I N N O D A T A
M O N O G R A P H S — 9

CREATING NEW CHOICES:
A VIOLENCE PREVENTION
PROJECT FOR SCHOOLS
IN AUSTRALIA

Maree Sidey
Assisted by Theresa Lynch

UNESCO

INTERNATIONAL BUREAU OF EDUCATION

The authors are responsible for the choice and presentation of the facts contained in this publication and for the opinions expressed therein, which are not necessarily those of UNESCO:IBE and do not commit the Organization. The designations employed and the presentation of the material do not imply the expression of any opinion whatsoever on the part of UNESCO:IBE concerning the legal status of any country, territory, city or area or of its authorities, or concerning the delimitation of its frontiers or boundaries.

Table of contents

Foreword

Creating New Choices is a violence prevention project begun in 1994 in the northern region of metropolitan Melbourne, the capital city of the state of Victoria, Australia. The project was conceived by Berry Street Child and Family Services, one of Victoria's largest independent, non-government welfare organizations, which continues to provide the organizational infrastructure to ensure the programme's continuity. The violence prevention model that forms the basis of the project was developed and subsequently refined into a highly effective and successful tool for dealing with all forms of violence within the educational arena. The intervention programme is based on a critical examination of the whole school culture, with the aim of creating a socially just environment for all members of the school community. The over-arching goal of Creating New Choices is to develop an intensive long-term relationship with two or three schools at any one time, to work with those schools utilizing a community development approach and to assist them in addressing issues relating to violence as they impact on their school community. The project aims to assist schools to develop strategic partnerships within their own community in an attempt to develop long-term community-based strategies that address violent behaviours and attitudes. It recognizes that no single agency can successfully address the needs of young people and that an integrated and inter-agency approach should be adopted in the formulation and implementation of the project. To date, the project has worked intensively with four state secondary schools, impacting on an estimated 2,000 young people, their immediate families and four different geographical communities.

Maree Sidey finished her Social Work degree in 1997 and has since worked with young people in a variety of settings, from 'out-of-home care' through to outreach counselling in schools. She currently co-ordinates Creating New Choices: Violence Prevention Project for Schools for Berry Street, Victoria. She is also undertaking her masters degree in Political Science.
Contact details: Creating New Choices Coordinator – Berry Street Victoria – 165 Burgundy Street – Heidelberg, 3084 – Australia – Tel. 613.9458.5788 – Fax: 613.9458.5825 – E-mail: msidey@berrystreet.org.au

Theresa Lynch has been working with Berry Street since April 1994. She has been primarily responsible for driving the development of Berry Street's educational programmes. Over the years, she has earned a reputation for developing a 'cutting edge' approach to the delivery of education and welfare services and building socially just schools communities. She is currently co-ordinating the Myer Full-Service School Project. She has been working in the area of violence prevention to women, children and young people since the mid 1980s. In her current post-graduate studies, she is exploring the construction of hegemonic masculinities and its links to male violence in schools.
Contact details: Myer Full-Service School Project Co-ordinator – Berry Street Victoria – E-mail: tlynch@berrystreet.org.au

Preface

Relating the story of the Creating New Choices Project has necessitated the telling of a number of other interrelated stories. What began as a documentation of the history of a six-year project now includes the recent history of the welfare organization in which this project is based and that organization's attempts to translate its commitment to issues of social justice into the educational arena. It is also the story of one worker and her vision and determination. It tells of the changes made to the education system of the State of Victoria over the last ten years and the effect some of those changes have had on the students, teachers and parents in a number of school communities within Victoria. It includes the growing awareness of 'violence' and its impact on schools within Australia, and the valuable contribution this project has made to furthering our understanding of this issue. On a broader level, we examine the story that has been woven around 'youth violence', the myths and realities of this story and the reasons why this story continues to gain momentum and credibility.

I have chosen to call these different perspectives 'stories' in order to highlight that it is extremely difficult to quantify and measure violence. Statistics never tell the whole story and nowhere is this more obvious than with statistics that relate to violence. Working with violence is about listening to the experience of others. Preventing violence is seeking out those stories of the marginalized and oppressed and making sure they are heard. It is ultimately about attempting to achieve social justice. Working with schools, a fundamental institution of our society, is about having a vision for the future and trying to translate that vision into reality:

To build a socially just society, it [a school] must build *real relationships between real people*—relationships of a particular kind. The kinds of relationships characteristic of a socially just community are ones that foster self-expression, self-realization and self-determination for each individual and for all. These are the opposite of the kinds of relationships that constitute injustice—relationships disfigured by domination and oppression (Kemmis & Lynch, 2000, p. 1-2).

Maree Sidey
August 2000

Introduction/background

BRIEF SUMMARY OF THE INNOVATION

Creating New Choices is a violence prevention project that operates across a number of schools in the northern region of metropolitan Melbourne, the capital city of the State of Victoria, Australia. Over the project's six-year history the violence prevention model that forms the basis of the project was developed and subsequently refined into a highly effective and successful tool for dealing with all forms of violence within the educational arena. Unlike behavioural management programmes that have flourished in Victoria in recent years and have been seized upon by schools as a cost- and time-effective means of addressing aberrant behaviour, 'managing violence' is not the central focus of the project.[1] By offering an intensive and long-term relationship, the project worker is able to encourage a school community to work towards violence prevention. In six years the project has worked intensively with four different state secondary schools.

The ambitious nature of Creating New Choices is often experienced as both stimulating and daunting by a prospective school. If accepted for the project the school offers its whole community as both the canvas and the means to achieve broad-based change. Intervention is achieved by utilizing a whole school approach and incorporating the development of curriculum, policies, professional development for staff, public forums and creative initiatives. The support of parents, students, teachers and the wider community is mobilized to make explicit the nature and effect of violent behaviour. The use of a broad, inclusive definition of violence is critical to the early stages of the project as the development of such a definition immediately challenges the existing relationships based on domination and submission.

Violence education is a key component of the project and a means for encouraging an understanding of violence as a continuum of behaviours. Teachers, parents and students discover that violence can take many forms and ranges from the more subtle and pervasive, such as coercion, intimidation and harassment through to illegal acts of abuse and assault. Violence is broadly defined *as intentional or unintentional exertion of power and control resulting in oppression.* This can be a revolutionary dialogue in an institution that operates through the exertion of power and control and can often be the means of perpetuating the oppression of minorities and the disadvantaged. Ambitiously, Creating New Choices offers an intervention programme based on a critical examination of the whole school culture with the aim of creating a socially just environment for all members of the school community.

Where problems have existed in schools the usual response is to situate cause in individuals. The feeble-minded, behaviour disordered, developmentally delayed, female, culturally

deprived, and stressed teacher, are all manifestations of this perception. . . we have developed technically sophisticated, some say crude, ascertainment procedures to determine how to support the deficient pathologies of some children in the regular classroom. No one has devoted an equal proportion of resources and time to the development of processes for ascertaining aberrant school pathologies (Slee, 1995, p. 22).

Berry Street Child and Family Services, Victoria's largest independent, non-government welfare organization, was responsible for the programme's inception six years ago and continues to provide the organizational infrastructure to ensure the on-going existence of the project. Berry Street has been providing services to children and families in the state of Victoria since 1877. Berry Street's core programmes are 'out of home care' services for children and young people. The continuing commitment to 'out-of home care' reflects the intention of the organization's original programmes: the Victorian Infant Asylum, later known as Berry Street Babies Home (1877–1975) from which the organization derives its name, and Sutherland Homes for Children (1909–1994), which amalgamated with Berry Street in 1994. In the last ten years Berry Street has spent considerable effort strengthening the preventative arm of its services. Creating New Choices, a project that sits on the cutting edge of educational innovation in Australia, spearheads the organization's preventative work in the educational arena. As Berry Street's first school-based project, its success and recognition encouraged the organization to seek funding for other school-based programmes.

Creating New Choices now exists as one of a range of school-based programmes offered by Berry Street. Today the project coordinator has the benefit of drawing upon the support and expertise of a team of education-oriented workers. Violence prevention remains firmly on the agenda, but it sits alongside other aspirations for educational change such as Full Service Schooling[2] and Whole School Reform. On an organizational level, the work of Creating New Choices is now complemented by a range of violence prevention programmes focused both on education and on violence prevention. The story of the Creating New Choices programme is the story of how one community agency began with the aim of co-ordinating its delivery of services to a number of local schools and was subsequently challenged to broaden its focus to include a vision for education. The vision statement of the Berry Street School Based programmes Team (Figure 1) illustrates that the organization now sees itself working in partnership with the education system to develop socially just schools.

FIGURE 1. The vision statement of the Berry Street School Based programmes

> ### BERRY STREET SCHOOL BASED PROGRAMS—VISION STATEMENT
>
> *We see education as the pathway to democracy, and the elimination of poverty and violence…It provides hope for a more just, humane and equitable society where differences in race, gender and ability are celebrated and tolerance and inclusiveness promoted.*
>
> *It is a critical site for equipping young people with the necessary skills to participate fully in life and increasing their opportunities to a range of health, social, welfare, recreational and other support services.*
>
> *Young people need to be the architects of their own destiny…It is our obligation to fulfil this promise in every child.*
>
> *Our team is committed to the principles of social justice, empowerment, access and equity.*
>
> * *We believe all young people have a right to an education system that values them as citizens, who have a right to determine what is of value to them and their communities.*
> * *We believe all young people should have access to an education that is appropriate to their skills, aspirations and life circumstances.*
> * *We believe the development of sustaining and cooperative partnerships is the key for the development of positive school communities.*
> * *We believe that we can best meet the goals of our organization by being a resource to other services and programme initiatives.*
> * *We believe the development and provision of high quality integrated service models is essential for developing socially just education systems.*

NATIONAL POLITICAL/SOCIO-ECONOMIC CONTEXT

Creating New Choices came into existence in early 1994 after a successful submission by Berry Street to the Office of Youth Affairs, a State Government body. On a national political level, Australia had experienced the global recession under the Keating Labor Government. Keating's empathy with the right of the Australian Labor Party (ALP) produced a brand of economic rationalism hitherto unseen within the ALP. Australia's response to the global economic crisis emulated that of Britain, the United States and Canada, as described in 1984 by George and Wilding:

social services are currently under attack by right-wing governments in a number of advanced industrial countries. The immediate and most obvious reason for the attack is that the collapse of economic growth means that increased public expenditure can only be financed through increases in taxation. Such increases are seen as economically and politically unacceptable…cutting back on social service expenditure seems to offer the best hope of curing the economy and avoiding political bankruptcy (as quoted in Mullaly, 1993, p. 21).

EDUCATION POLICY—STATE

Under the leadership of a State Labor Government less committed to economic rationalism than its Federal counterpart, Victoria rode out the early period of the

recession with minimal impact on social welfare and educational expenditure. The rise to power of the Kennett Liberal–National State Government in 1992 changed this. During the 1990s Victoria experienced a radical restructuring of its education system. In addition to introducing massive cuts to the education budget, the Kennett Government proposed the concept of self-governing, self-managed schools. Whilst 'self-government' never became compulsory, many schools chose to take up the offer. Education theorists have been concerned about the impact of this semi-restructuring on the placement of Victoria's education system, both within Australia and on a global level. Much criticism has been directed towards the Kennett Government by those who point to the drastic cuts to education and compare Victoria's minimal spending on education per head of population. 'In the space of a couple of years Victoria fell to middle position [in Australia] in spending per student and to the bottom of the scale for education spending per head of population. It should be noted that Australian averages are at the bottom end (14 out of 17) of OECD spending on education' (Hannan, 1996, p. 54).

