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“Linking Local Initiatives to Causes of
Violence and Drug Abuse”

Presented to the Commission
by Rod Mullen & Naya Arbiter

ROD MULLEN & NAYA ARBITER

Rod Mullen has a thirty-year history providing education, prevention, intervention, and treatment services, primarily using the therapeutic community model. He has worked as a consultant to several states designing and implementing services to reduce the recidivism of criminal offenders incarcerated or under criminal justice supervision. He is the founder and CEO of Amity Foundation of California, which has received national attention for its recidivism reduction programs for incarcerated offenders. He has been a frequent presenter at national and international conferences, author of several book chapters, and a frequent contributor to journals. Mr. Mullen is a graduate of the University of California at Berkeley.

Naya Arbiter is the owner of Extensions, LLC. She is an independent consultant and trainer. She also serves on the Board of Directors of the Amity Foundation of California. She is internationally recognized for her innovative approaches to underserved populations, particularly addicted women and their children. Ms. Arbiter was selected by President Reagan in 1987 as conferee to the White House Conference for a Drug Free America, served on the Inter-American Commission on Drug Policy, and currently serves on the Advisory Board of the Center for Therapeutic Community Research. She has been developing specific curricula for the past fifteen years to be used with addicted women, incarcerated men, and to reduce violence amongst both.

Rod Mullen: Of the developed nations, the United States has the worst violence and drug problem. In 1989, there were 4,900 cocaine related cocaine-related arrests in Boston. During that same year, there were only 677 such arrests in all of France. According to the 1989 surveys of drug use among U.S. high school students, the proportion trying cocaine was more than five times that of high school students in Germany, England, and Italy and about 20 times higher than for students in Sweden, Holland, and Norway (Currie, 1993) In 1990, more than six million violent victimization were attempted or completed in the United States. Homicide rates in the U.S. are much greater than those of any other industrialized nation. (Reiss and Roth, Eds., 1993)

The United States has the least adequate provisions of health care, income support, and social services. "...[E]ven before the Reagan administration began a deliberate assault on the welfare state, the United States already ranked lowest among advanced industrial societies in the generosity of its safety net for the disadvantaged and in the degree to which income benefits kept people from sinking into poverty" (Currie, 1993)

As a nation we have been like townspeople afflicted with a malaria epidemic, fighting the plague by issuing fly swatters to the populace and ordering them to kill every mosquito they see. We have issued mosquito netting to every citizen and spent millions to develop sophisticated treatments for infected victims and billions more on developing more powerful pesticides to fight the "war on malaria."

We looked for causes, but mostly have blamed the victims. We've quarantined them, hoping their isolation would contain the spread of the disease. We've even introduced malaria prevention programs in our schools to teach our children how to avoid mosquito bites.

Have the efforts been enthusiastic? **Yes.**

Has the attention of the community been focused on malaria through the efforts of local and national leaders and the media? **Yes.**

Have billions of pages and articles, scholarly and popular, been written? **Yes**

Have there been interminable meetings in every locality about the epidemic?
Yes.

But have we addressed the problem that we are surrounded by swamps, fed by our own wastewater that bred diseased mosquitoes? **No!**

Sound familiar?

Naya Arbiter: Elie Weisel, holocaust survivor, tells us, “The opposite of love is not hate but indifference. The opposite of life is not death but indifference to life and death. Indifference is the enemy.”

AMITY is one of many organizations that fight against indifference. Daily, 500 men, and women in 6 teaching and therapeutic communities in Arizona and California receive services. We at AMITY work in jails, prisons, the streets, and residential and ambulatory settings. We work with gangs, prostitutes, violent offenders, and every combination thereof.

Successful local initiatives are the result of people who know the local culture, people who understand the culture of hopelessness as it impacts upon a culture of indifference, the culture that extends beyond ethnicity, beyond academic understanding of cultural competence.

This is the culture that develops when your first sexual experience is rape, when your mother is in a crack house and you don't know who your father is, or when you are one of 6.4 million children who live in a no-parent household (Gross, 1992). This is the culture for the felon the world views as male but who is female.

This is the culture where your most stable relationship is with a parole officer and has been since you were a teen. This is the culture that develops when you don't want to get off your “paper” because when things get bad you can always get locked up; when you have been documented, observed, transported, fingerprinted, urine tested, photographed, weighed, inoculated and no one has asked your first name; when you have been in the joint and haven't seen yourself for several years because there are no mirrors or glass. People say you have a low self image, but you have NO self image.

