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Teens, Crime, and
TCC the Community

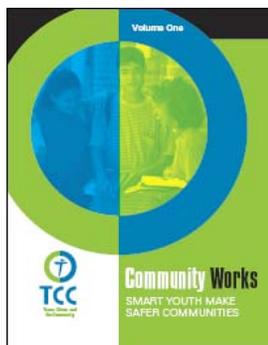
Community Works Program's Best Practices

This document describes how the *Community Works* program has been implemented in a variety of settings. The program descriptions highlight best practices used by the instructor to enhance their *Community Works* programs, incorporate community resource persons, and engage students in service.

Community Works Program and Curriculum

Community Works is a science-based program and primary vehicle for educating middle and high school students under the Teens, Crime, and the Community (TCC) Initiative. The comprehensive *Community Works* program consists of three elements: (1) the *Community Works: Smart Youth Make Safer Communities* curriculum; (2) input and advice from community resource people; and (3) service-learning projects.

Curriculum



Educators, school resource officers, juvenile justice administrators, and youth service providers use the *Community Works: Smart Youth Make Safer Communities* (CW) curriculum to educate young people about the costs and consequences of crime and ways to reduce the risk of becoming crime victims. The CW curriculum is a combination of crime prevention and law-related information, providing practical advice and competency-building activities designed to help students understand the civic problem of crime and take action to prevent it. The content and strategies of *Community Works* sessions encourage young people to analyze situations, exercise reason and critical thinking skills, effectively communicate ideas, and exhibit positive behaviors.

Community Works instructors begin the program by teaching the sessions in the first volume of the two-volume curriculum. The eleven sessions included in Volume One lay the foundation for the program. Here, young people begin to get the "big picture" of their communities. They learn about the different types of crime, the costs and consequences of crime, conflict management strategies, how crime affects communities, and what community prevention programs and services are available to them. The sessions in Volume One build upon one another; first introducing factual information, then giving young people the opportunity to practice critical thinking, communication, and problem-solving skills. The sessions in Volume Two focus on serious youth-related topical issues like bullying, dating violence, gangs, substance abuse, underage drinking, and police-youth relations.

Adult instructors teach *Community Works* in a variety of settings: in schools during regular class time, in school-sponsored afterschool programs, in community-based programs that support education tracks, and in juvenile justice settings as part of diversion programs. *Community Works* programs may span one school semester or one school year, depending on how frequently the classes are held.

Community Resource People

Community adult volunteers enhance the learning experience by providing subject matter expertise to the program while engaging students in hands-on classroom activities with the *Community Works* instructor. Examples of community resource persons used in *CW* sessions include police officers, substance abuse counselors, business owners, and victims' rights advocates. The community resource person's involvement benefits students in a number of ways. They introduce real-life experiences, provide career information, and help break down barriers between young people and the community.

Service-learning Projects

At the end of their *Community Works* course, students plan and complete a service-learning project. Projects range from short-term projects where students created posters and table tent-cards with safety tips posted throughout their school to longer-term projects in which students organized a 911 cell phone drive, collecting old cell phones and distributing them to victims of domestic violence for use in emergency situations.

Recipe for Success

The *Community Works* program was designed primarily for sixth to ninth grade students. The program works best in school settings (both traditional and alternative), in afterschool settings, and in community-based organizations where the instructor meets with the same group of students over a period of time.

Requirements for Successful Implementation

- Conduct sessions with the same group of students for at least 15 total hours (using the sessions listed below).
- Invite community members with expertise on a topic to share factual information and personal experiences with students.
- Let students know at the beginning of your class that they will choose, plan, and complete a service project.

Sessions for Successful Implementation

Community Works is a skill-building program and the sessions in Volume One should be taught in consecutive order. These 11 sessions lay the foundation for the program. These sessions are designed to increase crime prevention awareness and empathy, and to improve decision-making, critical thinking, problem-solving, leadership, and citizenship skills in students.

Session 1: Creating a Community Vision

Session 2: What Is Crime?

Session 3: Victims of Crime

Session 4: Safe and Secure Communities

Session 5: Where Are We Safe and Unsafe?

