All too often, the discussion of juvenile violence is framed in a way that suggests it is a problem that affects only certain people. It’s important to remember that violence is not just a matter of personal choice; it is also a result of systemic issues such as poverty, lack of education, and exposure to violence in the community. An honest dialogue about strategies to prevent youth violence must take into account these underlying factors.

Mentor and Youth from Teens on Target, Oakland and Neighborhood House, Richmond

resources for YOUTH
The California Wellness Foundation is an independent private foundation created to improve the health and well-being of the people of California. It was funded in February 1992 by a substantial endowment from Health Net, California's second largest health maintenance organization. Recognizing that violence has become a public health problem of severe magnitude and that youth are disproportionately affected, the Foundation has made youth violence prevention the focus of its first initiative. More than $35 million has been allocated to the Violence Prevention Initiative (VPI) over an initial five-year period and dedicated to developing and evaluating a comprehensive approach to reducing youth violence.

One objective of the Foundation's VPI is to alter the view of many Californians that violence is inevitable. It isn't. By placing the issue on the public health agenda, The California Wellness Foundation hopes to stimulate understanding and support for policies and programs that will prevent youth violence. As part of the VPI, The California Wellness Foundation provided a grant to Martin & Glantz to create a public education campaign designed to increase resources that help to reduce the level of violence and crime among the state's young people.

The campaign begins with the assumption that youth violence is a problem that affects all of us. While ensuring public safety is a priority, we believe much more can be done to prevent youth violence and crime. Discussion of solutions is often difficult because this issue has become both polarized and politicized. One thing we can all agree on is the need for an honest dialogue. The campaign will provide California policy makers and community leaders with facts, perspectives, voices and strategies to prevent youth violence and crime so that together we can become resources for our youth.
All too often, the discussion of juvenile violence and crime begins with labels. It’s an issue that divides us into camps before a sincere discussion can even begin. Dare to suggest that we must teach our young people sound moral values—to teach them the difference between right and wrong—and you’re branded a “heartless conservative”. Talk about the fundamentals of investing in prevention, even if it is a fraction of what we spend on corrections, and you risk being labeled a “bleeding heart”.

It’s Time for an Honest Dialogue
Let's Agree on the Basics
California's young people are California's "..."

An investment in California's young people is an investment in our common future. Young people need support before they get into trouble and before they become involved in violence. Incarceration only provides public safety after someone has been hurt. An investment in prevention means fewer victims in our communities and more productive young people contributing to society.

Public safety is paramount. The most violent young people need to be removed from society. In fact, they are. However, public safety must also mean preventing violence and crime before it happens.

Today's juvenile crime responses are inadequate. Every year California spends over $2.2 billion on its juvenile justice system. Despite this heavy investment, almost no one is satisfied with the results. Our elected officials know that the current course is ineffective. The League of California Cities' Investing in Our Youth Task Force concluded in their 1995 report, The Cost of Denial, that "it takes courage to admit that what we've been doing for the last 20 years isn't working. It's time for a change."

Attorney General Dan Lungren sponsored a 1995 conference, Violence Prevention: A Vision of Hope, which brought together representatives from law enforcement, health care, community-based programs and many others with a stake in preventing youth violence. Their collective recommendation was that change needs to be initiated, and

I truly believe that no matter where you live in California, if you're between the ages of 11 and 21, you're at risk. No matter what socioeconomic group or racial grouping we're talking about, the top three leading causes of death among teens—homicide, motor vehicle accidents, and suicides—is the same except the order. The fact is, if you're in the age group we call adolescence, you're at risk.

Dr. Barbara Staggers, Director of Adolescent Medicine at Children's Hospital, Oakland
that schools, communities and juvenile justice agencies need to create a "continuum of swift, meaningful interventions to respond to misconduct by juveniles at all levels of severity."

It's not just elected officials and police chiefs who believe something different needs to be done to prevent youth violence and crime. The public is also deeply concerned about these issues.

**The Public Wants Change.** In a statewide survey conducted in May 1996 of 1,000 registered voters, 77 percent said they believed that prevention programs—such as mentoring or conflict resolution—are effective responses to juvenile violence, while just 17 percent believed that building more juvenile detention facilities is the answer. More than half of the respondents believed that it is the government's duty to devote more money to youth violence prevention than is allocated today.

**Attitudes on Responses to Juvenile Crime and Violence**

- 77% of voters believe prevention programs are effective.
- 6% believe more detention facilities are a solution.
- 17% are undecided.

