

**Staying Alive:  
Healthy People 2010 Violence Prevention Report  
Wisconsin Chapter of American Academy of Pediatrics  
Principal Investigator: Marlene Melzer-Lange, M.D.  
Program Coordinator: Toni Rivera, MS**

**Purpose:** The intent of this project is to promote healthy communication and relationships among 6<sup>th</sup> grade youth attending Milwaukee Public Schools through an asset-based approach to violence prevention and systemic integration of violence prevention practices in MPS schools.

Overall goal: To design and pilot an innovative intervention to reduce intentional injuries, in particular, fighting, gun violence and death among young adolescents.

Objective 1: Bring together pertinent community partners and the WI-AAP to design an intervention with direction from two stakeholder advisory boards: 1) youth and 2) family, faculty and staff

Objective 2: Pilot the intervention at two Milwaukee Public Schools reaching a total of 200 students.

Objective 3: Evaluate the intervention through process and outcomes measures.

Background: Milwaukee youth are at risk for violent, intentional injuries as well as psychosomatic problems such as headaches, abdominal pain, post-traumatic stress and school avoidance caused by bullying and threats. By improving interpersonal communication and understanding of the roots of violence, this project targeted these important health issues. We addressed the Healthier Wisconsin 2010 plan by addressing major health risks including intentional injury and mental health disorders, by focusing on urban, racially and ethnically diverse youth, and by building capacity and systemic programs in a school-based environment.

## **Project Summary**

“Staying Alive”, an interactive, discussion based, sixth grade violence prevention program facilitated by firefighters, paramedics and youth violence experts with a “specials” in-classroom format. Youth, families, community advocates, teachers and school leadership are active participants in the promotion and success of this project.

## **Partners**

- Milwaukee Public Schools:
  - Teachers from K-8 and middle schools
  - Principals from K-8 and middle schools
  - Violence prevention expert from Violence Prevention office
  - Healthy Lifestyles expert from Healthy Lifestyles office
  - Recreation Director
  - Superintendant and MPS Board
- Milwaukee Fire Department:
  - Firefighter champion: David Anderson
  - Deputy Chief of Education and Training
  - Fire Chief—transition from one in 2006 to new one in 2007
- Project Ujima (Children’s Hospital of Wisconsin/Children’s Service Society of Wisconsin)
  - Program manager: Toni Rivera
  - Community Liaisons: Darryl Hall and Jermaine Belcher
- Medical College of Wisconsin:
  - Marlene Melzer-Lange, M.D. program director for Project Ujima

- Barbra Beck, PhD (left MCW 1/07, but still active in project)
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### **Accomplishments**

- Increased collaboration between all partners due to participation in this project
  - Interviewed Project Ujima youth clients during summer of 2006 and 2007 and developed a video about violence
- Developed 5 day interactive curriculum, including 2 days taught by MFD firefighters and Project Ujima staff, and 3 days taught by classroom teacher
- Curriculum includes: roots of violence, feelings of conflict, conflict resolution, physiologic discussion of anger incorporating heart rate monitoring in the classroom, and small group facilitated sessions of children to discuss their concerns and solutions, and utilizing audience response technology
- Five 6<sup>th</sup> grade classrooms (150 students) received two sessions each of the pilot curriculum
- 16 firefighters/paramedics have been trained in the curriculum to utilize in the 2007-2008 school year
- 24 teachers have been trained in the curriculum to utilize in the 2007-2008 school year
- Interviewed teachers, principals, and families as part of a PREVENT project related to this project for strengths and barriers in its use in MPS schools
- Assisted MPS in writing a Safe Schools, Healthy Students grant that would further expand this project
- Staying Alive was featured at a MPS South Division High School Press Conference on February 5, 2008, announcing the successful award of five year Safe School Healthy Students grant; the press conference featured comments from the Milwaukee Mayor, the MPS Superintendent of Schools, the Milwaukee Fire Chief, the Milwaukee Police Chief as well as MPS coordinators of the overall project. Two demonstrations of Staying Alive were held at the Press Conference for the many attendees of the press conference. Children from a neighboring grade school were guests and participants of the demonstration of Staying Alive.
- Shared ongoing progress with Jeffrey Britton, M.D. FAAP, Injury Prevention Chair for Wisconsin AAP, as well as with the Wisconsin AAP Board of Directors

### **Lessons Learned:**

- Teachers, principals and firefighters are enthusiastic about this project
- Melding the expertise of teachers and curriculum experts with the expertise of Project Ujima Staff and MFD staff yielded a well-done curriculum
- Presence of paramedics and firefighters in schools had a positive effect on students in their respect and interest for their work; in one case, a gym teacher noted that the paramedics were at the school with their rig and brought a youth from gym class who was having trouble breathing
- Scheduling within the school day/school year has challenges due to testing periods and the transient nature of enrollment in the first three weeks of the school year
- Presence of Project Ujima staff in the school led to increased interest by students according to school teachers

- Challenge of engaging teachers in the process—some felt this was a time when they could leave their students for other activities, others were engaged.
- Funding /reimbursement for governmental agencies is complex due to union stipulations and other restraints
- Difficulty of keeping things going over the summer when school and MPS employees are not on duty

**Evaluation:**

- Process evaluation: we accomplished our goals to meet regularly and develop a curriculum for this project; teachers and firefighters were trained in the curriculum following the pilot of the curriculum. Sustainability plans are in place.
- Outcomes evaluation: Pre- and Post- audience response data related to violence questions showed an increased knowledge among students after the sessions. This increased knowledge will lead to decreased interpersonal, intentional injuries.
- To identify potential barriers to implementing the program we conducted open-ended interviews with principals of the six middle schools that applied to the pilot program and six, sixth-grade teachers from the applicant schools. To date, all principal (n=6), teacher (n=6), and EMT (n=2) interviews have been completed and transcribed, and a qualitative analysis has been conducted. Feedback was incorporated into edits of the intervention. The focus group questions are attached.

