



Teens
on Target

Advocacy Manual

A Project of Youth ALIVE!

Youth ALIVE!
Summit Medical Center
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Teens on Target Advocacy Booklet

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How to Use This Advocacy Booklet

This *Advocacy Manual* was written by Teens on Target (TNT), a youth violence prevention and leadership development program in Oakland, California. TNT was started in 1989 in response to a number of shootings on school campuses. Members educate their peers about guns, gangs, family and dating violence, and the connection between drugs, alcohol and violence. They also lead special advocacy projects to make their communities safer and to make sure that the voices of young people are being heard.

This *Advocacy Manual* summarizes what we have learned about advocacy – how young people can have a voice in their communities and work for positive change. It includes information on working with the government, the media, and the community.

Teens on Target believes that *we must be the change that we want to see in our communities*. We hope that this manual helps inspire you to make a positive change in your own community, and gives you some practical tools to get started. If you need any other information, please contact us at (510) 594-2588.

Teens on Target also offers a Program Manual to guide you in starting your own TNT program (for ordering information, please call 510-594-2588). Our six-session violence prevention curriculum, *Teens on Target Violence Prevention Curriculum: For Grades 6-12*, is also available through the Educational Media Corporation (for ordering information, please call 1-800-966-3382 or go to www.educationalmedia.com).

What Is Advocacy?

“Why is it that in our neighborhoods, we can walk to get any kind of gun, drugs, or alcohol that we want, but we have to take the bus to get school supplies?”

– *Founding TNT members*

Definition of an Advocate: A person who speaks out for a cause and works toward solutions.

Definition of a Victim: A person who has been cheated, fooled, or injured.

Advocacy is about speaking up, making your voice heard and sharing your experience with others in order to create solutions. In drawing attention to the problems that you see in your community, you can get other people involved and make a positive change. Advocacy is stepping into leadership and influencing others.

Advocacy is especially important for young people, because ours are the voices that are not normally heard. We do not hold positions of power, and many of us cannot vote yet. This makes it easy for adults to talk about “our problems” and come up with solutions that may not take our real needs and interests into account. For example, when talking about crime and youth violence, some adults may conclude that all young people are troublemakers, and that the only solution is to lock us up.

There are two ways that we can respond. We can get angry, and blame people in power for punishing us instead of giving us tools to become positive and productive. Or, we can define the violence problems facing youth ourselves, and offer solutions that we know will make things better. The first way makes us victims; the second makes us advocates.

We need to move out of our victim roles and stop blaming others for the things that are wrong in our lives. Saying that its everyone else’s fault is easy, but that is only an excuse for not doing anything. **Our voices need to reach the people who are making decisions about our lives, or things will never get better.**

Deciding on a Strategy

As young people who advocate for issues that affect other youth, we can influence our peers, younger children, the media, and the people who make decisions about our community. Reaching each one of these audiences requires a different strategy and gets different results, so it is important to plan carefully before starting an advocacy campaign.

First, pick an issue that is important to your group. What goals and values do you have in common? What do you think are the major challenges facing young people in your community? How does your group want to be involved in making a change?

After deciding on your issue, you should narrow its focus so that it is a “do-able” project. This project should be built around creating a solution, not just defining the problem. The goal should be big enough to matter to people, but focused enough that you can see results in a reasonable amount of time. It should be interesting to everyone in your group, to other groups that you might want to work with, and to the public. It should also be something that will build to other projects your group can work on in the future.

