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*ABSTRACT*

When Columbine High School was the scene of America's worst school disaster, the Ontario Police Department decided to do more towards protecting our own students. We surveyed available programs and were unable to find one that covered both prevention and response. Using talented members of our community and volunteer Hollywood celebrities, we created a video that addresses "bullying" and peer pressure in school. Working with our schools and are SWAT teams, a second program was developed that instructs the staff, students, and officers on how to respond to an armed intruder. These programs were initiated by the police department yet developed by members of the entire community. They were introduced with the help of volunteers, celebrities, and survivors of school shootings from seven states. The final product is generic and has been requested by outside agencies across America.

## *SCANNING*

Over the past few years, we have all watched the violence on our school campuses escalate. Each time there was a school shooting in the news, we would hold our breath. Individually, we would be thankful that it happened somewhere else. Collectively, we all wondered when someone was going to do something to stop the carnage. Columbine was the wake-up call. We knew we had to do something before it was one of our schools on the six o'clock news. It was no longer "their" problem, it was "our" problem.

Ontario is a community of 150,000, with five school districts covering 41 public schools and five private schools. We had school resource officers in our two high schools and a good working relationship with all of our school administrators. The schools were as anxious as we were to work on a plan for the safety of their students.

There were many ways to approach this subject-all had been dealt with individually. We wanted to create a program that was comprehensive, inexpensive and generic. It had to have a "prevention" component and a "response" component. It was most important that this program be a community effort.

## *ANALYSIS*

It is a fact that many children come from less-than-perfect circumstances and hope to find acceptance or tolerance at school. When they are hazed because they are different, it sometimes sparks violence. This "bullying" appeared to be one of the common denominators. Our prevention effort was to

create a video about the need to be more tolerant and accepting of each other's differences. One that could be understood by students of any age.

Using the Internet, we were able to determine that Canada and the United Kingdom both have National Bullying Programs for their students. We used every method possible to locate and view programs and products that were already available. There were none that met our criteria. Using the information we obtained, we wrote a script and created a story-board. The script was shown to school officials, P child psychologist, and the local cable television manager. The schools felt the information was correct yet non-offensive; the psychologist gave the go-ahead; and the cable manager offered to shoot the story for free.

By the time we became involved in producing the educational package for our response segment, we had the people in place to advise and help us go forward.

### ***RESPONSE***

Knowing that getting and keeping the attention of young people is a difficult job, we turned to Hollywood and the sports community for some of their herds. We were able to secure the services of Kermit Alexander, (Past President NFL); David Gallagher (Seventh Heaven); David Faustino (Married with Family); Benjamin Salsbury (The Nanny); and Larry Hagman (Dallas and I Dreamed of Jeanie). What made their contributions so valuable, was that they had experienced everything from alcoholism to homelessness and were willing to share their experiences. Each of them talked about pressures they experienced from their peers in school, because they were different.

When we began shooting the prevention video "Young Minds On the Edge" we went on location to the largest of our two high schools. Some of the students served as actors, some were interviewed. During this period, newspaper articles were compiled by a local citizen and sent to students who were victims at Columbine High School in Colorado. We began talking to these students on the Internet, seeking their advise and counsel. Eventually, they came to California and participated in several speaking engagements with us.

We found that there is a network of school site shooting victims who all talk on the Net. We were next contacted by student survivors from Oregon (Kip Kinkle shooting) who wanted to assist. They came for one speaking engagement and indicated they wanted to raise money to help the Columbine students replace their library. We put them in contact with Hyundai Motor Company who arranged the "Twelve Stops of Christmas". The Oregon students drove a Hyundai across America, stopping at 12 Hyundai dealerships where they collected money. They arrived at Columbine on Christmas Eve with a very large contribution.

Spending time with these survivors strengthened our resolve to complete this program and added to our knowledge of what needed to be done. The video was completed in only a few months at no cost to the City. It was premiered before a large group of parents and students. After watching the video, they were asked to direct their questions or comments to a panel made up of law enforcement, psychologists, school administrators and the entertainment community. This discourse was also filmed and made a separate part of the video. This was done so the classroom teacher could preview the video and have some idea of the questions that might be asked by his or her students. The end result was approved by all those involved in the process.