Session 6: Our Community's Resources

Session 7: Your Conflict Choices

Session 8: Conflict, Communicating, and Working Together

Sessions 9–11: Planning, Designing, and Doing a Project

Two or more topical sessions (from Volume Two)

Community Works in an Alternative School Setting

“The *CW* curriculum is perfect for an alternative school setting. The students can really relate to topics and add dimension to classroom discussion on issues like violence and gangs. Many have personal experiences to share and it makes the youth feel good when they can contribute.” —*Kathy Vespia, Attleboro, MA*

Attleboro High School Network Program

Attleboro, MA

Goal: To address issues like violence and gangs, drugs and alcohol, and crime in the community

Implementation at a Glance

- Classes are held every day for 84 minutes over the course of one school semester.
- Community Works class is linked to health, social studies, or communications credit.
- Class size ranges from eight to 16 students.
- Community resource persons: Law students, judges, and parents
- Service-learning Action projects: Go the Distance Project and local playground renovation
- Additional resources used: *Who Moved My Cheese?*, *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective Teens*, *The Alchemist*, and *Teenagers Preparing for the Real World*

For the past five years, students at Attleboro High School have participated in the *Community Works* program. Martin Tighe, an adjustment counselor at the alternative school, was introduced to the program through the Rhode Island Children’s Crusade (the state technical assistance provider for the *CW* program). The service component was a big draw for Mr. Tighe as well as for other Attleboro High Network program staff. Dr. Kathy Vespia, the network program coordinator, believed that the service project component and the *Community Works* curriculum “created a wonderful dialogue in school...for these kids to look at life and the choices that sometimes trip them up.”

Many of the students at Attleboro have a history of significant academic, social, and emotional barriers that have affected their school achievement. Some of the students have been labeled as problem kids, bad kids, or troublemakers and have significant self-esteem issues. Despite the significant disconnect many of these teens have demonstrated toward their communities, they have learned respect—how to respect themselves and others—which has helped change their perspective about their roles as contributing citizens.

Dr. Vespia has been impressed with how *Community Works* has fit into their alternative school setting. “*Community Works* is a perfect fit for these students because it makes them assess their role in the larger community.” By trusting their teacher, Mr. Tighe, and with assistance from other teachers, administrators, parents, and each other, the Attleboro High School Network Program students are learning to take that first large leap into reconnecting with their communities and themselves.

Lessons Learned From Educators, Dr. Kathy Vespia and Martin Tighe

- The service-learning projects help the students see outside the school setting and into the community.
- Do not be afraid to let the youth take control of the project...trust them.
- Go beyond the curriculum—the service-learning project (whether large or small in size and scope) is vitally important to the educational process.
- Sometimes it is difficult to see the changes in the students immediately, but they may become more apparent two, three, or maybe even four years down the road—once the seed is planted.

Community Works in an Afterschool Setting

“In rural communities and small counties, the youth are like family and everyone wants them safe and cared for...and our afterschool program helps keep them safe during critical hours. This makes it easy for us to sell the program to the school administration.” —Linda Knight, Loudon, TN

Break the Cycle, Inc.

Gordonsville, TN

Goal: To address issues such as alcohol and drug use, cultural diversity, and community connectedness

Implementation at a Glance

- The afterschool program is offered in five schools throughout the county and is open to all sixth, seventh, and eighth grade students. Break the Cycle (BTC) instructors facilitate two-hour sessions (meal provided), one day each week (Monday through Thursday) during the fall and spring semesters.
- Class size ranges from 15–20 students
- Community resource persons include law enforcement officers, mayor, rescue squad, business owners, and parents.
- Service-learning projects include working with senior citizens at a local nursing home and creating a quilt with students’ signatures in memory of lives lost to drugs or alcohol.
- Additional resources used: WAIT program

Break the Cycle, Inc. is a not-for-profit community-based organization that provides a number of prevention programs for teens. Ann Porterfield, program coordinator for Break the Cycle, Inc., used community resource persons (CRPs) for nearly every session that she taught as a way to keep the youth involved and interested during their two-hour, afterschool *Community Works* program. In preparation for the CRP, Porterfield provided the guest with a copy of the session from the curriculum and encouraged these volunteers to be interactive with their session and bring hands-on tools if applicable.

While teaching *Community Works’ Session 19: Underage Drinking: Recognize and Prevent*, Miss Ann invited two CRPs to share important information and personal experiences with program participants. Sergeant William Prater, a Tennessee state trooper, talked about what can happen when people drive under the influence. Sgt. Prater started by asking students a few questions to gauge what the students already knew about the dangers of driving under the influence. He then introduced “fatal vision” goggles which allowed students to simulate how an individual’s vision can be impaired when drinking alcohol. Students volunteered to try to walk a straight line while wearing the goggles and then the experience was debriefed. The second CRP, Mrs. Becky Howell, was the older sister of a local teen who died in an alcohol-related automobile accident. The students listened intently to Mrs. Howell as she shared a video and talked about her brother who, at 16 years old, purchased alcohol after a basketball game and then drove himself and his 15-year-old girlfriend while intoxicated. They both died tragically later that evening in a single-vehicle automobile accident. Mrs. Howell shared with the group how one bad decision affected so many people. Her final message to the group was, “You will be put in that decision (to drink alcohol) and some of you already may have been...please make the right decision.”

