

Media release  
Public Health Association  
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### **Making the ideal real: A do-able response to youth violence**

The Public Health Association conference heard today that a new project to reduce youth violence attempts to give young people genuine and exciting opportunities to develop their "adult" identities to replace those being formed by violence.

The national manager of the project "RAP: Respect all People, Whakamana Tangata" told the delegates gathered at Waitangi that the prime goal of any young person is to develop an identity that will see them through adulthood.

Garth Baker told the conference: "Violence is often valued by the young people involved in it, because it helps form that identity. Young people are trying to work out what is the right thing to do as an adult, what is the wrong thing to do. For a few, using violence to resolve conflict seems the right way to go. It also provides the drama and excitement that young people crave."

Mr Baker said a definitive report on youth health in 2000 found that about half the males surveyed had experienced physical or sexual abuse or violence in the previous 12 months, and almost 41 percent of the females.

"This report was also the first to document the links between violence and adverse health effects such as mental health and relationship difficulties. In addition, much of New Zealand's preventable illness and premature deaths in adulthood can be traced to behaviours initiated during adolescence.

"So adolescence is a good time to intervene, to address the negative health effects of violence; to establish as normal, respectful ways of resolving conflict and to provide alternative ways of helping develop their adult identities."

Mr Baker said the first step has been working with about 60 youth workers who in turn will apply the principles of RAP to reduce and replace violence in the environments they provide to young people.

"We've identified ten strategies to reduce and replace violence, including rewarding respectful behaviour, clear boundaries and consequences, and adults modelling resolving conflict respectfully.

"We also need to provide exciting opportunities, such as in sport, for young people to develop their adult identities and gain the respect of their peers.

"We have a long way to go but we really believe this may be the way to turn the grand idea of a non-violent world into real action."

**For more information contact conference media advisor Liz Price on 0276 957 744.**