This is the culture where you cannot remember your little brother's name anymore. You have been placed in different foster homes to protect you from your

parents, and it wasn't anybody's job to set up a visit so you could see each other. This is the culture where you learned about love and loyalty from the *vatos* on the street dealing drugs. You were 15 when you got jumped into your gang. You were so proud. You were smoking pot in the living room when your mother asked you to answer the door, but you didn't get up. She answered...the bullet that killed her was meant for you. How do you live with it?

This is the culture where your father's death was billed as a suicide, but you watched his girlfriend shoot him and never told. You are 16 and five of your homeboys have already been killed.

This is the culture of a woman who never paid a taxi driver with money, only with sex. She wakes up each morning and hates herself. She panders to the least exalted needs of men. She knows she is a failure as a mother. She turns on the television and sees a life in which she can never participate.

Last night, many of you seemed surprised that the high school student held at gunpoint was not distressed, and viewed guns as commonplace in school. The student with the gun was expelled. What happened to that student? We are suffering from a cultural reality gap. Listen to the rap music from Ice-T.

*“Here I come, so you better break north.
As I stride, my gold chains glide back’n forth.
I care nothing about you, and that’s evident.
Sound crazy? Well it isn’t. The end justifies the means.
That’s the system. I learned that in school.
Then I dropped out.
Checked a grip and now I got clout.
I had nothing and I wanted it.
You had everything and you flaunted it.
Turned the needy into the greedy.
With cocaine my success came speedy.
Got me twisted, jammed into a paradox.
Every dollar I get, another brother drops.
Maybe that’s the plan and I don’t understand.
God Damn! You got me sinking in quicksand.
But since I don’t know and I ain’t never learned.
I gotta get paid. I got money to earn.
Cool out and watch my new Benz gleam.
Is this a nightmare or the American Dream?”*

Ice-T, Original Gangster, “New Jack Hustler,” 1991.

Rod Mullen: Local initiatives develop in the context of federal and state policies, regulations, directives, and conventional wisdom. Often these policies boomerang. Weed and Seed programs sound logical. Let's get rid of the gangsters and drug dealers in

drug-ridden areas and then go in and rebuild these communities. This could really help. But if our recent history is any guide, we will spend 70 percent of our funds on law enforcement “weeding” of these communities while alienating the residents (Budget of the United States, 1993). Then those who are supposed to do the “seeding” will be told that for some reason the funds have run out, or priorities have changed, or they discover that the seeding plan must be done in a way that does not reflect the needs of that particular community.

Remember, a majority of those imprisoned will come back-so very shortly “weeded” gangsters will be “seeded” on parole back to their neighborhood, not improved by their prison experience, just hardened. If we’ve put them through shock incarceration or a “boot camp,” we might inadvertently militarize the drug gangs, helping them to be better organized without changing their anti-social values.

If we are not careful, we could replicate our misguided adventures in Latin America where, in an attempt to eradicate cocaine, we have destabilized democracies, strengthened military dictatorships, provided a steady source of crop supports for coca farmers, encouraged new growers to get into drug production, and have actually increased the amount of drugs coming into the United States, all at great expense to the American taxpayer, who believed this was the panacea that would rid us of our drug problem.

Research data have accumulated to show that our policies of widespread imprisonment are actually helping to increase drug abuse and violence in our country! The incarceration of so many young, Black men from impoverished, minority communities has left very few to form intact families (Sampson, 1993). Nationally, almost 25 percent of African-American men and ten percent of Hispanic men in their twenties are under correctional supervision. In some states like California, the proportion for Black men is closer to 33 percent (Currie, 1993). The correlates for drug abuse and violence are congruent: high concentrations of impoverished, single-parent families; high residential instability; large, multi-unit, anonymous housing; and low integrity of social networks. A better “swamp” could not be conceived for breeding criminality and drug abuse than the state and federally supported system of public housing. We support *de facto* racial and class segregation in public housing with tax dollars and support conditions that guarantee increased levels of drug abuse and violence because of vociferous opposition by more advantaged neighborhoods to low income housing being spread throughout our cities. If we really want to reduce drugs and crime, these swamps must be drained.

