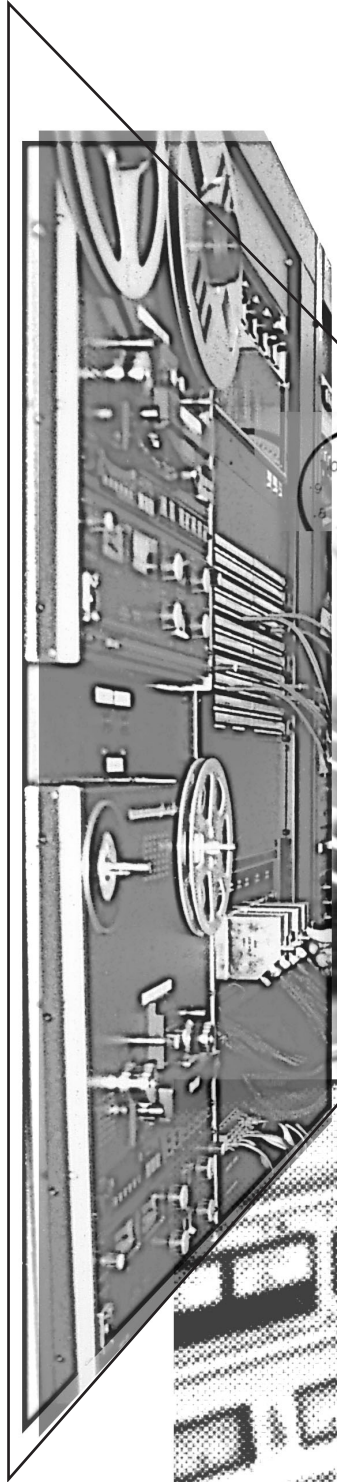


I S S U E

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August
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Youth Radio: Broadcasting Violence Prevention



It's Sunday morning at eight o'clock. The radio is tuned in at 94.9 on the FM dial. With a hip-hop beat in the background and a microphone in front of them, Anita Johnson and Alex Savidge invite listeners throughout Northern California to stay tuned for the next two hours by announcing:

*"Youth Radio...
Bringing you community programming for the people,
— la raza —
by the people,
and always telling it like it is,
on WILD — WILD — WILD 94.9 baby!"*

Johnson and Savidge are part of Youth Radio, a multicultural training program for teenagers and young adults in broadcasting and journalism. WILD 94.9 isn't the only place on the dial where Youth Radio voices are heard. These young journalists are heard on radio stations across the nation as well as locally in their community. This is the story of the contributions made by Youth Radio in bringing the youth voice to the airwaves and educating the greater public about the concerns and interests of young people. And, it is a story of youth using radio to create their own representations as a mechanism for violence prevention.

Part of being young is asking
questions, wanting answers,
and having faith, convictions,
enthusiasm, and hope

Youth Radio: Young People as Resources

Youth Radio is dedicated to bringing youth voices to young and adult audiences through hands-on study in radio broadcasting. The programs offered by Youth Radio have explicit goals of increasing self esteem, building leadership, and mending race relations. Youth Radio offers young people experience and gives the public images of competent young people. This innovative program began in Berkeley in 1980, with the name "Youth News." Since its inception it has been an after-school program in which Bay Area high school students learn to write and report news stories for public radio broadcasting. Wilma Consul, who was Youth Radio's first School-to-Work coordinator, remembers the "good-old days": "I graduated from Youth News in 1986, and that's something I carry in my resume no matter how long ago it was." She says, "That experience prepared me for Columbia School of Journalism" where Consul earned a masters degree in journalism.

Youth development in a professional setting is the cornerstone of Youth Radio. The core training is an intensive, twelve-week course in the fundamentals of radio production and journalism. Students receive instruction, mentoring, and career guidance from some of the area's best journalists, engineers, and music programmers. As part of their training, students produce their own live radio magazine by, for and about youth. In this real-life learning laboratory, students are responsible for all aspects of studio operations, including on-air announcing, music programming, news writing, reporting, interviewing, radio engineering, editing and production. Promising graduates of the core training are hired as peer teachers to train the next group of students as well as further develop their own skills and staff the office. The concept of youth-training-youth has been so successful that more than half of the core training is now taught by peer teachers. Under close adult supervision, peer teachers develop leadership skills and act as role models and mentors for new students. Now an editorial assistant at a music industry trade magazine, Ayoka Medlock was a member of the National Public Radio Diversity Initiative Training. She was with Youth Radio for four years starting when she was a junior in high school. As one of Youth Radio's founding students, she has become a mentor to students who followed her into the program.