The Kennett Liberal–National Government adopted a free market approach to education. The venture was called *Schools of the Future*, the main features of which have been shown to be similar to that adopted in England, *Better Choice and Diversity*, and New Zealand, *Tomorrow's Schools*. Crooks argues that all three approaches 'embrace the essence of the Radical Right position on public education' (1996, p. 16):

The terms of the education debate imposed by the coalition government are that we had a debt and fiscal 'crisis' caused by the Labor government; we had 'overspent' in the major portfolio areas such as education and health; our class sizes were luxuriously too small by interstate comparison; teachers had 'captured' the decision-making process to the detriment of the system; we spent more on education than states like Queensland so the system was clearly plagued by inefficiencies and we spent too much on teacher salaries (Crooks, 1996, p. 3).

It is difficult to locate exact figures regarding the size of the cuts the Kennett Government made to the Victorian education system during its seven years in power. Most figures are similar to those quoted by Hannan: '270 schools [closed], 8000 teachers [lost], $370 million [cut]' (1996, p. 53).

Kronemann reminds those who lay the blame for the demise of the Victorian education system at the Liberal–National door that the cuts to education were evidenced in every budget for a decade preceding the Kennett coalition Government (1993). Regardless of where the blame lies, a comparison of Victoria's education system at the beginning of the 1990s with the current situation shows the devastating impact of years of neglect and diversion of funds. It does not, however, measure the loss of morale among teachers, parents and students:

Prior to the 1992 coalition win, Victoria's state education system was well placed by a number of important and telling criteria. It enjoyed a leading reputation on curriculum matters;

the quality and quantity of staffing was good; student retention to year 12 (85% in 1992) was the highest in Australia; the state also enjoyed the best teacher–pupil ratios in Australia, and had done so for twenty years; expenditure on schools per head of population ranked fifth of all systems in 1992/93; per capita expenditure on students in government schools ranked fourth of all systems in 1990–95; educational governance reflected a partnership involving parents, teachers, their representative organizations and those in government (Crooks, 1996, p. 23–24).

It is not surprising that at the time Creating New Choices was funded, many schools were unable to consider investing time and resources in a project as ambitious and long-term as CNC. School administrations were reluctant to ask staff to commit to anything over and above the daily teaching schedule. In addition, the pressure placed on schools to become 'self-governing' was increasing. Many Victorian state schools chose to take responsibility for their own budget administration. For all schools, funding became tied to performance indicators measured by student enrolments. In many ways it was not an ideal time to approach schools to participate in a violence prevention programme, particularly if their participation could be construed by parents of potential students as an admission by the school that it had a 'violence' problem.

ORGANIZATIONAL LEVEL

In the early 1990s Berry Street, like many other welfare services, was attempting to come to terms with the changing political landscape and its impact on the way welfare services were conceptualized, funded and, consequently, delivered. Competitive tendering had been introduced as a concept. Local and State Government bodies would no longer simply fund services, they purchased them and consequently they demanded more say in the final product. Funding providers wanted to simplify the welfare service delivery system and organizations were encouraged to amalgamate or form strategic partnerships. In September 1994 Berry Street chose to amalgamate with Sutherland Homes for Children.

   Creating New Choices was born out of this time of change and its early development was influenced by the forces at work in the broader political environment. The increasing interest in school violence placed pressure on schools to be proactively addressing the issue. However, the depletion of resources in the education system meant that many public schools were reluctant to even think about attempting such a daunting project. Pressure continued to be applied and by the mid-1990s many organizations, both within and external to education, had developed policies to deal with issues of violence. An excerpt from a document entitled 'New South Wales Policy—developing effective policies in school and system management of aggressive and violent behaviour' (part of a joint publication of the NSW and Victorian Independent Education Unions) illustrates that effective management of violence requires a basic level of resources:

Schools and systems need to ensure that there are ongoing resources allocated…These include areas such as:

- class sizes in the primary and middle years which do not exceed 30, and composites in primary which do not exceed 25;
- access to student counsellors in all schools;
- access to quality professional development for all teachers;
- whole school approaches and structures to problem solving (Independent Education Unit, 1995, p. 23).

This level of resources was no longer present in many Victorian schools. There is anecdotal evidence that the closure of schools had contributed to a rise in violence in the remaining schools as they attempted to assimilate displaced students. Bessant provides insight into the impact of the closure of Richmond Secondary College on the staff and students and the surrounding schools (1995). In their evaluation of the Creating New Choices Project, Ridge and McLeod (1997) highlight a similar scenario occurring at Banksia Secondary College in the early 1990s.

Violence, in all its forms, was also on the agency's agenda.[3] Berry Street works with the most marginalized and vulnerable children and young people. Their experience of violence, whether institutional in form, such as violence in school communities, or of a more domestic nature (all forms of family violence, including child abuse), impacts on our service users' capacity to exercise choice in their lives. The work of Creating New Choices has strong parallels with the efforts to address violence in other programme areas, for example youth and family mediation and family therapy. The organization's decision to develop a violence prevention programme for schools[4] came at an opportune time. Schools were being encouraged to turn to their local community if they required additional support in dealing with issues. This created an opportunity for Creating New Choices and for Berry Street as an organization. It also created a dilemma. Victorian schools were more open to external support than they had previously been. Yet it was not an easy acceptance of support, as their hand had been forced by the deliberate manoeuvring of those in power. Early on the Creating New Choices Project worker found herself ideologically committed to support schools in resisting the cuts to education and at the same time needing to make the most of the opportunities presented to the project—and this tension has remained.

VIOLENCE—INDIVIDUAL AND INSTITUTIONAL

Young people are suffering. They have the highest suicide rates in the country. They are most likely to be long-term unemployed. The numbers of homeless young people have risen rapidly. They have been among the main losers in cuts to government services. In Australia's new 'flexible' labour market, young people have little prospect of the job security that their parents took for granted. At the same time youth and their preoccupations are

being discredited, even demonized, in the media. A spate of stories has focused on youth gangs and youth crime. Young people are caught on the wrong side of an increasing gap between 'official' sanctioned culture and renegade culture (Davis, 1997, p. viii).

Creating New Choices seeks to remind schools that those members of any community that do not have a voice and are the furthest removed from the decision-making channels suffer most. In any school, as in any country, young people are at grave risk of bearing the brunt of inadequate systems or economic restraint:

In Australia, young people have been the great losers in the rush to embrace economic rationalism. Fifteen years on and the impact of more than a decade of fiscal restraint is clearly showing young people as significantly more marginalized; 'Policies to alleviate youth unemployment, homelessness and suicide have been neglected, schools have been closed down, fees imposed in higher education, youth wages reduced and access to the dole tightened (Davis, 1997, p. xii).

Since its inception Creating New Choices has resisted pressure to define violence as simply a 'youth issue'. The programme focuses on schools because there is a recognition that violence prevention requires working with the younger generation to both counter the effects of experienced violence and teach alternative methods of conflict resolution. The difficulty is that schools have a tendency to view the programme as something that exists for the students because violence is a 'student' problem. This perception of violence is not restricted to schools: politicians and the media are often responsible for perpetuating the 'violent youth of today' stereotype. The problem seems to be that the media cannot decide whether young people are the victims or the perpetrators. Newspaper headlines oscillate between accusing schools of failing to protect students from bullying and reporting on the latest youth crime wave. There is little doubt that cracking down on youth crime is certainly a vote winner. Summarizing his analysis of Australian crime statistics in the late 1980s and early 1990s, Polk fears that a misguided understanding of the nature of youth crime will do further damage to the reputation of young people, and as a community we are risking a 'misguided tide of punitiveness that would only serve to aggravate the fundamental causes of youth isolation and alienation' (1995, p. 52).

Some would argue that Polk's fear has already come to pass. Significant moves have been afoot in Australia in the last ten years to reduce young people's rights in relation to the criminal justice system. In his book *Gangland: cultural elites and the new generationalism*, Davis uncovers what he believes to be an inherent conservatism in Australian society that not only works to exclude young people from decision-making processes and takes away their voice, but also punishes them for their 'youth' as youth is often equated with 'danger' in the public perception:

The moral panic about youth culture has given rise to repressive legislation as well. The trend began in Western Australia in the early 1990's. After a series of deaths resulting from high-speed police chases involving young people and stolen cars, the Labor government, led by Carmen Lawrence, passed the draconian *Crime (Serious and Repeat Offenders Sentencing Act) 1992*…Since then, pressure to introduce youth curfews, wider police powers and mandatory sentencing for juvenile crime has built up in several states' (Davis, 1997, p. 15).

Mandatory sentencing was subsequently been introduced in Western Australia, effectively removing the discretionary privileges of magistrates and requiring that a prison term be handed down to second offenders (juveniles and adults) for criminal acts as insignificant as very minor property crimes.

   It is not the intention of this paper to argue that young people are incapable of committing violent acts. Education about the nature of violence is a key aim of Creating New Choices. This includes reminding schools about factors that impact on both the perpetration and experience of violence. Gender and culture are two important mediating factors. Polk summarizes his research regarding youth crime in Australia as follows:

While violence is primarily a matter involving adults, there is some amount of quite serious youthful violence in Australia. This violence tends to be male and collective in character, and has its roots in the compulsion that some males feel to defend their honour or reputation, especially when challenged in front of their mates. This violence typically occurs in leisure scenes, and most often the events build rapidly from an initial insult to the fatal injuries (Polk, 1995, p. 62).

Educating schools about the gendered nature of violence has been a central aspect of Creating New Choices since its development.[5]

   Creating New Choices supports schools in resisting the pressure to blame students; instead, attention is focused on institutional violence, in an attempt to highlight how violence is perpetuated in our society. Schools are asked to turn the mirror on themselves and identify obstacles they may place in the way of all students having their social, emotional and educational needs met. Inevitably, this has also meant that, as a welfare service provider, Berry Street has had to be prepared to scrutinize itself about the way in which it supports schools to meet the welfare needs of students. The welfare and education fields have not always had a comfortable or productive partnership and, consequently, young people and their families are often the unwilling victims of the system. The literature reflects this move away from talking about 'at-risk' individuals to focusing instead on 'risky systems'. For example, Knight argues that the increasing focus on the welfare issues of students has worked to create a 'dichotomy between intellectual and social development' within schools. He queries whether 'adult leadership is in fact "at

risk": Our present difficulties may well be a crisis of morality and imagination, a failure of political, economic and cultural systems' (1991, p. 17).

Thus, Creating New Choices often finds itself advocating for young people as victims of a system whose denial of the rights of young people could itself be considered violent:

Violence prevention is among today's greatest societal challenges. Interpersonal violence has invaded homes, schools and streets. Everyone is affected, but the group most affected is youth. In fact, recent research suggests that at around the ages of 13–14, the likelihood of attack seems to be at its greatest. Children suffer in both the short and long term from the effects of violence—be it directly inflicted upon them or they observe it used against others (Rice, 1995, p. 25).

