Case Study

CONTACT Council
NEWPORT, TENNESSEE

Institute for Community Peace
National Funding Collaborative on Violence Prevention
Introduction
The National Funding Collaborative on Violence Prevention (NFCVP) is a partnership among public and private grantmakers, experts in violence prevention and related disciplines, and community collaborations. Established by grantmakers in 1994 in response to increasing violence across the country, NFCVP promotes a safe, healthy, and peaceful nation by mobilizing community resources and leadership. We support strategies that emphasize resident engagement and community empowerment and address the range of factors that undermine safety.

Collaboration is a cornerstone of our work, as it enables groups to respond comprehensively to the complex web of individual, social, economic, political and environmental factors that give rise to violence. We believe the best violence prevention collaborations engage members across disciplines and sectors and include those most directly affected by violence. When done well collaboration can decrease isolation, foster mutual trust and goodwill and give birth to collective efficacy, all essential elements of building safe, healthy and peaceful communities.

NFCVP’s work has been informed by community collaboratives across the country with whom we have partnered since 1995 to address a cross-section of violence problems ranging from youth and generalized community violence to violence in the media and in the home. Our approach recognizes that the best solutions to violence rest in the hands of a community well prepared to define, develop and enact them. We provide our local partners with operational, technical and evaluation support tailored to their needs and that assists them in developing the competencies needed to implement their own solutions. Through our partnerships with these community groups NFCVP has been able to cull lessons learned and identify promising practices in community-based violence prevention.

The following case study illustrates the development of a community-based collaboration to prevent violence. It explores the collaborative process, the implementation of a collective vision and the lessons learned as residents struggle through the difficult processes of collaboration and violence prevention. It is followed by a series of discussion questions that highlight the salient issues in collaborations that prevent violence. It concludes with a vignette and theory of change for the collaborative. We hope that these additions will complement the narrative of the case study and serve as a model for developing comprehensive, community-based violence prevention.

If you would like further information on the NFCVP, or copies of case studies on other local violence prevention collaboratives, please contact us at:

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Published by NFCVP in 2003.

Effective June 2003, the National Funding Collaborative on Violence Prevention is changing its name to the Institute for Community Peace, a national resource center on violence prevention and peace promotion.
A Way of Life

In the summer of 2000, an East Tennessee auto dealer named Greg "Lumpy" Lambert wanted to increase business at his used car lot in a small town just outside of Knoxville, Tennessee, the largest city within proximity of Cocke County. As a marketing promotion, he declared August 26, 2000 "Second Amendment Saturday." Lambert planned to offer each car buyer on that day a voucher entitling him or her to a used bolt-action rifle from a local dealer. If shoppers happened to bring a child with them, the child would receive a free water pistol, whether or not the parents purchased a car.

Not surprisingly, the promotion sparked controversy between gun control advocates and National Rifle Association members and sympathizers. The regional daily newspaper, The Knoxville News-Sentinel, ran a story about the offer. Lambert told the media that his promotion was a direct response to recent gun buy-back efforts by the local police department and the federal government, a practice he believes undermines a resident's second amendment right to bear arms. The news was picked up by wire services and appeared in national headlines. On the Reuters' web-site dated August 24, a story about the car dealer was filed under the "Oddly Enough" curiosity section, while National Public Radio featured it as a bottom-of-the-hour 30 second segue amounting to a tongue-in-cheek anecdote.

The car dealer’s marketing promotion and the media attention it received presented conflicting messages about guns and the people of East Tennessee. In claiming that his promotion was a response to gun buy-back programs, Lambert set himself up as a champion of citizens’ rights, as he held that gun ownership, like car ownership, was the business of individuals, not a matter for public concern or government intervention. But national media reported Lambert’s gun giveaway as yet another laughable Appalachian stereotype.

There was no denying that Lambert had struck a dissonant chord, which at its base articulated long-held cultural assumptions about the righteousness of gun ownership that is still embraced by individuals in the East Tennessee region and across the nation. Nevertheless, the fact that these assumptions were called into question by local and national media at the time of Lambert’s promotion indicates that broader concerns about the implications of gun ownership and also about the nature of violence, gun-related or otherwise, were making themselves felt in the region.

Why Cocke County?

