

Section 5

Examples of good practice

During the preparation phase for DOMino a questionnaire was sent out to youth organisations, youth services and youth initiatives asking for descriptions of innovative peer group education projects. We would like to thank all those who answered this questionnaire, we regret that we could only include a small selection of the project descriptions.

In the following, you will find five project descriptions showing different approaches of peer group education as a means to combat intolerance and violence. Those projects reflect the different approaches described in Section 2 of Domino, i.e. projects in formal and informal educational settings and peer led or 'grass roots' initiatives. The addresses at the end of each project description will help you seek further information.

Xenophobia is the psychic trauma after a dramatic event that has to do with something unfamiliar or someone from other countries. The effect of the disorder is the irrational fear of anything strange...

Anthony Bargilly, 17 years,
Cyprus

5.1. The Peacemaker-project in Offenbach/Germany **An example for peer mediation in schools**

A peacemaker is a person who helps others to end quarrels. In many cultures, especially older ones such people are highly regarded. They have various names, but they all have the common role of finding solutions for quarrels without violence or injury. Such human traditions are important in our modern societies, where problems are more complicated and conflicts are more confused than ever before.

We have therefore taken this traditional model for a project on conflict resolution in the schools of Offenbach, Germany. The project is being run by the local Youth and Education Office, part of our National Youth Service, which organizes educational events to co-ordinate the activities of the different institutions that work with children and young people in our town.

The peacemaker-project forms part of a larger pilot project, “**violence-prevention**”, and was developed on the basis of two theoretical approaches: peer group education and mediation. This project was also grant aided by the European Steering Group of the European Youth Campaign.



The significance of peer group education in formal and informal educational settings for projects outside the school curriculum.

Peer group education in schools has a long history. The idea of helping relationships between students in formal school settings has been utilized by teachers for centuries. Some authors trace peer teaching back to the ancient Greeks and Romans, others just to the Middle Ages. It was not until the end of the eighteenth century and the beginning of the nineteenth century however that peer teaching started to be used on a large scale in Great Britain and America. In the other European countries it was practiced but to a lesser degree.

With industrialization knowledge of reading and writing became a necessity even for the poor, but there were neither teachers nor schools to satisfy the requirements. It was in this context that educational approaches such as Andrew Bell's Madras-system and the Monitorial-system of Joseph Lancaster were put into practice. Under these systems teachers taught a few students (monitors) who then became responsible for passing on what they had learnt to the rest of the children. The method used group teaching in a very formal and usually very authoritarian style but in the situation it was very effective.

However as the educational system of the western world developed in the nineteenth century, the monitorial system became less appropriate. Only in the smaller one-class schools were the methods of peer teaching still practiced. For the Developing World, especially in Latin America it continued to be a valuable way of teaching people to read and write. For this reason peer group education was for a long time identified as a cheap method of teaching basic literary skills.

In educational discussion however, attention was not paid to the benefits of peer group education. Benefits which we now see as valuable in the modern school system: children who do not respond well to adults will often learn more from peer tutors; and the tutors themselves benefit by learning the skill of teaching. The idea of students learning through helping each other is a positive alternative to the traditional system of learning through competing with others.

In the last twenty years the benefits of peer group education have been rediscovered in the educational debate, especially in Great Britain and the USA. Today in our developed education systems in Europe we have no lack of schools and teachers to teach the fundamental skills, but outside the field of "fact-learning" the formal methods are rarely effective. We are seeing more and more open discussion among young people about violence, intolerance, abuse of drugs etc. It is this latter context where peer group teaching can be an important addition to formal education and can significantly contribute to the humanisation of schooling.

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The necessity of conflict resolving in a constructive way for children and young people and the process of mediation.

For many young people violence is the most effective way of resolving problems. They get no pleasure out of violence but to them there appears to be no other solution. They learn from adults that it is acceptable to eliminate competitors for ones own success. They see films which show that you only achieve in this world through violence and they don't want to be considered weak in their peer group.

We would think that children and young people can learn the non-violent attitudes and that they are capable of resolving many of their problems themselves. However it is evident that our abilities to handle conflicts in a constructive way have not kept pace with the technical and social development in our societies. It is therefore necessary to break through this cycle of violence and counter violence among young people. There are various models to handle conflicts in a democratic and non-violent way.

One of these non-violent approaches is "mediation", solving a conflict through a third person. A third person can help the fighting parties to find a solution which suits both sides and create what is known as a win-win situation. The mediator leads the opponents through a stage-by-stage-process to clarify the problems and the motives and to find an acceptable solution.

The method of mediation was developed in the USA and has been used there for 20 years in various fields - in neighbourhood quarrels, in marriage conflicts and also in the so-called offender-victim compensation in youth criminal law. The most important condition - and also the most important restriction - is the voluntary readiness of all participants to take part in discussion and to look for a solution. The mediator can help both parties to find solutions, but he/she can't settle their problems for them.

The structure of the model project "violence-prevention" in Offenbach

In June of 1993 Offenbach Town Council asked the Youth Office to develop a programme against violence, racism, anti-Semitism and right-wing extremism. The background was the increasing racism in Germany in the nineties and the success in the local elections of the right-extremist party, the "Republicans". In the last local elections the party won 15% of the election votes in Offenbach, and in some districts more than 30%. The council recognizes that this is a potentially dangerous situation for Offenbach, especially taking into account that is the town with the highest rate of migrant people in Germany. Every third resident in Offenbach does not possess a German passport.