As a result of becoming more familiar with the educational needs of young people, Creating New Choices has extended its advocacy role and shifted its early focus on conflict resolution to looking at issues of access and equity within the educational arena. Early school leaving, alternative education, gender equity and curriculum reform are issues that the project grapples with.

Rationale/objectives

CREATING NEW CHOICES: PROJECT GOALS

The following project goals have been identified:
- To adopt a critical approach aimed at highlighting and redressing structural inequality and institutionalized violence;
- To inform, educate and model ways for students, teachers and parents to resolve conflict and take responsibility for their own behaviour;
- To help a school community to develop strategies that prevent violence and build on the strengths within their community;
- To understand and respond to the needs of schools and those people that work, study and participate in the educational arena;
- To work in a consultative manner and help schools to develop strategic partnerships within their own community;
- To develop long-term community-based strategies that address violent behaviours and attitudes.

KEY PRINCIPLES FOR SCHOOL-BASED INTERVENTION
(Adapted from Lynch, 1996)

Principles for intervention in schools, in addition to the project goals, have been developed from our experience of adopting a community development approach to violence prevention in the education system, as follows:
- Each school community needs to determine its own starting point in the process for creating positive change. For example, issues that schools may identify as being important include sexual abuse, substance abuse, conflict resolution, gender relations, vandalism, peer relationships, bullying, anger, early school leaving or health issues such as depression, eating disorders, self-harming and suicidal tendencies. Schools are generally in the best position to determine their own needs.
- Programmes need to include both short-term and long-term strategies. It is important that schools have the resources to respond to their immediate crisis. It is also critical that the immediate solutions are supported by long-term strategies aimed at changing violent behaviour and attitudes.
- Education programmes should incorporate a comprehensive structural analysis of power and control. Students can explore the nature and cause of violence embedded in our social institutions, in terms of power imbalances and abusive use of power.
- A whole community approach needs to be adopted. Integrating schools into the wider community is essential so that they can have access to community-based

services. Effective family support environments are inextricably linked to high-quality learning outcomes for schools. It is critical that schools see families and schools as interconnected entities. Clearly, the learning needs of all students depend on the well-being of families. The delivery and design of welfare services and programmes in any anti-violent strategy must reflect this juxtaposition.

- The creation of partnerships and the development of a more integrated approach to the prevention of anti-social behaviour are cost-effective and ensure that the issues are widely owned and accepted within the wider community.
- The concept of a continuum of violence needs to be introduced to the school community. The more subtle and pervasive forms of coercion, intimidation and abuse should be linked to the more extreme manifestations of violence. Physical violence is only one form of violence. Everyday experiences of abuse and harassment can be extremely debilitating and hurtful and need to be presented as unacceptable acts of violence. It is equally important that there is an increased understanding about the continuum of violence so that students, teachers, parents and community agencies can clarify their responsibilities and roles in helping to create safe school communities.
- Students can and should be involved in the process of identifying the problems and developing the solutions. Our experience has shown that it is better to work *with* young people than *for* them. We need to listen and involve students in a meaningful way that recognizes and validates their strength and knowledge.
- The concept of inclusiveness needs to be adopted to reduce the stigmatizing of 'at-risk' students. It is important to provide education and support to the entire school community, including the perpetrators and victims of violence.
- All programmes need to be systematically and continuously evaluated so that strategies can be modified accordingly.

Origins of Creating New Choices

RESEARCH/DEVELOPMENT OF THE VIOLENCE PREVENTION
FRAMEWORK

Berry Street's Youth and Family Mediation and Family Therapy Team identified
the need for an early intervention and prevention programme to operate in schools.
MATTERS (Mediation and Therapy To Enhance Relationships) is an early inter-
vention programme aimed at reducing family conflict and family breakdown by of-
fering families individual and family counselling and family therapy, as well as
support and assistance in resolving disputes. The MATTERS service began in 1990
as part of a pilot programme set up by the Federal Attorney General's Department.
That pilot programme resulted from the *Burdekin Report into Youth Homelessness*
(1989) and is one of eleven similar services operating under Federal funding.
MATTERS became a fully funded, on-going programme in 1993.

In the early 1990s the team of counsellors were becoming increasingly con-
cerned about the alienation of young people from the family unit, a situation
which was often exacerbated when adolescents resorted to violent behaviour dur-
ing times of family conflict. The team felt that young people needed to be given
the opportunity to learn alternative methods of dealing with conflict. A school-
based programme was conceived because of its potential to reach greater numbers
of young people. The principles of conflict resolution developed by the family
therapy team formed the basis of the early curriculum and training interventions
in the educational arena.

ORIGINAL OBJECTIVES

The original objectives of the programme illustrate the early conceptualization of
the Creating New Choices project:
- *To develop and implement a range of group work programmes for young peo-
  ple who are exhibiting violent behaviour and/or who are at risk of being ex-
  cluded from the educational system;*
- *To facilitate and provide opportunities for young people's development and
  their participation in planning the programme and decision-making processes
  which impact on them;*
- *To ensure that the programme is developed in a manner which recognizes the
  role and importance of the family in the development and support of young peo-
  ple and which aims to prevent family breakdown;*
- *To assist the school system to further develop its capacity to provide supportive re-
  sponses to young people and their families where violence is an issue.*

Although these early objectives have changed significantly, it is useful to cite them because they highlight the organization's attempt to move from casework with individuals and families to school-based intervention. They do not encompass the notion of a 'whole school approach' or the community development principles that are now central to the project; however, they do illustrate the importance of a 'co-ordinated service system' and the need to come to terms with 'family sensitive practice', both highly influential movements in welfare practice of the early 1990s.

EARLY RESEARCH

In the early to mid-1990s a number of reports were released at a national and State level that had a significant impact on the early development of the Creating New Choices Project. In 1994 the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Employment, Education and Training released *Sticks and stones: a report on violence in Australian schools*. Ollis and Tomaszewski (1993) co-authored *Gender and violence project: position paper* on behalf of the Department of Employment, Education and Training (DEET). In Victoria, Nic Abbey from the Victorian Community Council Against Violence released a discussion paper entitled *Creating safer communities* (1993) and later (with D. Butten) the booklet *Safer cities and shires* (1997). These documents, together with a number of subsequent publications such as *Towards safe and supportive learning environments* (ACSSO, 1996) and *Creating safe school environments* (ACSSO, 1998), contributed to the development of the conceptual framework of the project.

The Violence Prevention Framework is a broad strategy developed for the purposes of creating change within the school system. The strategy incorporates the use of a whole school approach, mobilizing students, teachers, parents and the wider community to work towards preventing violence and promoting safety. It not only seeks the support of these groups in developing and implementing policies and programmes aimed at addressing school violence, but also actively engages them in the process, thereby promoting a sense of ownership within the school community for any initiatives.

CNC: A VIOLENCE PREVENTION FRAMEWORK FOR SCHOOLS

The framework outlined below, as utilized by Creating New Choices, was adapted from the Victorian Community Council Against Violence strategy for exploring issues of violence and crime in relation to school and community safety (Abbey, 1993):
• Establish the conceptual framework—define violence and its impact on the school and its wider community;
• Clarify the role of both the school and the local community in addressing violence and crime through a consultative process;
• Identify the wide range of possible strategies and interventions and develop an action plan.

The model aims to strengthen the school community and provide a safe and secure learning environment in which all students can be offered a high-quality educational experience. It is based on the premise that no single agency can successfully address the needs of young people and that an integrated and inter-agency approach should be adopted in the formulation and implementation of the project (Lynch, 1996, p. 3).

CURRICULUM CONTENT

The above-mentioned reports recommend the development of a broad definition of violence, including emotional, physical, psychological and sexual violence. They insist that violence prevention work needs to take into account issues pertaining to racism, gender, disability and sexuality. In the context of Creating New Choices, the following publications are guides to assist in the development of a curriculum that addresses the above issues:

• Jenkins, J. (1996) *Resolving violence: an anti-violence curriculum for secondary students*. Camberwell, Victoria, Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER).
• Bodine, R.J., Crawford, D.K. & Schrumpf, F. (1994) *Creating the peaceable school: a comprehensive programme for teaching conflict resolution*. Champaign, Illinois, Research Press.
• Kivel, P. & Creighton, A. (1997) *Making the peace: a 15 session violence prevention curriculum for young people*. Alameda, California, Hunter House Publishers.
• Commonwealth Department of Employment, Education and Training (1995) *No fear: a whole school approach towards creating non violent school community*. Canberra, Curriculum and Gender Equity Policy Unit.

Programme description

PLANNING/SELECTION CRITERIA

Planning
The project worker provides an extensive secondary consultation service to schools interested in addressing issues of violence and to community workers seeking to work more effectively in the education system. The long-term, intensive nature of the project means that the number of schools that the project worker can effectively work with at any one time is restricted. If the project worker has the capacity to work with a new school, an extensive selection process is undertaken by the agency. This begins with a letter being sent to all the state secondary schools in the allocated region. The worker then waits for schools to express an interest in the project. In the most recent selection process (January 2000) five schools out of thirteen responded to the introductory letter. These schools were interviewed and were ranked in order according to the project's selection criteria. These criteria have been developed over a number of years and represent the basic conditions that need to be present for the project to operate successfully.

Selection criteria
• A commitment to addressing issues of violence in the school community;
• A willingness to allocate the necessary resources to the project, e.g. making staff available to participate in a steering committee;
• An effective welfare infrastructure;
• A commitment to the project by the leadership of the school;
• An understanding of the long-term nature of the project and a willingness to commit to this lengthy intervention;
• A desire to form a partnership with Berry Street as a welfare agency.

DESIGN/THE MODEL

The model developed for the project is an eight-stage intervention. Although it currently operates as a violence prevention model, the programme evaluation suggests that it could be adapted to address many issues that impact on a school community. The steps are ordered below for the purposes of clarity. However, it is important to recognize that this is not a linear process and that the different phases often proceed concurrently.

Relationship
One of the strengths of the Creating New Choices Project is its success in building effective partnerships with different school communities. This is the core of

the project: the nature of the relationship forged with the school determines the success or failure of the project. Consequently, a great deal of emphasis is placed initially on 'building a relationship'. It is during this phase that the project exposes the differences that exist between the welfare and education sectors. 'Getting to know each other' includes addressing any misinformation and misunderstanding that may exist, familiarizing both parties with the differences in their physical environments, workplace expectations and constraints, etc. Initially, this on-going process may only involve the key players from both the school and the project; however, as the project develops in the school, staff, students and parents also learn about Berry Street and its delivery of welfare services. This is reciprocated as the agency learns about the school.

Liaison
Very early in the negotiations with a new school, someone within the school is nominated to liaise regularly with the project worker. His/her role is to assist with the daily coordination of the project within the school. Whilst the project is in the establishment phase, it is important that this person is a leader—the principal or the vice principal. The active support of the school leadership in this early phase is essential. After the project is well established a different liaison person can be nominated. The liaison person needs to have an intimate knowledge of the workings of the school and hold a position of respect, as their support of the project assists with its development and acceptance within the school. If a number of different initiatives are happening concurrently (as is often the case), additional liaison persons are appointed to oversee a particular working group.