Who better to inform youth than young people themselves? Part of being young is asking questions, wanting answers, and having faith, convictions, enthusiasm, and hope. "Youth," says Ellin O'Leary, president and founder of Youth Radio, "is that moment of freedom before adulthood where you get to define yourself, what you are." O'Leary believes that young people have the power within themselves to effect change. She has spent the past 17 years supporting that conviction.

Youth Radio students address violence prevention in their work. They report news stories on contemporary violence topics such as the controversial youth curfew laws and other topics, but from the perspective of young people's strengths and contributions to society. Julian Ledesma, who is about to enter the masters program at San Francisco State University, has been associated with Youth Radio since he was 17, is one of O'Leary's many students. He believes youth voices are necessary for preventing violence. He says, "We are always talking about youth violence and youth issues and, it gets too somber. Let's get on with it! We know there are problems — but, do we have to keep mentioning them? The gang epidemic, the drug problem, the statistics on gun-related deaths.... It's depressing, it's sad, it gets redundant." Critically he asks, "How do we inform, enlighten people, and at the same time — not turn them off? How do we change it, get a different angle, put it in a fresher way?" Quickly, with the sharp edge of a trained journalist, he answers his own questions: "That's where the youth come in. We've got different ideas. Each student brings something different to give, our own angle, radical opinions and solutions...that's what keeps Youth Radio fresh."

In addition to bringing youth voices to the forefront on violence-related issues, the mentoring and engaging, meaningful activities Youth Radio offers are themselves violence prevention. *Coming up Taller*,¹ a publication by The Arts and the Humanities Council for Children and Youth at Risk, points out how organized youth activities can deter risky behavior in adolescents. The authors argue that quality youth programs, whether organized around the arts and the humanities, sports, science or outdoor exploration are a crucial source of supportive relationships and vital experiences that help prevent violence. Sadly, it also says that today's most vulnerable youth spend less and less time in activities like these and are therefore deprived of their benefits. On a more positive note, O'Leary notes how in many different occupational fields, adults are working with youth, helping them get into the business. She says, "Apprenticeship work is going on all over the place. We just don't call it that.... People take in the son or daughter of so and so and help them learn by doing. That's been the way since the beginning of time. All Youth Radio does is bring in people who have been shut out from those networks, the people who did not go to the same schools, and let them in."

The core training program at Youth Radio seeks students that represent the diversity for which the Bay Area is famous. A competitive application process emphasizes participation by low income youth, girls and people of color. The heart of the inner city high school student body is multicultural. It is rare to find an urban high school of only one race, one language, or one socio-economic class. However, there is still self-segregation; students rarely socialize with students different than themselves. One of the places where youth find cross-cultural similarities is in the media they watch, read, and listen to. These media have tremendous potential to connect and interact with the values of young people. Radio, in particular, is a nexus for young people.

Through trusting relationships with a diverse group of their peers and caring adults, Youth Radio students gain confidence, self-esteem and the ability to focus on creating a positive future for themselves. Students from various backgrounds, with differing accents, skin colors, gender and sexual orientations come together for the opportunity to learn by doing. Youth Radio encourages self reflection and understanding of culture by requiring students to critically examine and challenge their personal assumptions, attitudes, beliefs and behaviors to work through conflict with other Youth Radio members. The program believes that the process of empowerment includes purposefully challenging difference and fosters goals which encourage each student's ability to express ideas, think critically and resolve conflicts.

¹ The Arts and the Humanities Council for Children and Youth at Risk, *Coming up Taller*, Washington DC. 1996.