The Break the Cycle (BTC) staff also involved family members in the programming as much as possible. BTC staff provided parents with specific information on the topics addressed throughout the program and the different types of student activities and projects of the *Community Works* program. They hosted one family night per month and provided dinner and child care. During the family night events, BTC staff shared valuable information with parents that included communication strategies and how they can assist their child in effectively managing conflict. The BTC *Community Works* program concluded with a graduation ceremony during which program participants received certificates and a special snack.

Lessons Learned From Break the Cycle, Inc., Staff

- Allowing high school youth to help teach part of the lesson breaks up the two-hour session, and gives the CW participants a chance to learn from their peers. At times, the middle school aged youth are more apt to listen and respond to someone closer to their own age than an adult.
- It is important to bring the family of the student into the program and share with them what their children are learning.
- Using a variety of community resource persons keeps the participants excited and involved.
- Providing food is important; it gives the youth a break and it may be the final meal of the day for some youths.



Involvement Is Key

“The lesson plans are very youth-friendly and interactive; I love them. Students get excited when they see me come into the room. The students know it is not going to be a boring lecture and they actually retain what they learn during the lesson.” —*Melissa Larson, Tucson, AZ*

Challenger Middle School

Tucson, AZ

Goal: To address issues like truancy, vandalism, gangs, assaults/fights, bullying, and drugs

Implementation at a Glance

- *Community Works* is taught to seventh grade students for 55 minutes one day each week during both school semesters.
- Class size ranges from 30–35 students.
- Community resource persons included a sexual assault specialist, a MADD representative, a county attorney, and a judge.
- Service-learning project involved restoring school pride by hosting a clean-up day at school.
- Additional resources used: *We the People*

When you enter Challenger Middle School and ask a student for Ms. Larson, the student might respond, “You mean our track coach?” or “Are you talking about our yearbook director?,” or “Ms. Larson, the person in charge of Teen Court and who teaches *Community Works*?” Ms. Larson has earned respect from her students through her time in the classroom teaching *Community Works*, as well through her other leadership positions at the school. Ms. Larson is an educator, a mentor, and a law enforcement officer.

Ms. Larson was introduced to *Community Works* through the Arizona Foundation for Legal Services and Education. The Foundation provides training and instruction for educators and law enforcement personnel to teach law-related programs throughout schools in Arizona. Ms. Larson introduced the program to the school principal and teachers by sharing her goals, which were to reduce discipline problems, to develop a safer school environment, and to help the students take more ownership in their school and community. She then demonstrated how the lesson plans aligned with state standards in health, English, and government/civics. After a test period that provided teachers an opportunity to observe how much of an impact the lessons were having on their students, she encountered few challenges, increasing the number of students who participated in *Community Works* classes.

Ms. Larson attributed many of the positive changes at Challenger to student involvement in *Community Works*. Just one year ago, Challenger Middle School was known for having the highest number of referrals in the district. This year, referrals have been reduced from 270 referrals to 30, and fights were reduced from 30 fights to three incidents. Ms. Larson shared a variety of reasons for the change, which included holding the students more responsible for their behavior, students learning responsibility and respect through *Community Works*, and getting parents more involved in school activities.

Deserae, one of Ms. Larson’s students, described her *Community Works* experience at Challenger Middle School as “an enriching, fun program...not boring; [I] learned a lot, it opened my eyes.” Two of her favorite *Community Works* sessions were diversity awareness and gang prevention. Deserae said that through the group work and role-playing activities, she gained a new perspective on different races and learned to appreciate differences in others.

Lessons Learned From Melissa Larson, Juvenile Probation Officer

- Be an enthusiastic and energetic instructor.
- Make sure teachers and administrators see the curriculum and know what you are doing—make those strong connections in the planning stages.
- Invite many community resource people to your sessions and take field trips.

Community Works As an Elective Course

“*Community Works* fits in to the middle school students’ lives developmentally. It makes them hold up the mirror to themselves...evaluate themselves...look beyond their noses. They begin to think deeper. And that is what naturally is occurring with this age group, so it fits in with the other changes going on.”
—Deb Weimelt, Farmington, MN

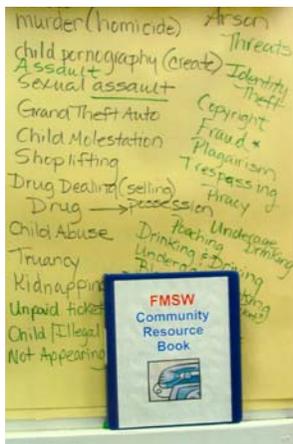
Farmington Middle School West

Farmington, MN

Goal: To address issues such as diversity awareness, vandalism, and bullying

Implementation at a Glance

- *Community Works* is offered as a credited course. Students may select *Community Works* as a health elective. The class is taught once per day for 45 minutes each semester. Students receive grades based on quiz scores, class participation, role-play participation, essays, and service project participation and completion.
- Class size is 20 students.
- Community resource persons include the Chief of Police, a victim service provider, and a school resource officer.
- Service-learning projects include CRP resource book, school safety audit, Acceptance Day (diversity awareness), and graffiti removal and repainting.
- Additional resources used included students electing a class leader who co-facilitated certain lessons with the teacher. The elected class leader spent their study hall period preparing *Community Works* lessons and activities with the instructor.