Steering committee
A steering committee drives the project within each school. As Creating New Choices is currently working with three schools, the project worker participates in three steering committees. The responsibility for coordinating and documenting the committee meetings can be shared by the school and the project worker, alternately, one party taking responsibility for ensuring that this happens. Documenting the steering committee meeting is vitally important as it enables the project progress in each school community to be tracked. The make-up of the steering committee changes according to the school. Schools are encouraged to recruit members from within the different populations represented in the school and the local community (students, parents, staff, school leaders, local community agencies, local businesses, etc).

  The steering committees become streamlined over time. In the early stages of the project they are large and occasionally unwieldy, representing all the different aspects of the school. If the project has been operating in a school for a number of years, the

steering committee may only contain a few key members. The challenge is then to remain representative and inclusive of the different voices within the school.

If the steering committee breaks down, it is often the first sign that the project is not working well within the school. Questions then need to be asked about what might be impacting on the success of the project. Is the school currently experiencing an unexpected crisis that is diverting energy elsewhere? Is the commitment to the project waning and, if so, why is that happening? It may well be a sign that the school is no longer experiencing the project as being relevant.

Definition of violence

The first task for any school community is to develop a definition of violence appropriate to the school's context and the philosophies of the project. This is an extremely important step as it encourages discussion and debate and allows individuals to talk about their own experience of violence. The project has developed its own definition as outlined in Appendix A. This is sometimes given to schools as a guide to assist them in developing their own definition. Creating New Choices has found the concept of a continuum of violence useful to encourage recognition of the different extremes of violent behaviour and to ensure that no violent behaviour is minimized. The right of every member of the school community to operate in a safe environment is emphasized.

ASSESSMENT AND ACTION PLAN

Making an assessment of the needs of the school community and developing an action plan to address those needs can take up to six months. This is often referred to as the orientation period. It is an essential time of reflection and planning before any direct service work begins. By their very nature schools are incredibly responsive and often reactive institutions. When the project begins work in a new school there is often pressure to move quickly into direct service work. If this happens, it can mean that the focus is transferred from the institution to the students without sufficient attention to the concept of institutional violence. In our experience, the school needs time to 'grapple' with the concept of operating a violence prevention project. This is a time for extensive consultation with the wider community in which the school operates: community forums, school surveys, discussion groups and information sessions, all commonly occur during this time. Developing an Action Plan involves concentrating on seven different areas of the school and prioritizing the areas that require immediate attention. Short-, medium- and long-term goals are identified for each of the following areas:
• Policy development;
• Curriculum development;
• Teacher training;

- Student education;
- Parent education;
- Community networking;
- Physical environment.

Working parties and evaluation
After an Action Plan is developed and needs are prioritized, working parties are formed. It is important that the working parties consist of people who have a vested interest in the issue being discussed. Each working party reports to the steering committee at regular intervals. It is also the task of each working party to decide how its particular initiative will be evaluated.

Risk factors

DIFFICULTIES IN PLANNING/EXECUTING THE INNOVATION

Education vs. welfare—reluctant partners

The tension that currently exists between the education and welfare sectors in Australia (as mentioned in the Introduction) is also evidenced on a global level:

In the quest for advantage (or survival) in today's competitive worldwide economy, school reform and restructuring have become international obsessions. Part of the restructuring picture in many places, moreover, involved calls to transform school and community relationships. But how these relationships should be revised—either for greater school effectiveness or for broader public goals—remains a subject of great debate (Boyd, 1997, p. 188).

The Victorian Government's policy push for schools and community agencies to work together can be seen as part of the global 'collaborative services movement'.[6] Boyd argues that, regardless of the merits or otherwise of such a venture, it is inevitable that when shifts in policy direction force 'rapid social change', 'troubling tensions and discontinuities' arise (1997, p. 189). This tension has been evident throughout the life-span of the Creating New Choices Project. While the project is justifiably lauded as a successful model of collaboration between the welfare and education sectors, it would be untrue to assert that the project has not had to struggle for its achievements. The record of the Project's last six years reads as a microcosm of the macro system (the Victorian experience) and, as such, is an invaluable resource for social and education theorists.

CNC was created at a time when Victorian schools were being encouraged to seek assistance from community agencies to address issues being faced by the schools. The cuts that had been made to the State Education Budget meant that, in a very real sense, schools had little option but to do this. This tension has been played out at various times within the project. The schools with which we have worked have been simultaneously grateful for the extra support and resources and yet protective of their terrain and reluctant to have their hand forced by the politicians. Understandably some schools were reluctant to work closely with people who had no background in education. We quickly discovered that partnerships cannot be forced. Of the two schools that Creating New Choices began working with, one partnership has been a highly productive and long-term relationship, and one ended after two years. The evaluation document suggests that the school's crisis-response mode was incompatible with the reflective/preventative nature of the project. It should be noted, however, that the partnership existed for two years and many aspects of the relationship were considered valuable by both parties.

Resources

Unfortunately, the recent policy initiatives encouraging greater collaboration between the education and health and welfare sectors to address the needs of young people have not translated into extra dollars to achieve these aims. *Turning the tide (199?)* and *Health promoting schools (199?)* are examples of attempts to address drug and alcohol use and basic health issues within the education sector that have suffered because of inadequate funding. The Creating New Choices Project, although on a smaller scale than the State-wide initiatives, has suffered under similar constraints. Although there is great potential for expansion, Creating New Choices has only had the resources to work with four schools in its six-year history. With funds for only one worker and a model that requires intensive long-term work, Berry Street has had to turn down many requests from schools interested in participating in the project. It is also important to note that the project funding (AUS $50,000 per annum) has not increased in the six years that Berry Street has operated Creating New Choices. In fact, increased organizational overheads and operating costs have resulted in the project having fewer resources, in real terms, than when it was established.

Community development vs. direct service work

The limited resources available to the project have also made it difficult for the project worker to decide where to focus attention within a school. Creating New Choices offers assistance and support and in many cases provides the direct service component of the project within the school, e.g. classroom programmes, parent evenings, festivals, short-term programmes, camps and public forums. Not surprisingly, these programmes have always proved to be the most popular and sought after aspects of the project. They provide tangible evidence that Creating New Choices is operating within the school, they are more easily evaluated and they provide a focal point for the continued discussion of violence prevention. The provision of these services places a great strain on the resources of the project and the wider Berry Street organization (Creating New Choices often draws on the expertise of other Berry Street programmes to ensure that the direct service is provided). Because of the time-consuming and resource-intensive nature of the direct service component, it is often difficult to sustain the community development aspect and the focus on structural issues, e.g. policy development, steering committee, health and welfare committee meetings, and strategic plans. There is continual pressure from schools to be providing community development and yet our experience tells us that the direct service work is only effective if it happens as part of a broader framework.

Hierarchical environment

A common dilemma for community development workers is the question of how to avoid intervening from the 'top-down' rather than the 'bottom-up'. When working in mainstream schools this difficulty becomes more pronounced because of

the hierarchical nature of the Australian education system. It is important that the project involves the school leaders because they have the power to influence its survival. Yet working with the power-brokers should not detract from working with those who do not pull the strings—most obviously, the students. In many instances this is not a weakness of the project but of the environment in which it operates. For example, in the majority of schools, curriculum development happens without any consultation with students. Thus, when Creating New Choices works with the curriculum committee to develop a new approach to violence prevention, it inevitably produces something devoid of student input. If this is considered in the context of the project's definition of violence, which includes the right for all groups within the school to have a 'voice', the dilemma for the project becomes obvious. The project worker needs to model equity of access and to work hard to ensure that it occurs. This is a constant challenge and applies not only to students, but also to parents and other groups that feel excluded from the decision-making processes in the school, e.g. non-teaching staff.

Demands placed on the project worker and the school by the project
The fact that Creating New Choices works within a school but the project worker is employed by and accountable to an organization external to the school is both a strength and a potential weakness of the project. The autonomy and independence afforded to the project worker within the school environment—because she is not employed by the school—often mean that she operates from a position of strength and is able to exert influence within the school. However, the intensive nature of CNC means that the project worker is at the school on a regular basis and can often be mistakenly thought of as a pseudo staff member who is there to provide the school with additional resources, rather than to challenge the school to work towards change. The worker needs to keep in mind the community development maxim, 'do not "do for", but join with'. If the project worker finds herself in the position of doing most of the work within the school, it may be important to re-visit the school's commitment to the project. The capacity of a school to commit to the project changes over time. There may have been external or internal developments that have impacted significantly on the time, resources and, subsequently, the capacity of the school to work with Creating New Choices. It is important not to underestimate the demands a project such as CNC places on a school system. Teachers, students and parents have a limited amount of spare time. Within a school, CNC has to exist alongside competing demands, such as school musical and theatrical events, sport and extracurricular programmes, broader health and welfare promotion activities and everyday crises.

Leadership and visionary capabilities of a school
It is difficult to think about the weaknesses inherent to the project because, in many respects, it does not and cannot exist outside the schools within which it op-

erates. Therefore, the project is extremely dependent on certain factors existing within the school environment. We know from experience that if the leadership of a school community is not wholly and completely supportive of the project, which includes allocating time and effort to its success, the project is likely to have little effect on the school community. The project is also limited by the visionary capabilities of both the project worker and the school community and, of course, their ability to work together. 'Building Relationships' has already been mentioned as a key concept of Creating New Choices. The project's success and/or weakness is dependent on the strength of this relationship between the school and the project worker/organization.

Misunderstandings sometimes arise over the definitions of violence, because of insufficient attention to this matter in the early stages of the life of the project, that are used within the project/school. Alternatively, it may be that the steering committee and the wider school population have not re-visited the definition for some time. Staff changes, particularly leadership changes, can also have a significant impact on how the project is understood within the school. It is important that assumptions are continually challenged and that the steering committee reviews its broader aims and objectives on a regular basis. A sign that this needs to be done is when the project begins to focus on student violence and neglects to take into account the issues of institutional violence.

Responding to crisis
Creating New Choices does not have the time or resources to provide crisis intervention to the schools with which it works. In addition, the project model does not allow for or encourage such a response. At various times in the history of the project other Berry Street programmes have been able to provide a crisis response service to the schools. One of the aims of Creating New Choices is to work with the school system to ensure that crisis management plans and procedures are in place. However, this work cannot occur when a crisis is happening—procedures need to be in place prior to a crisis. The dilemma for the project, then, is that it is unlikely to be able to offer anything to a school that is in crisis due to issues of violence. Schools in crisis are unable to sustain systematic preventative work as all available resources are being used to manage the crisis. The project is most effective in those schools that have recently weathered a crisis, and thus are motivated to make change, or schools that are working to avoid a crisis. Even in those schools that have worked with Creating New Choices for many years, the project offers little at the time a crisis occurs. It is hoped that when crises occur, as they will (CNC works to reduce violence, but yet it is pragmatic about the difficulty of this task considering the prevalence of violence in the wider society), the work completed prior to the incident will ensure the effective management of the crisis.

Evaluation

METHODOLOGY

In 1997, Berry Street allocated funds for external evaluations of a number of its services. Creating New Choices was one of the programmes chosen and the Youth Research Centre at the University of Melbourne was commissioned to undertake the evaluation. The three tasks for the evaluators were as follows:

• Assess the range of methods and strategies involved in the interventions used;
• Gauge the extent to which incidents of conflict and violence have been affected by the project;
• Ascertain the proportion of students and their families that have received some support from the project.