The Youth Educational Office began to work on a pilot project, which was accepted last year and is now running. The main objectives of this project are:



- a) The implementation of a system of constructive problem resolving in the schools and youth institutions of Offenbach.

This is done by using three working methods:

- to make “conflict profiles” of classes or groups of young people in schools, kindergarten and youth centres, in order to find out the existing problems and conflicts.
- to develop programmes for children and young people to handle conflicts in a constructive way. The most important programme of this type is the “peacemaker-programme” which involves conflict mediation and training for constructive problem resolving.
- to train teachers and social workers in the methods of conflict resolving. In this step by step training the teachers learn the methods of counseling children and young people with problems.

- b) The building of an infrastructure for tolerance and human rights education.

- c) The setting up of a local network and an information service for schools and youth centres.

The Peacemaker-Project of mediating conflicts between students

The basis of this project are the experiences of peer group education. It involves the transfer of mediation into the educational process and the trust in children to solve their own problems.

What happens in a peer mediation process is something like this:

Two students have a quarrel. There is not necessarily violence, but there is unhappiness and tears. They each decide (and it must be their decision) to ask for the help of a mediator. All four pupils - two disputants, and two mediators go through a stage-by-stage process which involves the mediators listening to the disputants, identifying their feelings and needs and then agreeing on a course of action. The culmination comes when the disputants sign a short contract and shake hands.

This scenario shows the mediation process when it is introduced in a class or a school and helped by the teachers. In the next three years we hope to create the conditions for this type of process to be put into practice.

As a first phase we have developed a training programme for the students and the teachers. In the process of building this training programme we saw that not all students are able to act as mediators, either because they are not interested or because they have too little appreciation in their group.

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Racism is a widely spread problem even in our days. People feel obliged to criticise others according to racial colour, religion, political or sexual beliefs. I find such behaviour unacceptable and even sickening. I just want to say that one should take a good look at oneself first before one begins to criticise others.

Miranda Maratheftou,
18 years, Cyprus



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We have therefore developed the training programme in two ways. We have trained a group of delegates from various classes (10-12 years old) in a course made up of two 2 days and three afternoons of 3 hours in mediating conflicts. After the training we introduced them as mediators in their classes.

In a second course we worked with a whole class for 5 units of 3 hours and held an election for the mediators. With the chosen students we have then gone through a separate training programme of mediation. The students who completed the training course received a certificate, or a "peacemaker-card". In this process we have seen that it is very important that the teachers help the students in their class and that other teachers and parents accept the mediators. We now run training courses for the teachers who help the students and information meetings for the parents. These activities were the basis for a constructive atmosphere at the "Schiller-Schule" a large secondary school where the project was first introduced. In the second phase we established the developed training programme in the other classes and began to implement the peacemaker-programme in the following steps:

- We run a training course for teachers from 6 classes. The teachers learn the basic exercises for problem resolving in a constructive way and the basic rules of mediation.
- These teachers then run the first parts of the training for pupil up until the election of the mediators, where approximately 6 students from each class are chosen. This is known as the run-phase.
- Then we build two courses with the elected students from these 6 classes and go with them through the mediation training course. These courses are lead by educated trainers without the teachers.
- When the trained mediators are introduced in their classes we monitor their activities and organize regular meetings for mediators.
- At the same time we organize various meetings and activities to encourage discussion between the schools about these projects. Such activities have included a prize-competition, schoolyard-theatre and other events.

The project was started in October 1994. The first experiences we have made are very encouraging and we are often astonished how quickly the children have found new solutions to conflicts.

For further information contact

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5.2. The Stop the Violence movement in Denmark

An example for a peer led youth initiative

The name of the project is *Stop Volden* (in English “Stop The Violence”). The choice of the name was inspired by the American Stop The Violence movement and by our desire to stop the increasing violence in our country with the help of the Danish youth.

In the autumn of 1993 five young people in Copenhagen got together to make an effort to change people’s carelessness towards the growing incidents of brutal violence especially among the teenagers. We had all noticed how increasingly violent the city of Copenhagen had become. Therefore we decided to make a common effort to convince our youth that violence was not the answer.

The start

After a common friend was stabbed 6 times and almost lost his life we decided to start preparing a concert against violence. Soon after that there was another stabbing again amongst vary young teenagers, and this time the victim died. After that we released a notice in the press and soon became popular all over the country as the “teenagers” called “Stop The Violence”.

Target group and place

The target group of the project was youth in Denmark, i.e. people aged 12-25. Young people living in major cities and urban areas where chances for success in life are usually lower than in the countryside. After a while we discovered that it was not enough just to address the youth. We had to work with those who surrounded young people: parents, school teachers, youth club workers, police, friends, etc. Only after raising the awareness of that “package” of people we could really get the results.

The project covers the whole territory of Denmark - at youth clubs, primary schools, high schools, etc., at music festivals and concerts.

We have access to young people in various ways. After our first concert, 1500 people had the opportunity to join our movement by sending out a special postcards with their name, address, age, etc. We found out that cultural events such as concerts were an effective means to show our concern and to indicate our common problems as young people be it Pakistani, Moroccan or Danish and whatever our favourite type of music was. Another way of getting access to the youth was through institutions. We started receiving invitations from schools to attend meetings and soon afterwards we discovered that we would be much more successful if we spoke directly to the people. So we started to give lectures around the country. After the press

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Racism is for me a severe sickness and I feel that all nations should co-operate to cure it. And I believe that every human being and every nation should feel this way.