When you get a standing ovation, it makes you feel good. When it comes from students you have not seen since the last academic school year, it feels even better. Deb Weimelt, a health teacher at Farmington Middle School West, teaches two 18-week semester courses (45 minutes a day, five days per week) of *Community Works*. The process of getting *Community Works* accepted as an accredited course took some time. Ms. Weimelt developed a proposal that included information on how the curriculum was embedded in national education standards and aligned with district outcomes; she listed the benefits to the students, and provided background information on her previous success teaching *Community Works* at an alternative school. After review from the curriculum committee of the local school board, Ms. Weimelt’s course was approved, replacing one of the health classes. The whole process took about two years.

Ms. Weimelt said that her enthusiasm stemmed from the quality of the sessions: “each session is a building block for the next one until you reach the service-learning project; [the curriculum] builds on each session and gets the students thinking and doesn’t just expect them to be able to do a service-learning project without any previous knowledge.” Ms. Weimelt’s students’ enthusiasm nearly matched her own as they described what it was like to participate in the class. The first semester *Community Works* class talked about lessons learned about crime prevention and teen victimization and the impact the video, *Homeless to Harvard*, had on them as they watched how tragic it is to be a victim and grow up with family members addicted to drugs.

The same class's service-learning project addressed bullying and diversity awareness in the school. The class planned an A Day—Acceptance Day. They created posters to spark interest in the event; one memorable poster read, "People aren't soups. Don't label them" and included several Campbell soup can illustrations. The *Community Works* students held three assemblies for 425 eighth grade students, splitting them into groups of 150. They used ice-breakers and games to get the students out of their cliques, different types of music to change activities, and self-written role-playing activities to demonstrate how exclusion and other discriminatory actions affected individuals and the entire school campus. The *Community Works* class collected an evaluation of the event and found many positive written comments by their peers, including

- "It made you open your eyes to other people...see what is going on and not just hang out with your own friends."
- "We thought we were bigger, cooler because we were in a new school and we thought we could push people around. We found out we were wrong."
- "After A Day, I went to different people and apologized."
- "The skits of the different situations of disrespectful behavior were so real, it made me realize it really hurts other people. I may not have meant to but it does hurt people's feelings."



Ms. Weimelt's second semester *CW* class used their knowledge of preventing property crime and creating safe spaces to paint out graffiti near their school. The area they chose to beautify was along an underpass walkway that led from their middle school to the high school. The path was often used by students for sports, theater, and other activities. Students brainstormed a design and determined the amount of paint they would need for the project, then collected donations to pay for the supplies. The finished mural included blocks painted with different colors (symbolizing diversity), the students' handprints (symbolizing unity) and the quote, "There is only one thing finer than to have a friend you can trust...but to have a friend who can trust you."

Community Works students involved in the project expressed a strong sense of achievement. One 15-year-old student remarked, "Together we accomplished something great. We didn't exactly put a stop to vandalism but we let the people in our community know that we actually care. Before, I would look at the [graffiti] and say, 'Why do people do that?' as I would pass by. But now I know that I can actually do something about it." Another student was impressed by his own ability to affect change on his community, stating, "People our age don't really understand that they can have an impact on the community."

Lessons Learned From the Teacher, Deb Weimelt

- As a teacher, I am not a sage on a stage but a guide on the side.
- Go a little further with the journals—don't just answer questions but develop the questions into paragraphs and then into class discussions.
- Encourage youth to take leadership of the class and to look for answers to their own questions.
- Tell your stories to the local press; they love to print stories of youth taking action to better their communities.

More Lessons Learned From Best Practice *Community Works* Programs

Lessons Learned From Salvation Army Boys & Girls Clubs, Louisville, KY

- Bring people in from the community.
- Be open, let the conversations evolve.
- Let kids be in control; don't worry about being late or "filling time." Let the kids talk and go at their own pace.

Lessons Learned From Lucerne Public School District, Lucerne, CA

- The activities can be adapted to small groups of youth.
- It is so important to give youth in rural areas a chance to participate in something productive and safe after school.
- The lesson plans are easy, you can just pick up the book and go.



Through its flexible design, the *Community Works* program can provide instructors with structured lesson plans in practically any setting, opportunities to engage students in meaningful contributions to the community through service-learning projects, and measurable outcomes for participants. Contact the National Crime Prevention Council program staff for additional information on starting a *Community Works* program in your community today.



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