Damien Ridge and John McLeod spent four months in 1997 working closely with the then CNC project worker (Theresa Lynch) and the participating schools (Banksia Secondary College in West Heidelberg and Macleod Technical College). The evaluators used qualitative evaluative methods, including interviews and focus groups involving staff, parents and students as well as the project worker and Berry Street staff. They also made use of the quantitative data collected by the project worker following comprehensive surveys of students. The surveys attempted to determine the types and prevalence of violent behaviour in the school. The following excerpt from the evaluation document provides details of the evaluation methodology:

Methodology

A literature review of violence in schools and programmes designed to diminish the effects of violence was undertaken. There was an analysis of the data and other information collected about the schools and the project by the worker. This included policy and descriptive documents and the results of surveys undertaken with students. In-depth interviews were undertaken with key stakeholders. These stakeholders included the project worker, other current and former staff from Sutherland [Berry Street], teachers from Banksia Secondary College, a selection of parents involved in the project and representatives from the funding body. A selection of teachers from Macleod Technical College were also interviewed.

A seminar was held at Banksia Secondary College with a range of students from years 9 and 11. The seminar consisted of open discussion on the students' definitions of violence and their reaction to it. They were also asked to reflect on the Creating New Choices programme and its contribution within the school's curriculum.

The two schools, Banksia Secondary College and Macleod Technical College, provided a useful contrast because of the differences in the way in which the worker approached the task, and the receptiveness of the school communities to the project.

RESULTS

Despite the difficulties inherent to the evaluation process, the findings proved useful to both the project worker and the organization. The innovative nature of the work was highly commended, as was the clearly conceptualized violence prevention framework. The report also included suggestions for future directions, almost all of which have been acted upon to varying degrees (Ridge & McLeod, 1997, p. 5):

- *Violence definition*—'The CNC Project has taken a broad definition of violence. Traditionally, the conceptualization of violence has tended to be confined to fighting and bullying. However, in recent times, violence has been redefined in broader terms to encompass inequalities of power and social relations that are not respectful and do not value individuals. Bullying is often the manifestation of underlying violent structures and relationships. This broad definition is appropriate and supported by current research in the area.'
- *Preventative focus*—'In the schools the project has tried to address the causes of violence and its various manifestations…The project has taken a preventative focus. There has been considerable effort to address violence on a variety of fronts, and to mobilize all members of the school community.'
- *School/community links*—'The school sees the Creating New Choices programme as a major catalyst for change to a less violent culture. A major feature of the programme has been the way in which it has developed and maintained a professional link between Berry Street and the school. The school now sees Berry Street as part of its community. The services of Berry Street are integrated within the day-to-day operation of the school.'
- *Model*—'The flexible, community development approach of CNC means that the programme could be implemented in other schools if there was a strongly perceived need and suitable conditions. The programme does place extra demands on the school. Paradoxically, the programme would be most effective if the school was not in a state of crisis (i.e., dealing with an upsurge of violent incidents. The operation of the programme at Banksia Secondary College with its preventative focus that addressed the broad causes of violence would not be particularly appropriate as a means of crisis management.'

BARRIERS TO EVALUATION

Community development framework and the 'whole school' approach
After reading the report it becomes clear that the evaluators struggled to devise an evaluative methodology capable of measuring the impact of the community development strategies employed within the project. The target group is made up of many different groups with varying interests and influence. Interventions are often tailored to meet the needs of a particular target group, and thus evaluating the impact of the project on the whole school community is difficult.

Statistical information on critical incidents or suspension of students for violent behaviour was not a good measure of the impact of the programme. The planned methods of evaluation also had to be altered somewhat to accommodate the precise nature of the project. A number of factors meant that it was difficult to ascertain what changes in the school were directly attributable to the project. These included the breadth of the model which was developed and implemented, and the broad definition of violence that characterized the programme.

Funding/resources
The difficulties encountered by the evaluators pose an on-going challenge to the project. Data continue to be collected each time a programme is run in a school that allows the project worker to evaluate whether that programme has achieved its objectives. However, measuring the overall impact of Creating New Choices remains difficult. One of the challenges associated with measuring the impact of the programme is trying to discover what changes, if any, may be attributed to the work of the programme. For example, in their evaluation, Ridge and McLeod remark upon the fact that, at the time Creating New Choices began in the school, Banksia was emerging from a time of crisis. The crisis had been marked by a number of violent incidents that had occurred which resulted in staff and students being concerned about their own physical safety. Experience of these incidents meant that the school was receptive to a violence prevention programme. Over the next few years the culture of the school changed markedly from one in which staff felt scared to go out into the schoolyard without a mobile phone to a place where staff felt reasonably confident that they could successfully manage conflict. The difficulty for the evaluators was discovering to what extent this change could be attributed to Creating New Choices:

Since Banksia was already becoming a safer place over time, it makes it difficult to assess the precise impact of CNC. This, in part, is due to the community development strategies employed by the worker. Community development enables people to define problems in their terms and develop appropriate solutions. They, therefore, become agents and instigators of their change (Ridge & McLeod, 1997, p. 23).

RESULTS COMPARED TO ORIGINAL OBJECTIVES

Defining violence and raising awareness
The evaluation highlighted the fact that the project's success in defining violence depends very greatly on the culture of the school and the individuals that make up that school. The project was not successful in encouraging Macleod Technical College to adopt a broad definition of violence. The school council would not pass the definition that was put to it. The evaluators suggested that the broad definition 'made little direct sense' to the staff in the light of their 'experience of violence as

an established crisis' (Ridge & McLeod, 1997, p. 23). At Banksia, however, the results indicated that the programme had had success in defining and raising the profile of violence:

Establishing a broad definition of violence has widened the interpretation of actions as violence in practice. This means that behaviours that might have been dismissed by staff in the past are now more likely to be scrutinized. It was widely reported that there was more awareness about the seriousness of subtle forms of violence and staff act more quickly on these forms (ibid., p. 23).

It is possible that the project was more successful in raising awareness amongst staff than the student group. The evaluators discovered that despite familiarity with the broad definition of violence students were still less likely to view *harassment or teasing* as a form of violence. Ridge and McLeod also highlighted the fact that some of the theoretical concepts bypassed the student group. 'The students in the focus groups found it difficult to grasp the idea of institutionalized violence that underpins the CNC Project' (ibid., p. 23).

Gaining access and acceptance in schools
The success of Creating New Choices in 'gaining access, acceptance and ownership' at Banksia Secondary College was and still is considered one of the major achievements of the project. The evaluators reported that both government workers and professional staff not affiliated with Berry Street or the school spoke highly of the relationship that had been forged between Berry Street and Banksia. The relationship was considered unusual because it was an exception to people's common experience of schools' tendency to attempt to solve their own issues internally (it should be noted that much has changed since the time this report was written in 1997). Victorian schools are now more receptive to external assistance than ever before. This can be attributed in part to some major political trends that have impacted on the education system in the last few years (as mentioned in the Introduction).

The evaluators were able to identify a number of factors that assisted Creating New Choices in gaining acceptance at Banksia:

• A sense that violence was a key issue and could be tackled;
• The skills of the project worker in developing partnerships and selling the project as something the school needed;
• A flexible funding body;
• Support from senior staff and the administration process in the school;
• The assistance and support provided to CNC by Berry Street and the MATTERS team through the running of workshops and counselling.

We have already touched upon the reasons why the project did not operate as successfully at Macleod. The recommendations coming out of the report were that Creating New Choices needed to develop a strategy for working with schools in crisis:

If violence is erupting and commonplace in the school, it is likely to require short term strategies that can deal effectively with incidents as they arise. In these situations a more structural approach will often be seen as too theoretical and impractical…it is a matter of making a judgment regarding the appropriate entry point (Ridge & McLeod, 1997, p. 25).

The difficulty with this statement is that it assumes that the project has the resources to provide a crisis response service to schools as needed. Unfortunately this is not the case. While moves have been afoot within Berry Street to develop a crisis response strategy to assist the education sector and complement the preventative work that Creating New Choices offers, CNC remains a preventative project only, primarily because of limited resources.

The impact of Creating New Choices

The Creating New Choices Project has had a significant impact both on the school communities with which we have worked and, perhaps unexpectedly, on Berry Street itself. The impact the project has made has been illustrated in a number of places throughout the text. However, it is worth highlighting the significant achievements and discussing the unexpected outcomes of the project.

SCHOOL/AGENCY RELATIONSHIPS

The over-arching goal of Creating New Choices is to develop an intensive long-term relationship with two or three schools at any one time, to work with those schools utilizing a community development approach and to assist them in addressing issues relating to violence as they impact on their school community. 'Relationship' is a key concept in the work because, as in so many other life ventures, it is on this basis that the project's success or failure often depends. It is the role of the project worker to bridge the aforementioned gap that often exists between welfare and education. If the project worker succeeds in establishing a strong and mutually accountable relationship with the school based on respect and tolerance, it paves the way for broader collaboration. In our experience schools do not immediately throw open the doors and offer privileged access to their internal workings. For a community worker working in schools it is always a process of testing. There is a need to be constantly aware of the limitations and restrictions with which teachers and students operate.

Creating New Choices has been a pioneer in its efforts at bridging this gap between education and welfare. The project has developed effective long-term relationships with a number of schools. Currently, it can sustain only one project worker. Given greater funding, it has the potential to reach any number of schools. The model has been tested and refined over six years. It is an extremely cost-effective project and although it currently functions as a violence prevention project, the broad definition of violence has enabled the project worker to address many health and welfare issues. The relationships which have been established through the project can be called true 'partnerships', evidenced by the fact that the schools seek the project worker's advice on issues as wide-ranging as staff appointments through to alternative sources of funding.

The relationship that has developed between Berry Street and Banksia Secondary College (the first school to adopt the project) has been particularly significant. It is held up as a model of collaboration and has been the subject of a number of articles, conference papers and informal discussion in the field

(Macrae, 1996; Lynch, 1996; Kemmis, 1998). While this has been positive for both the agency and the school, Creating New Choices has had to work hard to develop similar relationships with other schools. It is easy for other agencies and schools to dismiss the Banksia/Berry Street partnership as somehow aberrant and not able to be replicated. The relationship has had the advantage of a six-year history and a willingness by both parties to continue the partnership. It is also assisted by geographical proximity (Berry Street and Banksia are located within 5 kilometres of each other). The Creating New Choices project worker would strongly dispute the view that this relationship is unable to be replicated. Like any relationship, it has survived as a result of hard work, determination and trust. As Creating New Choices builds relationships with other schools, it becomes more obvious that this initial relationship can be replicated, given time and motivation.