Once you know what your project will be, develop your strategy based on five key questions:

- (1) **What do you want?** (Objectives)
You should have a clear goal that you can explain to other people, and which you think you can achieve within about a year. Do your homework and have research ready to back you up.
- (2) **Who can give it to you?** (Audience)
Who has the power to get you your goal? For example, if you want to change a school policy, you should focus on your administrators or on the school board; if you want to address a state law, you should focus on legislators. This will be your primary audience. Next, decide who directly influences their decisions – the media, local businesses, taxpayers, etc. These groups also need to be included in your strategy.
- (3) **What do they need to hear?** (Message)
Think about your issue from the perspective of your audience. What do they need to hear to make the change you want? Your message should be clear, true, and persuasive to the group you are trying to influence.
- (4) **Who should deliver the message?** (Messengers)
Your message will sound very different depending on who gives it. Teens on Target has found that young people speaking about their own experiences always gets attention, especially when backed up by professional “experts” on

violence prevention. In general, the most effective messengers are those who can speak from personal experience, professionals who have credibility in the field, and those who have a special connection with your target audience.

(5) **How can we get them to hear it?** (Delivery)

Your message will also sound different if delivered in a private meeting than it would at a protest. Think about how your audience would receive your group in different contexts. You may start with something small and move to a more public forum if you have not gotten the results you want.

When thinking about each of these questions, also take into account your resources – group members, support from other groups, information, money, etc. Develop the strategy that makes the most sense for your group and for this project.

(Adapted from the Democracy Center, *Democracy in Action*, Fall 1997)

Advocacy in the Government

“We need to understand how to participate in government in order to improve our lives and our communities.” (TNT Members)

“Everyone says during an election, ‘Well, you can write off the low-income areas; they don’t vote.’ If we don’t vote, we won’t have a voice, and we give up our control over who is elected. In a real democracy, everyone votes and the will of all people is represented.” (TNT Member)

Understanding how government works is an important step toward legislative advocacy – influencing laws and policies that affect your community. You need to know who to talk to in order to change the problems you see.

How Government is Structured

FEDERAL GOVERNMENT

The federal government is in charge of issues that affect the entire country, such as taxation, borrowing money, the environment, and education standards.

The **Legislative Branch**, made up of the Congress, makes laws. Congress has two branches – the Senate, and the House of Representatives. They have different rules for choosing representatives from each state. The Senate has two members from each state, no matter how large or small. The House of Representatives is based on population, so states with more people get to elect more members. Each Representative comes from a district, the section of the state that they represent.

In order to make a law, both houses of Congress must pass it through a series of committees and subcommittees. The entire house then votes on the revised bills. If both the Senate and the House approve a bill, it moves on to the Executive Branch.

The **Executive Branch**, consisting of the President, enforces laws. The President has the power to approve or veto bills that have been passed by the legislature. If the bill is signed or no action is taken, it becomes a law. If the bill is vetoed, the process ends.

The **Judicial Branch**, consisting of the Supreme Court, interprets laws. This is important when there is some conflict over how a law should apply to a situation or group of people.

STATE GOVERNMENT

Each state has a structure similar to the federal government’s for making and upholding state laws. The state legislature is made up of the Senate and Assembly. The

Executive is the Governor. The state court system makes up the judiciary. Superior Court is the highest court in each state.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT

There are two types of local governing bodies – county and city.

The **county** has a **Board of Supervisors**, elected by district. They administer and control spending on welfare programs, courts, animal services, libraries, social services and public health. They also oversee maintenance of some roads, zoning regulations, some education programs, and the sheriff's department. The Board gets money from the state and federal government and from local taxes.

Each **city** has a **Mayor**, an elected **City Council**, and a **City Manager**. The city sets local tax rates, repairs roads, keeps neighborhoods safe, maintains parks, provides recreation, transportation, fire services, education and culture, and regulates land and water use.

Other community agencies have smaller units to govern them, such as **School Boards**. School Board members are responsible for all of the decisions affecting schools in their district. These members oversee the Superintendent, who in turn supervises school principals. The Board also negotiates teacher salaries and makes policy decisions. However, the major funding decisions for schools and education are made at the state level.

Another example of smaller government unit is a **Zoning Board**. This board determines what can be built, sold, and developed. They set standards for neighborhoods, such as deciding where businesses can be, who can sell alcohol, and whether or not billboards can be displayed. Their decisions can be influenced by organizing a group to speak at a Board meeting.