Dia, 17 years, Cyprus

released information about our lectures, the demand for them rapidly increased.

Main content of the project

Our project is basically about the fight against violence as a process of understanding of its nature and of the social conditions which induce it. We had learned that violence, racism, anti-Semitism and drug abuse among the youth are often cry to the surrounding world: a call for recognition or a way to find/establish an identity, or an attempt to demonstrate a position. We did not believe that anyone can become violent simply because he/she likes it. There is much more to it, a logic which may not make sense to the established society but is of a very central importance to youth.

Outline of the methodology and description of one particular session

We never prepared ourselves before a session we followed the natural course of the discussions. Sometimes there was a particular subject everybody wanted to talk about, the subject depended on the place. We did not have all the answers to people's queries but we had the trust in youth and the will to talk about everything that worried them. We mainly talked about things we had experienced and which they were very likely to come across in the future.

We did not tell young people how to live their lives. We did not claim that we knew better what was good for them. That would remind them too much of our parents' generations' way of thinking and would make us seem part of the "establishment" which could result in the loss of young people's credit for us.

We ask the young people to learn from our experiences without having to live through them and learn the hard way we did. Since we're a couple of years older and normally more experienced than our audience we try to explain them that they were probably going to end up with more or less the same ideas.

Nevertheless, we had three principles that we asked the youth to respect:

- We are against all kinds of violence (physical as well as psychological)
- We deny all forms of racism (there has to be room for all of us)
- We say no to drugs

Here is one particular session. which takes approximately half an hour, or sometimes more. We were asked if we could visit that school because it had a problem with a group of boys harassing the other students.

Everybody in our original group had a different background. Dany and Ronni are brothers, half Danish and half Israeli. They lived with their mother who was working most of the time. They



were living in an area of Copenhagen which was loaded with crime, alcohol & drug abusers and a very high unemployment rate. Dany and Ronni didn't have anyone to keep an eye on them, so they ended up trying to do a lot of things that made them what they are today.

Both of them, however, got out of the criminal environment before it was too late. They had already learned the hard way that they were heading down the wrong path of life. That awareness came mainly as they witnessed the fate of some of their closest friends.

I am 20 years old, my parents are from Morocco. I have five sisters and three brothers and it was hard to live altogether and to establish a personal identity. We were living at the heart of Copenhagen, at a place called Vesterbro. It was much like the place where Dany and Ronni grew up, just add prostitution and drug problems. This place had everything for the adults but nothing for the kids apart from the school. My brother had problems as many sons of foreign workers do he had been involved with crime which brought much pain to our parents. The girls were struggling for something forbidden to them either by their sex or by the religion (Muslim).

All my sisters have one way or another fought for the right to choose in their own lives which is not easy to do when your parents have already decided your future. The only reason being that you are a female and have to be protected.

My parents used to say "The shame a girl can bring to a family is ten times worse than a boy is capable of".

Back to the session now.

The main problem was getting through the five "rotten apples" in the school. They were bringing weapons in school. The teachers talked first to the youngsters, then to the parents (which actually made things worse).

We didn't know how to handle the situation because we didn't have an idea why they were behaving this way. That day we were three of us (two boys and a girl). We entered the room where the session was going to take place and found all 7th, 8th and 9th grade students from the school in the same room. We first looked at the faces in front of us and tried to evaluate the young people from their appearances and mainly from their facial expressions (the eyes).

The first thing we noticed was the silence during our speeches. Not that they didn't have things to say but they were somehow absorbing what we were saying before starting their own "session". Everybody had the opportunity to speak. After a while we started talking about the situation in their school and we noticed that only a few mentioned the five trouble-makers of the school.

It's easy to point out at somebody and accuse them and punish them. But then for sure the problem would come back again. So we tried to find solution which was fair for all.

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We asked the trouble-makers to explain their reasons for doing these things which they chose to do after the session finished, when we were alone.

It turned out that they wanted something else to do besides the school, because that was not enough to fill their lives. They wanted something exciting and kept mentioning the word RESPECT. They didn't have positive means to assert themselves and resorted to the easy way of "revolt". For them it was a sign of respect when people moved aside after seeing them coming down the street. We did our best to convince them that what they were taking for respect was fear and that it was very easy to scare people. At the end we invited them to visit our offices and see if they could help in our work.

One of the things that made them listen carefully was our approach to sometimes present in a funny way serious things. The effect of exaggerating certain serious things and making people laugh is often stronger and the message more easily accepted than after a somber and gloomy speech in front of a young audience.

The best and the worst moments of the project

The main successes and failures

Several times we felt we were almost incapable of handling the situation because we were entering new fields. Office work and administration of Stop the Violence gave us a hard time - economic issues, the legal rules around our initiatives, mailing to 7000 people every month, arranging concerts, etc.

Everything is still completely new for us and we try to get as much help as possible but sometimes we feel like before a nervous breakdown. Though it usually only lasts a while we feel a collective mental strain particularly out of lack of support. But then we look back and realise that no matter how hard it was and how long it took as long as the result is worth the effort, and the people it was made for are satisfied, we are satisfied too.