Naya Arbiter: Thoreau tells me, “Action from principle, the perception and the performance of right changes things and relations, is essentially revolutionary and does not consist wholly with anything which was.” Can we afford a correctional system that only provides short-term security? Corrections can stop people but not change them; treatment can change them but not stop them. Put them together where possible. No warden in this country is yet rewarded for recidivism reduction.

The California legislature funds our recidivism reduction program in the R.J. Donovan Correctional Facility near San Diego. The prison holds 5,000 men. AMITY was given one cellblock of 200 men. These men have an average of 11 years in the system. They are the Crips, the Bloods, the Mexican Mafia, the Aryan Brotherhood. The program was set up without parole incentives. How do you motivate the unmotivated? We gained the support of men doing life without parole. They helped us establish the program. In the first year we had 1,700 unsolicited applications. We also had only three dirty urines, no instances of violence, and fewer disciplinary write-ups than any other cellblock. At the end of the year, we hired two of the lifers. They are on our payroll within the prison. At the time of the Rodney King riots, 40 percent of our population was from South Central Los Angeles. They watched the rioting on television. Men got up and moved next to someone of a different color. To them, overcoming their racial prejudice is as important as overcoming their addiction.

The convicted can agree that they do not want their children to join them in the penitentiary. We have helped these men find their children in foster care, in crack houses, and re-unify with them when they are ready. There is as yet no funding for this. The most significant predictor for substance abuse and criminality is a substance-abusing criminal parent. If we do not help a percentage of the convicted transform, we need only to count the children of the convicted to know the next generation of substance-abusing offenders. As we develop programs for women and children, we must not forget the fathers. Proposals for funding drug treatment programs for women and children must also include fathers who are sole guardians for their children.

“Action from principle...essentially revolutionary and does not consist wholly with anything which was.”

You cannot learn how to do this work in universities. We have no funding for the experimental training institutes that we need. In the 1980's, women were mandated to our programs by the courts. If they did not stay in treatment, they went to prison; if they did stay in treatment for the planned duration, they lost custody of their children. We fought it case by case. We secured three federal grants to work with mothers and their children. Arizona Senator Dennis DeConcini, a former county prosecutor, has championed this cause in Arizona and nationally. We still have problems when the women leave. They cannot afford to get off welfare. This is our next battle.

“Action from principle...”

We take men and women on third party release from the jail. Arizona is a mandatory sentencing state. In 1983, one Black man with prior convictions and a 15-year addiction history, and a ten-year-old son, came to us. The man spent several months with us and did well. His son's grades improved. He was pulled out and sentenced to 11 years for stealing a tire. It was a mandatory sentence. We will go to his parole hearing next year. Today his son is in a gang and has been arrested. Removing the man from AMITY, where he was doing well, has cost taxpayers more than half a million dollars, not counting the cost of his son.

Arizona transfers more youth to the adult prison system than any other place else in the United States. Young men have the opportunity to be punished as adults but not treated as adults. Over 16 months, 206 boys were transferred into the adult prison (Unpublished statistics collected by Arizona Probation/Parole Official, 1992-93). Fourteen percent were African-Americans; yet in Arizona, the African-American population is three percent. Twenty-two percent were Caucasian, and 54 percent were Hispanic. Four percent were transferred for murder, 49 percent for property crimes. These juveniles usually get two transfer hearings. The first is a warning; on the second, they usually go into the adult system. Of those transferred on their first hearing for a property crime, 64 percent were Mexican-American. On a local level, racial bias is a horrendous problem. Although 70 percent of the Black youth in Maricopa County are arrested before they reach 18 years of age, we have not received one African-American referral in five months (Whiting, 1992).

Gender bias is another serious problem. There are only 24 residential beds in the state of Arizona for girls. Arizona passed a law with the legislative intent to protect children. If you have sold drugs or are a felon, you cannot work with kids. You are a bad influence. There was no loophole for the habilitated. This means you can be incarcerated at 16 with murderers, but a recovered person cannot work with you. We fought that battle and got an exception for good cause.

Each month we send out a mailing to more than 200 incarcerated people. I asked Juan Lopez, called "El Wolfie," from "Barrio Garfield" a question. "What is the difference between real honor and false pride?"