How to Educate Elected Officials

Voting

It is important for elected officials to hear from ALL the people. The most basic thing that everyone can do to influence the government is to vote. As soon as you turn 18, it is important to register. Voter registration forms are available at schools, libraries, city halls, the Department of Motor Vehicles, and many other places in the community. Once you register, stay informed on the issues and vote in every election. **If you do not vote, you give your power away.**

Representation in Local Government

At the local level, you may be appointed or elected to join a smaller division of government. There are hundreds of boards, commissions, committees and councils that meet regularly and make decisions that affect young people. If there are no youth on these committees, it is difficult for them to make the most informed choices. You can

ask a member of the group for a youth representative. This member can be either a full-fledged voting representative, or an advisory member who speaks on issues but does not have a vote.

Speaking Before Decision-makers

If you do not have time to join a committee, you can still work with them on issues you feel are particularly important. Most groups have public hearings or open meetings where representatives from the community can speak their minds. A short speech before the people who are making a decision on your issue will make them better informed and could very well influence their votes.

Campaigning for Candidates

Volunteer to work on the campaign of a candidate you support. There are many opportunities to help, such as doing office work, sending out mailings, making phone calls or going door to door to gather support.

Working with Lobbyists

Finally, if you are working on a campaign around a specific piece of legislation, you may want to partner with a group that specializes in legislative advocacy. Special interest groups, or “lobbyists,” work to influence how elected officials vote on certain policies. Lobbyists usually specialize in certain issues, such as education, civil rights, health care, police, oil industries, guns, builders, and the environment. The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) is a lobbying group for the rights of African Americans. The Mexican American Legal Defense Fund (MALDEF) represents Chicanos. The National Rifle Association (NRA) represents gun manufacturers, suppliers, and owners.

In addition to national lobbying groups, each state has a number of groups focusing on state legislation. For example, California has the California Teacher’s Association, the Association of California Urban School Districts, and the California Association of Services for Children.

All of these groups are experts at influencing policymakers on their issues. If there is a lobbying group that represents your issue, you might want to work together to learn from them and make your effort more successful.

Phone Calls

Calling legislators is a great way to make your voice count. You can speak with someone on the policymaker’s staff to register your opinion and urge them to take a certain action.

You can also make phone calls to gather information about where a member might stand on your issue, and use this to plan future action. For example, calling to ask if legislators have children in public schools might gauge how they will vote on spending for education. If policymakers are not personally affected by public education, it is easier for them to cut it.

Letter Writing & E-mails

Sending a letter or an e-mail, either individually or as an organization, is a great way to register your support for your issue. Legislators keep track of each letter and e-mail that comes into their offices to see which issues are getting the most public interest. The more of their constituents who write in support of a certain piece of legislation, the more likely they are to support it themselves.

Letters and e-mails to policymakers should be brief and to the point. Explain who you are, what your position is, and what action you want them to take. Including a personal story will help your letter or e-mail stand out.

You can generate more support by having a letter writing party. Order some pizzas and invite interested young people to come send their own letters of support. Have a form letter available with the general points you think they should make, and envelopes addressed and ready to send. Each person should add a personal touch to their letters so that each stands on its own.

Legislative Visits

If you want to make a more personal connection, you might meet with your legislator face to face. Local, state and national representatives have district offices where you may be able to schedule a meeting with them.

Choose the legislators you visit carefully. They should have some influence over your issue, such as sitting on the committee or representing your district in the general vote. You should also think about the kind of support you need. Some policymakers will be ready to champion your issue with other legislators and in the media; some will quickly vote to support you; and others may need some more convincing. Choose your battles based on what you need and what you think you can win.

Here are some suggestions to consider when planning a legislative visit.

