

National *Academic Centers of Excellence* on Youth Violence Prevention

Southern California Academic Center of Excellence on Youth Violence Prevention

History

The Academic Centers of Excellence (ACEs) were established soon after the tragedy at Columbine High School. Each ACE works with the communities it serves to encourage participation and partnership, mobilizing residents and researchers to craft effective solutions for violence prevention tailored to their specific community. ACE Centers research youth violence prevention approaches, collect and analyze surveillance data, and foster relationships with local community partners to help develop, implement, and evaluate promising prevention efforts.

Established in 2000, the Southern California Academic Center of Excellence on Youth Violence Prevention's (ACE-UCR) is comprised of staff from five local universities: the Universities of California Riverside, Los Angeles, Santa Barbara, and Irvine, as well as the University of Southern California. The mission of the ACE-UCR is to develop and evaluate a comprehensive strategy to prevent youth violence among low-income Latino and immigrant youth in three areas of Southern California: Santa Ana, Riverside/Arlanza, and Perris. ACE-UCR develops and evaluates strategies to prevent youth violence through direct contact with youths and adults; through community collaborations and partnerships with academic institutions; and through information sharing with local law enforcement and policymakers. Local mayors' offices, police departments, judicial

systems, service providers, schools, and community residents and organizations are also involved in ACE-UCR violence prevention efforts.

Research

In Santa Ana, the ACE-UCR works with Latino Health Access, a non-profit organization established to assist with the multiple needs of Latinos in Orange County, to implement and evaluate the Families and Schools Together (FAST) project. Through FAST, staff work directly with low-income immigrant Latino elementary school children and their parents with the aims of connecting parents and children to their schools, empowering parents as leaders in their families, restoring family connections and unity disrupted by immigration and poverty, and increasing connections between parents and the community. The evaluation of FAST will assess the program's effect in reducing aggression, developing healthy social skills, and improving school performance.

The ACE-UCR is also involved in other research projects, including

- Evaluation of *Positive Life Choices*, a curriculum developed by ACE-UCR that promotes healthy life choices and skills, positive identity development, and smooth transitions into adulthood; and

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- Development and evaluation of the *Child Development Parent Training* program (*Madres a Madres*), measuring differences in youth health outcomes related to this parent training intervention.

Surveillance

The ACE-UCR routinely compiles, merges, and analyzes youth violence statistics from law enforcement, Center-administered surveys, and other data sets. The youth crime data are routinely geocoded and mapped by Center researchers for use by the Center, community partners, and residents. Statistical information on local violence, drug crime, and misdemeanor violation data is available through the Center's Website. ACE-UCR's surveillance data help monitor youth violence trends and coordinate services in specific neighborhoods. Surveillance reports generated through ACE-UCR's surveillance activities are also helpful to local justice departments and policymakers.

Training

At the ACE-UCR, junior faculty, doctoral-level fellows, and graduate students have the opportunity to work alongside some of the leading researchers in youth violence prevention. The Center is a sponsor of the biennial Summer Institute on Youth Violence Prevention, a week-long training seminar for graduate students seeking to expand their scientific knowledge about violence, youth violence, and the science of youth violence prevention.

Educational opportunities are also available for the community to help design research projects and leadership programs. The Center's Website hosts numerous training modules available for download. Center staff recently published *Preventing Youth Violence in a Multicultural Society*, a useful reference for violence researchers working with diverse communities.

Community Mobilization

One of the goals of ACE-UCR is to increase local community capacity to address and prevent youth violence. The ACE-UCR works closely with community leaders to identify priorities and coordinate a comprehensive effort to reduce youth violence. The Center organizes meetings, conferences, and workshops that build trust among participants to foster positive, long-lasting effects in each community. ACE-UCR staff members provide technical assistance to local organizations intimately involved in the Center's defined communities, such as the Arlanza Neighborhood Initiative and the Perris Youth Crime Prevention Red Team. Through this collaborative process, key community stakeholders are mobilized to prevent youth violence. Coalition partners value this expansive network of providers and appreciate the Center's guidance in evaluating activities and programs and leveraging resources. Community partnerships are also beneficial to the ACE-UCR because these relationships ensure the cultural and contextual relevance of the Center's work with the families in their communities.

For more information, please contact:

Southern California Academic Center of Excellence on Youth Violence Prevention
951-827-6205 • www.stopyouthviolence.ucr.edu • roxanna.alcaraz@ucr.edu

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
1-800-CDC-INFO • www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention • cdcinfo@cdc.gov