RELATIONSHIPS WITHIN SCHOOL COMMUNITIES

The Creating New Choices evaluation found a general enhancing of a range of relationships *within* school communities. Staff/student, parent/child and school/community relationships were all improved as a result of the work of the project; 'the processes and strategies of the project have helped to establish networks of relationships involving school and other professional staff, students, parents and wider community members' (Ridge & McLeod, 1997, p. 26). The effort that goes into examining the decision-making processes within the school, the complaints procedures, and policies that protect staff and students all help to improve the environment for all concerned. In addition to this, considerable effort is expended to teach staff, students and parents alternative methods of resolving conflict. These initiatives ensure tangible improvements in the quality of the relationships within the school. This is monitored through informal verbal feedback, the use of pre- and post-evaluative techniques for specific interventions, and reports made to the steering committee. The project needs to continue to work towards helping students to have a greater 'voice' and more say over their educational experience. It is important that the project worker strike the right balance between working with those who have the power to effect change and assisting those with the least power. Creating New Choices continues to challenge, from within, the existing system—at times succeeding and sometimes compromising.

CREATING A NON-VIOLENT CULTURE

Schools are often pleasantly surprised when they discover that Creating New Choices, despite its overall aim of 'violence prevention', does not have to be a depressing and difficult project to participate in. One of the most successful and effective ways of preventing violence is to find something to celebrate. We encour-

age schools to choose an event or an idea that can mobilize the school community to join together, either for a short or prolonged period of celebration. This has the secondary benefits of encouraging schools to think about what defines their community and how they create a sense of community. Attending to the concept of 'community' is extremely important, the benefits of which are increasingly documented in education literature: 'Schools with higher levels of communality also evidenced higher attendance rates, better morale (among both students and teachers) and higher levels of students achievement' (Boyd, 1997, p. 191).

An unexpected finding is the importance of the 'symbolic function' Creating New Choices performs in the school environment. The project provides a focal point for violence prevention in a school community. It promotes discussion and symbolizes an ideal that the whole school community can work towards. Its ultimate achievability is less important than the changes that happen as a result of trying. One of the most successful programmes at Banksia is the multicultural festival, a week of celebration where the different ethnic groups represented in the school showcase an aspect of their culture. The evaluators commented that 'rather than a dramatic drop in violence connected with the events, there was a sense that people were moved by the experience and gained a sense of hope that relationships involving violence were not inevitable and could be replaced by others that are more constructive and tolerant' (Ridge & McLeod, 1997, p. 26). The success of this festival has taught us that celebration is an extremely effective violence prevention tool. When working with schools we are now able to clearly articulate our methods for creating a harmonious school community. Schools are often relieved and excited to learn that the focus is not always on violence. For example, health promotion is another effective violence prevention tool. For instance, one Creating New Choices initiative involved a series of parent information evenings which addressed a range of health-related issues affecting young people (including drugs and alcohol, and sexual health). It is important to remember that the definition of violence, as well as the range of interventions, needs to be broad.

LESSONS LEARNT

Just as we have helped schools to recognize the importance of addressing issues pertaining to violence, schools have taught us that it is just as important to talk about peace. This lesson has taken a long time to learn. Initially it cost a great deal of effort to open a dialogue about violence in the educational arena. It has been most important to those involved in the early stages of the project that *violence* was not lost from the project's agenda. Nevertheless, Creating New Choices has struggled with the fact that it is difficult to unite people around the issue of violence, as it is by its nature a divisive topic. In more recent years the project has been influenced by 'strengths-based' practice and resiliency theories, both of

which emphasize the importance of enhancing positive influences to promote improved outcomes. School communities have been vocal in their desire to focus on achieving positive change as a means of eliminating negative aspects of their environment. It is interesting that from the beginning of the project we have been acutely aware of the need to reduce the stigmatization of individual young people and yet have remained largely unconscious of the fact that schools might be experiencing a similar process.

Our newest recruit, Merrilands P-12 College, chose to advertise Creating New Choices to staff, students and parents as a project that aimed at creating a peaceful school community (rather than a violence prevention project). Subsequently the project worker gave the steering committee the opportunity of creating a name for the project within their school community. This turned out to be a valuable experience in promoting ownership, as it also allowed the school to differentiate its undertaking from other CNC projects. The school decided to call the project 'Creating New Choices: Building upon a supportive and harmonious learning environment at Merrilands College'. Whilst recognizing that the overall aim of the project is violence prevention, the articulated aims were: creating harmony and tolerance, respecting and appreciating difference, promoting positive relationships, recognizing gender differences, promoting social and emotional well-being, enhancing life skills, strengthening the school community and building links with the local community.

Future prospects/conclusions

Creating New Choices was developed at a time when 'violence awareness' was firmly on the Australian social agenda. As an agency, Berry Street had started to develop a range of programmes that dealt with the nature and impact of violence, from the crisis intervention domestic violence outreach service that works from an individual and family focus through to the self-help/empowerment group work programmes for women and children. Today, Berry Street offers between six and ten early intervention and prevention programmes addressing the issue of violence. Six years ago many of these services were still being developed or had not yet been conceived. The services the agency was delivering to schools were also in the fledgling phase. Group work was being offered to a number of schools in the local area; however, there was little if any overall coordination or consistency in the services delivered to the education sector. The nature of group work also meant that individual young people were often targeted by schools as in need of a particular group work intervention (e.g. anger management). In some cases participating in a group increased the young person's feelings of marginalization and lack of belonging. Creating New Choices was conceived as a means of coordinating school-based services utilizing a violence prevention framework. By adopting a whole school approach, the targeting of individual students could be avoided.

The project's sustained testing and development of the whole school approach to violence prevention (using four different secondary colleges within a six-year time-frame) indicates that Berry Street is now an experienced player, if not forerunner, in the field of education and violence prevention. Creating New Choices is justifiably lauded as a successful model for building sustained partnerships between education and welfare. Developed at a time when resources in both sectors were stretched to the limit, Creating New Choices survived and thrived because it neither required expensive outlays nor offered quick fixes. The project was able to convince schools of the need to form partnerships, to be reflective, and to plan on a long-term basis. Instead of making recommendations and leaving, the project worker is able to work with schools to achieve change. This partnership between welfare and education has resulted in improved outcomes for the students and families in four different schools. It is estimated that the project has impacted upon two thousand young people, their immediate families and four different geographical communities in its six-year existence.

Currently the project is limited only by resource constraints. It is our belief that all interested schools should have access to the knowledge and experience of the Creating New Choices Project. The cost-effective nature of the project means that few resources are required to achieve change. It is our hope that future State and

Federal Governments will be convinced of the need to strengthen communities and build social capital. Addressing violence means maintaining a fundamental belief in social justice for all. Working in education means translating that belief into a vision for the future. The Creating New Choices Project has developed a highly effective and successful model for dealing with all forms of violence in the educational arena. The project is revolutionary in its insistence on addressing issues of institutional violence. It offers schools an intervention programme based on a critical examination of the whole school culture. It resists attempts to focus on a 'problem element' within the school and advocates for the rights of all members of the school community. The project has succeeded in this only because of its success in developing true partnerships. It has been sustained by Berry Street's commitment to addressing inequity and by the hard work and vision of all those involved.

Notes

1. Slee (1995, p. 17) argues against what he terms the 'tactical response' exercise often 'mobilized against problem students'. He aims to undertake 'a more searching analysis of the issue in order to diminish the seductive power of the "quick fix".' He argues for a whole school approach such as the one adopted by this project: 'an ethos needs to be developed where violent behaviour is abhorred, exposed and eliminated'.
2. For an explanation of these concepts, see Kemmis and Lynch (2000). 'In Australia today, a number of schools are grappling with the notion of education for community development as a purpose that complements education for personal development. Some are exploring this notion through the innovation of "*full service schooling*". These full service schools are dedicated to education for social justice. They aim to create and foster relationships that are *inclusive, engaging and enabling*' Ibid., p. 2.
3. See Atkins, 1995; Downey, 1996; Sheehan, 1997.
4. Turning to the school system to provide early intervention is consistent with Australia's reliance on the schools as 'preventative and human-oriented institutions' and the subsequent development of 'first chance programmes' within the education system—as opposed to America's emphasis upon second chance programmes, which come into effect after young people have slipped through the education system. For a more complete explanation of these divergent phenomena, see Batten and Russell, 1997, p. vii.
5. For a more complete analysis of the link between gender and violence and the impact of feminist theory on the Creating New Choices Project, see Lynch (1998).
6. The phrase used by Boyd to describe 'the effort to co-ordinate the activities of schools and other human services agencies serving children and families, particularly those that are considered to be at risk. See Boyd (1997, p. 189).

References and bibliography

Abbey, N. 1993. *Creating safer communities: discussion paper*. Melbourne, Victoria, Victorian Community Council Against Violence (VCCAV).

Abbey, N.; Butten, D. 1997. *Safer cities and shires: a guide to developing strategic partnerships*. Melbourne, Victoria, Community Safety and Crime Prevention Unit, Police and Strategic Development Division, Department of Justice.

Atkins, P. 1995. Making the links: working to connect the issues for children, adolescents and non-offending parents in situations of family violence. (Paper presented at the 4th Family Violence Research Conference, University of New South Hampshire, NH, July 1995.)

Australian Council of State School Organizations. 1996. *Towards safe and supportive learning environments: strategies for parent groups and school councils*. Canberra, ACT, ACSSO.

—.1998. *Creating safe school environments: what's working in Australian schools*. Canberra, ACT, ACSSO.

Batten, M.; Russell, J. 1997. *Students at risk: a review of Australian literature, 1980–1994*. Melbourne, Victoria, Australian Council for Education Research.

Bessant, J. 1995. Violence, the media and the making of policy: the closures of Richmond Secondary School. *In:* Bessant, J.; Carrington, K.; Cook, S., eds., op. cit., p. 45–58.

Bessant, J.; Carrington, K.; Cook, S., eds. 1995. *Cultures of crime and violence: the Australian experience*. Bundoora, Victoria, La Trobe University Press.

Bessant, J.; Watts, R. 1995. Young people and violence: a focus on schools. *In*: Chappell, D.; Egger, S., eds., op. cit., p. 105–22.

Boyd, W.L. 1997. Competing models of schools and communities: the struggle to reframe and reinvent their relationships. *Leading and managing*, vol. 3, no. 3, p. 188–301.

Chappell, D.; Egger, S., eds. 1995. *Australian violence: contemporary perspectives II*. Canberra, ACT, Australian Institute of Criminology.

Crooks, M.L. 1996. 'To market, to market': The Radical Right experiment with Victoria's state education system. *In:* Webber, M.; Crooks, M.L., eds., op. cit., p. 3-42.

Davis, M. 1997. *Gangland: cultural elites and the new generationalism*. Sydney, Allen & Unwin.

Dixon, J. 1995. Creating safer communities. *In:* Chappell, D.; Egger, S., eds., op. cit., p. 339-55.

Downey, L. 1997. Adolescent violence: a systemic and feminist perspective. *Australian and New Zealand journal of family therapy*, vol. 18, no. 2, June 1997, p. 70–79.

Hannan, B. 1996. Lying low: education under Kennett. *In*: Webber, M.; Crooks, M.L., eds., op. cit., p. 53-76.

House of Representatives Standing Committee on Employment, Education and Training. 1994. *Sticks and stones: a report on violence in Australian Schools*. Canberra, ACT, Australian Government Publishing Service.

Independent Education Unit. 1995. New South Wales policy: developing effective policies in school and system management of aggressive and violent behaviour. *Independent education: violence in schools* (NSW and Victorian Independent Education Unions), vol. 21, no. 2, July, p. 22-23. (Special edition.)