◆ Make an Appointment:

Contact your legislator's Appointment Secretary/Scheduler. Explain what you are doing and what group you represent. It is easier for congressional staff to arrange a meeting if they know what you wish to discuss and your relationship to the member – living in their district, supporting an issue they are working on, etc.

◆ Be Prompt and Patient:

When it is time to meet with a member, be punctual and be patient. It is common for legislators to be late, or to have a meeting interrupted due to their crowded schedule. If interruptions do occur, be flexible. When the opportunity presents itself, continue your meeting with a member's staff.

◆ Be Prepared:

Bring information and materials supporting your position. Legislators are required

to take positions on many different issues. In some instances, they may lack details about the pros and cons of a particular matter. You should be ready to tell someone why they should support your position, and to answer arguments against it. Leave a single-sided, double-spaced summary of the issue and the action you would like them to take.

◆ **Be Relevant:**

Do your homework. Know in advance what position the policymaker holds on the issues to be discussed, so you will know what new information to present and what arguments will influence them most. In general, it is always best to present a human side – how their decision would affect you, your family, or people in your community personally. These stories will stick with them more than facts and figures. Mix these stories with statistics to paint a broader picture of the issue. Data is most useful to a member if it is specific to the district they represent.

◆ **Be Positive:**

Have suggestions and solutions, not just criticisms. Do not make other people feel angry or uncomfortable by attacking them. The people who are willing to meet with you are the ones who are probably willing to help you. They want to discuss solutions and hear your recommendations.

◆ **Be Strategic:**

Legislators want to represent the best interests of their district or state. Be clear about the connection between what you are requesting and the interests of the legislator's constituency. Describe how you or your group can be of assistance to him/her.

◆ **Be Specific:**

After giving general background on the issue, give the legislator a concrete thing they can do in response. This might be voting a certain way, talking to other legislators to gather additional support, or attending an event to publicize your cause. Ask for a commitment in the meeting, and make sure you know where they stand before you leave.

◆ **Be Responsive:**

Be prepared to answer questions or provide additional information, in the event the member expresses interest or asks questions. Follow up the meeting with a thank you letter that outlines the different points you covered, and send any additional information and materials requested.

Parading, Picketing, Protesting

If you have not been able to get what you want any other way, you can stage an event to draw media and community attention to your issue. This is a very time consuming endeavor, but can be an effective way to get legislative attention. Different options you may want to try are a demonstration or protest march. Make sure that you have support from people you respect who will participate and speak out to the media. In addition to

planning the event itself, have a strategy for follow-up that will make the time you spent worthwhile.

See the suggestions for **organizing a press conference** for further information about organizing an event for legislators. Keep in mind that media coverage is a major goal of this strategy – if it is not publicized, it may as well not have happened.

Government Advocacy Case Study: Teens on Target and Oakland Gun Dealers

In 1991, Teens on Target members determined that violence in their communities could only be stopped by reducing the number of guns being sold in Oakland. With so many private residences licensed to sell guns throughout the city, it was ridiculously easy for anyone to get one. Young people saw this easy access to weapons as one of the primary causes of youth violence in their communities.

TNT members decided to show lawmakers a vision of East Oakland through the eyes of young people, so that they could see for themselves what guns were doing to the community. They made video and audio recordings of their neighborhoods at night – including the sound of multiple assault weapons being shot, and ambulance sirens from all directions.

Teens on Target members then presented this evidence to the Oakland City Council at a public hearing. Members spoke about friends and family members who had been injured and killed, mixing statistics with personal stories for an honest and persuasive testimony. They told the council members that it didn't seem fair that the residential gun dealers were making a profit off of their friends and family members lives.

In response, the Oakland City Council passed a resolution against residential gun dealers. **The result was the reduction of the number of gun dealers in Oakland from 115 to only 4.**

Teens on Target members were then invited to take their expertise regionally. They worked with the East Bay Public Safety Corridor, an organization dedicated to reducing crime which covers two counties, 27 cities, and many school districts. TNT members provided expert testimony before city councils which were considering similar legislation. Over a series of months in 1996 members presented before 15 city councils. Not only did their presentations contribute to the passage of a residential gun dealer ban in many of the cities, but TNT members provided positive models both to adults and for other youth, as many of their presentations were covered in the media.