We felt happy after a session when we could feel and see that we made a difference by listening or talking to the youth who were at the session. Sometimes girls would come up to me after a session and compliment my work. They would say that it has been great because it is so unusual to have people of almost the same age talking to students. I know one thing for sure from my time in the public school - I have never experienced young-to-young dialogue. Instead we had police, dentists, etc. to tell us what not to do. There was only one time when someone with AIDS came to speak to us and we learned something that the person had lived through, their true personal story.

We also remember with joy the moments when we were given either an award or another sign of appreciation of our work.



Training for the peer-teams and/or their coaches?

When the project got more acknowledgement from outside we decided to let schools who had pupils interested in helping other young people give an extra hand. After a while we discovered that it was not easy to integrate newcomers every week or month. We had the peers accompany us at our sessions and meetings so they could get an idea about our work. Most of them learned a couple of things, others got a little taste of it. At the end we decided to have one responsible person for every five peers at the office which helped us to relieve the stress.

The results and the impact of the project

The project is still going on so I can only describe the results we have so far. A folder entitled "Life is too short for violence" was distributed to 40 000 pupils all over Denmark. The folder was produced with the financial assistance of the Ministry of Social Affairs.

Stop The Violence has more than 7000 members, most of them young people between 12 and 18. We have produced a 12" inch record of talented young musicians who had never had the chance to be recorded. The youngest of them was 13 and the oldest 25. The record was released with the help of the Ministry of Culture.

"Stop The Violence" has held five concerts with musicians from France, U.S., Denmark. All of them have been successful.

We invited the famous photographer Jacob Holdt to show his pictures from America - a dream land for many young people. The pictures revealed the poverty, racism, drugs and violence in American cities.

We have been out to 250 schools and clubs to talk about racism, violence, hope and all sorts of other subjects. We have participated in three different books about the young and the problems of the teenagers.

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Anti-semitism means to hate all Jews without any particular reason. In my opinion this skepticism demonstrates an uncivilised person and we should do something to get rid of this kind of thinking.

Sotiroulla Aristodemou,
18 years, Cyprus



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5.3. 'Building Bridges' in Sheffield/UK ***A peer group education programme of a non-governmental organisation***

The National Coalition Building Institute (NCBI) England, is a registered charity and affiliated to NCBI International.

Target group and place of the project

Young people between the ages of 15 and 26 years who were drawn from youth clubs in Sheffield area took part in the programme. They come from a diverse range of background like Jewish, Christian and Muslim; Afro-Caribbean, Asian, Pakistani, white English and black English; disabled and able-bodied; lesbian, bisexual and heterosexual; employed, unemployed and students. They were at that time all voluntary or part-time paid youth workers, or young people using youth work provision.

The young people who take up trainer's role could take advantage of youth work provision. It took place in Sheffield, at a residential centre.

NCBI gained access to the young people through the youth service and youth organisations.

The start

The group were already meeting as part of a Youth Involvement Group and they identified prejudice reduction and diversity work as something they wanted to take on. NCBI were contacted by the youth worker involved because of our good reputation in this field of work.

Main content of the project

The main content of the project was to welcome diversity; for participants to reach for pride in their own identities; understand diversity issues; make effective interventions to prejudice and discrimination; and to train other young people in prejudice reduction methods.

Outline of the methodology and description of one particular session

We wanted to bring ideas to every city, town, campus and organisation. Our staff and Associates helped in launching Local Associations in different communities. We led either introductory one-day Prejudice Reduction workshops or 3-day train-the-trainer workshops teaching the people (a minimum 15 including leaders from community groups, schools,

religious groups, local governments, police, private and public sectors) to lead the NCBI Prejudice Reduction workshop and Conflict Resolution models.

We provided further assistance and training to local groups and National Associates (local community leaders designed for connection with NCBI).

NCBI methodology is different from that employed by many others in this field of work. It is upbeat, fun and practical. It offers specific and concrete skills which are immediate, practical and adaptable. Guilt and blame are counter-productive and immobilising and as such form no part of the content. Participants are encouraged to reflect on current practice, to increase their own personal effectiveness and to plan future action and strategies. At a recent workshop for a group of young women hearing each others stories of racial, religious and ethnic prejudices had them moved and making connections with the way they have themselves been hurt, and emerging with new understandings and a more sophisticated of how all their experiences are connected.

The best and the worst moments of the project

The main successes and failures

The main success has been twofold. Firstly, each participant has given feedback that their understanding of diversity issues, prejudice and discrimination have been radically altered, their behaviour and ability to handle situations has dramatically changed. Secondly, many of the participants have gone out and used what they have learned with other young people. The main failure has been that we have not had the financial resource for the key trainer to remain involved to offer an on going support, supervision and fresh training input required for the group to continue.

Training for peer-teams and/or their coaches?

The project itself was specifically about providing training for peer-teams.

Financial and material resources

Financial resource came from the YIP programme, NCBI England, and Sheffield Area Youth Association. Input and training for the key trainer came from NCBI International.

Results and the impact of the project

The project made a good impact on the young people who were directly involved in the project itself, and with the young people the peer-teams have gone on to work with.

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*For further information contact:
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Intolerance is a feeling that most people have because they can't stand their fellow human beings for lots of reasons. As a result they discriminate others and have negative attitudes towards their fellow human beings.

