

Here and Now

Forum Theatre Exploring the Connections between Gang Violence and Issues at Home

Community Outreach Final Report

By Dafne Blanco

It never ceases to amaze me the way that grassroots communication works. Each new contact made is a little thread in an endless web with a tremendous ripple effect potential. Each person is at the heart of a concentric circles' system that reaches a huge number of people when it taps into other people's circles and so on. Thus, it is impossible to define the exact number of people who were impacted in one way or another by **Here and Now** without adequate quantitative methods of analysis. However, there are what I believe are reliable points of reference in order to gauge how far the project reached out into the community. One of them was the amount of awareness about the project steadily gaining momentum throughout the months leading to the performances, during the shows and beyond. The word of mouth kept spreading in a ripple effect that truly surpassed my own expectations. Very often, it was easy enough to realize the extent of it when talking to friends, people working at some other community organizations or in social events when I started to talk about **Here and Now** and people had heard about it through at least 2 or 3 other channels!

Another indicator of the project's grassroots foundation was the strong connections of workshop participants with experiences in the issues of gang violence and its connections with domestic problems. The authenticity of these lived experiences constituted the core of the project, granted legitimacy to it as a real grassroots initiative, and gave it the potential to evolve into a powerful tool for community dialogue.

When I outlined my Community Outreach Plan for **Here and Now** I stated that it was necessary for me to reach out to the Indo-Canadian community at a very grassroots level, in addition to tapping into obvious organizations' networks. My big and pleasant surprise was to start receiving applications from community members at large to become workshop participants even before connecting with such organizations. The word of mouth was already moving as early as April 2005! The community was *coming* to us! I found myself more than busy dealing with individuals and juggling at the same time to develop new relations with pertinent organizations. **(Appendix A)** It is important to note the effectiveness of Headlines' already established, strong networks nurtured by the monthly newsletter that I send to about 2800 contacts in launching the first wave of information about the project and call out to potential participants.

In the early stages of the community outreach process I identified 2 basic phases. The first one needed to focus on the Indo-Canadian community to recruit participants and consolidate strong connections with organizations that can bring people to the shows. The second phase would be to broaden the scope and tap into the multicultural community so it can come to the performances and be actively engaged in the dialogue.

On **September 2004** we started collecting newspaper clippings. The Vancouver Sun launched a series of articles titled: *How Organized Crime Has Infiltrated Our Communities*. In

September 10, a special report appeared describing the different organized crime “families” of BC, from the Vietnamese, Eastern European, Italian Based, Indo-Canadian to the Hells Angels. It was very interesting to notice that except for the latter, which is mainly constituted by individuals of Caucasian ancestry, the rest of the organized groups were identified by ethnicity or country of origin. (See **Appendix B**)

A series of articles and reports followed focusing on the Indo-Canadian organized crime. It was undeniable that the community was struggling with the issue but then the question arose, what’s happening inside the community? What’s happening underneath the newspapers’ headlines? Why are the youth becoming involved with gangs in the first place? Is there any connection between gang involvement and issues at home? These questions certainly constituted the seeds of a project but, was there any interest and support from the community?

On **October and November of 2004** David Diamond, Headlines’ Artistic Director presented a preliminary idea of the project to members of the community who were involved with past Headlines’ projects; Charan Gill from PICS - Progressive Intercultural Community Services Society, Hemi Dhanoa from B.C. Coalition to Eliminate Abuse of Seniors and Kamal Sharma who had been member of our Board of Directors for many years, specifically. Some other names came after some research, including Ravinder Dhir from Immigrant Services Society of BC and Aneeta Jandu from Surrey Delta Immigrant Services Society. The response was enthusiastic! The first layer of community outreach was taking shape and that gave me a solid starting platform.

I had previously contacted Balwin Wong, Social Planner at the Community Services - City of Vancouver and he recommended to contact Suki Grewal from SAFA – South Asian Family Association, an amazing grassroots activist in the community. Dylan Mazur, Headlines’ Administrator, established the first contact with her as well as Nav Sanghera from VIRSA – Sikh Alliance Against Youth Violence and Shashi Assanand from Vancouver & Lower Mainland Multicultural Family Support Services Society to gather letters of support for the project.