Advocacy in the Media

Television, radio, newspapers, and magazines shape the way people think about the world around them. Left to itself, the media often perpetuates negative stereotypes about young people and minorities. In general, there are not many positive stories about youth in the news. The media tends to focus on the negative stories about young people, exaggerating the violence and destructive behavior of a few individuals. Because these are the majority of the stories that get covered, the people reading them think that they represent the majority of young people.

For example, LaTonya was a TNT member and Castlemont High School student asked to leave a movie theater during Steven Spielberg movie Schindler's List.

When we were kicked out of the Grand Lake movie theater for being noisy, it was an "outrage." Every news channel and newspaper covered the story, even outside of California. But when Steven Spielberg and Governor Wilson came to Castlemont to hear what the students had to say and discuss the incident, it was hardly reported.

If youth actively seek coverage for the positive things they are doing, the media can also be a powerful tool for getting your message out to a wide variety of people. You can reach millions of people to show that some youth are making a difference, and share your perspective on challenges and solutions facing young people today.

Preparing for Media Advocacy

As with any advocacy campaign, you should begin by strategizing how you want to use the media to reach your audience and send your message.

- **Build good relationships with reporters.** Even before you have a specific issue you want the media to cover, take every opportunity to meet reporters. Establish yourself as a trusted source with good information. This makes it more likely that as reporters work on stories related to your issue, they will think of you. They will also be more likely to respond when you want them to cover something specific. Keep a list of contacts covering your issue so that you can reach them when you need to.
- **Make your story "newsworthy."** Keep in mind that reporters can choose only a few stories to cover at a time. They are more likely to focus on yours if it provides controversy or conflict, highlights a breaking event or milestone, or provides a local angle and a human face.
- **Make your story easy to cover.** Think about your issue from the reporter's perspective, realizing that they usually have limited time to learn everything they can

about your group. Do as much of their job as you can for them, such as providing clear press releases, persuasive statistics, and lots of quotes. If you are working with visual media, create good images for them to film. Be accessible, respond quickly, and offer to do interviews over the phone.

- **Mix facts with human stories.** The best perspective on an issue gives both a general overview with facts and statistics, and provides a personal example with which people can connect. Keep in mind that young people speaking out for themselves is almost always going to get the media's attention.
- **Have a clear and compelling message.** Keep in mind that you will probably only get a couple of sentences or a 20 second soundbite to put your message in your own words. Practice making it clear and concise, and be sure that will be persuasive to your target audience.
- **Frame your position *positively*.** If you only complain about the problem, you will sound like a victim, not a leader with solutions. A leader has information and ideas for solutions. *Mobilize, do not paralyze.*
- **Make your information relevant to your audience.** Find out what areas each media outlet covers, and get statistics about that area. Break down large figures into visual terms. For example, "In 1996, 34,000 people were killed by guns in the United States. This is enough people to fill the Oakland Coliseum."

(Adapted from the Democracy Center, *Democracy in Action*, Spring 1998)

Methods of Media Advocacy

There are several ways to get your message out through the media. Each one reaches a different audience and takes a different amount of effort.

Produce public service announcements for radio or television. This is free air time given to members of the community who have an idea or opinion that they want to air. Call radio or TV stations who have an audience you want to reach, and find out what you need to do to prepare your message for the station. Work with your school or community media source to produce your message.

Appear on local radio or television programs. Contact producers or station managers of local radio and TV programs, and explain what your group does and that you would like to be on their show to talk about your issue.

Contact individual reporters about your issue. Take every opportunity to connect with the reporters who regularly write about what you are working on. Add them to your media list, and make sure that they add you to their list of sources.

