

## **SAN DIEGO SEMINAR/WORKSHOP ON SOURCES OF TEEN VIOLENCE BY MJ WARRENDER, SAN DIEGO CHIEF CORRESPONDENT**

More than 250 students, educators, community leaders and SGI-USA members participated in San Diego's first Victory Over Violence seminar/workshop at the Kearny Mesa Community Center. The event opened with two speakers who were disabled by gang violence, R.B. Bogstad and Cruz Carrasco.

Mr. Bogstad is the founder of "Think! Stop Teen Violence" and has transformed 11 neighborhoods from gang warfare to safety and harmony. His poster campaign, television commercials and one-on-one conversations with gang members have created more peaceful, drug-free communities.

Mr. Carrasco is a former high school football running back who was shot by a gang member and is now paralyzed. His wife, who was initially his occupational therapist, now visits schools and community centers with him to speak against drug and gang activity. Cruz just recently received the M.K. Gandhi Peace Award from the M.K. Gandhi Institute for NonViolence in Tennessee.

Video clips of Bogstad's television commercials, news clippings and excerpts from talk shows were combined with his experiences and a question-and-answer period afterward. Cruz's speech was heard through a microphoned computer, since when he was shot, the bullet pierced through one side of his head and lodged in the opposite side of his brain, damaging some of his memory, critical thinking and speaking abilities. His pre-recorded speech entitled, "Their Bullet, My Life," recapped the experience of having his life and dreams, as he knew them, taken away in one brief moment as a result of making wrong decisions and surrounding himself with the wrong friends. He pleaded with all the youth participants to "please stay away from guns, drugs and gangs. Don't give up! Stop the violence and increase the peace. We are all in this life together."

After the seminars, participants were given the opportunity to share in groups their feelings concerning sources of violence and how violent experiences in their own lives shaped their attitudes and destinies. Discussion groups were facilitated by leaders in the community: educators, a school psychologist, a school counselor, directors of San Diego's domestic violence police force, the street gang task force, and SDYCS's community developer. Group participants included former gang members, students, teachers and many guests who continually face acts of violence in their homes, on their streets or in their schools. Youth representatives were selected by participants to come to the main microphone and give a summary of what was shared in their groups. Youth shared how many of them were victims of extreme acts of violence. It caused some to be fearful, they said, and some to be angry and others to be more determined to avoid violent situations and create more peaceful relationships with their own families. Other youth spoke about how friendship was the most important thing and how essential it is to see into a person's life, not judging them solely by their appearance. One youth said how important it was to think before one spoke, and the last asked all the participants to think with their hearts, not with their heads.

The day's activities finished with an interactive group exercise, one-on-one discussion and refreshments outside in the community center's courtyard. Partnerships were solidified among members of the community.