

The Jacob Journal

A Newsletter from Supervisor Dianne Jacob

April 2001

Serving the Cities of:
El Cajon
La Mesa
Lemon Grove
Poway
Santee

Serving the communities of:
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Healthy Families Make Our Schools Safe

Three weeks, two high schools and one broken-hearted community.

All across the East County, at church gatherings, business meetings, and especially at our own dinner tables, we are grappling to comprehend the violence that unfolded at Santana and Granite Hills high schools.

These days, the desire to prevent another harrowing incident is so intense that suddenly, there are as many proposed solutions to school violence as there are questions about why it happens in the first place.

There's frequent talk of metal detectors, school uniforms, hotlines, gun banning and stiffer penalties for juvenile crime. There's even talk of educating students from computers in our homes. Before we even consider such measures, I'm asking that we pause, take a brief break from external solutions and examine the single most prevalent factor behind youth violence.

Many times over the years, I've said that the best violence prevention program is a strong family unit.

Recently, however, these words were supported by painstaking research in a landmark report by the United States Secret Service.

The report profiled students who had committed terrifying acts of extreme violence on America's school campuses. In case after case, one common denominator held true. Each suspect had a troubled home life.

Healing Families, Saving Lives

As an elected leader, I frequently ask myself just how much a government should involve itself in the daily affairs of the people it represents. Always, the answer is a resounding, "not much."

Yet in the wake of the school shootings, after seeing, first hand, the petrified faces of parents and students at Santana and Granite Hills, I am convinced that the growing threat of youth violence demands action from, "the system."

To protect our communities from the desperate actions of a distressed teen, the County should and must have some sort of filter to identify and attempt to heal troubled families.



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Healthy Families

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Fortunately, in San Diego County, this critical safety net already exists. Unfortunately however, it is not often used.

The promising program is called the Community Assessment Team, or CAT team. Developed by the County's Probation Department and counselors and therapists from regional non-profit groups, this revolutionary program aims kids and families in the right direction. Most importantly, the program doesn't wait until kids get arrested to intervene. A simple phone call from a concerned teacher, confused parent or worried sibling and the CAT team springs into action.

Two-person CAT teams, made up of one probation officer and one social worker, visit families in crisis, frequently making house calls and always speaking objectively. Participation is voluntary, of course, but CAT professionals say help is rarely turned down. Experts say it's the CAT team's non-adversarial approach that makes the program so appealing to families.

CAT teams talk at length with individual family members to find out the exact nature of a family's problems. Whether it's a parent's drug addiction, a teen's depression, a mental health problem or the trials of divorce, the team can develop a rehabilitative game plan tailored to the needs of each family.

The word "rehabilitation" is easy to say but it hardly details the comprehensive services CAT teams offer. From individual and family counseling, mentor programs and tutoring to mental health care and anger management classes, kids and adults tackle issues together. In the words of one CAT official, "Family problems demand family solutions." Indeed, with the CAT team, every family member has a role in the solution.

Consider 13-year-old Richard whose step-mother contacted the CAT team when she found out the boy had begun experimenting with drugs. The CAT team linked Richard's step-mother with parenting classes and helped Richard attend a charter school.

"Nobody cared before what I did," Richard recently told the *San Diego Union-Tribune*, "so I fell into a bunch of bad habits." Richard's grades have improved and his step-mother is involved in his extra curricular activities which include varsity football.

Now, the drive begins to make Richard's experience more accessible to all families. The Board has voted to expand funding and staff for CAT outreach and I'm taking steps to make certain that every teacher in every school district in our County is armed with the lifesaving phone numbers of the County's CAT teams.

It'll take a massive commitment to proactive violence prevention to get school staff as well as all County residents conditioned to call on CAT teams for family problems. Luckily, there's a team in every region of the county willing to touch families to prevent a possible disaster.

Think for just one moment, how different things might have turned out in Santee or El Cajon had the parents of the two teen shooters become involved and accountable for the well-being of their families.

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Healthy Families

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If you know of a troubled youth or a family facing challenges, the County's CAT team has a network of resources waiting to intervene. Please contact the numbers below. Join me in my efforts to keep our schools safe by making others aware of this valuable program.

- Central: (619) 283-9624
- South: (619) 420-3620
- North Inland: (760) 747-6281
- North Coastal: (760) 757-0118
- East County: (619) 579-3201

The CAT team operates a 24-hour hotline. The number is: (800) 640-2933

Campus Deputies Change Students' Views of Law Enforcement

After last month's violence, parents and teachers in Santee and El Cajon wanted an added sense of safety on school campuses. The County has responded by providing a sheriff's resource deputy to every campus in the Grossmont Union High School District.

More than just officers of the law, school resource deputies work alongside teachers and faculty to give students a fresh perspective on law enforcement. Resource deputies give students the feeling that law enforcement exists to help and protect them.

These uniquely-trained officers have experience dealing with young people. They become mentors, role models and confidantes to students. In fact, some students have entered into law enforcement careers because of their relationship with resource deputies. Most importantly, kids learn that the law is indeed on their side.

I'm convinced that school resource deputies are one of our most powerful tools to keep students safe. Coupled with prevention programs like the County's CAT teams, we will move a step closer to stamping out school violence on all fronts.

Join me for Coffee and Conversation...

Saturday, April 7, 2001, 10:00 a.m. to noon

Julian Town Hall- upstairs
2131 Main Street, Julian

Friday, May 11, 2001, 10:00 a.m. to noon

Kountry Kitchen
826 Main Street, Ramona

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We hope to hear from you soon!

Apr-01

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