Marina Pitta, 16 years, Cyprus



5.4. The guardian angels **Peer group action in big cities**

The initiators of the project were young men and women in England who contacted the Guardian Angels organisation in New York City, where the movement was founded in 1979. People involved as founder members were in England: Dave Edmonds, Tom Hibberd and Colin Hatcher; and from New York: Collins Pompey, Sebastian Metz, Robert Powell and Guardian Angels Founder Curtis Sliwa. I (Colin Hatcher) was one of the people from London who contacted the NYC group, and I was also one of the first members to join in January 1989 when the project was set up in London.

The start

Throughout 1988 the streets of London like many large towns and cities were becoming more and more violent. Young people (men and women) were getting involved in street fighting. The major problem was racial hatred and intolerance. So there were racially segregated street gangs of Black youth, White youth and Asian Youth. Particularly dangerous were the large street gangs of white football hooligans and racists who were involved in some terrible acts of violence during that year. They cruised the underground on Saturday nights, looking for trouble, they usually found it.

Another development during 1988 was the emergence of “Steamer” gangs, where a group of 10 or more youngsters, armed with knives, boarded underground trains and, between stops, would rob (“mug”) all the passengers. Because the robberies needed to be carried out very quickly any resistance from victims was met with extreme violence. The targets for these gangs were often young men and women of the same age group. These were teenage gangs robbing and attacking teenage victims.

Violence against women was not a new thing in 1988 but was certainly increasing, especially on public transport systems, most notably on the Tube, where the lack of security made it a paradise for rapists, flashers and gropers. Increasingly women, especially teenage women were becoming reluctant to travel alone at night.

Growing unemployment, lack of opportunity and boredom drew many kids into violent lifestyles and criminal behaviour during this time. For many kids, crime was the only way to make money. The role models for a growing number of youth (symbolised by money, success, status) were the drug dealers and gangsters on the street corner. And many youngsters aspired to that lifestyle. A whole climate of intolerance, hatred and violence was growing. And also indifference. Passengers on trains sat and watched while gangs beat up victims, and no-one did anything.

But many young people were distressed by what was happening on the streets of London. They were unhappy with the situation, with the way kids were divided and with the way that fear and hatred and violence were making Saturday nights more and more dangerous.

London is like every other big city. On Saturday nights many go out on the town and have a good time. Then everyone tries to get home, not everyone makes it home. Some end up in jail and some end up in hospital. And the most dangerous age to be (the most at risk) are young men and women between the ages of 16 and 25. Myself and my friends had all suffered this violence - street fighting, racial violence, muggings or sexual attacks.

So we were looking for some way to do something. You know how it is. Most people watch TV or read the newspapers, and say "Oh how terrible the world is!" but they don't DO anything. We wanted to DO something to make our city safe and to unite the youth, especially against racial hatred and violence. Since the youth are the future.

So having known about the Guardian Angels for a long time and admiring the way they had brought the youth together in New York City we contacted them and asked if they would come to England and teach us how to be Guardian Angels too.

They said yes, the instructors came to England from New York and set up a training programme.

Target group

The project started in January 1989 based in Kings Cross, London - an area notorious for violence, drugs, prostitution and a place where young kids who ran away from home often ended up. The other place where we trained was Leytonstone in East London, very near to West Ham United football ground, an area with a large minority Asian population and a lot of racial violence.

The target group of the project was the youth of the city - all of them! We aimed to bring together young men and women of all races, all religions, all cultures and subcultures (i.e. skinheads **and** B-boys or Hip Hoppers), all abilities and all political opinions (racists of other people with hatred and intolerance were not welcomed) many people came down and changed their views through contact with our group.

We reached the youth of the city in a very direct way. The Guardian Angels basically walk the streets and travel the trains and we help people get home safely. When we run our "safety patrols" as we call them, we wear an identifying uniform, which consists of a red beret and a white T-shirt with the symbol of our organisation printed on it in red (we call it our "colours"). Apart from the red beret and the T-shirt, everybody can dress however they want, and express themselves through the way they look. This meant that wherever we walked in London, young men and women saw us and wanted to talk with us. When we walk the

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streets we make it our business to talk to everyone we meet. And we also carry information leaflets about our group, which invite everyone to join us and participate.

In addition to talking with youth on the streets, in the most dangerous and violent areas, we also received media coverage from TV, radio and newspapers. Since our initiative was the first time anyone had tried this in England. Some people said *“This won’t work in England - it’s an American thing”* but the New York City Angels reassured us - *“This is a universal idea addressing a universal problem”* they pointed out to us. After all, they observed: when crack cocaine and its associated American style gang violence came to England, no-one said *“This won’t work here because this is England.”*

Main content of the project

The purpose of the Guardian Angels in every city where we work is twofold. Firstly it is our aim to prevent violent street crime by being a visual and if necessary physical deterrent. This means that when we are out on the streets, if we see violence, we will go in between the people fighting and we will try to stop the violence. We put our own bodies between the criminals and the victims. The group is anti-violence and carries no weapons. But we will get physical if we have to. The streets are tough and so are we. But we follow the laws of self-defence in whatever country we work.

We are activists, protecting the United Nations Declaration on Human Rights 1977, especially article 3 which states that: *“All people have the right to life, liberty and security of person”*.

Our second, and equally important aim is to provide real life walking talking role models for young people. By showing them members of their own peer group who come from the same backgrounds and have the same problems, but who are solving them in a constructive and non violent way. The aim is to attract young people away from violence into positive activities. And we make this activity exciting!