Cocke County, with a population of just over 30,000 inhabitants spread over an area of 434 square miles, is located in a mountainous region on the Tennessee-North Carolina state line. Though the region can be accessed via Interstate 40 and several state highways, much of the population resides in the more remote reaches of the county on hilltops and in narrow hollows between steep mountains. At the southern end of the region is the Great Smoky Mountains National Park, while the eastern Cocke County Mountains lie within the Cherokee National Forest.

A widely held belief about this part of East Tennessee is that the hills and hollows have been home to moonshiners and marijuana growers for generations, and that a segment of the county's economy is based on contraband. Historically, the above ground economy of Newport, the county seat, has come from tobacco farming, light manufacturing, food canning and some government employment. U.S. Census Bureau data from 1994 reported a per capita income of $14,139 per year and estimated that at least 25 percent of the people were living below the poverty line.

Other significant data characterizing the region show that only about half of the people over age 25 have finished high school. Functional illiteracy is common; 1993 figures estimated 4,300 adults with reading skills below the 6th grade level. Additionally, the region has one of the highest teen pregnancy rates in the nation, and in 1995, the rate of reported cases of child abuse and neglect was 17.5 per 1,000 children, compared to the statewide rate of 9.1 cases per 1,000 children.

The geography of Cocke County poses challenges for community organizers as well. The Community/Neighborhood Team for the Arts, Communication & Technology (CONTACT) Council, a community-based violence prevention collaborative, centers its work in Cocke County’s hub and commercial center—the town of Newport. Outside of Newport, much of the rest of the region is divided into half a dozen smaller communities, each isolated from the other and from Newport by the mountainous terrain, creeks and rivers. While there are many shared concerns among Cocke County residents generally, each of the smaller communities has unique characteristics and needs, and as a county-wide network, CONTACT must find ways to serve these communities individually while also developing a regional identity.

Violence Ingrained in Culture and Identity

Individuals who work to prevent violence and to build safe, healthy and peaceful communities in East Tennessee were frustrated by the mixed messages in the news, but not surprised. Such attitudes, they say, are symptomatic of a local culture prone to accepting violence in all its manifestations as part of day-to-day
existence. "Guns are a fact of life here," said long-time East Tennessee non-violence activist Camille Carter when asked about her reaction to the story. "It's part of the culture. It's not the root of the violence." She readily acknowledges that guns are prevalent and easily available in her community. A recent drive-by shooting near Carter's place of work at the Tanner Cultural Center in Newport, Tennessee is an example of urban-style violence manifested in a small town. However, for Carter, preventing violence in the region entails devising alternative strategies rather than addressing the seemingly unquestioned acceptance of widespread gun ownership; it is about changing attitudes that allow all kinds of violence to occur and perpetuate themselves.

The Cocke County region of East Tennessee where Carter lives has historically been regarded by local residents and those in neighboring counties as tough territory. Bill Murrah, a Cocke County land owner who also serves on the board of a regional non-profit economic development organization, notes that Cocke County is "an economy built on moonshine, [which] led to lack of trust between neighbors and built a climate of distrust and violence in the community. People burnt each others' houses down over moonshine. And those same families still live here. These conflicts have deep roots and contribute to an environment where violence is prevalent, even commonplace. It's historic."

"There's a cultural and moral laxity brought on by the despair in the area that fosters this [reputation]. We're not going to be free of guns in East Tennessee. We had best seek freedom from poverty, freedom from injustice, freedom to participate in the democratic process," Carter observes. She quickly catalogs a number of non-gun related violent actions that have taken place in her community within the last few years: barn burnings, contract murders, kidnappings, mutilations, seemingly countless incidents of domestic violence and sexual abuse. "These are everyday events; they make the local papers and sometimes the national news," she says. "But still, people here will deny we have a problem with 'violence'."

A Holistic Approach

Carter is Project Director of CONTACT Council, a grassroots community collaborative based in the city of Newport, Tennessee about fifty miles east of the Knoxville suburb where Lambert was giving away guns. CONTACT might best be described as an organizational tapestry-in-progress. It provides forums for community members to identify specific and immediate needs for resident empowerment in their neighborhoods. The organization then gets those needs met through coordination of special programs and projects created by the people they are designed to serve. These projects and programs focus on creating safe, violence-free communities. They approach violence prevention in part by addressing the lack of economic, educational, social and cultural opportunities in Newport and the surrounding region. The interrelated problems addressed by CONTACT result from lack of resident empowerment and are key factors giving rise to violent behavior, say Council members.