Creating Media: A Violence Prevention Activity

Ayoka Medlock, as senior peer-teacher, explains how Youth Radio does violence prevention. “We are not teaching specific ways to avoid danger,” she says. “We are both doing stories about violence and getting the stories out there. We bring in youth who are living in the neighborhoods that have a high rate of violence, and get them involved. We teach them that they have a voice, they can put it on paper. Once they sit down, we tell them, ‘let it flow, put your feelings on paper, don’t worry about the grammar. Ask questions, and we can not only answer them, but we understand where you are coming from.’” Medlock believes this activity will contribute to reducing violence; in her words, “It’s someone your age having a conversation with you. Once you get that young person involved in something positive, in something that will keep their minds off of negative things, they are going to learn, ‘I don’t have to do violence!’”

For Youth Radio, violence prevention is the activity of creating media. In the words of O’Leary, violence prevention is “offering youth something to do that’s interesting, that’s at their level, and that they can have some feeling of empowerment and control over, with adults who care about them.” The most important thing, she underscores, “is to keep the program always accessible and in their vernacular, going back to the base and making sure it integrates.”

The staff at Youth Radio are hesitant to talk about their work strictly in the context of a “prevention program” to “empower youth,” perhaps because their aim is to do that and much more. Jacinda Abcarian, who joined the program at age 16 when she was a junior at Berkeley High School puts it this way: “Youth need a voice. We always have something to say...we are denied and are not given that [voice]. That’s why Youth Radio is here, because we stay in contact with the youth.” And it is not only individual voice that is developed, but the language of power. As O’Leary points out: “We teach them about speaking to different audiences...different ways to present what you believe in and who you are.”

Chris Arnold, now a National Public Radio producer, was feature and commentary producer at Youth Radio for two years. He believes that learning to be a journalist is also learning that the world is a lot more complex than it appears. He sees cross-cultural learning happening where there is dialogue, safety, and the expectation that opinions will be challenged. In terms of violence prevention he says, “If we want to reach kids that really are at-risk for violence, and do a classroom presentation saying, ‘we are going to talk about all this emotional stuff that has to do with violence,’ students might not want to do it. What’s cool about a program like Youth Radio is that they come here, have fun, play music, want to be disc jockeys, get on the radio, bust a rap, or whatever, and then, they get here and in order to be a DJ, there’s a rotation, one week you be a DJ, the next week you have to write a commentary, you may go to a city council meeting or do on-the-street interviews, the next week it’s learning news-writing for radio.... A shift happens, critical thinking happens. It’s exciting and it has nothing to do with drugs or danger. This is a good environment to share stuff that’s real.” Arnold, a professional in the radio business, is clear that the primary goal at Youth Radio is not limited to training young people to be journalists. The goals are more general, like modeling respect, providing encouragement and teaching skills that can cross over to whatever destinations the young people choose.

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Creating Media: Journalism

Violence Prevention is not all Youth Radio does. The students are well trained in covering breaking news and analysis. Their goal is to gain credibility and skills on a range of issues via the media. Movement and action characterize the atmosphere at Youth Radio. Young people talk on the phone while at a computer writing a script; they have earphones on, listening for the media bites they'll use in their story; they are walking and talking, laughing or joking in the shared open space. Along with Ayoka Medlock, Noah Nelson was a student founder of Youth Radio. He agrees to an interview while tackling an analog editing machine. He wants to talk about journalistic ethics, an important subject for him, and one he has taught other youth as a peer teacher. "No one can escape their personal bias," he says. "But there is a matter of hunting for the truth.... Somewhere between various perspectives on this truth exists reality. My duty is to truth and objectivity and not to collecting only evidence to support what I believe." Concentrating while in the middle of using the digital network audio system editing machine, Anita Johnson, 21, nods her head in agreement.

Johnson's trajectory illustrates how participation in Youth Radio raises consciousness, self worth and confidence. At 19, Johnson left a steady job with no movement and no learning for the apprenticeship-style program at Youth Radio. Sometimes the peer-teachers were younger than she was, often she missed the regular pay check, but always she needed the space to be able to make mistakes and learn by trial and error. Today she produces the WILD 94.9 show, creates and produces programming for National Public Radio, and trains young people in media advocacy and broadcasting throughout California. "Yeah," she emphasizes, "there are resources in the whole circle of violence prevention. Connections, people you can talk to, to get your story. But," she says emphatically, pausing and using her hands for further expression, "we do stories on violence prevention because they are important issues, not because we are purposely funded to do violence prevention.... We cannot lose our integrity by being biased; that is not journalism, it's public relations [and] would jeopardize our journalistic ethics."