‘In this world a few good guys stay good and a few bad guys stay bad’. But the vast majority are caught in the middle, and make choices, especially during teenage years. Many young people could go either way depending on what is available. The Guardian Angels was established for these kind of people - it was set up BY these kind of people. Many of our members are ex gang members and trouble-makers, who have found a positive expression for their energy.

Curtis Sliwa the founder of the group in New York City found a way to create a group with all the attractions of a gang - “colours”, a look, a language, an attitude - but without the negative.

New members of the group train for three months before graduation. During this time they are given the opportunity to learn some really effective urban survival skills everything is free.

In addition new members walk out on the streets straight away and start learning how to



communicate, to protect and to help other people. The sense of empowerment is great. We believe that young people join gangs for love and respect, friendship and status, and especially in order to feel powerful. We have been successful in the Guardian Angels in providing that powerful feeling to young men and women who have previously only experienced it in criminal activities.

Guardian Angels hang out on the streets and squares, and we look cool - and we are seen by youth as positive role models. Young men and women want to be like us. And we look just like them, so people see us and think "I could be like that!", because it's not just males, or just Black guys, or just big strong guys. Young people are attracted by the way we look, by our sense of purpose, and because they can see that we are having a good time. The sense of danger and risk which accompanies the group is also attractive to youth. We are like real life comic book superheroes and heroines. The martial arts features strongly in our training programme and in our philosophy.

Description of a training session:

I will here briefly describe a typical training session, and a typical safety patrol on a Saturday night:

Training

A group of 20 or so young people have met in an upstairs room of a youth centre in Kings Cross, London. The group is multiracial. The chief instructor today is, surprisingly, a young Indian woman, who goes by the street name "Judge". The other instructors are a stocky Black guy who calls himself "Mr X" and a white guy called "Gabriel". The training group consists of a mixture of experienced Guardian Angels and relatively new trainees. New and inexperienced people are straightaway partnered up with the more experienced ones. Most of the trainees are wearing Guardian Angel T-shirts and red berets. The experienced graduates wear a shirt that reads "Guardian Angels Safety Patrol". Trainees who have been on patrol but have not yet graduated, wear a T-shirt that reads "I Support the Guardian Angels".

Judge introduces herself and welcomes the 2 new people. And this is a feature of the whole training - despite the intensity and physical violence of a lot of the training, the Angels certainly look after each other very well. The class begins with a close quarter combat drill called "Sticky Elbows Defensive Wall Drill". This long title describes a simple drill which gets everyone warm and develops close range sensitivity. It also teaches everyone to protect their head from attack.

Next in the class come wrestling and grappling work. Partners fight on the ground, trying to hold each other down. After the combat section comes role-playing. Some of the experienced angels take off their berets and T-shirts, and become the bad guys, or "mutants"

all different
all equal

I don't think that racism is good for the people and for the world. I think no one is better or worse than others. There is no sense in classifying people by any kind of rule.

Annamaria Bikkes,
21 years, Hungary



all different
all equal

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as the angels call them. A “patrol” is picked of 6 angels who leave the room. Then as they enter the room as if on patrol, they are presented with a problem to solve - it could be two people fighting, it could be an encounter with a gang, or it could be a man harassing a woman. Whatever it is the patrol tries to deal with it - calming the situation down, and using minimum force, and providing first aid if necessary.

“Angels train in first aid” says Judge. “Now to a lot of people first aid is not cool - macho guys think it’s something that weak people do, or sexist guys say it’s for girls. In the Angels first aid is cool, just like the medics in a war in the army are cool – they are heroes. And so are we. And then later when you use it on the street and it works, and everyone is thanking you - especially if you save a life, which we have done many times - the feeling is incredible. You’re high for days.”

Sometimes the patrol screws up the role-play - and things go wrong. *“But that’s the whole point of training” Judge points out. “You learn by mistakes, and this is a safe environment in which to learn”.*

“You need to draw the line earlier” Judge points out, and she leads the class into a whole series of training drills called appropriately *“Drawing the Line, or DTL”*, which teach Angels when to stop negotiating and when to start fighting, and what to do in between. *“It’s the mutants’ choice”* Judge observes. *“We don’t want to fight, but if we are pushed too far, than the Angel will take the mutant down”.*

All around us “mutants” are “Crossing the Line” and are being wrestled down to the ground by “Angels”. The techniques are streetstyle - hair pulling for example is permitted, and everyone has to watch out for the mutants’ teeth. *“On the street there are no rules”* comments Mr X. *“In a street fight people will bite each other, gouge, kick, scratch - do anything to win. Angels are prepared for anything. The streets are rough and so are we - but we have hearts of gold. We use minimum force to prevent an attack continuing. But don’t be fooled - we are peacemakers - not pacifists.*

You can see why the training is so popular. Even small members can take the bad guys down and out. Judge says one of the main purposes of the training is to create and develop what the Angels call *“Warrior Spirit”*.

Training finishes with knuckle push-up - more warrior spirit training, according to Judge, and then the group “raps”. Everyone introduces themselves, comments on the training and asks any questions they might have.