"In our underserved position," says Carter, "we have to do everything from environmental monitoring to youth programs to cultural programs to getting people cars; you name it. We don't have things like Boys' and Girls' Clubs, or a big arts center, or lots of private foundations or other resources available in bigger cities. Because a lot of Cocke County seems geographically and culturally isolated, we've really fallen between the cracks in terms of these kinds of services; there just isn't the kind of economic base here that you see in some of the neighboring counties."

Addressing violence in these Cocke County communities means dealing with the associated socio-economic and environmental conditions contributing to a climate of intolerance, hopelessness and distrust. "We have to take a holistic approach," Carter says, "which, of course, means working on a wide range of problems at once. We don't have just one issue or project; we've got many, too many, and new ones keep coming up. But they're all interconnected, like a set of overlapping circles."

CONTACT members see environmental work as integral to their mission because environmental projects often address the same issues as violence prevention, such as the sense of disenfranchisement and lack of control people feel in their lives. In a broad sense, the pollution is itself a form of violence because it poses a threat to the well being of a community. One of their first activities — cleaning up the local Pigeon River
(rendered "dead" by contamination from a paper plant at the Tennessee/North Carolina border)—provided the fledgling collaborative with firsthand experience in community organizing. This experience also showed them how the success of such organizing could lay the groundwork for subsequent programs that would empower their community. Working across sectors and within already established networks, community stakeholders address the generations-old environmental abuse of the Pigeon River, community beautification, and responsible community development. The unifying aspect of the collaborative’s efforts is that they are place-based, rooted in proven relationships, and center on an understanding of the history of Cocke County.

**What Violence?**

The Council has fostered communication, a sense of regional identity, and a growing feeling of self-empowerment, thus laying the foundation for community development and violence prevention programs.

A county-wide listening and planning project sponsored by the National Funding Collaborative on Violence Prevention (NFCVP) under the auspices of the East Tennessee Foundation was undertaken in order to learn more about residents' concerns regarding violence. Residents of Newport and those from the more rural Cocke County communities were invited to participate. What emerged through this process that was most surprising to collaborative members was the fact that many residents did not identify "violence" as a problem.

"No one wants to think of themselves as living in a violent community, especially because we don’t exactly have gang warfare here. People think that's what defines a violent neighborhood, and since we don’t qualify, we must not be violent, right? But all the evidence was right there. For instance, during the listening project we conducted an interview nearly adjacent to the place where a man 'super glued' his wife’s vagina because he thought she was being unfaithful. I mean, that story made national headlines," recounts Carter.

But residents participating in the listening projects did raise a wide range of concerns about topics other than violence, including race relations, environmental devastation, and the need for economic development, youth programs and creative cultural projects. Volunteers and workers who conducted the listening project saw that working on these issues would provide an opportunity to create violence prevention initiatives. It would involve teaching people to work together on a problem about which there was already some consensus, and then address some of the root causes of violence. This would be the basis for the collaboration.

This dialogue led to the establishment of neighborhood projects to address the diverse issues identified in the listening project and by doing so, aimed to create a broad-based violence prevention campaign. As ideas for specific projects emerged, CONTACT looked for ways to fund them and to collaborate with other organizations. Consequently, some neighborhood projects are built around one-time events such as a regional conference at the Highlander Cultural Center designed to provide forums for organizers. Other activities, such as the AfterClass program or environmental projects, reflect more long-term sustained programs. During the CONTACT Council’s development process, members devised a statement of purpose that reflected community needs identified in the listening project. The statement, an articulation of the Council’s holistic approach, reads as follows:

"The CONTACT Office is dedicated to promoting safe, peaceful, and productive Cocke County communities through collaboration—in the arts, health, environment and development for the preservation and enrichment of the children, families, neighborhoods, businesses, communities, farms and homesteads of Cocke County in context of its location in East Tennessee; operating by prayerful consensus in the spirit of diversity, sense of place, flexibility, sharing of information, respect, inclusion, humor, tradition, appreciation of local history; emphasizing entrepreneurship, sustainability, and volunteerism."
"Place-Based" Community

The CONTACT Council found its home in the Tanner Cultural Center in the spring of 1998. Originally constructed in 1925 as the Tanner School, the building served Cocke County's African American population as a segregated learning institution until about 1967. It was converted to a community center in the decades following, and is now owned by the City of Newport, which makes it available as a multi-purpose center. The Tanner Cultural Center is located in the racially diverse Jones Hill community of Newport, and also houses a variety of social service organizations.

