

# Safe Neighborhoods Newsletter

April 10, 2024

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## **Making Neighborhoods Safe for Kids & Families!**

Safe Kids Now National Network shares information to empower and keep children, families, and neighbors safe. We provide steps to make neighborhoods, communities and cities safe, healthy places to work and live.

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**Children are God's love gift; they are Heaven's generous reward - Psalm 127:3**

## **OUR Children are in Crisis**

By Stephanie Mann

Are “we the people” expecting politicians to save our children and restore family and community values? A politician’s job is to pass laws and spend taxpayers’ money.

Beware of giving politicians too much power. Hitler demonstrated how one man took over Germany, gradually becoming a nation of followers. Putin is today’s example of one man’s evil power to control people as he tries to extend his power beyond Russian borders. Could that happen in America?

**The world will never see peace if we ignore the power of the human spirit.**

Look around; what areas in your city have peaceful neighborhoods? Which neighborhoods have the most crime and violence? What is the problem? Single moms? Lack of responsible fathers? Out of control youth? Drugs and alcohol abuse? Homelessness? Prostitution and drug dealers? Have some neighborhoods become a sanctuary for criminal behavior? How are these problems being addressed?

Years ago, parents understood the power of faith and taught children the Ten Commandments. Today, according to the Hartford Institute, roughly 350,000 religious congregations in the U.S. must be involved and help unite the community as they demonstrate the power of “Love Thy Neighbor.” Neighbors used to be friends and help each other, which was a check and balance on young bullies and bad behavior in neighborhoods. Men counseled men, women supported women, and neighbors looked out for children. In other words, a strong sense of community offered support for everyone. Today, if children don’t have love at home, they look for love on social media, run away, or join gangs to find friends and community. Today’s lack of community has emboldened sex traffickers and gangs, costing taxpayers **\$655 Billion a year**. (Source: [www.youth.gov](http://www.youth.gov))

As a crime and violence prevention specialist, I can tell you these problems are not being addressed. We are a reactive society, but we must become a preventative society to keep our freedoms. Smaller cities have less crime and violence because people know each other and engage in their communities. We can make that happen in big cities.



American taxpayers spend **\$220 million a DAY** on child abuse and neglect as angry youth feel entitled to loot, set fires, disrespect police, and destroy their communities. There are two ways to help decrease city crime and violence and make cities safer. (Source: CDC)

**Step 1.** America needs a spiritual awakening! Years ago, life in America was peaceful because most people had strong moral values and respected each other! All children are born with many gifts, including creativity, insights, a sense of humor, imagination, intuition, instincts, and a self-protective conscience that can keep them safe and healthy. Adults must work together to empower and support youth in staying emotionally centered and developing the 3C's: courage, character, and a self-protective conscience so they don't become bullies or victims.

**Step 2.** Children need a healthy network of friends and neighbors to build trust and care about people so they don't feel socially isolated and self-absorbed, which can lead to self-destructive behaviors. In some neighborhoods, people need to hire and pay "Neighborhood Safety Experts" who look like and speak the language of the community to help bring neighbors together. Responsible non-profits can collaborate with the police to help with this project.

Everyone has a role to play if we want to make our families and neighborhoods safe places to live. A spiritual awakening and people working together in neighborhoods could cut crime, violence, and gangs in half within ten years.

Consider this old Arabic Proverb. They asked the Pharaoh, "What made you a tyrant? He said, "No one stopped me." It's time to speak up and get involved. You only have three choices in life: Give up, give in, or give it your all. If we are going to remain free, it starts with you and me. When we focus on good, the good will increase.

In a democratic society, it is up to "we the people" to decide whether we will help strengthen our families, ensure the safety of youth, create peaceful neighborhoods, or watch the chaos in our communities! You decide.