Principal Interviews:

- Number and severity of violent acts are increasing in most of the schools.
- A relatively new phenomenon is students phoning relatives to come to school and help with a fight.
- Many principals stated that students were exposed to more violence outside of school - either in their neighborhoods or in their homes – than in the past.
- Several principals acknowledged that many parents encourage their kids to fight and could also benefit from violence prevention training.
- Many principals have implemented violence prevention programs in the past with varying degrees of success, but given the growing violence they see in their schools and the surrounding community, they are supportive of trying the “Staying Alive” program.
- Teachers, counselors, social workers, psychologists and technology teachers were identified as existing resources that could assist with the program. Several principals stated that for the program to be most successful these staff members needed to be involved in the training, and also participate in the student/EMT sessions.
- Overall, principals predicted strong support by teachers for the program.
- Ideally, principals would like the “Staying Alive” program to 1) provide students with viable techniques/strategies, other than violence, to respond to disagreements and perceived threats, 2) help students understand that violence isn’t a “spectator sport”, 3) help students identify what constitutes violence (not just physical

- fighting), and 4) increase their ability to communicate more positively with each other.
- For the program to be successful, it should be for a specific, well-defined number of weeks – not go on forever; be flexible so that it can be implemented around competing academic demands and calendars; be “real” in the eyes of the students; and, be delivered by someone “who looks like the kids” (similar racial background) and who is well-respected by 6<sup>th</sup> graders. EMTs were identified as a good choice for program facilitators because they don’t have the negative attitudes associated with police officers.

Teacher Interviews:

- Most teachers are very aware of the violence in their schools and surrounding communities, and most stated that both the incidents and severity of violence was increasing. However, many teachers are unsure as to how to best address the topic with their students. Several teachers stated that they were searching for something to do related to violence prevention and were open to ideas, while other teachers indicated that they felt helpless. As a result, teachers we interviewed were supportive of the “Staying Alive” program and predicted their peers would also support the program.
- Sixth grade appears to be a good year to implement the program because in many of the schools 6<sup>th</sup> graders are experiencing several changes such as getting lockers and changing rooms for their classes for the first time. Several teachers stated that implementation of the “Staying Alive” curriculum would most likely be seen by students as just one of many new aspects of school.
- Commonly identified barriers to implementing the program identified by many teachers include time to prepare and implement the curriculum, and competing academic demands – in other words, when during the day and school year would the program be implemented?
- The “perfect” violence prevention program would: be delivered by adults who “look like the kids” (similar racial background); expose students to opportunities they typically wouldn’t get to participate in; be interactive; include multiple sessions – more than a couple; continue through the summer; be flexible to respond to the unique aspects of each school; present students with options other than violence.

EMT Interviews:

- Both EMTs acknowledged that they have very limited experience working with the community on violence prevention. As EMTs they provide medical attention to victims of violence. The increasing number of violence-related calls spurred their involvement in the project.
- Both EMTs stated that there is mixed support for this program from other EMTs within MFD. Some EMTs do not see the connection between this project and their role as EMT, while others feel that there isn’t much that can be done to “fix” the violence problem in the community.

- Students' participation in the pre-pilot project was viewed very positively with students sharing their opinions and experiences with violence.
- A resource guide is needed to help teacher identify appropriate resources for students who need additional assistance with the social, emotional and psychological effects of violence.
- Identified barriers to implementation of the project include: racial/cultural differences between EMTs and the students; program location within the schools – in the community would be preferred; and, initial youth resistance to the program.
- Project Ujima and the MFD have developed a strong, positive relationship through this project.

**Sustainability:**

- We plan to expand this project to include all 6<sup>th</sup> grade students in the City of Milwaukee. Initially we will target Milwaukee Public Schools; subsequently we will include charter, voucher, and private schools. Eventually we would like to have a specific “Staying Alive” location, where children can visit for these sessions in a “field trip” format.
- MPS received funding for expansion of this project for the MFD component (\$96,000 each year for 5 years) as part of a Safe Schools, Healthy Students application. Through this funding, MFD has hired a full time coordinator for Staying Alive who will coordinate the program in the MPS schools by scheduling the classrooms, firefighters, teachers and Project Ujima staff.
- Marlene Melzer-Lange completed an application for the 2007 MCW Healthier Wisconsin Partnership Program funding for \$150,000 annually for a three year time period to fund this program. Notification of grant decision expected April, 2008.
- All partners are pursuing a non-profit status for this project by incorporating the program into a non profit board that will oversee both Staying Alive and the Survive Alive House. This board has been under operation for 9 years to provide external funding for the Survive Alive House in Milwaukee. Additional board members with violence prevention expertise will represent the Staying Alive program and will be incorporated into the already existing board. This board will be made up of community members, leaders from Milwaukee Public Schools, Milwaukee Fire Department, Children's Hospital, Project Ujima and Medical College of Wisconsin and external to the agencies involved so that private and non-profit funding may be sought. This is similar to the structure for MFD's Survive Alive House.

Respectfully submitted,  
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3/10/08