

## \* A New Approach To Crime Prevention\*

By Dorothy Maraglino

Since the dawn of civilization, society has struggled to keep law and order. Modern times herald "tough on crime" campaigns. Society increasingly locks away offenders and even kills them at an alarming rate. Once a prisoner is released, society limits anyone who had been convicted of a crime. Laws over-penalize and still does not address the underlying causes of crime. The traditional approaches to crime fighting and prevention have failed. Today, our jails and prisons are overflowing. The violence in our streets are rampant. There is an approach that is so simple but would dramatically decrease crime rates in our nation. It would require bravery of ordinary citizens and it's so daring that few would ever think it possible or would agree to try it themselves. The solutions is the application of Love.

Stay with me as I explain. I did not say to love. Love must be applied. Crime is preventable when you focus on the people not the crime. The majority of criminals were victims themselves. Many of their abuses began in childhood. The inability to deal with traumas led to addiction acting out and eventually crime. The best way to stamp out crime is to prevent it from ever happening. The solution is to active in society, aware of the needs of others, and willing to act for the benefit of others. Everyone from children to adults, poor to the wealthy, single people to parents can play a role in crime prevention.

Adults, if you want to help reduce the revolving rate of recidivism , consider what the community can do to provide other options than crime. For decades, felons have been prevented from finding gainful employment, restricted in housing options and shunned from taking an active role in leadership roles. Why should felons who paid their debt to society continue to be marginalized for the rest of their lives? Opportunities to succeed must be extended to felons. If you want to reduce recidivism, try hiring a felon to work at your company, encourage co-workers who are putting crime behind them, and support anyone who is trying to better their lives.

The religious community must also play their role in establishing a balance of law and order. The Bible and other religious text all talk of forgiveness and redemption. How do you expect your God to forgive you and accept you, when you refuse to forgive and accept others? Community churches need to activity invite and welcome felons into their congregations. Church goers should create and support prison outreach ministries and include families of the incarcerated. Churches need to reach out to the people who live around the church building and in neighbors and build relationships. How many of us lived next to people for years without ever inviting them to share a meal? If you are not comfortable having them inside you home, consider a cook out or organize a block party and have conversations. What is the name of the people who live to the right, left front, and behind your home and church? What is their family like? Do they have a church family? Are they employed? Do they have needs you can meet? Inclusion and support is the answer. This is true for individuals and churches alike.

If you know your neighbors, your fellow church members, students in the schools, and co-workers, you will notice when something is wrong. When you see someone with bruises speak up. When you see someone struggling with addiction, reach out. When you see someone hopeless, offer them hope. When you see people that are angry or sad, talk to them. When you see people struggling, consider what might be done to help. There are resources and sometimes, a person doesn't need you to solve their problem.... They just need you to help them find someone who can or just listen to them. We should each be aware how fast our negative and positive interactions travel and the severity of the consequences for both good and evil.

Children are so vulnerable to injury as they grow up. Adults and other kids harm their fragile spirits. Bullies, neglect, abuse and torment damage people. A damaged child will make a dangerous adult. Unless some intervention is done, the damaged child can be a risk to themselves or others. A child can rarely heal on their own. Because of the lack of available foster parents, only extremes cases can be acted on by Child Services. This leaves children vulnerable to the conditions of their environment and the adults in it. If you want to prevent crime, consider being a foster parent or adoption. If you are unable to commit to raising a child full time, consider being a mentor, big-brother/big sister, child advocate in the court system, be a school volunteer, or just listen when children communicate verbally and bob-verbally. So many time I hear someone say that a friendly neighbor made all the difference in their childhood life. If you are working in the garden, invite the children around you to join in. When a child is always sitting alone outside while the adults inside yell back and forth at each other, consider inviting the child to sit on your porch with you. Feeling safe is essential but not always possible for children in this world. You could offer that one safe space and those few precious minutes of sanctuary.

Adults can volunteer for after school programs, support the school events, support the school's sports programs, and community activity for children, even if you do not have children yourself. If you are a parent, encourage your children to talk to you about their class and their observations. Encourage your children to be inclusive and kind. Your children are in the best position to alert you to vulnerable families. Befriend the parents of your child's classmates. Be an example of a kind, compassionate, and inclusive person who is doing their part to stop cycles that lead to acts of crime.