For more information on how to empower youth which can keep them safe so they make good choices, go to [www.safekidsnow.com](http://www.safekidsnow.com)

*About the Writer: STEPHANIE L. MANN Author, Crime and Violence Prevention Consultant, Founder, Safe Kids Now National Network, is the author of "Empowerment Parenting: How to raise resilient children." In 1975, Stephanie co-authored, "Alternative to Fear: Guidelines to Safer Neighborhoods." With the help of California's first lady, Nancy Reagan, the California Youth Authority funded the guide and sold thousands nationwide to police departments, police training centers, state and government agencies including the FBI. "Alternative to Fear" helped educate police about the potential of involved citizens and popularized the "Neighborhood Watch" Programs. Mann is the author of six books on home, family, neighborhood, and city safety For more information, visit [www.safekidsnow.com](http://www.safekidsnow.com)*

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*For More Information on Gangs: The US Department of Justice and the US Department of Health and Human Services have co-published a free download "Changing Course: Preventing Gang Membership." This guide is a must-read resource for schools, government leaders, law enforcement, parents, and anyone involved in serving communities where gang violence occurs.*

*"In 2008, Phelan Wyrick, Ph.D. (now a senior advisor to the Assistant Attorney General for DOJ's Office of Justice Programs) was an NIJ program manager when he picked up the phone and called Dr. Rodney Hammond, then the Director of the Division of Violence Prevention at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Wyrick pitched his idea: 'We know that youth gangs contribute disproportionately to crime and violence... so let's put some good public health and criminal justice minds to work on determining ways to stop kids from joining gangs in the first place.' Always a champion of prevention, Hammond immediately saw the advantages of this collaboration." (Source: Acknowledgements <https://www.ojp.gov/pdffiles1/nij/239234.pdf>)*

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## **Crime Hasn't Changed Much Since My Teen Years**

By Sher Graham

Growing up in urban/rural Midwest, the thought of gang violence as we describe it in today's community culture was not even discussed. Yes, adults talked about the crime waves in our community in southern Ohio, or the 'people on the other side of the tracks' who participated in petty theft, joyriding in stolen vehicles, or verbal/physical confrontations between people on the streets or behind the school or in the park. Yet, not once did I witness any type of negative threat of violence until I was sixteen.

My first job was a playground supervisor for the local parks and recreation department. They had playgrounds at elementary and junior high schools open during the summer so kids would have a place to come, play basketball, be part of a reading group, or just a place to enjoy the outdoors. The city hired high school juniors and seniors to be playground supervisors. There was an age limit and it was not the place for children who were left unattended nor adults to 'hang out' because they were not working nor had anywhere else to go. Yet, they found their way there, especially in the late afternoon. These parks were open from 10 am – 6 pm, with one teen supervisor per shift.

I loved my job and enjoyed the kids who were part of my programs. The reading circles were my favorite as I liked to read, but more importantly, I liked to read to the younger kids. It was wonderful to share stories with them, hoping to encourage them to read at home or write or draw their own dreams and inspirations. Reading was an essential part of my life, and kept me dreaming about how different my life could be or what I would become or just how much my faith meant to me. So, to share it with others played an important role in my dreams.

Reading circles were early afternoon activities so we could sit under the shade of the large maple tree that grew in the middle of the cement playground. Kids were fidgeting and waiting for story time to begin. As I sat down to begin reading, an adult male started to come towards me. All supplies were locked in the school, of which we had keys and only got items out on request. He wanted me to get a basketball. I politely explained that the playground was open for kids in schools and not for adults. He became very agitated and raised his voice. The next words he spoke were "I want to play basketball. Get me the ball. If you don't, I will come back and shoot you." With those words, I calmly moved the kids from the circle and then told them they needed to go home as I was closing the playground. There were several other parents there, and they helped to get the kids off the playground.

I found myself unlocking the door to the school and going inside. Several times a day, the local police officer would stop by the playground just to make sure everything was all right. I knew it was time so I waited inside the building. My car was parked too far away for me to get into the car, so I waited. It was noon, and the other supervisor arrived at about the same time the officer parked. I remember being shaken and telling both of them what had happened. It was so long ago I can't remember if we opened the playground back up or it remained closed.