By **January 2005**, even though we hadn’t officially announced the project, the word was already out. Virginia Cooke from the University College of the Fraser Valley sent me an email:

From: "Virginia Cooke" <...>
Date: Mon, 10 Jan 2005 13:14:36 -0800
To: <outreach@headlinestheatre.com>
Subject: Your next production

Because we are establishing a Research Centre in Indo-Canadian studies, we would be really interested in following your progress in the development of the production with the Indo-Canadian community. I’m not sure what form that “following” would assume--perhaps the newsletter is sufficient. But as you may know, Abbotsford has an extremely large and active community, and some of our Criminal Justice students have embarked on very particular studies of violence in that community. So whatever you could let us know about your schedule for this would be very welcome, and we look forward to the results.

Dr. Virginia B. Cooke
Dean, Arts and Applied Arts
University College of the Fraser Valley

Virginia recommended me to contact Satwinder Bains, another instructor at the UCFV and I sent her an email introducing the project later in the summer. Satwinder proved to be helpful when Dylan was looking to fill the Community Scribe position and Manjot Bains, our Publicity/Community Outreach Assistant followed up with her to bring UCFV students to *Here and Now* performances.

In early **February**, Suki Grewal suggested I contacted Sadhu Binning, a writer and poet, professor of Punjabi at UBC – Department of Asian Studies:

----- Forwarded Message

From: Dafne Blanco <outreach@headlinestheatre.com>

Date: Thu, 03 Feb 2005 16:28:28 -0800

To: <...>

Subject: Headlines Theatre - Our Indo-Canadian project for 2005

Hello Sadhu,

First of all, greetings from David Diamond who is facilitating a workshop in Regina now!

My name is Dafne Blanco and I'm Headlines Theatre Outreach Coordinator. Suki Grewal suggested I try to contact you to introduce you to our 2005 main stage project.

Our 2005 main stage project will be a community interactive play on violence in the Indo-Canadian Community for which Headlines Theatre staff held a consultation meeting with various leaders in the community who are on the front-lines dealing with the violence issue. The purpose was to investigate the possibility of working with the community to create this theatre project that would move away from the sensationalist news' headlines to dig deeper into the real community's struggle with violence.

The production will also serve as a public education project that will generate a community action report containing concrete suggestions for social services agencies and anti-violence programs. At the same time, the project will promote a cross-cultural dialogue with other ethnic communities by reflecting on the roots and solutions to violence in their own communities.

Headlines' approach is that the community has both the responsibility and the ability to deal with its own issues. The wisdom that Headlines' Theatre for Living techniques unlocks resides within the community itself. And in order to tap into that common knowledge, we need to include as many voices and perspectives that help us to explore the connections that shape this complex issue.

We are in the process of approaching new community organizations and leaders to consolidate our network in order to truly reach out to the community at a very grassroots level and I wonder if you would be interested in the project! I'd be wonderful if we can arrange a time to meet and further discuss this project.

I'm attaching a copy of our project proposal for your review.

Many thanks for your time and attention and I eagerly await your reply.

Warm regards,
Dafne Blanco

Word also came about an organization called UNITED - The Unified Network of Indo-Canadians for Togetherness through Education and Discussion, a grassroots organization dedicated to empowering youth, parents and families in response to social issues that have impacted the Indo-Canadian community in recent years. UNITED was composed of young professionals that volunteer as mentors for youth at risk. In this way, I contacted Amar Randhawa and Gurjit Toor and we held a great meeting later in March to discuss outreach possibilities.

With this last addition, our Advisory Committee had been consolidated!

My search within the community for a choreographer who would help us to develop some kind of symbolic physical language and a graphic designer to create promotional materials for the play begun. It was a good exercise to help me start digging the community, gathering new contacts that will help later in the process to raise the project's profile.

In **March** I met with Kamal Sharma to talk about outreach possibilities. Kamal is very well known in the community and hosts a popular TV show in Shaw Multicultural called *Kamal's 5 Top Hits*. He offered to help us to recruit workshop participants through it.

Dylan and I went to the Moberly Arts and Cultural Centre in South Vancouver. The purpose was for him to inspect the facilities as a possible venue for the theatre workshop that would lead to the creation of the play, and for me, to pick Danita Noyes' brain, the wonderful Moberly's rentals Coordinator about community contacts and ideas. Sure enough, Danita gave me Sudnya Niak's contact info, who would become our choreographer. She also suggested I contacted women's groups at the Moberly and Sunset Community Centre.