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Creating Media: A Full Spectrum of Choices at Youth Radio

Effective programs present young people with opportunities for learning and doing, fueling their bodies, brains and spirits with options. All Youth Radio programs incorporate modeling and apprenticeship. O’Leary says, “They watch their peer teachers do a radio show one week and then the next week it’s their show.... When they first get here we tell them, “You are now a reporter for Youth Radio; from today on you are our eyes and ears.” The different Youth Radio Programs illustrate:

Youth in Control

At Youth Radio, “Youth in Control!” is the name of the two-hour weekly show produced in its entirety by the Youth Radio posse. The name, like the show’s format and themes, came from the young people themselves. They picked the name to reflect what they want to see happen. They decide, control, and produce the show. As radio personalities, youth play and introduce music, create public service announcements, write and read commentaries, deliver poetry, rap and provide their audience with the youth perspective on movie reviews. As radio engineers, young people learn all about the equipment and skills involved in putting a radio show on the airwaves. They practice computer editing and production with the latest in digital technology. Youth in Control airs every Friday night on KPFB 89.3, a local listener-sponsored station in Berkeley. Commentaries and feature stories are carried in California by KQED, KCBS, KPFA, and nationally by National Public Radio, Public Radio International and Latino USA.

Youth Radio on WILD 94.9

The WILD 94.9 show airs Sunday mornings on KYLD 94.9 FM. This show is produced and hosted by the more experienced tier of journalists-in-training at Youth Radio. The show provides them with a vehicle on a major station in the San Francisco Bay Area where their voices and talents can be recognized by thousands of listeners. When asked about the pressure of putting together such a high profile show, Alex Savidge, 17, with Youth Radio for three years, says, “I’m just having fun, using my own creativity. I help out, put stuff together.... It doesn’t feel intimidating. If this wasn’t fun, I’d be out of here a long time ago.” In addition to being fun, producing a show the caliber of WILD 94.9 is challenging. Not all youth are comfortable with the long-term focused concentration and intensity that it takes to produce commentaries, features, and news stories on tight deadlines.



Community Action Street Team

WILD 94.9



Web Site



Media Advocacy Trainings



Youth Voices



School-to-work

Community Action Street Team

The Community Action Street Team was created based on the tremendous response students received from other young people about how to spread powerful anti-violence messages and learn technical skills while having fun. The Street Team takes a DJ system on the road to high schools, community fairs and other events where youth gather. It offers community-based opportunities to create media. The Street Team is a program designed for young people who are primarily interested in being a DJ and/or radio personality without the rigorous training required for other Youth Radio programs. Street Team members are trained at Youth Radio in the basics of broadcasting, music, announcing, using high-tech equipment, writing commentaries and production. Youth Radio then takes the Street Team to street fairs, community events, high schools and other venues, where the young people provide entertainment and produce forums on serious issues in informal, attractive ways. In addition to promoting Youth Radio, the Street Team members get the feel of being radio personalities, receive community exposure and serve as positive role models and contributors to society.

Luis Vergara, executive director of Youth Radio, encourages other programs to replicate Youth Radio's Street Teams: "You don't need to be in a professional broadcast-journalism training program to create media as a violence prevention activity. For \$2,000 you can buy a DJ set-up and do community media." Street Teams are a low-cost way young people can become visible in the community on violence prevention. As Vergara notes, "Street Teams give youth the opportunity to promote themselves in the discussion. They provide a platform to showcase their talent and stage the events in their community which will attract media attention."

School-to-Work

The School-to-Work component of Youth Radio provides youth with continuous learning through internships. It is an internship program for young people interested in a career in journalism, which places them at various adult media outlets. Since its inception, Youth Radio has had strong links with both schools and the media industry. Through the School-to-Work program, these links have been formalized into a system for preparing and training students for a successful transition into the work world.

Web Site

Youth Radio trained a core group of students to set up a web page [www.youthradio.org] and spread the word even further. To date the web site has generated response from as far away as Australia. Most inquiries are from people seeking to establish a Youth Radio model in their area.