Write or call in to talk shows. If there are shows covering your issue, let them know what questions or comments you have. You might be invited on as a guest speaker!

Write letters to the editor. These are a particularly good tool to catch the attention of public officials, if you mention them by name. Letters most likely to be published are usually brief (200-250 words), reference a specific letter or article that you are responding to, and include your contact information.

Invite reporters to an event. If you are having a meeting or staging an event as part of your advocacy strategy, inviting the media is a great way to increase its visibility. Let reporters know what will be happening, what visuals and interviews they can get, and why the event is worth covering.

Hold a press conference. This is the most time consuming strategy, but it can also get the best results. A press conference gives representatives from your group a chance to speak on the issue directly, and to include other experts in the field.

Writing a Press Release

If you want the media to cover a particular story, event, or press conference, let them know between a week and three days ahead of time. Keep the release concise and clear. Some news outlets may use it verbatim, while others will just use it as background for writing their own stories. It is very important to have a contact person listed on the release who will be available to answer questions and give more information about your issue.

Keep in mind that newsrooms can receive hundreds of news releases each day, so try to find ways to make yours stand out. Use catchy letterhead and bold type.

When preparing to send a release, make sure that you have current names, addresses, phone and fax numbers for all of your media contacts. Follow up on the release with phone calls the day before the event. Ask if reporters received the release, sum up why they should attend, and ask if they have any questions.

The basic format for your press release should be as follows:

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE <i>(Date released)</i>	CONTACT: <i>(name)</i> <i>(phone number)</i>
HEADLINE <i>(short, capital letters)</i>	
1st paragraph:	<i>What, who, where and when (brief)</i>
2nd paragraph:	<i>Why event is significant and newsworthy</i>
3rd paragraph:	<i>Quote emphasizing significance of event</i>
4th paragraph:	<i>Details on where and when</i>
5th + paragraphs:	<i>Other details, including: Speaker names and affiliations Description of photo opportunities Further quotes from spokespeople</i>
Final paragraph:	<i>One-sentence description of the organization planning the event</i>
MORE <i>(if release goes onto next page)</i> ### <i>(to indicate end)</i>	

(Adapted from Berkeley Media Studies Group, *News for a Change*)

For a sample press release, see the Appendix.

Organizing a Press Conference

Before the Conference:

- **Decide on a time for the event that will give you the best coverage.** On weekday mornings, 10:00 am is usually the best time – afternoon events will not be covered by daily papers on deadlines. Saturday events compete with less news, but the coverage also be seen by fewer people. Choosing a significant date, such as an anniversary or piggybacking on another breaking story, will also increase your chances of getting covered.
- **Choose your location.** It is important to find a relevant location for your event. For example, if you are talking about the number of people injured by guns, you might hold your conference at a cemetery or outside a hospital emergency room. Once you have chosen a location, make sure that you will have enough room for the

number of people you are inviting, plus a few more. If you are outside, avoid noisy and windy areas. You will also need parking and enough electrical outlets for television cameras.

- **Choose and train your spokespeople early.** Each person should be ready to give your message in a concise statement. Leave plenty of time to practice in front of different audiences, so that they will be smooth and comfortable presenting at the event itself. They should also be informed and comfortable taking questions from reporters. Finally, if at all possible, have people give personal testimonies so that the media can profile a “human” face for your story.
- **Choose an emcee to facilitate the conference.** This person should be prepared to welcome guests, give a brief background on the event, and introduce speakers.
- **Keep the agenda brief.** Do not plan to spend more than 15-20 minutes giving information. Allow an equal amount of time for questions from the media.
- **Prepare press packets.** These are folders of information that reporters can take to use as background for writing their stories. The most important things to include are contact information and background on each of your speakers, statistics with full references, and background on the issue. You may also want to include brochures on your organization, a copy of your press release, an agenda for the event, additional quotes they can use in their stories, past media relevant to the issue, and a list of additional contacts who will back up your perspective.
- **Prepare interesting visuals.** Television and print media will want something they can film. Blow up a few eye-catching charts, posters, or photographs that illustrate your main points.