In March 13, Dylan and I attended an amateur Bhangra festival organized by Suki Grewal's son, which gave me the opportunity to start exploring the community and talk to a few people about the project. Kamal was there as well and introduced me to a couple of Community Representatives from Mehfil Magazine, a high profile Indo-Canadian magazine. We talk about the project and they became interested. Later on, Manjot established a strong connection with them and got a media sponsorship to publicize the performances.

Nav Sanghera, VIRSA Executive Coordinator, had been in the back of my mind. After several failed attempts, we finally got to meet at her house and enjoyed a nice cup of tea while talking about the project and outreach strategies. My purpose was to establish an initial warm connection in person, since I believe that human contact is always more effective than the phone! Despite her kind welcoming, soon it became apparent that Nav was skeptical of the theatre approach. She was also concerned that the community was still in denial. It wasn't easy to explain to her the powerful ability of forum theatre to promote community dialogue. The common question was: how is a simple theatre play going to solve the problem of gang violence in our communities? I often found this barrier throughout the project.

After contacting several candidates and interviewing a few of them, we finally hired Balgit Deo, a great photographer to design our promotional materials. He designed *Here and Now's* promotional button (see below), but unfortunately we couldn't continue our work collaboration due to Balgit's other photography commissions.



Baljit in turn introduced me to Tarannum Thind, the host of Music Waves' TV Show Jovani, a youth-based show that airs nationally. She became truly excited about the project and I promised our Publicist was going to contact her later on.

I had been trying to coordinate a meeting with our advisory committee since January. The goal was to find a title for the production. The big, pending question was, do we have a Punjabi or Hindi title? The debate had been lingering for quite a while and proved quite frustrating. Who do we want to reach at? What will be the political implications of choosing one over the other, or simply using English? We couldn't reach an agreement in the office nor could our advisory. The 2 main points of discussion were: Hindi was the official language of India, used by most of the vastly multicultural country and that fact extended to Indian immigrant families to Canada. However, more than 80% of Indian immigration came from the Punjab region, which translated into something like 120,000 residents of the Lower Mainland whose first language was Punjabi, versus 20,000 who had various languages but use Hindi as a common language. The dilemma laid in the concept of inclusiveness versus the reality of the community here...

On the 23rd, we finally had a very interesting meeting with our advisory. I sat back and listened to the committee's discussion simply throwing concerns heard in conversations with other community members around the potential downsides of choosing one or the other. At the end of the session the consensus was to go for the Punjabi translation of the title that David had come up with: **Here and Now.** ਏਥੇ ਤੇ ਹੁਣ

April arrived and I officially announced **Here and Now** through our monthly newsletter! (See **Appendix C**, it contains samples of our ongoing newsletters) It was time to develop a brochure to recruit workshop participants so I created one for **Here and Now**, (**Appendix D**) using as a reference a brochure designed for a previous Headlines' project *Practicing Democracy*.

At this point we identified a challenge using as a starting point the struggle of the Indo-Canadian community for the Forum Theatre piece knowing that the issue of gang violence affects all of our communities. How were we going to reach out to other communities with an articulate discourse that appeal to them? We found a potent clue in the focus of the media in recent years. We recognized communities that had been targeted in the last 20 years: Honduran in the 90's and Vietnamese and Chinese going back to the 80's.

After some research and interviewing, we hired Manjot Bains as a Publicity/Community Outreach Assistant and together with Jen Cressey, Headlines' Publicist, we held a first very

exciting brainstorming meeting on the 13th. Besides the South Asian-based community organizations and the usual multicultural workers, we were going to specifically target the Latin American, Chinese and possibly Vietnamese media and community workers.

On April 15, I went to the Health Fair organized by Suki Grewal in the Ross Street Temple Community Annex. There was an estimated 300 people, mostly seniors attending the event and I was able to introduce the project to many of them and distribute recruitment brochures. I also made initial contact with Wally Oppal, BC Attorney General and Minister of Multiculturalism, and briefly told him about the project and gave him the project's description. I also met Sargie Kaler, member of India Mahila and Narinder Basi, Immigrant Services Society of BC Employment Counsellor.

During **May** I focused on researching organizations and key people in the Indo-Canadian community in my ongoing campaign to expand the project's outreach scope and profile. At the same time, I designed the project's temporary website (**Appendix E**).

Charito Gailling, Community Development Coordinator at the Fraser Region Community Justice Initiatives Association and youth advocate in Surrey contacted us offering help to recruit participants and promote the shows. She had taken our Theatre For Living Annual Training in 2003 and been receiving our monthly newsletter.

