



NORTH CAROLINIANS AGAINST GUN VIOLENCE EDUCATION FUND

Teens on Target

Report by Gail Neely, Assistant Director

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Children are the victims and perpetrators of violence and weapons use in cities across the country. Often times, these children know about the causes of and realistic solutions to this violence better than an outsider could. Unfortunately, they do not have the means or channels to express their concerns and opinions. In Durham, North Carolina, however, this is changing. By joining forces with local community-based organizations, North Carolinians Against Gun Violence (NCGV) has developed a pilot group of Teens On Target (TNT), a program started in Los Angeles, California in 1989 in response to the large number of children killed by guns throughout the country. Middle school and high school students from neighborhoods with elevated levels of violence in Durham, the city with the highest child homicide rate in the state, meet after school throughout the school year to talk about violence in their lives and neighborhoods and how this violence can be avoided and remedied.

During the first semester of the 2007-2008 school year, TNT discussed gang violence, gun violence, family and dating violence, the connection between drugs/alcohol and violence, and how youth can prevent violence. Guest speakers were brought in for each session to reinforce each topic of discussion. There was a high participation rate among the teens during this part of the program and by the end of the semester, 2 out of five participants raised their grades from C's, D's & F's, to the A/B honor roll.



**Selected Teens on Target members met with Skip Auld,
Director of the Durham County Library System.**

TNT encourages advocacy in these teens, showing them that they can make a difference if they try, and providing them a voice in the community. One of the ways this is done is by Community Mapping: teens compare their community's resources and amenities with those of a more affluent area and think of what would greatly improve their neighborhood. The Durham Teens on Target have finished their community mapping, and their final analysis is access to a local public library would reduce violence and

improve their community is. The Durham Public Library is not easily accessible to these students, and they feel that reading is fundamental to the well-being of their community.

Directors of the Durham Public Library have already expressed interest in opening community branches of the main library to ensure access to more community members. The TNT teen advocates are gathering signatures from community members to show support for this project. They will be presenting their project plan to Skip Auld, Director of the Durham County Library. If all goes well, the families of the West End Community of Durham will see their world open up to them by opening the doors to their library and opening the pages of a good book.