"For us Chicanos," he told me, "the *vatos* who have false pride lead us kids into the penitentiary *la pinta*. The *vatos* with real honor help us get out." No one has helped Martin Rodriguez get out. He has been waiting now for a year in the adult Maricopa County jail. He has fallen through the cracks. He asked my colleague who interviewed him, if he went to a program, could he learn to read and write?

In our state, the Supreme Court and legislature advocate family re-unification. But what if there is no family? Or a family of drug dealers? Calvin did well with us for a year, but parole insisted he return to his grandmother because he had been in treatment long enough. We wanted to keep him even without funding. A staff member offered to move him into his house. Calvin's grandmother sold crack. Parole refused, saying there was no proof of the crack selling. Calvin went back to South Phoenix, was arrested two months later in a drive-by shooting, and is now in adult prison. Because of cases like this, local-initiative Americans end up at the cemetery. You can see us there every day of the week, burying our young, our police officers, or friends. Anwar Sadat asked Golda Meir when it would end? She answered, "When we love our children more than we hate each other."

Rod Mullen: An African proverb says, "It takes an entire village to raise a child." This was true and it remains true today. In our high-tech society, there is one job that

adults cannot delegate, the initiation of a child into adult society. Our genes do not make us “human,” they merely give us the potential for humanity. In this century, both parents have left the home, so the home is no longer productive and social center of adult life. The most important aspects of adult lives occur outside the home, where children cannot see them nor participate in them (Coleman, 1972). Children have been relegated at very young ages to day care centers where turnover among poorly educated, poorly paid, and poorly trained caregivers occurs at rates of 40 to 300 percent per year (ABC World News Tonight, June 3,1993).

Childrearing is no longer a communal enterprise. Parents take on the task alone, though research, history, and cross-cultural studies show us that even a marginal parent can do an adequate job if he or she is embedded in a social support network of other adults who share the task of childrearing (Furstenberg, 1993). We have convinced ourselves that children can raise themselves – but they can’t. The process of becoming an adult human being requires intense and sustained involvement of concerned and competent adults over many, many years. In our modern, high-tech society, we are paradoxically failing to provide the conditions that make human beings human – and this is true of all our children (Bronfenbrenner, 1970).

But the children in our society who are the most affected are those in the ghettos and barrios where the poor are concentrated, those areas with the highest rates of teen pregnancy, unmarried female heads of household, inadequate health care, mediocre education, and every other imaginable social ill. The overwhelmed parents in these areas were themselves inadequately socialized and are passing on their own inadequate experience to their children, further worsened by the terrible increase in poverty in the past decade, the ravages of crack cocaine, the increase in sexual and physical abuse of children, and neighborhood violence.

One of the best tools in such neighborhoods is the development of extended Therapeutic Communities. TCs were developed in the 1960’s, not as traditional, medical drug treatment, but as intensive and holistic socialization engines for underclass drug abusers. They are really a modern manifestation of the extended family and healthy neighborhoods of an earlier time in our history. TCs have been successful precisely because they have learned how to take the most negative leaders in gangs and prisons and make them into responsible, adult role models in healthy, crime-free communities (Mullen, Arbiter & Glider, 1991; Mullen & Arbiter 1992). TCs should be wedded with local business ventures to go out and rebuild the economic and social infrastructure of poor communities. Such a domestic peace corps would draw heavily on the adults in poor neighborhoods to fight drug abuse, violence, poverty, and racism at the source.

Until we take such steps, we should not be surprised when we learn that:

- 23 percent of high school students on Chicago’s South Side say they have witnessed someone being killed, and 40 percent of these victims were family, friends, classmates, or neighbors (Greene, 1993).

- In the past decade there has been a 79 percent increase in the number of juveniles who committed murders with guns (FBI, 1991).
- According to the 1990 National Crime Survey, more than six million violent Crimes were committed. That averages out to more than 16,000 violent victimizations per day (Reiss and Roth, Eds., 1993).
- Juvenile arrests for cocaine and heroin have increased 713 percent in the last decade with a staggering increase of 2,373 percent for the African-American Teens! (FBI, 1991).

Attorney General Reno spoke the great truth about drugs and violence in our society. We cannot punish our way out of it. We cannot program our way out of it. And we cannot ignore it. Our only hope is to make the socialization and education of the young the most important and sustained national priority. This is where the rubber must meet the road and where national strategy and local initiatives must converge if there is to be a change. We must go to the devastated poor communities in this country and provide economic opportunity, adequate health care, good education, and a decent and safe physical environment and help rebuild our human infrastructure.