Media Advocacy Trainings

The California Wellness Foundation (TCWF) funded Youth Radio in 1995 to develop a model for engaging youth in violence prevention through media advocacy trainings. Youth Radio serves as a resource for the various other programs funded by TCWF by providing media advocacy trainings which teach the young "violence prevention specialists" how to gain access to the news media. Youth Radio peer leaders teach their counterparts in community action projects across California how to attract the media and to cover events from their point of view. In the words of Jacinda Abcarian, senior peer trainer, "We get the young people to be violence prevention advocates and look at the media with a fiercer eye, analyzing it a little closer to see what the messages are, so that they are not just taking in what is given." As a trainer, she says, "I try to give a voice to all the youth organizations out there that are working on the big issues like gangs, guns, drugs, teen curfews, graffiti. Every organization, every person has an objective for which they stand. It's important how you frame your objective...that's the best part of the media advocacy trainings."

The young journalists have traveled to various youth organizations which are part of the Violence Prevention Initiative to provide on-site individualized consultations as well as lead workshops at conferences and regional trainings on media advocacy. Abcarian summarizes, “no matter what age, what place, what race, what gender, wherever we go to do training and say, ‘OK, you are going to learn to do commentaries, formulate your opinion, design PSA’s and help you receive news coverage,’ the one thing that comes through is that youth always have a point of view. Right off the bat they speak out!” Snapping her fingers she continues the description, “teenagers always want something to do to help themselves, and this is contrary to popular beliefs, where adults think that youth don’t care about themselves and they don’t care about their future.”

One example is Youth Radio’s work with the Community Wellness Partnership in Pomona. Like many other urban centers, Pomona has experienced alarmingly high rates of violence and a dramatic increase in arrests for homicide and aggravated assault in the 10–24 age group. Youth Radio staff met the youth and adults who comprise the Community Wellness Partnership during media advocacy training offered to members of the Violence Prevention Initiative. Kevin Benjamin, artist, organizer and editor of the Partnership’s bi-monthly newspaper, “Unheard Voices,” found the media advocacy training valuable. “We have to use the same forces that are misprogramming our people into re-programming in some positive way,” Benjamin says. “It’s a video-radio age, and these are skills for economic empowerment. It’s creating jobs for young people where there are opportunities — like those with skills in broadcasting, engineering, journalism.” He would like to see the group in Pomona emulate Youth Radio: “We would like to be like Youth Radio, getting our little niche, and hopefully be heard at various stations, or at one station.” Pomona and Youth Radio are collaborating on a story about teen pregnancy, parts of which will be featured on National Public Radio.

Youth Voices

California youth caught up in the criminal justice system know the devastation of violence first hand. “Youth Voices” is the broadcast journalism program Youth Radio tailored for incarcerated young men at Log Cabin, a correctional camp in San Francisco, which has now expanded to the San Francisco Youth Guidance Center and Camp Sweeney in San Leandro. The program was created to offer viable technical skills to young men completing their sentences. For these young people, Youth Radio offers skills training with the goal of producing a cadre of violence prevention activists who will speak out to other youth from the perspective of having been there. Vergara says, “What we are trying to teach youth at Camp Sweeney is that they can have a voice of their own, they can accomplish something. Especially upon being released, it is extremely important for youth to have a sense that they finished something.” Upon graduating from the intensive 12 week program, Vergara says, “They develop a sense of accomplishment and the ability to express themselves. They believe nobody has given them that chance before, and when someone gives them that chance they really don’t take it for granted.”

DJ’s and rap music are a familiar part of incarcerated youth culture. One resident explained, “I got skills working with the equipment, setting up time and distance, and knowing how to use the sound system. It exposed me more to what I was already into. Writing commentaries is like writing a rap. It’s like writing your opinion.” A fellow inmate, 17-year-old M.D., delivered a commentary that was heard on Youth Radio’s WILD 94.9 show.

