



WORKING  
IN  
CRIME PREVENTION  
& with  
YOUTH

C  
CREATIVE



# A Comprehensive Approach to Crime Prevention

Crime in Central America is a factor of daily life. Violence undermines schools, neighborhood businesses, national economies and even international relations.

In Honduras, a 2011 Creative Associates International survey revealed that only 22 percent of people felt “very secure” in their own neighborhoods. Regionally, there are more than 100,000 murders each year—with youth comprising a large segment of victims and perpetrators.

Typically, the response has been incarceration, leading to a population of youth who have missed out on getting an education. Prevention policies and activities were limited.

Instead, Creative identified 13 critical risk factors—including low self-esteem and limited job prospects—that make youth vulnerable to getting involved in illicit activities.

By identifying these root causes of crime and violence, it enables communities to craft solutions and develop positive opportunities for at-risk youth. Creative’s multi-level approach works beyond the borders of an individual community to engage government officials, opinion leaders, the private sector and others in holistic solutions.

## Mobilizing Communities

Creative’s approach to mitigating violence starts with communities.

Officials, businesses, residents and organizations are organized into Municipal Violence Prevention Committees, which identify the most prevalent risk factors in their communities, think of solutions and use Creative’s support to mobilize their own assets.

Many communities, for example, start Outreach Centers (OCs) where at-risk youth find a safe space to enjoy hobbies, receive tutoring, learn marketable skills and find a sense of belonging.

Public organizations and private companies collaborate to support the centers, linking them with the community and ensuring that youth are perceived as potential employees rather than potential problems.

Today, in the countries where Creative has crime prevention programs, there are 115 outreach centers—a number that is set to at least double over the next five years. Each one reaches thousands of youth throughout the year.

In addition to the OCs, Municipal Crime Prevention Committees are actively involved in stopping crime and building other opportunities among the most vulnerable populations.

Governments will be able to rely on these sustainable mechanisms to support communities throughout the region that are committed to making their neighborhoods safe again.



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# THE CREATIVE DIFFERENCE

Today there are 115 Outreach Centers in the countries where Creative has crime prevention programs, with at least another 115 planned over the next five years.

## ■ 115+ Outreach Centers

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### Making Youth the Solution

In many areas where crime and violence are rampant, youth are often viewed as the problem. For Creative, they are also the solution.

At the OCs, youth build their confidence and start to believe that they can have a positive future as they start to feel empowered through mentorship, coaching, and training in life skills and leadership.

As part of the *Alianza Joven Regional* program, Creative's "Dreaming My Life" campaign encouraged 6,434 youth in Honduras, Guatemala and El Salvador to develop life plans that reduced their vulnerability to violence and linked them to mentors.

In Panama, the *Alcance Positivo* project enhanced five key protective factors that help youth stay strong and find nonviolent opportunities—factors like caring mentorship and creative use of after-school time.

By giving youth the confidence to lead, the capacity to succeed, and the chance to give back to their communities, Creative empowers youth to become a skilled force for positive change at all levels of society.

### A National Network of Partners

Creative's programs take crime prevention beyond the neighborhood and into the national arena.

They partner with governments to develop violence prevention strategies such as restorative justice systems that go beyond incarceration and help youth rebuild their lives.

For example, as part of the *Desafío Joven* Program in Guatemala, hundreds of ex-gang members were successfully reintegrated and equipped with life skills coaching and job training.

In El Salvador, the government is working with Creative in 55 municipalities to implement a national violence prevention strategy.

In addition to partnering with governments, other institutions are key allies in this strategy. For one, Creative engages the media to build awareness and amplify the voices of those calling for peace.



For example, in Panama, the *Alcance Positivo* project trained news outlets on how to constructively report on violence, held dialogues with the media on youth violence, and created a code of ethics for responsible coverage.

Involving law enforcement is critical, too: When police become partners instead of punishers, communities trust them enough to integrate them into efforts for prevention.

Creative also integrates civil society organizations (CSOs) into national strategies, leading to increased support and sustainability.

*Alcance Positivo* provided funding to 107 CSOs for activities that targeted at-risk youth, and trained NGO leaders in social media, marketing, strategic planning and operations. It developed the country's first web-based platform for CSOs to connect, learn and share best practices.

Integrating civil society with national strategies has led to increased and ongoing support for crime and violence prevention activities: Networks in El Salvador and Honduras each contributed more than \$1 million in funds and resources.

### Seven Countries, a Unified Strategy

Creative recognizes that the problems facing Central American countries know no borders: the drugs, crime, and violence are transported internationally.

# 6,434 YOUTH

in Honduras, Guatemala and El Salvador developed life plans that reduced their vulnerability to violence

To bolster transnational capacity to address crime and violence without just throwing youth in jail, Creative trained judges and prosecutors region-wide on restorative justice.

It also provides expertise and resources to the Central American Integration System, a political and economic regional union that is crafting regional security strategies and policies for juvenile justice and violence reduction.

This regional approach has influenced the thinking of youth themselves.

They founded the Youth Against Violence (YAV) movement that expanded to all seven countries of Central America. Chapters have since been recognized as legal NGOs in Guatemala, El Salvador and Honduras.

In Honduras, members of the YAV movement broadcast a nationwide television show to raise awareness and spread information about violence prevention, entrepreneurship, anti-bullying and OCs.

In El Salvador, more than 1,000 youth and political leaders participated in dialogues and drafted anti-violence proposals.

And the Guatemala chapter's recommendations were adopted as the basis for a new National Crime Prevention Policy and national youth policy.

Today, more than ever before, youth leaders are the ones holding their governments accountable for addressing violence.

As the YAV movement demonstrates, youth are stepping up as leaders across communities, countries, and the region. Creative is working with them to mitigate their risk factors and strengthen their capacities to build a stronger, safer world for themselves.

## Safer at Every Level

As a result, Creative contributes to the reduction and prevention of crime across Central America, making citizens feel safer in their communities, countries, and throughout the region.

- Out of eight Salvadoran communities where Creative's Alianza Joven Regional program worked, five saw significant improvements in their perception of security between 2010 and 2011. And 25 percent more people believed their community had an organization that helped youth plan their dreams and futures.
- Before Creative's Alcance Positivo program began in Panama, 38 percent of people in target neighborhoods reported feeling somewhat or very safe. Less than three years later, that number had jumped to 62 percent.
- Meanwhile, 520 youth reported increased volunteer participation, and nearly 800 got involved in sports programs. Almost 400 youths said they had more confidence and leadership capacity.
- In Honduras, the percentage of people who thought there were more opportunities for jobs and training tripled.

Youth in Central America now believe that they can be a part of preventing violent crime. With the support of Creative, their communities and their government, they have more tools to do so, and the confidence to succeed.



Creative Associates International works with underserved communities by sharing expertise and experience in education, economic growth, governance, elections and transitions from conflict to peace. Creative is the second-largest company owned by women that works with the U.S. government.

Based in Washington, D.C., Creative currently has field offices in more than 20 countries. Since 1977, it has worked in more than 85 countries and on nearly every continent. Recognized for its ability to work rapidly, flexibly and effectively in conflict and post-conflict environments, Creative is committed to generating long-term sustainable solutions to complex development problems.

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