**There are strategies that offer hope.** The good news is that there are policies and programs that have made a difference. Many of these strategies have worked in other states and in communities across California. For example, school districts around the state have implemented conflict resolution programs that train teenagers to mediate on-campus disputes. These conflict resolution programs win praise in our inner city schools and need to spread to suburban and rural districts where other kids would also benefit. Since studies show that the greatest proportion of violent crime by youth occurs between the hours of 2 and 6 PM, it's clear that quality after-school programs found in many affluent school districts need to be replicated in our cities.

"Many communities have looked to the schools as a promising place to set up programs addressing problems facing youth. Various called "Beacon Centers," "New Beginnings," "YouthNet Centers" and "Second Shift Schools," these programs are undertaking the formidable job of reconnecting parents and adult members of the community with children, and schools with communities."

Pacific Center for Violence Prevention
Policy Brief: Preventing Youth Violence: Full Service Schools
Let's Take a Closer Look at the

"There ought to be massive intervention early on with these kids."

Juvenile Justice Dilemmas

A 14-year old picked up for stealing an expensive athletic jacket is a classic red flag to those who work in corrections. But, juvenile probation departments are too busy dealing with more serious offenders to give much-needed attention to young people committing lesser crimes. In many counties around the state, juvenile offenders arrested for such crimes as petty theft or property damage are typically placed on probation. In the majority of cases, a probation officer will meet with the first-time offender or his or her family just once or twice. Then his or her file may be added to the thousands of probation cases that sit in offices around the state until that youth's six- or twelve-month term of probation ends.

Juvenile judges, the police, and others on the front lines of the juvenile justice system have consistently asked for a wider range of tools. In the absence of alternatives, California judges are often forced to practice what may be called legal triage. Youth who receive probation or "a slap on the wrist" for a minor crime are then punished severely after they've been re-arrested on a more serious or repeat felony charge. California taxpayers pick up the tab for the delay spending roughly $32,000 per year to punish a young serious offender.

The results indicate that appropriate early interventions would both rescue some youth from a life of crime and save the state money over time.
Problem

"I'd like a system whereby every first offender gets at least a stinging slap on the wrist. There ought to be massive intervention early on with these kids. We should be bird-dogging these kids like you wouldn't believe. Then we can really start getting tough on crime. Instead we just tell them to go home and please don’t do it again—because people just don’t want to pay for these things that those of us working in juvenile corrections recognize is needed."

Judge Wilmont Sweeney
A 14-year veteran of California's Juvenile Court system

"If we can keep our children from a life of crime through appropriate mentoring programs, through afternoon and evening programs that give constructive activity for our children, let's do it. It's a lot cheaper than a detention facility. But more importantly, it's saving a kid who can become part of a workforce, who can become part of the strength of this nation."

Janet Reno
U.S. Attorney General- August 8, 1996

Prevention and Intervention Options

A recent study by The Rand Corporation, Diverting Children From a Life of Crime: Measuring Costs and Benefits, attempts to answer the question of whether or not California would save money in the long-run if the state invested more in violence prevention programs. The results indicate that appropriate early interventions would both rescue some youth from a life of crime and save the state money over time. More than 150 crimes a year could be averted for every $1 million invested in programs that teach parents better parenting skills. A program that offers high-risk teens tutoring assistance and modest financial incentives to graduate from high school would prevent an estimated 258 crimes a year per million dollars invested. A program that closely monitors 12- and 13-year old delinquents would prevent an estimated 72 crimes a year for the same financial investment.
Responsibility and Accountability

Based on findings from the May 1996 survey, Californians believe that families and local communities have the greatest responsibility for preventing youth violence. They also know that families and communities may not be able to simply bootstrap or “gang summit” their way out of the epidemic of youth violence without a commitment of resources. They believe that prevention programs, such as mentoring and conflict resolution, would be more effective responses to juvenile violence than building more juvenile detention facilities. In fact, over 75 percent of those polled said they’d be willing to invest tax dollars to fund prevention programs.

“...The strongest message that surfaces from this poll is that Californians, concerned about the rising violence among young people, are looking for alternatives to building prisons to solve the problem. They believe young people need to know that there are consequences for their actions, but that throwing them all in prison is not necessarily the answer.”

Paul Maslin
Fairbank, Maslin, Maulin & Associates
Democratic Pollster for Resources for Youth

“What is striking about this survey is the willingness of Californians to try change—any change—in the area of prevention to try to ease this problem. Any way we put it, and on any choice we tried, the vast majority of Californians preferred an emphasis on prevention over a strict emphasis on sentencing and enforcement. We didn’t get into the funding mechanism, but I think people heard something beyond just the dollar sign—they heard that counseling or discipline or human involvement was present.”