Driving to the parks office I told the director what happened. Later, people who lived in the community told me that the man had served time for theft and assault and had recently been released from prison. This was so far from my quiet neighborhood community and not part of my everyday existence. So, now I am grateful for my mother's insistence that I quit, although I was not a quitter. My mother feared the man would return with a weapon and shoot me, or anyone else.

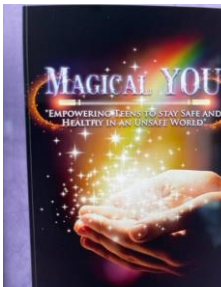
The Morale of this Story: Violence still exists today on the playgrounds, in our schools, in workplaces and on the roadways. No part of our community environment is exempt from violence in any form. I live in Mobile, Alabama, where gunshots are heard in many neighborhoods, where young people threaten their peers and older people, and where rage and entitlement are interchangeable words when someone is offended and someone else doesn't like to be told what to do, or what to say or not say, or how to act, where disrespect is the norm, or rather as someone on nextdoor.com wrote: You just have to get used to the disrespect because that is the way it is."

No, that is NOT the way it is. We must find respect for ourselves as the first priority, then respect for our elders and siblings, and friends, and each person we meet in our daily journey. Respect is a priority that we must choose to return to the classroom, to the office, to the courtroom, to walking down the street and driving on our highways. Let us take the 'dis' out of disrespect and begin to use the other seven letters "RESPECT."

*About the Writer: Sher Graham began as a community activist at age 12. Her commitment to making life better for others began with the legacy inspired from her grandmothers. As an author and speaker, she share her personal journey of surviving parental substance abuse disorder, verbal/physical abuse and being an unwanted child. Her journey has led her to advocate for mental health services for everyone, bring awareness of mental illness stigmas and to guide other to create heart calm with their chaotic environments. You can reach her at [slgraham4969@gmail.com](mailto:slgraham4969@gmail.com) or <https://www.shergraham.com>.*

## Action Items....

*From the Editor: Safe Kids Now News is on [LinkedIn](#). If you have relevant announcements about important events aligned with our efforts to shed light on the problems that kids, their families, and America's neighborhoods face in the midst of the confusion today, please email Stephanie at [safeneighborhoods@gmail.com](mailto:safeneighborhoods@gmail.com) by the 30<sup>th</sup> of each month prior to our monthly newsletter around the 15<sup>th</sup>-20<sup>th</sup> of each month.*



**Call to Action:** Stephanie Mann has written an empowerment guide that targets our preteens and teenagers on how to stay safe and healthy in an unsafe world. "Magical You" is a unique opportunity for parents, grandparents, what they need to do to make better choices in everyday life. This is the time to prioritize time for that conversation with them about making choices, what events are happening in today's world, and how those events impact their lives. "Magical You" is available on Amazon. Visit [www.safekidsnow.com](http://www.safekidsnow.com) for more information. For more information on Safe Kids Now, or to book Stephanie for keynote speech, workshop or panel, community crime prevention consultation for law enforcement, education and faith-based affiliations, email her at [safeneighborhoods@gmail.com](mailto:safeneighborhoods@gmail.com).

**NEW BOOK RELEASE:** A Safe Kids Now Network Member, Pastor Ovella Davis, Detroit, MI, and founder of The United Communities of America ([www.theucoa.com](http://www.theucoa.com)) has released her first book, "Victory Is Your Purpose." ([www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com)) Victory is your purpose is a deep dive into the inner person that you are born to be. If you are reading this, it's because you were created with a purpose and you are on the right path to fulfill the PURPOSE. A must-read book for every person, no matter how young you are!

**Call to Action:** Celebrate these April health awareness observances with your children: Minority Health, Alcohol Awareness, and Public Health Week.

**And... Remember to breathe, pray, smile, laugh, read, move, and love. Repeat as many times as necessary!!!!**