“Every angel has an angel name - a street name” Judge answers. *“It’s part of our tradition that every member chooses a “tag”. Your street name is like an alter ego. You put it on with your colours. In your day to day life you may not have so much courage, but when you put on your colours to patrol, you become an Angel, and the name comes with that. Our members get inspiration from it. It’s all part of our culture”.*

Patrolling

I meet the patrol at their HQ in a dark side street of Kings Cross. It's 1930 hrs. HQ is a basement office, decorated with Angel photos and articles. The patrol group is multiracial and there are men and women present. The average age is about 18 years old. "We dress for combat, comfort and style, in that order" explains Michael "Mr X" Quinn, one of the patrol leaders for tonight. I ask about the uniform - "The uniform is just the red beret and the T-shirt - we call that the colours" Mr X answers. Apart from that people can dress however they want. We encourage diversity in our group - it develops tolerance."

There are 18 Guardian Angels present. Mr X calls us all to order and the room becomes silent and expectant. Mr X calls the patrols aloud, indicating which angel is assigned to which patrol. Each patrol has a name. Tonight London will see "Justice Machine" (led by Dominie "Judge" Kitaj).

Before we leave everyone is searched out of the HQ. I ask Mr X why. "We are checking each other to make sure that no-one is carrying weapons or drugs" he explains. "Out on the situations Guardian Angels rely on our own bodies and each other for protection."

The patrols split up. "Justice Machine" heads for the subway, heading for a dangerous area in east London called Stratford, where there was a recent rape on the station platform. The station manager there is a great supporter of the angels. "Rapture" walks into the downtown area of London's West End, where there are a lot of clubs and a lot of people. They will be patrolling an area where a local gang sell crack and other drugs to the tourists.

'Department of Correction' heads up to the area around Kings Cross station. 2 months ago a 15 year old white boy was stabbed and killed by a gang of 6 Asian boys - some of the killers were 13 years old. "The racial hatred and violence has been going on for a long time" explains Judge. "The murder happened right on our doorstep. This is our neighbourhood and we want to do something about it."

The angels walk down Drummond Street, a street full of Asian shops and restaurants. Half way down the streets there is a big posse of Asian boys, just hanging out, bored, with nothing to do. Most of the youth clubs in this area are closed because there is no money available to pay staff to run them. The Asian youth are also nervous. Everyone is still waiting for the inevitable revenge attacks by the local White street gangs. Here in Drummond Street Asians are relatively safe.

The Angels stop to chat, shake hands and distribute information leaflets. They are respected by the Asian boys, who have a lot to say about the situation. The Angels move away from the Asian area and cross into the White gang's turf. The Asian posse said that they were too scared to walk these streets, but the Angels seem to be able to walk anywhere. I ask Judge why.

"Firstly" she answers, "we are multiracial. That means that in an area of racial tension, we are

all different
all equal



all different all equal

Sexual discrimination is something I have experienced through someone else's eyes. I have friends of mine getting fired because their sexual orientation was different from other people's.

Jerzy Roziewicz,
20 years, Poland

a calming influence simply by our physical presence. The other reason is that street gangs know that we are neutral in any conflict. We try not to take sides. We are against violence, but we are not "against" particular people. If we see an Asian gang beating up a white boy we'll do the same thing as if we see a white gang beating up an Asian boy. We'll stop the violence. And they all know it. Another reason that we are respected is that everyone knows that we carry no weapons. And the last reason youth look up to us is that we're not getting paid for this - we're volunteers. People respect that commitment."

Outside a pub the patrol meets a posse of white boys. They, like the Asian boys, are hanging out and are bored. They are also just waiting for something to happen. Again the angels shake hands and "rap" (as they call it).

"You know" says Judge to 2 of the boys, "You're saying exactly the same things to me as some Asian guys over in Drummond Street. They think that you started it, and you think that they started it. They hate the cops and think the cops side with you, and you hate the cops and think the cops side with the Asians. You're sitting out here bored, and they're sitting out over there just as bored. Why don't you guys get together and have a party?" A police van rolls by. The police don't walk the streets here. They patrol in riot vehicles. They aren't very popular among the youth. "See those guys over there" says Falcon, pointing to some rough looking young guys. "We arrested them a few weeks ago. They were beating up and robbing a 65 year old man. There was a fight. We won. We arrested them and called the Police".

The night remains tense but calm. "That's a good night for us" says Falcon. "A good night for the Guardian Angels is when nothing happens." We return to base, and meet up with the other patrols. Everybody is excited as they take off their colours and wind down. As we leave for home the sun is rising. I ask Judge one last question. Why do they do it, since it is all volunteer work, and none of them are paid?

"Well, we all believe that everybody has the right to go out and have a good time on a Saturday night without being threatened, attacked or mugged, and believe that every person has a responsibility to protect that right, not just to say it, but to do something to make it happen. We want to make our city a safer place to live in. Many of us have been attacked on the streets, and when it happened there was no-one there who would help us. We don't want what happened to us to happen to anyone else."

The best and worst moments of the project **The main successes and failures**

The main success of our group has been to not only set up in London, but to expand across Europe. To date we have 2 groups in England (London and Manchester), 3 groups in Sweden (Stockholm, Malmo and Gothenburg), and 2 groups in Germany (Berlin and Hamburg). In



Berlin especially the group has played an important role in countering the neo Nazi movement among young white guys, bringing together White Germans, Turkish youth, Africans, German Jews and other minorities into one group. We have also visited Amsterdam, Paris, Milan, Copenhagen, Liverpool and Moscow. In 1995 we will hopefully be setting up groups in Milan, Copenhagen and Moscow.

