

WAYS YOU CAN HELP RIGHT NOW

BY ERIN GRACE, STACIE HAMEL AND JOEL FULTON | WORLD-HERALD STAFF WRITERS

Our community has numerous efforts under way aimed at curbing the problems that contribute to violent crime. Here are some of the ways you can help.

BE A MENTOR

WHY IT WORKS

All children need significant adult role models. Research has shown that youths, when mentored, tend to do better in school and at home. But for mentoring to be effective, relationships need to be sustained for at least six months, said Rachel Wise of Omaha's Building Bright Futures. Programs should aim toward meeting best practices in recruitment, screening, training, matching, monitoring and support, according to MENTOR/National Mentoring Partnership. Many require background checks and screening interviews for prospective mentors.

WHO CAN HELP YOU DO IT

ALL OUR KIDS

Works to increase mentoring and scholarship opportunities for at-risk youths in the Omaha area.

Phone: 930-3000
Web: www.allourkids.org

AMACH MENTORING CHILDREN OF PRISONERS PROGRAM AT GETSEMAINE MISSIONARY BAPTIST CHURCH

Mentoring for the youth ages 4 to 18 but can continue to age 21 if the child still in school. Mentors must agree to serve as mentors for a year, meeting at least four times a month. The group also serves children in high-crime areas and those already in the justice system.

Phone: 402-933-6564

BIG BROTHERS BIG SISTERS OF THE MIDLANDS

Provides mentoring to children of prisoners and siblings of offenders. Also provides mentors to youths ages 6 to 18 through schools, the community and its Latino program.

Phone: 402-505-3075
Web: www.bigmaha.org

BOYS & GIRLS CLUBS OF THE MIDLANDS

Sites throughout the metropolitan area promote healthy development and education. Gang-intervention programs at the north and South Omaha clubs work with youths who are gang members or have friends or relatives in gangs. Participants visit the clubs before or after club hours and are grouped based on their gang affiliations. A truancy-abatement program also works with youths on life skills and enrichment activities.

Phone: 342-1600
Web: www.bgomaha.org

GIRLS INCORPORATED OF OMAHA

Serves 1,000 girls ages 5 to 18 with after-school programming in north and South Omaha. Services include transportation, meals and a range of educational, recreational and cultural programs. Girls Inc. weaves conflict resolution and healthy relationship lessons into programs.

Phone: 457-4676
Web: www.girlsinomaha.org

GOODWILL GOODGUDES

This new program will begin serving about 40 youths ages 14 to 17, many of whom are in Omaha's juvenile justice system. Mentors commit to four hours monthly for a year. Goodwill is looking for more adult career-oriented mentors and youths.

Phone: Carly Switek, 522-7232
Web: www.goodwillomaha.org/goodwillgrad.php

GRANDFRIENDS FOR GRASSROOT CHANGE

Mentoring program pairs older African-Americans with young adults for encouragement, support and leadership. Mentors use approved curriculum, mentoring best practices, and their life experiences.

Phone: 502-9788
Web: www.grandfriendsmentoring.org

100 BLACK MEN OF OMAHA

Young Men Mentoring Institute promotes postsecondary education, career exploration, goal setting and positive decision-making among African-American males in grades 9 to 12. Workshops focus on life skills, conflict resolution and personal development. Members of 100 Black Men serve as mentors.

Phone: 934-7065
Web: www.100blackmenomaha.org

RUTH K. SOLOMON GIRLS CENTER

This Heartland Family Service neighborhood center provides summer and after-school programs for girls ages 5 to 18, serving about 200 families in northeast Omaha. Most of the girls served are black and nearly all come from homes with annual incomes under \$30,000 a year. Participants can earn scholarships for post-secondary education. Programs incorporate violence prevention, anti-bullying messages and gang awareness.

Phone: 455-1755
Web: http://heartlandfamilyservice.org/programs/neighborhood-enrichment-centers/

TEAMMATES MENTORING PROGRAM

School-based mentoring program for grades three through 12. Mentors from the community meet once a week with youths to talk, play games, work on projects and help with homework. Once a youth is matched with a mentor, the goal is that the match will stay together through high school graduation. Mentors must be at least 18 years old and have a high school diploma or equivalent.

Phone: 877-531-8326
Web: www.teammates.org

WHERE ARE THE GAPS?