The Internet Survivor club continued to grow. We were contacted by their spokesperson who was interested in our sponsorship of a survivors forum. Many hours of planning went into the "Gathering" wherein 36 survivors came to Ontario for one emotional weekend. The object was for them to talk about their ordeals and look for answers. Some of them had been shot, some had escaped injury and some were parents who had lost their son or daughter. They came here from Virginia Beach, Virginia; Bethel, Alaska; Littleton, Colorado; Springfield, Oregon; Jonesboro, Arkansas; Deming, New Mexico; and Paduca, Kentucky. We were able to raise \$16,000 from our business community for transportation and hotels. Local churches saw that they had time to bond in the evenings. On the first day we had a luncheon for our community where the survivors all told their stories. Our educators and politicians were invited to show them the gravity of the situation.

On the second day, we amassed 16 youth bands and put on a rock concert for our youth. The football field was ringed with booths where students could find alternatives to being alone or getting in trouble. Our survivors spoke to them to remind them that this tragedy can happen anywhere. Many people in our field suggested that we were taking a big risk with some of these programs. We felt that the risk was worth the powerful outcome.

There was a great deal of media attention which pleased the survivors. They left Ontario believing that America cared about what happened to them. They are currently planning another Gathering because the survivor club continues to grow.

Once we had the deterrent video, we felt the program would not be complete until we had a response

to a threat on campus. Members of the department began writing a script for "VIPER" (Violent Intruder Police & Educator Response). This was written as a curriculum with the input of school administrators, risk management, psychologists, and law enforcement SWAT leaders. It became another community effort.

To get the footage needed for the video, a mock disaster was set up at a high school. Five city SWAT teams took turns rescuing dozens of students being held hostage by young terrorists. To enhance the realism, Hollywood make-up artists were used to place horrible wounds on the students. With the permission of the school administrators, the fire department torched a vehicle on campus.

Once the video was completed, professional writers worked with police and school personnel to develop workbooks for teachers, students and police responders.

### *ASSESSMENT*

When the VIPER program was completed, it was previewed at the FBI Academy in Quantico, Virginia in front of 200 police chiefs. The feedback was all positive and orders for the program continue to come in from across the nation. "Young Minds On The Edge" was duplicated with funds from a non-profit organization. To date, over 4,000 copies of "Young Minds" have been requested throughout America. VIPER has been presented to all of our schools. "Young Minds" has also been given to our schools, plus repeated showings on the Cable Television Networks. We continue to talk daily with our "Gathering" friends as new members join the group. We continue to look for other remedies we can add to our current programs.

What this school violence program has done for our community goes way beyond protecting our students on campus. We have developed a bond with our business community, our schools, parents and students. We have become a part of the "big picture" in our work with national survivors. Very few people in Ontario have not been touched by these programs. Most are proud that their City is working towards solutions. We have learned how to bring cooperative programs together where everyone feels important and focused on a predetermined outcome. Prior to this project, our department did not have a video unit or anyone with expertise in that area. We now have \$50,000 worth of equipment (grant provided) and employees who have the necessary initiative and expertise. Department employees have spoken at numerous conferences on the programs and the process involved in bringing the programs together.

### *Agency and Officer Information*

This project started with an idea of one employee. It was such an important subject, it soon took on a life of its own. Many members of the department at all levels worked on one or all of the projects. Once it was completed, every member of the department was introduced to the programs through briefings. Our community outreach is enormous. We have contact with over 1,000 neighborhood watches through visits and newsletters. We teach parenting classes; gang awareness classes, Citizen's academies; student academies, and business academies. We have Reserves, Senior Volunteers, Clerical Volunteers, Celebrity Volunteers, Mounted Police Volunteers, and Explorers Volunteers. We direct a non-profit community organization that raises money for youth programs And we have a boxing PAL program.

Ontario has been involved in Community Policing for many years. All corporals and above are sent to C.O.P. schools. They are, in turn, expected to train their subordinates-civilian and sworn. We have a COPS specific unit consisting of 8 COPS officers and 8 bike officers led by a lieutenant and two sergeants. Patrol officers identify COPS problems and ask for assistance from the COPS unit. The patrol officer then handles the problem bolstered by the additional personnel. All employees are evaluated on the identification and successful conclusion of COPS programs. In-house training comes with manuals and examples on how to do successful COPS programs.

The programs described in this report had different cost levels. There was no cost associated with the prevention video. We spent \$16,000 on the Gathering, but the money was donated by the community. The Twelve Stops of Christmas was a no-cost item. The VIPER program cost \$65,000 for professional writers, videographers, and packaging. This was paid for out of the general fund. This program is being sold for \$100 per school site which is replacing the money that was spent.

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