Ed Goeas
The Tarrance Group
Republican Pollster for Resources for Youth
Investment Choices

Investment strategies can be singular or diversified. Faced with voter preoccupation with crime, policy makers are tempted to stick to a portfolio that invests in a single strategy—incarceration. Does California need to diversify its portfolio? This is a difficult question to raise as long as prevention measures are labeled “soft on crime.”

Here are some facts to consider. The 1996-1997 budget for the California Youth Authority (CYA) is $361.4 million, while the current census of youth incarcerated in CYA facilities is 9,808. Approximately 32 percent of those housed by the CYA were committed for non-violent offenses. According to a 1995 study by the National Institute of Justice, 91 percent of CYA’s parolees are rearrested within 3 years.

This year’s budget also allocated $11.6 million to fund a mentoring initiative which links at-risk youth with responsible adults. There are currently an estimated 70,000 mentors in California providing support to youth through 139 programs. Yet 78,000 young people remain on waiting lists in the state in the hopes of connecting with a mentor.

The state budget also contains a six-fold increase over the prior budget in funds for county-level juvenile justice and youth violence prevention programs, with total appropriations exceeding $60 million. This is an important step in the direction of balancing state and local expenditures for these types of programs.

“One young man—I’ll never forget this—told of how he was released from jail on a Friday, but by Monday he was attending community college classes that someone with the Omega Boys Club [of San Francisco] had helped him arrange. I think that more than anything else, that made me realize that with a little bit of help, these kids can really make it. For me, it was simple. I wanted to be a part of any effort that helped young people save themselves from a life inside the system.”

Tony Harris, Mentor

“The administration is committed to mentoring not as a panacea for youth’s problem but as a logical, cost-effective method of assisting today’s at risk youth to become productive, contributing members of our society.”

Dr. Andrew Mecca
Director of the State Department of Alcohol and Drug Programs
Talk Honestly To the Public

Californians believe in young people. The public is unwilling to give up on youth. Three out of four voters surveyed say that it's never too late to help a young person who has gotten involved in violence and crime. The choices, however, are not limited to building more prisons versus funding prevention programs. There needs to be frank discussion about how limited funding could be applied to multiple strategies that encourage self-respect and the respect of others, which can lead to the prevention of youth violence and the enhancement of young lives.

Resources for Youth is an educational effort to help inform California's leaders. Without the understanding and support of strong leadership, California cannot invest in its most precious resource: its youth.

\[\text{Facts}\]
In order to engage in a productive discussion, we need to start with the facts. What is the extent of the problem? How much does youth violence and crime cost the state? Are there more effective ways to respond? Resources for Youth will work with various organizations and agencies who compile data to provide Californians with the facts about preventing youth violence and crime.

\[\text{Perspectives}\]
There are many perspectives on the issue of juvenile crime prevention. In addition to providing polling data on a regular basis, Resources for Youth will reprint editorial commentary, expert opinions and community viewpoints for review and discussion. briefing papers and opinion pieces from law enforcement experts, judges, health professionals, youth organization leaders, academic researchers, and policy makers will offer informative and provocative starting points for discussion. Resources for Youth will seek out the opinions of a broad cross-section of Californians concerned about California youth.

\[\text{Voices}\]
Resources for Youth explores and promotes violence prevention programs and policies and the people who create, implement, and participate in them. Resources for Youth will provide a forum which will include the voices of youth who have been helped by these programs as well as the caring adults who've seen the value of an ounce of prevention administered wisely. These are people who see the possibilities for change once a community commits to preventing youth violence.

\[\text{Strategies}\]
In California, too many people are working in isolation. We need to do a better job of sharing the creative ideas devised by communities across California. Resources for Youth will provide policy briefs, program descriptions and other materials that help facilitate the critical decisions our community leaders and elected officials must make to prevent youth violence. Only then can we transcend partisan debate and find the common ground that binds all of California together.
Elizabeth Hernandez was 16 years old, a high school dropout with no direction in life, when Jimmy Valenzuela of the Proyecto Pastoral program in Los Angeles inspired her to go back to school to finish her high school degree. Elizabeth is now 18 and a freshman at Cal State-LA.

"Young people need to take more responsibility for their lives, but kids also need more programming to prepare young people for jobs. We can't do it alone. We need to get kids involved in things outside their neighborhood. What really made a difference in my life was someone like Jimmy. He helped me get a job as an office clerk. He would take us to events. He took a group of us camping in the mountains. He showed us other parts of the city. Before that, I had never seen anything outside the housing projects. It's like my world was no bigger than those projects until meeting him."