More mentors are needed, especially adults of color. The metro area's programs combined serve an estimated 3,000 children, half the number Building Bright Futures believes could be served. Young adults are often left out because most programs end at age 18. Of the 70 mentoring organizations, just a dozen meet national standards in best practices. There's a need for less-direct mentoring programs such as youth athletic leagues and night basketball.

GIVE: TIME, MONEY

WHY IT WORKS

Time is money, especially for community-based groups that don't have a lot of either. Adults who can offer their time and talent help organizations direct more of their limited resources to programs rather than administration. Plus there is a mutual benefit. Doing for others feels good and expands a volunteer's worldview. Opportunities run the gamut from coaching a youth sports team to stuffing envelopes. Every act of volunteering, no matter how small, helps. Then there's money. Philanthropy can do three things, said Patrick McNamara of the Omaha Community Foundation: provide much needed funding for programs and the people who run them; inspire people to work together around a crucial problem; and many government and business to leverage greater resources and results. One doesn't have to be Warren Buffett to have an impact. "If a lot of people give a small amount," said the United Way of the Midlands' Kathy O'Hara Brehm, "it's a lot of money." Money isn't the only gift. Camp Fire USA, for instance, posts a wish list on its website that includes art supplies and food for its weekend backpack program that feeds needy children.

WHO CAN HELP YOU DO IT

AFRESH ANOINTING CHURCH

4757 N. 24th St.

Reaches out to young people through several programs to prevent violence:

Youth Save Night: Tuesday evening events that teach values and life skills. The program began as a response to the beating of a teenage girl by other youths.

Prayer in the Park: Saturday morning prayer gatherings to prevent violence and support families from June 5 to Sept. 4 on the basketball court at Fontanelle Park.

Neighborhood Block Party: 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. July 31 on 38th Street from Grand Avenue to Fowler Avenue.

Phone: 932-2977
Web: www.apostlevanessaward.org/aac.html

BLACK MEN UNITED'S REAL MEN READ PROGRAM

Launched this month, this program brings black men into classrooms at Mount View Elementary School to read to fourth-, fifth- and sixth-graders. The program aims to improve literacy skills, reading confidence and reading performance among youths by providing positive male role models and is looking to expand to more Omaha schools and possibly statewide.

Phone: 707-3115
Web: www.blackmenunited.com

CAMP FIRE USA

Provides education and nutrition programs for school-age children, monthly educational events and dinners for about 1,000 families and the coordination of some 1,900 volunteers. Violence prevention is a key aspect of programming; children are taught to problem-solve and deal with conflict in a nonviolent manner.

Phone: 397-5809
Web: www.campfireomaha.org

HOPE CENTER FOR KIDS

2206 N. 23rd St.

Offers activities in athletics, art, education, social skills, employment training, community service and biblical life teaching. As part of its outreach, the center offers Hope Skate, a skating rink and entertainment center.

Phone: 341-HOPE (4673)
Web: www.hopcenforkids.org

MIDWEST TRAILBLAZERS

Year-round athletic program serving 165 boys and girls throughout the metro area in first grade through high school. This nearly all-volunteer organization stresses academic achievement and community involvement. A golf outing fundraiser May 21 is still open to players. Coaches are needed for athletic teams.

Phone: 991-1570
Web: www.trailhoops.com

WHERE ARE THE GAPS?

Not surprisingly, there never seems to be enough of either time or money. A national group ranked Nebraska No. 2 in its volunteerism rate (about 40 percent); but suburbanites and those in rural areas volunteered more than their urban counterparts here. (Omaha tied with Toledo, Ohio, for No. 20 among cities, with a rate of 34.8 percent.) Some groups need particular demographics; Midwest Trailblazers needs more female coaches for its girls basketball teams. Then a down economy stretched an already thin safety net for the poor that already has gaping holes in health care, housing, child care and transportation. In the wake of a shooting death, bereaved families often can't afford burial expenses, let alone counseling. And the myriad community groups still don't meet a pressing need for recreational space, programming and staffing for youth activities in northeast Omaha neighborhoods.

PROVIDE JOBS

WHY IT WORKS

A paying job not only puts money into the hands of someone in need, it also provides structure, training, skills enhancement and — for at-risk youths with few opportunities — necessary diversion. They get practice in being engaged, responsible and productive. But employers can't simply offer a job. Employers need to be prepared for poverty's complications: transportation, housing and child care crises and underdeveloped skills that may put a new hire at odds with a manager. Basics, such as attendance, often need to be taught and reinforced.