Carter points out that this banding together of social service agencies around common issues makes membership in CONTACT flexible. The listening projects helped CONTACT identify potential members at the outset, but Carter also notes that since CONTACT has become a visible presence in Cocke County, the group’s assistance is being sought out on specific projects. For instance, when residents of Cocke County’s Rock Hill community became alarmed about perceived health threats from a chemical laboratory, they asked for advice from a statewide organization and were told to go to CONTACT for help. “This is an example of how we operate,” says Carter, “being known regionally, responding locally, serving a distinct group of families—not an individual—who clearly suffer from injustice, attempting to locate outside resources and providing customized assistance to emerging native leadership. A person or a group of people from a neighborhood come to us about a problem in a community, something that divides a community or poses a threat, so we always have to be ready to work with that group or find someone who can help them.”

Initially, the collaborative drew on local volunteers from the Tanner Cultural Center, but also attracted dozens of Cocke County residents working in education, the arts, health care, recreation, law enforcement, environmental action, elder and child care, human services, business and industry, and real estate. Membership in the collaborative is dynamic, with individuals and groups joining on a project- or event-specific basis. Most collaborators are long-term Cocke County residents with ties to the community extending back several generations. “We define membership in the broadest terms. People aren’t interested in joining another ‘organization’ per se, but they are interested in events and projects,” Carter explains. Thus, in the process of working on a specific issue such as water quality, community members learn about other CON-

TACT projects and events, such as a forum on race relations, and may continue to work with the collaborative on another issue of concern. “Since all the work is place-based, people who share a vision of a civil society and peaceful communities in a sustainable ecosystem continually cross and re-cross one another’s paths.”

Fighting the Flames of Intolerance

While there are a number of serious environmental concerns threatening the health and stability of Cocke County communities, another violence-prevention issue highlighted by the listening projects was that of race relations. Racially motivated violence is nothing new to the area. In the summer of 1999 tensions were running high in the small town of Bybee where the national non-profit organization Telemon Head Start Corporation planned to build and operate a day care facility for the children of Latino migrant farm workers. Telemon had tried to open such a facility two years before in Parrottsville, another Cocke County community, but had met with such resistance from residents—resistance the Head Start program believed was at least in part racially motivated—that the corporation sought another location in the county.

Cocke County was selected because it is centrally located among several other rural counties hosting Latino workers whom Telemon Head Start Corporation hoped to serve. Although the Head Start program had secured a lease agreement from James Ellison, a Bybee farmer, for land on which to construct a modular building to house the day care, the organization again found itself facing community resistance and outright hostility from Bybee residents. In the early part of the summer, signs were posted on the main road through Bybee reading "No Way Jose" and "Keep Our
develop relationships with the existing local, regional and national Latino support networks."

The tensions and violence surrounding the Telemon situation underscored the need for more effective collaboration at the planning stages for community projects and direct involvement of local residents from the outset. The outcome of the Telemon project raised the level of urgency for resident engagement around race. In the fall of 1999, partly as a response to the Bybee violence, CONTACT hosted an afternoon discussion group on race relations at the Tanner Cultural Center. Cocke County High School students were invited to attend so they could meet with founders of the emerging Alianza Hispana (Hispanic Alliance) and hear presentations by representatives from Legal Services of Upper East Tennessee, Tennessee Industrial Renewal Network, the University of Tennessee and the Highlander Research and Education Center.

At the meeting, students connected with regional community organizers and learned about local youth gatherings, and regional and national conferences on youth and race relations. The collaborative youth video crew recorded one resident’s recollections of the early struggles for civil rights. In recent months several of the younger members of CONTACT have been able to learn more about how youth from around the Southeast address issues of race and violence in their schools while participating in a youth leadership collective at the Highlander Center. All of these activities were geared toward preparing the community to respond differently to racial tensions in the future.

Violence Prevention through the Arts
A focus on youth education has been one of CONTACT’s strengths in violence prevention. Almost immediately after moving into the Tanner Cultural Center, CONTACT organized an afternoon discussion group on race relations at the Tanner Cultural Center. Contacts were invited so they could meet with founders of the emerging Alianza Hispana (Hispanic Alliance) and hear presentations by representatives from Legal Services of Upper East Tennessee, Tennessee Industrial Renewal Network, the University of Tennessee and the Highlander Research and Education Center.