Farina Reinprecht also contacted us; she was part of *Generations*, Headlines' 1997 Forum Theatre project. She signed up to be part of the workshop and offered to help recruit participants, so we met to develop an action plan, talked about possible outreach crossovers, etc. Farina's active collaboration helped us to reach out to important sectors and key people in Richmond, BC.

----- Forwarded Message
From: farina REINPRECHT <...>
Date: Thu, 16 Jun 2005 10:54:14 -0700
To: outreach@headlinestheatre.com
Subject: **Here and Now** - Volunteer Report (Farina Reinprecht)

Hello Daphne,

I think, reporting in via email in writing is a more sensible method. Keep me on track too. Anyhow...

I handed a brochure and explained the concept to Richmond MLA Linda Reid. She was most interested in attending a performance, immediately marked down the dates. Perhaps, follow up closer to the time?

Handed brochure and explained concept to Miss Samra, a combined studies teacher at McNair Secondary School, Richmond. She is active in the Indo Canadian community/youth. She was most interested and promised to hand over a brochure to her sister-in-law who is a social worker.

Handed brochure and explained concept to Surjeet, a long time anti-violence advocate, now working at the North Vancouver, RCMP as par of the Family Court Committee. Her phone number is (604)551-1513 in case you want to pursue this link further.

Previous outreach to: Rob Inrig (Richmond School District Superintendent)
Judy Assoon (Richmond School Counselor - rotating!)She will hand brochures to several schools.
Paul (Cambie Community Centre and City of Richmond Youth Coordinator)

Jet (Team Izzat RCMP officer)
Shashi.....and so forth.

There is great scope for outreach. Could you please mail me more brochures, hopefully with some inserts i.e names of **Here and Now** advisory committee members to strengthen marketing.

Would love to meet with you soon...personal touch

Best Wishes
Farina

Another great contact was Baljinder Narang, one of VIRSA founders, a great community activist. She helped us to spread the word about workshop participants and later on to bring audiences to the shows.

At this point we decided to offer ad-hoc matinees to secondary schools, so I began a little research. The big question was: Do we invite mostly Indo-Canadian teens or bring schools with more multicultural population? Dylan took over later on the process and coordinate school matinees and in the end, both happened.

We did an intense ongoing search for an Indo-Canadian set designer. After many, many phone calls and a couple of interviews we started to realize that it wasn't going to happen and gave up.

Eugene Keallis, ex-communications director of the Burnaby Multicultural Society, contacted us to become workshop participant. Not being Indo-Canadian was, of course, an obstacle which brought up a very interesting discussion with him: the need, from his prospective, to include other communities into the exploration of the issue and the play's creation if we didn't want to ghettoize the issue. I agreed on principle, but explained that we needed to begin the investigation through the theatre workshop with a very particular story (the Indo-Canadian) and bring multicultural audiences to the audience-interactive performances, which is precisely one of most amazing tools to activate real community dialogue and cross-cultural reflection upon issues that affect us all in similar ways. That conversation truly helped me to articulate my thoughts around the topic for my own purposes and Eugene acceded to network the project!

By mid May more and more responses from potential workshop participants started to arrive. Again, the problem was that often people who didn't belong to the Indo-Canadian community applied, because they were concerned or because they saw the need for other communities to be present so the project didn't feed into loops.

I contacted Preet Hander, South Asian Community Worker at the South Vancouver Neighbourhood House. I little disappointing conversation and an alarm bell... Preet was skeptical about using theatre as a means of dialogue in her community because is not a rooted tradition in her community. She agreed nevertheless, to spread the word about recruitment, and later in the fall she allowed to make a presentation to her Seniors Women's Group at the Moberly Arts Centre and the Sunset Community Centre.

We kept building connections. Lu Ripley a Prevention Consultant for the Addiction Services of Vancouver Coastal Health and other members of the Families First Program came to met with us. They were putting together an initiative to look at intergenerational issues, and to connect grandparents with youth to tackle the issue of violence and addiction in Punjabi community. A great networking meeting that unveiled many outreach possibilities.

Sarjeet Purewal called the office on the 21st. A great conversation! She facilitates a parents support group called Parents Together. She was very passionate and loved the project and offered her 100% support to recruit participants. Eventually, Sarjeet became our Support Person for the theatre workshop and gave tremendous support to the project. The word was truly reaching the community...