Kemmis, S. 1998. Building a community of practice: developing full service schools. (Address to the National Workshop *Full Service Schools: From Ideas to Actions*, sponsored by the National Schools Network and the Australian Centre for Equity through Education, NSW, 11–13 September 1998.)

Kemmis, S.; Lynch, T. 2000. *The aspirations of the full service school: individual and community development.* (Discussion paper.)

Knight, T. 1991. 'At risk' schools: a problem for students. *Principal matters*, vol. 2, no. 4, April 1991.

Kronemann, M. 1993. *Trends in Victorian schools' funding*. Melbourne, Victoria, Federated Teachers Union of Victoria. (Research paper.)

Kronemann, M. 1996. *Victorian government schools trends data, April 1996.* Melbourne, Victoria, Australian Education Union, Victorian Branch.

Lynch, T. 1996. *Preventing violence in secondary schools*. (Paper presented at the Full Service Schools Conference held by the Australian Centre for Equity through Education (ACEE), September 1996.)

Lynch, T. 1998. *Developing socially just schools: the use of a gender analysis in addressing the personal, professional and institutional manifestations of violence*. (Paper presented at the Fourth UNESCO–ACEID International Conference on Secondary Education and Youth at the Crossroads, Bangkok, 10–13 November 1998.)

Macrae, D. 1996. *Mixed marriages: pioneering partnerships between health and education. A local model*. (Paper delivered to the 2nd National Conference of the National Association of Health Promoting Schools, Sydney University, December 1996.)

Mullaly, R. 1993. *Structural social work: ideology, theory and practice*. Toronto, McClelland & Stewart.

Murphy, L. 1995. Don't let the view obscure the vision. *Independent education: violence in schools* (NSW and Victorian Independent Education Unions), vol. 21, no. 2, July, p. 14-17. (Special edition.)

Ollis, D.; Tomaszewski, I. 1993. *Gender and violence project: position paper.* Canberra, ACT, Department of Employment, Education and Training (DEET), Commonwealth Government Printer.

Polk, K. 1995. Youth violence: myth or reality. *In*: Chappell, D.; Egger, S., eds., op. cit., p. 51–70.

Rice, A. 1995. Forming a coalition for the prevention of violence against youth and families: current international trends. *Independent education: violence in schools* (NSW and Victorian Independent Education Unions), vol. 21, no. 2, July, p. 24–26. (Special edition.)

Ridge, D.; McLeod, J. 1997. *Creating new choices: an evaluation*. Melbourne, Victoria, University of Melbourne, Faculty of Education, Youth Research Centre.

Rigby, K. 1995. New thinking about bullying in schools. *Independent education: violence in schools* (NSW and Victorian Independent Education Unions), vol. 21, no. 2, July, p. 3–8. (Special edition.)

Seddon, T. 1996. Devolution: pressing education beyond politics. *In*: Webber, M.; Crooks, M.L., eds., op. cit., p. 43–51.

Sheehan, M. 1997. Adolescent violence: strategies, outcomes and dilemmas in working with young people and their families. *Australian and New Zealand journal of family therapy*, vol. 18, no. 2, June, p. 80–91.

Slee, R. 1995. Pathologies of school violence: a reconsideration. *In*: Bessant, J.; Carrington, K.; Cook, S., eds., op. cit., p. 16–23.

Smith, P. 1995. Violence in schools: issues, challenges and successful strategies. *Independent education: violence in schools* (NSW and Victorian Independent Education Unions), vol. 21, no. 2, July, p. 3–8. (Special edition.)

Webber, M.; Crooks, M.L., eds. 1996. *Putting the people last: government, services and rights in Victoria*. Hyland House, Victoria, Victoria Foundation for Public Policy.

Wilkins, R. 1993. Training children and adolescents in the skills of interpersonal conflict resolution: a developmental theory and training strategy. *Positive initiatives and new frontiers: 1993 National Conference*, p. 173–82.

Appendix A: Definition of violence

- *Violence is both a social and cultural phenomenon.*
- *It is not merely a product of aberrant or deviant behaviour of isolated individuals.*
- *People's behaviour and experiences are strongly influenced by their gender and cultural location.*
- *Violence can take on various forms such as the abuse and illegitimate exercise of physical, sexual, emotional, economic and social power.*
- *The consequences for the victims of violence are serious, debilitating, hurtful and unjust.*
- *Violence needs to be understood as a continuum of behaviour covering a broad range of conduct, acts and practices.*
- *Rape, murder and war are at the more serious and extreme end of the continuum, while name-calling and harassment are the less extreme manifestations of violent behaviour.*
- *Under Australian law many acts of violence are illegal and are therefore considered criminal offences.*
- *The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child protects Australian children from violence. This came into force on the 16th January 1991.*
- *Everyone has the right to be free from violence.*

Creating New Choices Project, 1994.

Appendix B: Case examples

Creating New Choices—Violence Prevention Initiatives, Berry Street Victoria

Maree Sidey and Theresa Lynch

This document outlines a number of violence prevention initiatives and provides examples of CNC work in each of the seven areas that have been identified for the development of key strategies and action. The document includes examples of past and present CNC initiatives.

POLICY DEVELOPMENT

Policy development is a process that occurs in the early stages of CNC's relationship with a school. During the process of developing an action plan to direct the project within the school, existing policies are reviewed and non-existent policies are developed. The extent of the work depends entirely upon the willingness of the school to submit their policies for review. Relevant policy areas include:
• bullying and harassment;
• welfare;
• student discipline;
• emergency management;
• health and safety;
• equal opportunity.
Effective and comprehensive policies enable schools to manage violence as it occurs, whether it involves staff, students or family members. Reviewing these policies encourages the school to reflect upon its level of responsibility to its staff, students and the wider community.

During the policy development process valuable relationships are often built with relevant community agencies. For example, developing an *emergency management protocol* may involve making contact with the local police station and seeking guidance regarding police backup, or it may be necessary to find out what critical incident de-briefing is available for staff and students and where it can be accessed. Similarly, developing a policy regarding harassment may mean contacting child welfare officers or the Equal Opportunity Commission. Throughout this process the school increases its knowledge regarding its own level of responsibility and the community supports available during a crisis. A school that takes the time to develop relevant and responsive policies increases its ability to effectively manage violence, thereby providing a safer environment for all.

The extent to which policy development is embraced depends entirely on the individual school. Some schools have well-developed policies that may only need

to be reviewed in the context of violence prevention. Other schools have very few policies on paper and welcome the opportunity for a comprehensive review. However, it is not uncommon for schools to be reluctant to allow external agencies access to their policies. It is important that this is clearly negotiated and becomes part of the terms under which *Creating New Choices* operates in a school. Invariably, the steering committee experiences pressure to complete the policy work quickly, as teachers are often eager for classroom work to begin.

CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT

Curriculum development is guided by social justice principles that are embedded in the policies and practices of CNC. This process is a collaborative one involving teachers and the wider community. Workshops covering a wide range of issues relevant to violence prevention have been developed for all ages of students. For example, workshops have been designed to facilitate students understanding about the continuum of violence, the impact of racism, sexual harassment and family violence. The content of the programmes is determined by the need of the students and is usually planned to coincide and/or complement existing curriculum activities of the school.

A key feature of *Creating New Choices* has been the development of special curriculum events, including:
• Violence Awareness Week;
• Multicultural Festival;
• Banksia Festival;
• The Disability Awareness Programme;
• Getting Along: Conflict Resolution In Schools Project.

Violence Awareness Week—1995 (Banksia Secondary College)
The first Violence Awareness Week was held in September 1995. The aim of the week was to create greater knowledge and awareness within the school community about violence prevention, in a manner that was both educative and fun. A range of guest speakers representing key community agencies talked to the students about issues such as racism, gender and violence and human rights. Workshops were also held on domestic violence, conflict resolution techniques and sexual assault. In addition, a number of entertainers, including poets, buskers, artists and singers, came to the school to share their knowledge and skills with the students. Basketballers from our National League also participated in this special event and an Art Display produced by Year 11 students proved to be a successful strategy for engaging students. The incorporation of fun into the week helped students to focus on the more serious aspects of learning about violence. Workshops were also held specifically for teachers and they were invited to participate with students in the daily lunchtime activities.

Two other Violence Awareness Weeks were held in 1999 and 2000 to coincide with a much broader national campaign entitled *Week Without Violence*. These events are coordinated on a State-wide level by the Domestic Violence and Incest Resource Centre and Family Violence Networks.

Multicultural and Banksia Festivals—1996 (Banksia Secondary College)
The success of the first Violence Awareness Week led to the development of the annual Multicultural Festival, the inaugural event being held in the first week of April 1996. The aims of the Festival are:
• The creation of an educational programme that addresses the schools' cultural diversity;
• Improving students' understanding of how different cultures operate;
• Increasing students' knowledge and understanding of racism;
• Engaging the whole school community in the creation and implementation of the programme.

The organizing committee comprises five teachers, staff from Berry Street Victoria and students from each of the major cultural groups in the College. Cultures represented were Anglo-Celtic, Somalian, Lebanese, Vietnamese, Greek, Koorie, Polynesian, Philippine and Italian. Students shared their traditions and heritage through a variety of media, including dance, music, art, recreation, food and sport. Activities included an Opening Ceremony, Cultural Concert and Food Stalls, Lunchtime Radio Station, National Dress Day, Student Workshops, Student Art Display, Coin, Stamp, Musical Instrument and Artefact Displays, Sport Clinics and Staff/Student Games as well as a Staff Seminar on 'Multicultural Issues'.

A particular strength of this activity is the student interest, input and leadership. Another strength, similar to the *Violence Awareness Week,* was the support from community agencies. Over ten organizations played an active role during this first multicultural festival, with an additional twenty agencies providing consultation and resources to the school.

With the support of the CNC co-ordinator, Banksia Secondary College has continued to hold annual events celebrating the cultural diversity of the college community. These have included the Banksia Festival (April 1997), the Disability Awareness Programme (November 1997) and the Multicultural Festival (April 1998).

Getting Along: Conflict Resolution In Schools Project
Diamond Valley College and Banksia Secondary College
Another significant curriculum initiative was the development of the 'Getting Along: Conflict Resolution in Schools' project, funded by the Danks Trust. It encompasses models of conflict resolution and family therapy to build on the school

community's strengths and resources to resolve conflict. The core of the project is the development of a social and emotional skills group work programme enabling young people to recognize, avoid and deal with conflict. Emphasis is on building young people's strengths and skills in relation to a number of interpersonal qualities.

This innovative project included the development of a Peer Mediation Programme enabling young people in conflict to resolve their disagreements through a negotiation process mediated by their peers.

TEACHER TRAINING

Throughout the CNC project all teachers have participated in various workshops and in-service training. Our programmes seek to further teachers' understanding and knowledge of violence and conflict, assist them in challenging their own behaviour and attitude towards resolving violence and conflict and improve connections with other community support and services. Teachers have been able to explore various strategies for dealing with conflict through case studies and sharing of information and knowledge.