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Center, with its comfortable meeting rooms, performance spaces and kitchens, CONTACT was able to put a creative arts after-school youth program solidly into place. Under the supervision of Debbie Bahr, who initially worked as a volunteer and later became a part-time CONTACT staff member, young people ranging in age from 10 to 18 began to gather informally at the Tanner Center on Wednesday afternoons to share pizza, write and perform poetry, make art, shoot video and play music. The program was dubbed AfterClass, and about 8-15 students now attend on a regular basis, though as many as 35 have turned out on some days. Bahr’s work as a youth arts organizer has taught her that providing an outlet for creative expression is one of the best ways to divert ‘at risk’ youth from destructive behavior. ”When kids do creative projects, they get involved in the process. It takes time and a certain amount of focus, and when they finish a project they have a sense of self-esteem,” Bahr says.

The program, which began with a core group of four participants, appealed to young people who were frustrated by lack of creative outlets at school and at home. While some of them were academically successful, many were not. Quite a few were also struggling with drug abuse, social and economic concerns or abusive or neglectful parents. Several were regularly truant or had been disciplined at school through in-school suspensions and detention. Some were suspended for fighting. Two of the AfterClass group were high school dropouts working on GEDs.

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However, not all the members were lacking in economic or academic privilege. The program also attracted several college-bound honor students and teens from families with some financial means. Additionally, while the majority of participants were Caucasian, Native American, African-American, Latino and Asian-American students also attended AfterClass programs.

"We ended up building a little out-of-school community. We gave the kids a place to vent, where they felt they could honestly say what was on their mind, no taboos,” Bahr explains. Encouraging participants to speak out also gave CONTACT staff the opportunity to listen in and offer assistance. Bahr also believes the relationships established during AfterClass carry over into the wider community. "The kids are from a diverse population, and they come to see each others' worth in what they create. They are supportive of each others' creativity, and they take that respect for diversity back with them into school”.

“I think because the kids see us as open and tolerant we end up doing some conflict resolution too. We listen to them and things come out about anger and race and social class, drug stuff, abuse, school problems. We talk about it with them, try to help identify what they can do to change a situation or deal with it in a better way," says Bahr. She believes that taking advantage of these "listening" moments is fundamental to the program’s violence prevention strategy.

**Building a Non-Violent School Community**

Another important collaboration for AfterClass has been working with the local public high school to establish a peer mediation program for conflict resolution on campus. Cocke County High School serves 1200 students in grades 9-12. During AfterClass sessions the participants voiced dissatisfaction with disciplinary measures taken by the school when students in conflict ended up exchanging blows. When such a fight erupted, the school’s usual approach was to determine who had thrown the first punch and whether or not blows were returned. The person throwing the first punch would then receive out-of-school suspension, while the person who had been the initial object of the assault would receive in-school suspension if blows were returned. AfterClass members were dissatisfied with this arrangement because they felt no attempts were being made to take the causes of the conflict into account.

In discussing this problem with Bahr and Carter, the group hit upon the idea of establishing a formal peer mediation program in the high school to promote peaceful conflict resolution and thus to avoid the school’s ‘punishment only’ mode of dealing with assaults. In 1999 the students took their idea to school administrators, who were already considering peer mediation. The high school administration supported the program, offered to fund a voluntary peer mediation training course and selected a faculty sponsor for the program. CONTACT helped the school locate a certified social worker to conduct the training. Trainings began in the spring of 2000 and have continued since with about a dozen students participating at any given time. As part of the training, CONTACT AfterClass students produced an instructional video about peer mediation and non-violent conflict resolu-
tion. The videotape is used in the high school to announce the program and to generate interest in participating.

Don’t Fence Me In!

With CONTACT Council in a stable office space and the youth program on its feet and doing well, it might seem that Carter could take a little break from organizing. But in the midst of all the other ongoing projects and continuous grant proposal writing for new projects, there has been, as Carter puts it, “this disgusting highway thing.”

The “disgusting highway thing” is an extremely controversial alternate route for a project proposed by Tennessee Department of Transportation (TDOT) to expand an existing roadway. The official description of the project calls for a highway connection from the Tri-Cities airport near the East Tennessee-Virginia border of Sevier County in the Great Smoky Mountains. The connection requires a major highway expansion through Cocke County. One rationale behind the expansion is that the state hopes to improve automobile access from neighboring counties to the Great Smoky Mountains National Park, already the most frequently visited national park in the country. Three options call for an actual bypass around Newport. However, Alternate B, an expansion option currently favored by TDOT, calls for the construction of a 20-foot viaduct in the heart of Newport’s downtown—less than a mile from the Tanner Cultural Center.