In my search for community key people I found out about Kuldip Gill, a writer and poet. We never met in person but she was one of the many that help to spread the word about participant's recruitment and the shows:

David found out about a radio project developed by the CBC with the Indo-Canadian community and I contacted several of the actors. As usual, the most important requisite to be considered as a workshop participant was to have life experiences around the issue of gang violence, regardless of the quality of their acting skills. One of the people that answered my call was Seth Ranaweera, an amazing human being with a strong connection to the issue and great acting skills who eventually became a cast member.

June 28 was a great day. I met with Alex Tayob, a member of the Muslim Indo-Canadian community at his cozy home in Surrey. We had a lovely afternoon talking at length about the project and I left a good number of project packages that he promised to distribute within his circles. After Alex, I dropped by the Surrey Delta Immigrant Services Society to talk to Anneta Jandu, a member of our advisory. She wasn't in her office but being there gave the opportunity to talk to a couple of the volunteers that were hanging around. They took brochures and talk to some of their friends about **Here and Now**. Another nice moment of actual face to face contact with members of the community... At the end of the day I also met with Sarjeet Purewal in her Surrey home and she invited me to attend one of her group sessions and speak about the project to the parents, good perspectives were taking shape!

Eventually, out of this connection with Parents Together came Jas Grewal, whose connection to the issue was through experiences with her daughter. Jas played *Rupa*, the mother in **Here and Now**

July

I had decided to contact somebody else at the South Vancouver Neighbourhood House and that's how I found a lovely woman named Kiran Takha, Domestic Violence Program - Family Worker. A great meeting took place on the 8th, where she truly enlightened me about some of the factors complicating the issue of gang violence. She offered to help me recruiting participants, although her main concern was the fact that she mostly worked with newly arrived immigrants whose English hadn't developed enough to take part in the workshop and possibly perform for the public. Listening to her stirred some of my own concerns expressed earlier in the process: how was this project to serve recent immigrant communities when they are at a stage too busy juggling with a whole different set of not less complicated issues of settlement and adaptation? Was the possible involvement of their teenagers and other relatives in gang life on their radar? How to bring them to the dialogue? And yet, we were hearing from other community members that precisely many of the issues around adaptation and cultural clash were part of the complicated equation. In the end, we had recent immigrants at the performances.

Baljinder Narang had given me the contact information of Lali Pawa, director of the Academy of Indian Fine Arts in the Lower Mainland. Lali works mainly with youth and she offered to support the project in any way she could. Thus, she invited me to make a brief presentation of the project to recruit participants at her dance academies' 2nd Annual Graduation Program. More than 350 people attended the show and many, many approached our little table in the lobby!

In mid July, I attended a Parents Together meeting, where I presented the project and the parents generously shared with me some of their experiences dealing with troubled teenagers, concerns about cultural gaps, lack of communication, etc. The meeting gave me a lot of food for thought.

At this point I had received many applications from potential participants. However, most of them were young adults and middle age people. And thus, I clearly identified the urgent need to include the actual youth at risk, street active youth, so I connected back with Charito Gailling, from the Fraser Region Community Justice Initiatives Association, and together we brainstormed outreach possibilities.

With this little shift of focus in mind, I sent an email to RCMP Inspector Kash Heed, the Richmond Youth Services Agency, West Coast Sikh Youth Alliance, Sikh Youth of BC. I also initiated contact with Corporal Jet Sunner, from the RCMP - Richmond City Detachment who coordinates the Team IZZAT which according to their website: "is a youth-targeted program driven by the positive volunteer efforts of a group of police officers serving with the Richmond Detachment who are breaking new ground reaching out and connecting with young people".

Rob Rai had been in the back of my head. Numerous people in the community had pointed me in his direction as a very well regarded member of the community who was doing truly meaningful work with South Asian Youth at risk. I would take me at least 2 more months to get in touch with him.

Early in **August**, after several communication attempts and when I had almost lost hope, volunteers at BCSikhYouth.com, a web-based resource centre for South Asian youth responded with an encouraging email:

----- Forwarded Message
From: BC Sikh Youth <...>
Date: Fri, 05 Aug 2005 22:28:40 -0700
To: Dafne Blanco <outreach@headlinetheatre.com>
Subject: Re: Sikh Youth / **Here and Now** - A violence prevention theatre project in collaboration with the Indo-Canadian community

Dear Dafne,

Please use us and our website as a resource for announcements about your events and organization.