The main failure of the group is that we are still small when compared to the population of 16-25 year olds in our cities. We are always seeking new ways to grow. Also, expansion needs money, and we have constant difficulty in paying phone bills, buying new T-shirts etc.

I think the best moment in the history of our project has been the graduation day of 50 Guardian Angels in Berlin in June 1993. Because there are such problems in Berlin of racial hatred and violence we felt the group's work was so important there.

I can think of 2 worst moments:

Firstly I remember in 1991 trying to save a man's life, he had had a heart attack at a station, and I was doing CPR (resuscitation), he died.

The second worst moment came in Malmo, Sweden where we were patrolling during the European Football riots, I think it was in Summer 1992. Our patrols saw and were caught up in such terrible violence that night, although we saved a lot of people there was very little we could do to stop the violence. There were several hundred football hooligans on the loose with weapons, and the police had pulled out of the area. Many of our members there were patrolling for the first time. It was a nasty baptism of fire.

Training for the work

Training is not only given to new members we encourage all members to train to become leaders. Leadership and good life skills are important to the group.

The results and the impact of the project

We know we have changed the face of many of Europe's cities. We have offered youth a chance to do something positive. To date we have probably had several thousand young people training with us, working to stop the violence in the cities. The groups not only patrol the streets we have speaking engagements in schools and youth centres where we talk realistically about violence. We offer free self-defence courses for women, and offer 'street smart' courses for young kids (6 to 14 year olds). Finally we are involved in food distribution for homeless people.

We know we have made a difference.

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*For further information contact:
The Alliance of Guardian Angels
Website in English of the main organisations worldwide:
<http://www.guardianangels.org>*





5.5. RFSL; School information about homosexuality (Skolinformations) Peer group education by a non-governmental organisation in Sweden

The Swedish Federation for Gay/Lesbian Rights (Riksforbundet for Sexuellt Likaberattigande, RFSL) recruited young members to carry out the information part and a co-ordinator.

The start

RFSL felt there was a need for the already existing information about homosexuality, to be complemented since the literature was often of poor quality and teachers often lacked sufficient knowledge to give appropriate information about the topic.

Target group

The main target group were young students between the age of fourteen to eighteen. (There are however exceptions such as university students, school staff and other groups working with young people.)

Place of the project

At present, information is concentrated to the main cities in Sweden but RFSL strives to cover other areas as well, most sessions take place in schools. Sometimes students come to the RFSL premises. Occasionally sessions take place in youth centres or in the premises of youth clubs/organisations.

Access to the target group

Initially RFSL offered their services directly to schools and spread information through other institutions who also have contact with schools. At present schools contact RFSL for information, all “marketing” and bookings are made by the co-ordinator.

Outline of the methodology and description of one particular session

Information is often given during respective schools thematic working days or weeks when students learn about and discuss love, sex, relationships and contraceptives. Informants work in pairs; one male and one female. The duration of the sessions vary between 40 to 80 minutes per group. Ideally the groups are no larger than 30 people in each group. An introduction is



given for 10 to 20 minutes (depending on the amount of time available). At this point a very short introduction to RFSL is made and a brief presentation of the informants. Some terms and expressions are explained and a very brief description of the general situation for 'queers' is made (a few words about the legal situation, that many queers choose to conceal their sexual orientation, the situation for 'queers' from an international and historical perspective.

After the introduction part many schools prefer to split the group into two groups; one male and one female. If this is the case, the informants take one group each and switch groups after half of the remaining time in order to allow both groups to meet a male and a female informant. Regardless whether the group is split or not the floor is now opened for questions and general discussion. The students are allowed to ask general and personal questions. Rather than restricting the questions the informants will explain to the group that a question is too personal to answer. Generally, most questions are answered. According to clients wishes and needs, the information can be altered to focus more on youth issues, women's issues, men's issues, immigrant's issues, HIV/AIDS etc. Typical questions are: "What did your parents and friends say when you told them you are gay?", "How do you have sex?", "How do other people treat you when they find out you are gay?", "What if you want to have children?", "Are you not afraid of AIDS?"

The best and worst moments of the project

The best moments are when the informants have been able to "sow thought seeds" for the students to reflect upon and when 'queer' students have found encouragement in the information to "come out" and get in touch with other 'queer' youth. The worst moments are when faced with bigot teachers who insist on theoretical discussions which students cannot follow. (These teachers are often asked to leave the session.) Facing students with fascist and religious fanatical ideas is never pleasant either.

Training of informants

All informants are given training this takes place during three evening sessions and a full weekend and seeks to give the future informants knowledge about homosexuality, young people in general, 'queer' history and information methodology.

When this part of the training is completed, the informants accompany experienced informants to schools on at least three different occasions before they go out on their own. Follow-up meetings are held on a regular basis and often in connection with a guest speaker on a relevant topic.

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A friend of mine tried for years to get a job but the employers kept turning her down because somebody said that she was gay. They didn't even know it for sure. They destroyed a person's life in order to satisfy their own stupidity and ignorance. One day she decided that she couldn't take it any more and killed herself. She was 22 years old.

Themis, 16 years, Cyprus



all different
all equal

Results and impact

As the project aims at giving information it is very difficult to evaluate the results and impact. The RFSL however believes this is one way to demystify homosexuality and a contribution in the struggle against prejudice and intolerance.

For further information contact:

Website in Swedish: <http://www.rfsl.se/stockholm>

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te sem vagy más