There are many community objections to Alternate B, not the least of which are concerns about increased traffic flow and the loss of green space and public memorials. But most offensive have been the questionable attempts to involve the public in the planning process and the proposal to dead-end and fence off streets in the Jones Hill community in order to accommodate a “cloverleaf.” This move would leave Jones Hill residents without direct street access to Broadway, the main downtown commercial thoroughfare, in effect isolating an African American neighborhood which has struggled to establish comfortable homes in a safe and pleasant neighborhood environment. Indeed to fence off the neighborhood, separating the community from its accustomed access to downtown businesses, public offices, banks and the public library, and bringing heavy truck traffic across the pedestrian route between Jones Hill and the high school, flies in the face of CONTACT’s attempts to build a community identity inclusive of diversity.

Plans for the highway expansion were publicly announced in the late spring of 2000. Public hearings were scheduled for the summer of 2000, but, says Carter, proper legal notices were not printed and attendance was scant. This oversight on the part of the state gave CONTACT the chance it needed to arouse public interest and schedule a new hearing. “I think attendance was so light at the first hearing because there was only one printed notice given but also because people don’t believe they have a voice and are not in the habit of keeping themselves informed about public issues which can impact their lives,” she explains. “But catching the technicality extended the opportunity to get the word out by several months. Still, it was hard to convince people to speak up when they felt they had never been heard.”

CONTACT members, including staff member Shedenna Dockery, a Jones Hill resident, met with local residents to get the word out in the community and among downtown business owners who stood to be adversely affected by the expansion. They have met with community members one-on-one and in small groups, and have distributed “Don’t Fence Me In!” flyers to raise awareness. After many such actions, CONTACT has successfully stalled the construction of the highway.

Moving From Crisis to Crisis

It is rare to find Camille Carter sitting down. At the CONTACT office, she moves from desk to table to file cabinet to bookcase to phone to computer and then out the door to a meeting down the hall or across town. If she is asked who would be the best person to call for a certain type of information, not only will she be able to give you a name, but she often can also provide the person’s phone number off the top of her head. And the list of names is not short. When teased about being a human Rolodex, Carter, responds “I just call these people all the time. There’s always something coming up. We’re in pretty constant communication.”

And indeed it is this sense of something always coming up that characterizes how CONTACT operates. On the one hand, the organization is firmly grounded in its mission to prevent violence by strengthening the community. On the other hand, long range planning to achieve this goal has been a challenge in the face of enormous needs. “Sometimes it does feel as if we are moving from crisis to crisis trying to deal with them before they get too big instead of being able to keep them from starting in the first place,” explains Shedenna Dockery. “We’re not able to be as proactive as we need to be all the time.” The outcome of the Telemon Head Start situation is one such example of how a problem escalates. “That was an example of try-
ing to do an intervention after it was already too late. That's not what we are about. We're not about treatment, and we're not trying to do intervention; it's prevention that we want. We want to build community in such a way as to keep situations from getting to that point in the first place."

The process of building place-based violence prevention collaboratives aims to counter this problem, but collaborations take time to develop. Also, coordinating relationships takes personnel, and for CONTACT, this is in very short supply. The two staff members are part time, temporary and without benefits. Carter would like to see CONTACT acquire a more stable staffing and admits to feeling overwhelmed at times by the need to "do it all, and do it all now."

**Building Programs for Economic Justice**

Part of "doing it all now" has also meant exploring economic development projects. CONTACT programs for economic empowerment have been implemented with minimal funding.

There are several economic development partnerships that CONTACT intends to pursue in the future, but these collaborations may have to wait until the group is able to fund more staff positions. Economic Ventures, a non-profit micro-lending organization based in Knoxville, has approached CONTACT about establishing a Cocke County micro-loan program that would be able to draw on a regional funding base for support. The Cocke County program would be managed by CONTACT working in collaboration with local banks which would need to provide a $10,000 guarantee to get the program off the ground. Economic Ventures would provide technical assistance and training to CONTACT members.