We would be happy to work with you to promote the "**Here and Now**" production.

Please e-mail us to inform us as to how we can assist.

Thank you,

-Volunteers
BCSikhYouth.com

----- Original Message -----

From: "Dafne Blanco" <outreach@headlinestheatre.com>

To: <...>

Sent: Wednesday, July 20, 2005 1:26 PM

Subject: Sikh Youth / **Here and Now** - A violence prevention theatre project in collaboration with the Indo-Canadian community

Hello dear Sikh Youth Members,

I hope this email finds you well. My name is Dafne Blanco, I'm Headlines Theatre's Community Outreach Coordinator. Your organization has come up during conversations with other community members and that is why I want to introduce you to "**Here and Now**".

"**Here and Now**" is Headlines Theatre 2005 main stage production, we are working in collaboration with many Indo-Canadian community organizations to dive into the real struggles faced by the community around the issue of street violence. We will have 22 public-interactive performances, in the Ross Street Temple and in the Surrey Arts Centre. We will hold two exclusive matinees for schools at the Surrey Arts Centre.

With this public-interactive theatre project we want to explore the possible connections between violence on the streets and issues at home; Identity struggles or the need to belong; How do intergenerational conflicts between immigrant parents and first or second generation Canadians play a role in the issue. The title **Here and Now** refers to the fact that whatever the answers to these questions are, the solutions reside not in the past or the future, but **Here and Now**.

The story that gets told will need to be intergenerational, we want to involve in the project as many voices as possible from the community in a collective dialogue reflecting upon violence, its causes and possible solutions. Forum Theatre is about community empowerment, about people being the experts in their own lives and being able to use theatre as a means of creating change. And Forum Theatre is entertaining and fun!

To access "**Here and Now**" website, just click on the link below:

<http://www.headlinestheatre.com/Hereandnow/index.htm>

I'm also attaching a detailed project proposal for your review. I would love to have an opportunity to talk to you on the phone to tell you more about the project and discuss possibilities of outreach to youth at risk. Let me know what is the best time to call you and please send me your telephone number!

I look forward to hearing from you.

Warm regards,

Dafne Blanco

At this point, David and Dylan had connected with Larry Axelrod and some members of the Group of Ten, a federal initiative to tackle gang violence in the South Asian Community. Larry suggested to David he read a report prepared by Kelly Chahal, from South Asian Interactive, called *A needs assessment on young South Asian Women*, as a good background paper on issues affecting the community. Searching for the paper gave me the opportunity to connect

with Kelly and keep a telephone/email relationship for months. She was helpful to reach out to the community in Chilliwack.

Another important contact was established this month. Kiran Hundal, Youth Worker at PICS, called me. She had heard about the project and wanted to help me to recruit participants, so she coordinated a couple of meetings with other PICS staff members to bring them on board. She introduced me in person to Barinder Mann, Senior Worker at PICS, who I had contacted by phone prior to that day and distribute recruitment brochures throughout the Senior Housing Complex managed by PICS. It was a perfect outreach opportunity, since many seniors were living in the housing project away from their families because of abuse and violence issues.

Manjot had seen an interview of a very articulate community activist and SFU student who had been a member of a gang in the past. She gave me his email address and I contacted him at the beginning of August. Jagdeep Singh Mangat was his name and he ended up been a cast member and a fundamental voice of the project.

----- Forwarded Message

From: <...>

Date: Fri, 12 Aug 2005 14:43:50 -0700

To: outreach@headlinetheatre.com

Subject: Re: **Here and Now** - A violence prevention theatre project in collaboration with the Indo-Canadian community

Hello Dafne,

Further to our telephone conversation on the 8th of August, please accept this email as notice of my acceptance of your offer to participate in Headline Theatre's workshop for **Here and Now**.

I am very honoured for the chance take part in this important contribution to developing a critical depth of dialogue within the community on issues of street violence and gang membership. I have lost many friends on the streets myself and when I think back I always think of how promising so many of them were. I believe I can bring to the table one perspective which may be a little bit more difficult to find - that of a person who has been deeply involved in the exercise and infliction of violence on others as well as the subject of it through gang involvement.

Having left that life behind, I have committed my life to community empowerment and taking part in the cause of creating a better world which works for all of us. It is efforts like yours, which involve the community from a standpoint of where they are at which are important. Again, I am honoured for the opportunity and look forward to meeting yourself and the other workshop participants in person.