Tuning In a Youth Perspective

Learning to write commentaries (editorials read during a radio program) is a required, and important, part of the training at Youth Radio. Even those passionate about their love of music and becoming a disc jockey have to spend, at a minimum, a third of their time developing the critical thinking skills necessary to write a commentary. After some voice training, familiarity with projecting into the microphone, and experience following a producer's cues, the youth tape their "perspectives." Youth Radio commentaries can be heard across the nation by audiences ranging from Public Radio International's "Marketplace," National Public Radio's "Morning Edition" and "All Things Considered," leading commercial stations in the San Francisco Bay Area and local listener-sponsored Pacifica affiliates. Commentaries are rarely edited for grammar; the objective is to capture the young person's perspective with authenticity. The following transcript is an example of the award-winning work produced at Youth Radio.

Anchor intro: Living in the Bay Area means being part of a mosaic of cultures, backgrounds, and ethnicities. Nora Barrows-Friedman, a student with Youth Radio, has a perspective.

"Last October I was held up at gun point by a 15-year old boy. Afterwards, I learned it was all part of a gang initiation.

As I shared my frightening experience with classmates and friends I realized that this happens more often than I thought. People thought I was overreacting by being scared to go out if I had to walk. They said, 'you weren't shot and neither were your friends, get over it.' Well, I tried. But there I was, nearly sixteen and my whole life ahead of me. What if I had been hurt? What if that barrel resting on my left temple had been emptied into my head, interrupting my dreams, my future, my whole life?

Every day I see kids at school killed, brothers killed, girlfriends killed, neighbors killed.

The whole thing doesn't make any sense to me: where did we as a people go wrong in this world? At this rate our children and our grandchildren won't know peace from war, love from hate, and cooperation from violence. And with our government doing little to help my generation, it's time we start helping each other instead of hurting each other.

I realized that the point of this young man's hold-up was for one sole purpose: power. Power in a gang. And with his scepter of steel and gunpowder, he could control. He could control me and my friends. Reflecting on this, I realized that we as young people need a sense of real power within this society. But I choose my power from gathering people together and making changes in my community for the better. I probably feel as good as he did: I have the power to move within the young people's culture and be accepted by my peers. He held the power needed in order to be accepted into a small and violent group to feel that same sense of community. I've begun to despise that simple division between love and hate.

I want to live in a safe world. But in this society I wonder if that's too much to ask. I never want to see this happen again. To anyone.

With a perspective, I'm Nora Barrows-Friedman."

Anchor out: Nora Barrows-Friedman is a student with Youth Radio, a journalism training program in Berkeley.

Solutions to Violence: Youth-centered Prevention

Innovative programs such as Youth Radio offer solutions to the problems related to violence and other health and social issues. These programs focus on the positive resiliency factors which produce leadership and skills in young people. Youth Radio senior peer teacher Jacinda Abcarian believes it is important that programs engage youth in meaningful ways and include them at all levels of the program, from planning to implementation and evaluation. “In the conferences and events dealing with youth and with violence, there are many adults talking about kids or what affects us. It would be nice to see some younger faces there. It would be refreshing for adults to hear youth voices on real solutions to what we are facing.” Participants and peer teachers agree that a key to Youth Radio’s success has been its commitment to involving the young people at all program levels.

Youth Radio is transforming the culture of violence prevention programming with a shift from an emphasis on grief and therapy to providing young people with critical thinking and technical skills. Young people of all walks of life need to be prepared to match today and tomorrow’s technological arenas, and not be left behind. Ellin O’Leary operates with the assumption that young people must learn a multiplicity of skills to compete in a volatile job market and not be marginalized. She says, “These days with jobs changing nothing is sacred. Technologies are merging, we constantly have to reinvent ourselves. All of us, youth and adults have to be versatile and have multiple skills in our kits.”

Youth Radio has gained national exposure and recognition as an organization because they bring youth voices to the airwaves and educate the greater public about the concerns and interests of young people. The story of Youth Radio is a good reminder that when adults provide access and opportunities for youth the result is a better future for all of us and the generations ahead.

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Issue 6 was written by Vivian Chavez, MPH, who was a Youth Radio/Youth News student reporter during her junior and senior years at Berkeley High School. Edited by Lori Dorfman, DrPH. Special thanks to Ellin O'Leary, Luis Vergara, Beverly Mire and the students at Youth Radio.

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