Local residents who aspire to be business owners but do not have access to funding would have that access through the micro-lending programs. Economic Ventures, in partnership with the U.S. Small Business Administration and local lenders, makes small loans ($500-$25,000) available at a rate of 2 to 3 percent above the prime rate to these prospective entrepreneurs. In addition, Economic Ventures would offer assistance around developing feasible business plans, building equity and establishing credit history.

"People ask me all the time, what can you do with $500?" says Economic Ventures board member Bill Murrah. "And my first answer is always, 'You can pay it back.' For example, we might loan a struggling family farmer $500 to fix a broken tractor. The tractor gets fixed, the farmer has a crop to sell and pays back the loan. He builds credit where he didn't have any before, and the next time he needs some help with cash flow, he can come back to us with a good credit history."

In August 2000, Carter, and various CONTACT members including Bobby Seay and Jerry Wilde, met with Murrah to discuss implementing the micro-lending program as a way to strengthen Cocke County’s struggling economy and encourage local investment. "We’d like to do it; it’s just a matter of getting the right people involved to set it up," says Seay.

Murrah says his group has sought an alliance with CONTACT because "they are a good diverse group. They involve Euro-Americans and African-Americans. They are very interested in linking with the Hispanic community. They are inclusive. Not only are they grassroots, but they are linked with other organizations. They have a wide base." Given the long-standing poverty of the region and the levels of violence, it was easy for Economic Ventures to perceive a need for economic development to strengthen a historically disenfranchised community.

Murrah also points out that about 80 percent of the people in the Economic Ventures program are women and minorities. To illustrate how the program functions as a means of violence prevention, he recounts the story of a mother who was trapped by financial circumstances in an abusive relationship. With a micro-loan she was able to start a home-based business and generate enough income to move with her children away from her abuser. "Children can see these positive changes. It makes a difference in family life," Murrah says.

**Staying In Place**

CONTACT Council is still growing and changing; its projects are diverse and its network remains flexible. But the overarching theme in the projects is the sense of place. The mission of the organization is to empower residents to affect positive change in local communities. Yet, members understand that these changes are taking place in the context of a deeply rooted commitment to place and thus must be rendered in such a way that respect for place and culture remain intact. As Carter explains "No one at the core of this collaborative is on their way to somewhere else. We are permanent and place-based. Our homes and lives are here, and our graves will be here, too." Everyone involved makes a difference, and as Carter says, "that’s the beauty of collaboration."
The CONTACT Council has worked with the local school board to organize and provide training for the Community Safety Workshop, and with high school administrators and the school board to foster policy changes for at-risk students. The collaborative also coordinates regional RuralNet on-line technical assistance and mentoring, and provides support for community initiatives through its emerging micro-loan program and various partnerships, including:

- The Governor’s Prevention Initiative Task Force, which funds the Del Rio After-School Program and Northwest School Counseling Office;
- Maintaining the archives and serving as a communication center for the volunteer-driven Dead Pigeon River Council, which works to clean and restore the Big Pigeon River, contaminated with dioxin after nearly 100 years of use as an industrial sewer; and
- Supporting the Cast & Crew Theatre program, established in conjunction with the Newport Theatre Guild, which provides youth the opportunity to explore art and build artistic skills and self-confidence. Cocke County youth, supervised by adult mentors, serve as performers, production staff, and technicians.

Future Directions. A community Listening Project, conducted in 1995, brought early visibility to the collaborative and formed the direction and focus of the work through 2000. The second Listening Project began in 2000 and will be completed in 2001. The results of the project will be used to aid the CONTACT Council in determining future directions.
Community empowerment is essential to violence prevention in Cocke County.

Cocke County ranks among the most underprivileged and poverty-plagued across the country.

To prevent violence and reduce risk factors that predispose youth and families to participate in violence through a range of effects to further social, economic, and environmental justice in Cocke County.

Contact Council—Cocke County, Tennessee

Background

Cocke County CONTACT Council

Collaborative

To build the capacity of:
- New participant/Jones Hill community
- Del Rio community
- High School students
- Nos Hermanos y

Goal

Arts/Cultural Events

Youth Development Activities

Activities Monitoring Race Relations

Economic Activities

Policy and Legislation Changes

Strategies/Activities
Immediate Outcomes

- Number of partnerships
- Number of participants
- Number of products produced
- Number of individuals

Intermediate Outcomes

- Number of participants
- Number of accounts opened
- Diversity of entrepreneurs
- Tracking payment revenue

- Number of individuals organizing for cause
- Tracking media’s reporting of public meetings