Warmest Regards,
Jagdeep Singh Mangat

Nav Sanghera from VIRSA put me in touch with the volunteers that run their Basketball program for youth at risk at Tamanawis Secondary School. I spoke to a group of 75 teens and met with wonderful Rubi Bedi, who took several brochures and distributed them within her circles.

After I identified the need to reach out to street active youth, or youth with true experiences around gang involvement, I thought that connecting with probation officers would be a good option. That's how I got in touch with Patrick Giasson, Youth Probation Officer at the Mission Community Corrections. He was extremely excited about the project and agreed to spread the word and find possible candidates from his caseload. He also recommended I contacted Darlene Jamieson, Practice Analyst Youth Justice, at the Fraser Region Service Quality Team -

Ministry of Children and Family Development. She proved to be a great contact and distributed my email and brochure to all the Fraser Valley Probation Officers! She also invited me to make a presentation about the project at their 13th Annual British Columbia Probation Officer's Association Symposium to be held in October.

At the end of the month I went to the Moberly Arts Centre to the Community Sports Event, and connected with Hardeep Sahota. She is the Program Assistant & Special Events Coordinator and Sunset Community Centre and very connected with the Indo-Canadian community in South Vancouver. It was a great moment because I hadn't been successful at getting any allies there, after numerous emails and phone messages to their youth worker. We couldn't afford not to connect with the community in South Vancouver. Hardeep I believe, was essential to spread the word within the youth population in that area and she herself became workshop participant.

September 9 was the deadline to recruit participants. The goal was to have at least 35 applications to shortlist and interview 30 to ultimately choose 25 workshop participants. By the beginning of September I only had 19 relevant applications. I had received many more than 19 but I had to pre-scan them to rule out people who had no relevant experience and wanted to be part of the project to gain theatre experience, or because they were just concerned community members or didn't belong to the Indo-Canadian community. Looking at the applications we realized that most of them were middle age women, a few strong young applicants but the senior component was practically absent. The deadline was fast approaching and I kept pushing, although at one point I felt that I had almost exhausted my resources. Despite the genuine interest manifested by many, the main obstacle was the time commitment, since workshop participants have to invest 6 days, 8 hours a day. That had been the case with the many potential candidates sent to us by Hemi Dhanoa, a member of advisory who had been tremendously helpful during the recruitment process. However, thanks to her Raminder Thind became workshop participant and cast member, an important addition to the mix, since he brought the voice of the father's generation to the community exploration of the issue.

I had heard in several occasions about India Mahila, a women-based organization, but hadn't been successful on contacting them. I had left several messages and one day, their contact person Sarjee Kaler finally called me. A wonderful surprise, since I had previously met Sarjee at the Health Fair in the Ross Street Temple back in April! We sustained a long and thorough conversation about the project and she agreed to distribute brochures and forward emails to her circles and also invited me to another Health Fair at Akail Singh Temple to take place on October 23. Thanks to this connection came Balinder Johal, our fantastic grandmother cast member, who had also heard about the project through Shashi Assanand.

Last push to recruit participants. Kiran Hundal from PICS introduced me to Shawn Cheema, a young guy who had been street active in recent years and we met over hamburgers at the PICS little cafeteria in Surrey. He applied and became the Jay of our play, the youth whose journey became the heart of the story on the stage.

In my pursuit of senior participants, I made a presentation to the Senior Women's Group at Sunset Community Centre invited by Preet Pandher. Another big discovery, part of the reason why we couldn't recruit enough senior participants was the language issue, since most of the older generation only speaks Punjabi or very little English. In the end, 3 out of the 22 participants were seniors.

By mid September I connected with Haroon Bajwa, the Restorative Justice Program Coordinator from Touchstone Families in Richmond.

The offer to use Kamal Sharma's TV show to recruit people had been in the back of my head, but Manjot was hesitant because of what she perceived to be the type of audience and reach of the TV show. I finally convinced her arguing that any tool was useful. We appeared for 5 minutes on his show and it turned out to be a big hit! Right after the broadcast of the announcement we started to receive dozens of calls occupying all of us on the pre-scanning and booking of interviews with viable candidates! I had been saved from having a heart attack...