Let me tell you the story of the Greek immigrant living in Oakland, California, in the 1930's. He lived in an ethnic Greek neighborhood with his wife and three teenage children. He worked in the local shipyards. It was his habit to address his family at dinner with his observations about the day, the state of the neighborhood, the country, and themes ranging from the pedestrian to the universal. He addressed them in Greek as his command of English was poor. One night, after saying a prayer before the evening meal, he said, "You Americans, you are going to lose your country." One of his sons, a state senator in California who told me this story 40 years later, explained that when the "old man" was upset with conditions in his new country, he would emphasize the difference between himself and his English-speaking progeny by calling them "you Americans."

The old man was agitated that night. Earlier that day he was walking through the neighborhood when he saw a boy hitting a younger girl in some sort of squabble, perhaps a game they were playing or a dispute about a possession. He immediately collared the boy and, taking him by the ear, delivered him to his home, scolding him loudly for his behavior all the way. Of course, all the neighbors on the street were on the porches, observing this scene, and nodding their heads in agreement with his actions. Ethnic neighborhoods of that day, like rural towns and villages, were places where everyone in the neighborhood minded everyone else's business. News of even the most insignificant behavior among neighbors was communicated by word of mouth very quickly. When he reached the boy's house, he knocked on the door and asked for the boy's mother. When she appeared, he began explaining what the boy had done wrong and suggested what punishment might be meted out. There was probably some sense of disapproval in the old man's demeanor; the boy's bad behavior reflected on his family. To the old man's shock and dismay, the mother, instead of thanking him, yelled, "Let go of my son, and

don't ever touch him again! Go away! What he has done is none of your business!" The old man turned away in consternation and departed.

That is why the lecture that night at dinner was, "You Americans are going to lose your country." The old man had grown up in circumstances in which all parents, uncles, aunts, grandparents, cousins, and neighbors shared congruent expectations for children's behavior. Many adults, not just parents, were involved in the lives of children, were available to children, and took an active part in the raising or socialization of the young. Intuitively, the old man knew that what happened that day was a harbinger of things to come. Unless we change the way we are living, his prediction will come true.

Naya Arbiter: The immigrant Greek expected that the community would respond. He had the courage to extend himself. Maya Angelo tells us, "We must have the courage to create ourselves daily." Is that our expectation for ourselves? What are your expectations about drugs and violence? Can we be realists...with high ideals?

I ask you realistically, what are your expectations for the 55-year-old Mexican male with 30 years of addiction and criminality? Ten of those years in prison, a son murdered by dealers, and an addicted daughter-in-law? Can he be trusted to raise an orphaned grandson?

What are your expectations for the women who spent five years in a crack house selling every orifice for a hit of the pipe? We may be ready for recovered ex-convicts, but are we ready for ex-crack whores? Do you think she can regain dignity?

How about for the woman who left her child as collateral at the dope house? Or for the man who did 14 years in the penitentiary and described himself as a hating machine...and liked it that way?

What about the 14-year-old girl with two years of prostitution and three of heroin addiction? Or for the Native American boy charged with murder at 17 after 20 other arrests? What about the woman who gets angry as her friend is overdosing because it is blowing her high and leaves her friend dead on the floor?

Or finally, what about the woman who ran away from the step-father who was raping her at 14 as her mother watched, was beaten by her boyfriend, had a baby, and then when the boyfriend beat her, beat him back, and was sent to prison for aggravated assault? Her child was put up for adoption and she spent 20 years prostituting and strung out. Do you really expect that these people can rejoin society? Could they sit in this room and discuss these problems?

I know all of these people. They don't use drugs. They pay their taxes, and they raise their children. I have seen them make the journey from degradation to dignity. Three of them drove me to the airport to come here. One of those stories is mine.

Emerson tells us, “A mistaken reverence for our past acts confines us to be true to yesterday’s realities.” Do we have the courage to recreate ourselves, to fight against the culture of indifference, to believe that Spring is possible in human life? To be realists with high ideals? Hope starts with one story. **INDIFFERENCE IS THE ENEMY.** Responsibility...the ability to respond.

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