Opportunities for teacher training have become more limited, due to external demands and shrinking resources available to schools. However, in the last twelve months the training either coordinated or facilitated by the *Creating New Choices* programme (Banksia Secondary College and Diamond Valley College and King Khalid Islamic College) has included: Working with At-Risk Students, Conflict Resolution, Adolescents and Depression, Suicide, Sexual Abuse and Mandatory Reporting, and Responding to Disclosures of Violence.

An innovative approach to teacher training was successfully attempted at Banksia Secondary College in 2000. The *Community Linkages Project* involves inviting community workers into the school twice a term to talk about the work they do with young people and families. Although attendance is voluntary, sessions have been well attended by staff who enjoy the opportunity for informal sharing of knowledge and skills. The project encourages early identification and response by increasing teachers' knowledge about available support services. While it remains the role of the Student Welfare Coordinator (SWC) to refer individual young people to services, SWCs rely heavily on teachers' personal knowledge of students.

STUDENT EDUCATION AND SUPPORT

Student education and support is a central element in the various stages of the programme and students have participated in a wide range of group work activities addressing the following themes: Gender Awareness and Violence, Domestic Violence, Sexual Harassment, Racism, Disability Awareness, Boys Groups (Exploring Masculinity), and Alternative Strategies for Resolving Conflict.

Utilizing artwork as a medium for understanding and exploring issues of violence and conflict has proven a successful strategy for raising awareness about both the individual and the community's role and responsibility in the prevention of violence. It is usually in the process of 'doing the artwork' that young people begin to feel confident and safe to explore some of the more complex areas of violence.

An example of some recent work completed with young people is described below.

Bold Bodies and RAGE—2000
Diamond Valley College and Banksia Secondary College
A comprehensive programme was developed this year targeting all Year 9 students in two separate secondary schools in the Banyule/Nillumbik region. The programme ran over three weeks with each student participating in a total of six hours of intensive small group work. Students were divided along gender lines with the programmes being developed to meet the needs of the different sexes as identified by the schools. Issues identified for Year 9 girls were: eating disorders, low self-esteem, self-harming, early school-leaving, emotional stress, pregnancy risk and substance abuse. Concerning boys, the schools identified the issues of early school-leaving, absenteeism, aggression and violence and substance abuse.

The programmes developed deliberately challenged traditional gender constructions. The girls' programme utilized physical activity with the girls receiving training in basic circus skills. This was combined with discussion around self-esteem, body pride, personal boundaries, gender construction and societal expectations of women. The boys' programme was discussion-based and covered positive emotional expression, the impact of violence and societal expectation of men.

Feedback from students and staff indicates that both programmes were enormously successful, not only in meeting the original aims and addressing issues of concern, but most importantly, in providing information in a fun, creative and engaging format. Both schools are eager to have the programmes repeated in 2001.

*N.B. Creating New Choices worked with external facilitators to develop a programme appropriate to Year 9 students. The *Bold Bodies* programme was developed by Linda Wilson and Joanne Donne (ex-members of the Women's Circus). RAGE is a federally funded Berry Street programme targeted at adolescent boys who have been affected by domestic violence.

Expect Respect: Health and Relationships Forum—2000 (13 schools)
This forum for schools in the Northern metropolitan region was held on 23 October as part of the Week Without Violence 2000. The forum brought together 135 Year 10 students from 13 schools in the Northern region for a day of interactive workshops on violence prevention facilitated by service providers from that region. There were 30 workshop sessions on subjects such as safe sex, work-

place bullying, supporting a friend, gay and lesbian young people, art therapy to build self-esteem, peer education about relationship violence, how to party safely, etc. Teachers also participated in workshops run by the DVIRC (Domestic Violence and Incest Resource Centre) and the Northern Centre Against Sexual Assault on how to respond to students who disclose abuse.

Feedback on the forum was extremely positive, with 86% of students rating the day very positively in their evaluations. The interactive workshops (e.g. art therapy and drama) were particularly popular. Comments included *'I learnt other people have the same problems', 'I learnt to deal with other people and express myself with other people', 'It was relaxing and I felt better about myself'* and *'I learnt about relationships and who to turn to if you need help'*.

Contributing to the success of the forum were the following features:

• The issue of relationship violence was addressed directly (through the opening ceremony and in specific workshops), and indirectly (through workshops on related issues, e.g. how to party safely, safe sex, conflict resolution, self-esteem, how to find help on the Internet, how to support a friend, and sexuality and homophobia). This meant that the forum was able to address violence prevention for students in a non-threatening way.

• The day was interactive, and used art, drama, circus skills, video, the Internet, as well as discussion-based workshops to address issues of violence prevention. Students responded particularly well to the mixture of workshops used.

• Young people were able to meet service providers in their local region in person, which may help to make them more comfortable in approaching these services.

• Teachers also participated through workshops on how to support students in dealing with relationship violence.

• Young people met students from other schools in the region. Comments from students included *'I liked it because I got to talk to people who I've never met before'*.

• The combination of gender-specific and mixed-gender workshops. For example, a workshop run by young women for young women through Berry Street's Young Women's Project used art to explore ideas about healthy relationships. The RAGE programme at Berry Street provided a workshop entitled 'Respect, Responsibility and Choice' for young men to discuss what makes a good relationship.

School Camps (Diamond Valley College)
Since 1998 the CNC Co-ordinator has participated in the Year 7 Camp for students at Diamond Valley Secondary College. The camp aims to provide orientation to secondary school students and the opportunity for them to engage on a social level with their peers. In addition to the myriad activities available to campers, each student participates in a social skills workshop facilitated by the Creating New

Choices project worker. The workshop aims to help students adjust to the transition from primary to secondary school, by allowing the opportunity to talk about the pros and cons of leaving primary school. The workshop also covers topics such as making friends, identifying mentors, and where to go to get help in secondary school. During the workshop, each student is asked to identify a person (e.g. caregiver, friend, sibling, relative, neighbour, teacher, school counsellor) to whom they can turn should any issue arise during the course of the year. The role of the school welfare co-ordinator is also explained. These workshops are highly valued by the Year 7 staff at Diamond Valley College. The workshops play a crucial role in assisting new students to adapt to their school environment.

OUTREACH COUNSELLING

An important service to families and young people is the Outreach Counselling Programme. This service provides appropriate counselling and support to young people identified as being at risk of school exclusion and other forms of alienation associated with a range of social issues (homelessness, violence, abuse, neglect and poverty). The service assists young people and their families to develop, maintain and use their own networks of support and provides a forum for young people and their families to reduce their level of conflict. Teachers are also provided with consultancy and welfare support. This service is run with the help of our Youth and Family Mediation Team.

PARENT EDUCATION

For a school community, working with the parents and families of students can be both extremely challenging and very rewarding. It is in this area that community agencies have a great deal of expertise. It is important that schools do not feel they have to undertake this challenge on their own. The approach taken depends entirely on the needs of the school community. For some schools it can be very difficult to engage parents. Schools that are located in communities with low income levels, a small percentage of parents who completed tertiary education, a high percentage of people from a non-English-speaking background, and a high proportion of single parents may find that parents do not have the time or perhaps the confidence to actively involve themselves in their child's education.

Creating New Choices has adopted many different approaches to parent education. In schools with a high proportion of 'anglo' parents, information and education nights have been well received. A school may choose to do a survey to ascertain topics of interest to parents. The project then draws on the expertise of local community workers. 'Living with Adolescents: Let's Talk About It' or 'Drug and Alcohol Information' evenings are examples of this type of approach. If the issue of alienation and lack of communication between parents and students is identified, engaging parents and students in a mutual activity is a possibility. The

project recently ran a parent and students night called 'Negotiating a Safe Night Out'. This encouraged communication between the different age groups whilst covering topics such as "how do you bring up the issue of going out without having a fight?" and "how to organize a safe party".

It may be important to target a particular group of parents within the school. For example, one of the schools holds two morning teas per term for the mothers of the Somali students who attend the school. The mothers bring traditional food and beverages and hold a ceremonial meeting with school staff. Any issues that pertain to the Somali students are raised and the mothers have the opportunity to question the school about how they are managing particular issues/incidents. It is an opportunity for staff to consult the mothers about culturally sensitive issues. The opportunity to meet in this way has significantly improved relations between the two groups and has had a positive impact on the Somali students' educational experience.

COMMUNITY NETWORKING

A key to the success of CNC is the recognition of the importance and capacity to develop sustaining collaborative partnerships from both within and outside the school environment. In this context schools are encouraged to hold community consultations and broaden their relevant support networks. This has been achieved through Public and Community Forums and participation in a number of local, State-wide and national networks.

The first Public Forum was held at Banksia Secondary College in late 1994. Parents, teachers, and local community agencies (including the Police Department, Banyule Council and West Heidelberg Community Health Centre) attended this special event. It provided both the school and community with an opportunity to hear each other's views on violence and to develop cooperative partnerships and projects.

Myer Foundation Full-Service Schools Project
Due to the extraordinary relationship developed between Banksia and Berry Street, both organizations were funded by the Australian Centre for Equity Through Education and the National Schools Network in 1997/1998 to participate in a national project exploring the discourse on full-service schooling. The project developed furthered our understanding of the relevance of full-service schooling for young people who are marginalized and losing their connections to mainstream education. As a result of this project, a number of community consultations were held to seek the support and commitment from the community. An Open Day was held to showcase the practices of full-service schooling at Banksia and to identify and share effective strategies in the building of collaborative practices between schools, community and agencies. This was followed by another com-

50

munity forum held on 25 November 1998 with nine different educational and welfare organizations represented. At the conclusion of this meeting there was a commitment from participants to assist in the development of an alternative educational setting for young people not connected to mainstream education. Further discussions took place at a meeting held on 8 February 1999.

The development of Banksia as a Full Service School was born mainly out of the lessons learnt from CNC about how to develop successful partnerships which improve the educational opportunities and experiences of all young people. More recently, we have been funded by the Myer Foundation to establish a 'School Partnership Research Centre' with Banksia to expand our knowledge of full-service schooling, across Victoria and nationally. These are very significant developments as they are illuminating other pathways to creating peaceful solutions to school violence.

Other examples of community networking achieved in the early stages of the project (1995–1996) include the project worker's involvement in the Community Relations and Education Project, Victorian Education Department. This project provided a strategic response to school and community concerns about the impact of racism, discrimination and violence on community well-being. The project worked in partnership with a wide range of organizations and individuals within the education, government, community, business and private sectors to provide leadership and coordination for work being undertaken in this area across the State of Victoria. The project worker also participated in the Advisory and Planning Committee for the Schools and Violence Forum established to assist the Commonwealth Government in identifying whole school approaches to addressing violence in schools. The committee held a State-wide forum in 1997 to present effective ways of dealing with violence in schools and made recommendations for further national work. These experiences provided extensive support and resources to CNC and gave the project an elevated profile enabling it to further develop its pioneering approach in the area of violence prevention.

Each festival, as listed above in the previous section, has also played a very important role in welcoming families, the community and a variety of other agencies, service providers and professionals into the school. They have proven to be very effective strategies for building school and community partnerships, which are critical for developing a safer school environment.

PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

It can be argued that the broad strategy adopted by CNC to effect a cultural change in the school community lends itself to the building of a safer physical environment. Although no specific event has focused entirely on improving the school's physical construction, the various festivals, particularly with the emphasis on art, have sought to improve the general ambience of the school environment.