During the Conference:

- **Make the event easy to find.** If necessary, have signs or volunteers available to direct reporters to your location.
- **Have staff or volunteers on hand to take care of reporters.** Set up a table to greet reporters and pass out press packets. Have extra pens and paper available, and if possible, provide coffee and snacks. Each journalist should sign in as they arrive so that you can follow up with them later.
- **Simplify the issue.** Each speaker should highlight a perspective that will be interesting to the press and your focus audience. No one should speak for more than five minutes.
- **Provide photo opportunities.** Post or have volunteers hold up your visuals as the speakers talk. After the conference, speakers should be available to pose as well as answer questions.

- **Make room for questions.** Leave time in the agenda for reporters to ask questions of your speakers and others at the event who they might want to interview. After the event, help individual reporters connect with speakers for one-on-one interviews.

After the Conference:

- **Make sure your contact people remain available.** Your office should be staffed for the full time that the news item is “hot.”
- **Follow up with reporters.** Use your sign-in sheet to contact everyone who attended to see if they need further information. Send press packets to those who did not attend your event, and call to see if they would like to do an interview over the phone.
- **Evaluate what went well and what could be improved.** If the coverage did not turn out as you had hoped, try to figure out why. This may be due to circumstances beyond your control, such as a competing story you could not have planned for. Apply anything you learn to future media events.

(Adapted from Berkeley Media Studies Group, *News for a Change*)

Media Advocacy Case Study: Teens on Target's Oakland Tribune Campaign

Teens on Target discovered that Oakland's daily newspaper, the Oakland Tribune, advertised handguns and semi-automatic ammunition each week. This worried us, because so much of our violence prevention work centers around guns. Our research showed that guns are used in 96% of youth murders in Oakland, and almost all of these involved handguns. TNT was also concerned that the advertisements were in the sports section, which is read by many young people. Overall, Teens on Target thought that the ads in the Tribune made Oakland youth feel like guns were cheap and easily available. The more accessible guns are, the more likely young people will get a hold of them, adding to the violence in our community.

TNT did some research and found that another local paper, the San Francisco Chronicle, advertised only shotguns and sporting rifles. The Chronicle's policy was careful to exclude handguns, automatic weapons, and ammunition for these weapons because of the risk that they pose to the public.

As Teens on Target, we decided that we did not want handguns and automatic weapons to be advertised in our local newspaper. After a number of unsuccessful attempts to schedule a meeting with the newspaper's publisher, on May 13, 1999, we held a press conference in front of the Oakland Tribune office to ask them to change their gun advertising policy to one like the San Francisco Chronicle's. TNT members read facts about the dangers of handguns and showed posters of the advertisements run in the Tribune. The most intense part of the press conference was when we showed an article about a boy who killed himself playing "Russian Roulette", and right under the article was an advertisement for a gun show. The head of trauma surgery at Oakland's County Hospital spoke as our professional expert about the dangers of gun violence.

Our press conference was covered by local newspapers and TV stations. However, we did not get a response from the Oakland Tribune, so we decided to try another approach. Because the decision-makers at the Tribune had not responded to us when we acted alone, we worked to get support from the community. We asked other community groups, youth organizations, and violence prevention agencies to write letters to the Tribune urging them to change their gun advertising policy. We also presented our research in front of Oakland's City Council, and they agreed to write a letter of support. This was important because the City gives the Tribune tens of thousands of dollars each year to publish notices of public meetings. Another local newspaper heard about this decision, and wrote an article on our campaign. With all of these groups behind us, in March 2000, we wrote a letter to the publisher of the Oakland Tribune asking for a meeting.

