



Above: Erick Betancourt and Teny Gross  
Right: Bill Pellicio

# Ending Violence, Vendettas and Vengeance

THE INSTITUTE FOR THE STUDY AND PRACTICE OF NONVIOLENCE

**T**here are roughly forty people in the emergency department who are anticipating news about a gunshot victim. Most are family and friends, but some are rival gang members. The atmosphere is tense.

The medical team is working to save the teenager's life. Social workers are doing their best to comfort the family. Security is trying to calm the agitated crowd. Then, a small group of young adults enters the building. At that moment, the crowd visibly relaxes. The streetworkers have arrived.

The streetworkers are a group of inner-city Providence youth, some former gang members, led by Teny Gross of The Institute for the Study and Practice of Nonviolence. The streetworkers are on the scene whenever and wherever there may be trouble, acting as mediators between rival gang members. They have been doing so since 2003.

"Once an individual is shot," says Gross, "their chance of survival on the street is slim. Intervention and communication are essential to prevent a second attempt and/or

revengeful action."

According to Gross, "Many of these kids want out of their gangs, but rivals won't let them. We work as mediators between the gangs, communicating truces and getting these kids out, and into work or school programs. We are happy to say that we have been successful."

From 2005 to 2006, the homicide rate in Providence was cut in half and violent incidents also sharply declined. Hieu Ton-That, MD, a trauma attending physician and Institute board member, attributes the change to the streetworker program. "The results are tremendous," he says. "I am proud to be a part of it."

Bill Pellicio, a social worker at Rhode Island Hospital, believes in the program so much that he conducts training sessions for the streetworkers on topics ranging from trauma management to grief counseling. "They help me when difficult situations arise; therefore, I want to help support their efforts."

Lifespan also is proud to support the program, donating the cost of the streetworkers' health care premiums to help ensure the streetworkers will continue to be there, whenever and wherever they are needed.

Erick Betancourt, a 26-year-old streetworker, says, "The money will help the Institute and anything that helps is incredibly appreciated."