Ultimate Outcome

**Youth**
- Improve youth development
- Improve contact among the races

**Communities**
- Improve economic empowerment
- Improve understanding of different races
- Enhance understanding of best practices of community-based violence prevention
- Influence policy decisions

**Reduce Violence**
- Build Community Capacity
Case Study Discussion Questions:

Our experience in community based approaches to violence and the body of literature on collaboration have helped us to identify the key components of successful collaboration which are illustrated in this case study. The following questions have been provided to assist you in using the case study as a tool to examine your own practices. The questions should help you to identify and examine the critical aspects of collaborative practices to prevent violence. Placed within your own community context, we hope they can further your work in community based violence prevention.

1. **Nature of Violence**
   What violence problem brought this collaboration together? What methods did members of the collaborative use to deepen their understanding of the issues underlying this violence problem? How did they use this deeper understanding to build their collaborative? How did this help them to focus on prevention and not just crime reduction? What methods did your collaborative use to determine the violence problems in your community? Do you feel as if you have a holistic understanding of the nature of violence in your community?

2. **Community Readiness**
   What was the broader community context when the collaborative formed? Were there social, political or economic conditions that may have contributed to the violence in the community? If so, what were they? How did the collaborative incorporate the knowledge of this context within their work? What is the relevant context in your community? How is your violence prevention effort addressing it?

3. **Membership**
   How did the collaborative select its members? Why were these members chosen? What relationship did they have to the violence problem, the factors underlying it or the community context? What was asked of the members? What stakeholders should be part of your effort to prevent violence? How will you choose them? Given your greater understanding of how collaborative members should be chosen and utilized, would you change your current collaborative structure?

4. **Governance**
   How was the collaborative organized and governed? How did the members make decisions? Do you know how they communicated with one another? Can you identify what the collaborative’s leadership was like? Can you identify the various roles and responsibilities that various members had in the collaborative? How is this similar to or different from your work?

5. **Transition**
   Was there evidence that the membership changed and shifted over time? What is your sense of how long members stayed involved and why? What was the effect of shifting membership on the collaborative? Was it able to sustain progress despite the shift? If so, how did it do so? How do you handle shifts in membership? What types of transition strategies do you use to ensure the forward progress of your work?

6. **Vision and Strategy**
   How did the collaborative determine its vision and strategies? Where did they focus their work—on the individual, family, community, or system level? Do the strategies make sense given the communities’ targeted violence issue? How did they involve those most directly affected by the violence in determining their strategies? Did this help them in targeting prevention or were their strategies primarily intervention focused? Did it matter in terms of their ability to effect change? How were your strategies determined? Do you feel that the strategies selected will truly lead to prevention of violence?

7. **Conflict Management**
   Conflict is fairly inevitable in any collaborative process. Did evidence of conflict emerge from the case study? If so, what was it? How did the collaborative handle the conflict—did it seem haphazard or was there a system in place to resolve difficulties? How does conflict arise in your collaborative? Are there certain issues designed to trigger conflict? Do you have a system in place for resolving them?

8. **Collaborative Challenges**
   What challenges did the collaborative face? Did these challenges seem to evolve from the issue of violence prevention or from the process of collaboration? How did the collaborative handle these challenges? What do you do when challenges arise in your community—is there anything you could put in place now to avoid some of the challenges the community faced in the case study?

9. **Evaluation**
   Did the collaborative use evaluation to improve its work? Did evaluation bring about any changes to the philosophies, mission or strategies of the collaborative? What evidence of success was identified in the case study? How was this used to promote and/or improve upon the mission of the collaborative? What evaluation process does your organization use to determine what it can improve upon? Is this similar to success stories in your own community? What lessons can you take from this study back to your own community?
Institute for Community Peace  
National Funding Collaborative on Violence Prevention

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**FUNDERS**

*Private Foundations*

- Adobe Systems, Incorporated
- A.L. Mailman Family Foundation, Inc.
- American Express Company
- The Annie E. Casey Foundation
- The Burnett Foundation
- The California Endowment
- The California Wellness Foundation
- Charles Stewart Mott Foundation
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- Public Welfare Foundation
- Surdna Foundation, Inc.
- Waitt Family Foundation
- W.K. Kellogg Foundation
- William Caspar Graustein Memorial Fund
- William Randolph Hearst Foundation

*Federal Grants*

- U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development
- U.S. Department of Justice