Finally, the Tribune agreed to hear what we had to say in person. The President and Publisher of Alameda News Group, which owns the Tribune, and the Executive Vice-President of Advertising and Marketing came to Castlemont High School. There, TNT members provided the facts about the dangers of handguns. We also presented the San Francisco Chronicle's policy, and asked the Tribune to consider changing their policy to one like it.

About a week later, the Oakland Tribune informed us that they had decided to change their policy. Their new policy is similar to the Chronicle's; the Tribune will not accept advertisements for pistols, handguns, revolvers, or automatic weapons or ammunition for such weapons. This leaves only advertisements for sporting rifles, shotguns and other hunting guns that are clearly intended for hunting and recreational use.

To celebrate this victory and encourage other young people that they can make a difference in their communities, Teens on Target held another press conference on August 7, 2000, this time inside the Tribune offices. Again, TNT members spoke about the dangers of handguns and the importance of making guns less accessible to young people. We thanked the Tribune for listening to us and for being concerned about the health of our community. The publisher of the Tribune, the director of trauma surgery in Oakland, and Oakland's Chief of Police all spoke about the importance of the policy change. Many representatives of the organizations that had supported our campaign attended the event. This press conference got coverage from local newspapers, television stations, and radio stations.

Teens on Target was recognized in 2001 for its work on gun violence through the Tribune Campaign with an Ally of Justice award, presented by Co-Motion. One TNT member was flown with her mother to Washington, D.C. to receive the award on behalf of the group.

We understand that based on Teens on Target's work, groups in other cities are working on similar advertising bans.

(For more information on TNT's Oakland Tribune Campaign, see the news release and press clippings in the Appendix.)

Advocacy in the Community

When working to change a community, it is often best to start with the people you already know – those who live, work, and go to school with you. Getting more people involved in your issue may in itself spur the change you are looking for. Even if it does not, connecting with a wide base of people will give you a strong foundation for future projects.

Teens on Target recruits high school students to become members of the program. These students go through extensive training on different kinds of violence and how to come up with solutions. Members then go into middle and high school classes and present workshops for other students to share the message. This work helps young people make positive changes in their own lives, and creates a community of youth working to solve problems in their community.

In order to create this base of young people, TNT recruits high school students by putting up flyers, making announcements over the intercom, and doing presentations at orientation and in classrooms. Sometimes teachers, administrators, or probation officers refer young people directly to the program because they have had direct experience with violence and want to make a positive change. Recruitment requires working with teachers and administrators to make the program visible at the school. Scheduling presentations at other schools in the community also takes a great deal of collaboration and planning. (For more information on how to start your own youth violence prevention program, please call 510-594-2588 to request a copy of the Teens on Target Program Manual.)

Another way to reach young people is through existing programs, both in the school and the community. Focus first on groups that work on similar issues and might want to collaborate with you on advocacy projects. Doing presentations to other groups which work with young people in your community is also a great way to spread the word about what you are doing and how others can get involved. Think about community centers, tutoring programs, and churches that might have youth groups you can visit.

One important thing to remember during recruiting is that you want to involve a wide spectrum of people. Although it may be most comfortable to form a group that looks and thinks just like you do, it is important to include people of different cultures, ethnicities, and communities. The more diverse your group is, the more easily you will be able to connect with a variety of populations. A diverse group will also give you a wider range of opinions, skills, talents, experiences and connections. All of these things give you more power to influence and change your community.

Conclusion

Teens on Target is committed to making positive changes in our community and on a broader level through the advocacy work that we do. We are dedicated to preventing violence and building youth leadership, and we view advocacy as an important piece of our work.

We hope that this Advocacy Manual has inspired you to make positive changes in your own community, and has given you some practical tools to get started. Advocacy is an important way that we as young people can make our voices heard in our communities, to government officials and other key decision-makers, and to the media.

If you need any other information or would like to receive technical assistance from Youth ALIVE!, please contact us at (510) 594-2588.

Appendices