



# Youth Violence Prevention

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The United States Congress created the Inter-American Foundation (IAF) to fund the efforts of grassroots groups in Latin America and the Caribbean and the organizations that support them. Recently, youth violence, associated with gang membership, has emerged as a priority for many IAF grantees.

Youths under 30 make up more than 40 percent of the population of Latin America. In Central America alone, some 60 percent of the population is under 25. Estimates on gang membership in Central America and Mexico run between 100,000 and 300,000. Half of the 1,688 students surveyed by an IAF grantee in Guayaquil, Ecuador, in 2000 reported a connection to a gang. In El Salvador, 40 percent of all homicides are thought to be gang-related.

Several Central American governments have responded with *mano dura*, or iron-fisted criminal codes that don't address the causes of violence: Young people join gangs when they feel excluded from their communities, often because they lack the education and experience that lead to productive employment. Violence in the home, danger in the neighborhood and migration of adult family members are also contributing factors. So far, *mano dura* laws have failed to make Central American societies safer. Murders of youths in El Salvador, Honduras and Guatemala increased up to 90 percent between 2002 and 2006.

IAF grantees are working to prevent youth violence by reaching out to vulnerable young people through job training and access to credit, self-expression and cultural identity, leadership development, and sports. Beyond its grant program, the IAF is collaborating with the Central American Coalition for the Prevention of Youth Violence (CACPYV), a regional partnership of non-governmental organizations and local and national government officials. In 2006, the IAF supported a one-week workshop hosted by the Nicaraguan National Police Academy and a two-day conference in San Salvador featuring participation by the Central American Integration System, a regional body of government officials. Both CACPYV events focused on



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prevention and reintegrating offenders, as opposed to *mano dura* policies, and they advocated community-based, youth-led initiatives that develop leaders and result in jobs and education—such as those undertaken by the following IAF grantees:

**Fundación Salvadoreña para la Reconstrucción y el Desarrollo (REDES)** is using its 2005 grant to assist 18 communities characterized by high migration rates. Its program, incorporating family remittances and contributions from hometown associations, includes sub-grants and loans for pilot microbusinesses managed by young adults. U.S.-based organizations will identify young Salvadorans about to be deported back to the project area; they will receive support from a designated fund as well as the technical assistance in micro-enterprise development offered to all participants.

**Comité de Reconstrucción y Desarrollo Económico-Social de Comunidades de Suchitoto (CRC)** received a 2006 grant to plan a community program involving 50 youths and benefiting 10,000 other residents of Suchitoto, El Salvador. The consortium it has formed with Radio Suchitlán, TV Municipal Comunitario de Suchitoto and Centro Arte para La Paz, will upgrade the local radio and television infrastructure, update the skills of the young staff in radio and video/television operations, and strengthen the Centro's administration.

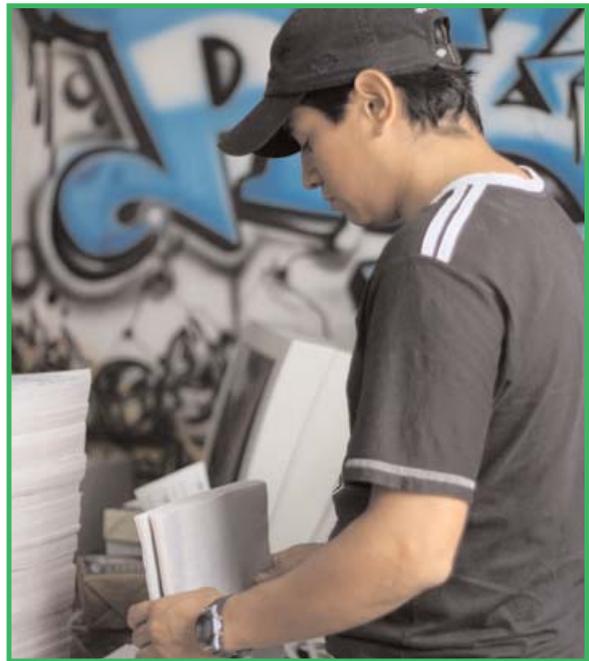
**The Asociación de Gerentes de Guatemala (AGG)**, in collaboration with *Empresarios Juveniles de Guatemala*, will use its 2006 grant to offer training in entrepreneurial development to high school students identified as at risk from gang activity and violence.

**Corporación Ser Paz (SER PAZ)** is using its 2006 grant to work with Guayaquil residents and youths from five gangs toward creating safer neighborhoods through workshops on social inclusion, communication, self-esteem, civic participation, conflict resolution and the arts. SER PAZ also funds participants' development projects addressing neighborhood problems, and helps them obtain additional vocational training.

**Fundación de Desarrollo Social y Cultural Afroecuatoriano "Azucar" (AZUCAR)**, funded in 2006, is working with children and at-risk adolescents and young adults from Afro-Ecuadorian neighborhoods in Quito. AZUCAR conducts activities that highlight Afro-Ecuadorian culture and the right to equal treatment and provides opportunities for active civic participation.

**Movimiento Mi Cometa (MI COMETA)** received a 2006 grant to develop its Leadership School for a New Millennium in six locations throughout Ecuador, where adolescents debate issues related to civic responsibility and democratic leadership. The methodology focuses on identifying the problems that young people currently face and on channeling their creativity, optimism, solidarity and collegiality toward solutions.

To learn more about the IAF, visit  
[www.iaf.gov](http://www.iaf.gov)



Heidi Smith

**Instituto Pauline Reichstul (IPR)** has used its 2005 grant to improve the income prospects of hundreds of young adults in Belo Horizonte, Brazil, through supporting youth-led businesses and teaching marketable skills that lead to better employment options.

**Fundación Defensores del Chaco (DCH)** is using its 2005 IAF grant to consolidate a network of grassroots organizations by working through several soccer leagues in Buenos Aires, Argentina. These "solidarity leagues" emphasize tolerance, unity, respect and participation. DCH recruits community leaders from the leagues and at cultural events to train in counseling neighborhood residents with limited access to the justice system.