202-682-5400  
Internet: [www.arts.endow.gov](http://www.arts.endow.gov)

**National Endowment for the Humanities**  
1100 Pennsylvania Avenue NW.  
Washington, DC 20506  
202-606-8400  
800-634-1121  
Internet: [www.neh.fed.us](http://www.neh.fed.us)

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## State and Local Programs

### Administrative Office of the Courts/ Juvenile Services

Kenton County Building, Room 606  
303 Court Street  
Covington, KY 41011  
606-784-8664

### African Heritage Dance Center

4018 Minnesota Avenue SE.  
Washington, DC 20019  
202-399-5252

### Bells of Love

Elisa Mescon  
210 Gifford Parkway  
Syracuse, NY 13214  
315-445-0018

### Children's Aid Society Chorus

219 Sullivan Street  
New York, NY 10012  
212-533-1675

### City at Peace, Inc.

Suzanne Tarlov, Executive Director  
3305 Eighth Street NE., Studio A  
Washington, DC 20017-3504  
202-529-2828  
202-529-1654 (fax)  
Internet: [cityatpeace.org](http://cityatpeace.org)

### Do the Write Thing Challenge Program

National Campaign to Stop Violence  
1120 G Street NW, Suite 990  
Washington, DC 20005  
202-393-7583

### New Visions/Nuevo Visiones

136 Suffolk Street  
Holyoke, MA 01040  
413-532-6350

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Points of view or opinions expressed in this document are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official position or policies of the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, BJA, or the U.S. Department of Justice.

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*The National Youth Network, founded and managed by the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, consists of diverse youth leaders from across the Nation who are sponsored by youth-serving organizations. The goal of the Network is to recognize and build upon the power and importance of youth leadership by uniting young people and adults, through communication and action, to enable youth organizations and nonaffiliated youth to have a positive, formidable impact in our communities and throughout our Nation.*

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*The Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention is a component of the Office of Justice Programs, which also includes the Bureau of Justice Assistance, the Bureau of Justice Statistics, the National Institute of Justice, and the Office for Victims of Crime.*

**U.S. Department of Justice**

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*Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention*

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