WHO CAN HELP YOU DO IT

EASTERN NEBRASKA COMMUNITY ACTION PARTNERSHIP

Provides summer jobs for youths ages 14 to 18. Businesses provide the jobs. The program pays a stipend of \$50 a week and provides transportation to the work sites, plus breakfast and lunch. To provide jobs, contact Rodney Evans, youth program manager, at revs@encapomaha.org. To donate money, contact Barbara Johnson at bjohnson@encapomaha.org or call the office.

Phone: 453-6656
Web: www.encapomaha.org

GOODWILL INDUSTRIES

Helps train and place traditionally hard-to-employ workers through a variety of programs. Last year, those programs combined placed 806 people in jobs, the bulk of which were summer youth jobs. Two business outreach specialists work with employers.

Phone: Elizabeth Startzer, program manager, 342-2200
Web: www.goodwillomaha.org/employment.php

GREATER OMAHA CHAMBER OF COMMERCE WORKFORCE COLLABORATIVE

Tries to match businesses that need to fill certain areas with employees who traditionally have had obstacles to working because of education level, criminal background or work history.

Phone: Othello Meadows, 978-7938
Web: www.omahachamber.org/EducationWorkforce/OmahaWorkforceCollaborative.aspx

IMPACT ONE COMMUNITY CONNECTION

Coordinates the Great Summer Jobs Program in partnership with the Empowerment Network, offering 150 spots for ages 14 to 29. The program offers career workshops and up to 20 hours a week paid work experience.

Phone: 932-2855
Web: www.impactonecc.org

URBAN LEAGUE OF NEBRASKA

Administers the Urban Youth Empowerment Series for those ages 16 to 21, providing tutoring and remedial learning, computer technology, and ACT and SAT preparation; teaches job-readiness skills and offers on-the-job training, internships and part-time jobs. Urban League University will offer credit-recovery help this summer to those in ninth through 12th grades at North High. The Urban League, the City of Omaha and Metropolitan Community College are providing 125 publicly funded jobs for youths this summer.

Phone: 453-9730. To volunteer, ask for Ricky Smith or e-mail him at rsmith@urbanleagueneb.org.

WHERE ARE THE GAPS?

Funding. Once-large government programs have been so whittled down that there are fewer opportunities. Half the 725 seasonal jobs created last summer in Omaha are available now. The economy also has stiffened the competition for youths, putting those with spotty work histories even more behind. Employers are not always prepared for the hand-holding they must do to help the job placement stick; nor are many willing to overlook criminal records.

UMBRELLA GROUPS

Churches, government agencies and community groups offer many ways to help, but we couldn't list them all here. That's why some organizations that serve as clearinghouses for volunteers or funding might offer other avenues. Consider these or ask your church or neighborhood group. To add your group to our online list, e-mail information to news@owh.com with "anti-violence" as the subject.

BRIGHT FUTURES FOUNDATION

Supports needy students through high school, college and into the work force. Provides mentoring to selected students in 15 Douglas and Sarpy County high schools. The foundation's Avenue Scholars program, in a partnership with Urban League of Omaha, helps secure college admission and financial aid.

Phone: 916-9777
Web: www.bffoundation.com/

EMPOWERMENT NETWORK/OMAHA 360

This three-year-old entity involves 500 organizations, businesses and individuals working together to improve the quality of life and economic position for black Omahans, north Omahans and city residents in general. The group has developed strategies in areas such as jobs, education, youths, businesses, housing, violence prevention, communications and media expansion.

Phone: 502-5153
Web: www.empoweromaha.com

MIDLANDS MENTORING PARTNERSHIP

Works to connect existing youth mentoring programs, serves as a resource to organizations starting mentoring programs, and increases public awareness of youth mentoring.

Phone: Executive Director Deborah Naylor, 932-2025, ext. 1005
Web: www.buildingbrightfutures.net

UNITED WAY OF THE MIDLANDS

Coordinates donations, volunteers and services in Douglas, Sarpy and Pottawattamie Counties. It also connects people in need to services through its 211 hot line. Helps fund nearly 150 programs.

Phone: 211; 342-8232
Web site: www.uwmidlands.org