Thus, David and I spent September 22, 23 and 24 interviewing 27 very strong applicants. We had received a total of 51 applications and ended up with 22 workshop participants. It was a huge moment for me because it represented the culmination of almost a year of relentless outreach and the results of it were patent.

The concept development for the project's promotional materials started as far back as April, and it was a truly exciting, fluid collaborative exercise. Balgit Deo was part of the first meetings but when he was unable to continue working with us I took over the graphic design and press coordination of the poster and postcards and spent good part of September on their creation, after David Cooper shot the two faces of the poster, the upset grandmother and the young male with sunglasses. (See **Appendix E**)

I had one concern when designing the promotional material that went back to the decision to use a Punjabi title. Were we going to be able to bring multicultural audiences to the shows by using not only clearly South Asian models for our graphic materials, but also a Punjabi title? If I put myself on the shoes of the average citizen that picks up a postcard or sees a poster in the street, and I see Punjabi written on it I immediately assume "*this is for them*". Moreover, during my trips to Surrey and South Vancouver where the majority of the Indo-Canadian community resides, I notice that posters of movies and other community events were produced exclusively in English. Why then, brand our project and jeopardize our ability to engage the multicultural community? After intense discussions here at the office, we decided not to use the Punjabi on the poster and use it only on the back of the postcard as a way to honour the fact that the play was a gift from the Indo-Canadian community to start the dialogue and engage the rest of us. It became essential to use the phrase: We all share the problem. The solutions are... **Here and Now**. Pretty catchy slogan. However, later on we received several comments about the materials, people didn't know immediately what the play was about, it was not evident. We mistakenly assumed that the strong image of the guy with sunglasses, the police tape and the distressed grandma were enough clues, we didn't want to overstate the message. Looking back, I think it would've been better to include a subtitle stating the play's subject matter.

Once the graphic concept was defined and on its way to the press, I proceeded to re-design and replace the website with the official image of the project (**Appendix G**).

October found me designing the bus shelter poster. Back in the summer I had started communications with Klodyne Rodney at the Office of Cultural Affairs of the City of Vancouver and thanks to the support of Jackie Crossland, Headlines' Financial Administrator, we submitted a grant proposal for bus shelter spaces for our poster. We were granted 26 spaces around the city for 2 months. The result was spectacular, since the final size was a 68 x 47 really visible poster in the streets of Vancouver that actually brought people to the shows and increased the project's profile. **(Appendix H)**

As I mentioned in the introduction, the outreach process for **Here and Now** evolved in two phases. Once the recruitment was over, the second stage was dedicated to broadening the outreach to the multicultural community and to promote the performances at the grassroots level. Again, I tapped into the already established contacts so they could send an announcement developed by Jen through their lists:

----- Forwarded Message

From: Dafne Blanco <outreach@headlinestheatre.com>

Date: Thu, 03 Nov 2005 16:41:07 -0800

To: Haroon Bajwa <...>

Subject: **Here and Now**, Forum Theatre Exploring the Connections between Street Violence and Issues at Home

Hello Haroon ,

Thank you so much for forwarding this email to your lists!

I mailed you today some promotional materials as well. Please send me your materials for the resource table for the theatre lobby, below is my mailing address.

Warm wishes, Dafne Blanco

A HEADLINES THEATRE Production

VANCOUVER
Nov 17 - 20
and 23 - 27
at 8pm
2 for 1 Preview Nov 16
Tickets \$15
Box Office: 604.871.0508
www.headlinestheatre.com

SURREY
Dec 1 - 4
and 7 - 11
at 8pm
Tickets \$15 + \$1.45
service fee at the
Box Office: 604.501.5566
www.arts.surrey.ca

Ross Street Temple
Community Annex
8000 Ross St, Vancouver
(at E 64th Ave off SE Marine Dr)

Surrey Arts Centre
Studio Theatre &
13750 - 88th Ave, Surrey
(at King George Hwy)

we all share the problem.
the solutions are

Here and Now
ਏਥੇ ਤੇ ਹੁਣੇ

Reservations Recommended

**We all share the problem.
The solutions are**

Here and Now

Investigate the connection between domestic issues and street violence at interactive performances designed to seek solutions, foster cross-cultural dialogue

**at the Ross Street Temple
Community Annex * 8000 Ross Street, Vancouver
November 17 - 20 and 23 - 27
2 for 1 preview November 16**

to buy tickets online click on the link:

<http://www.headlinestheatre.com/Hereandnow/index.htm>

**and the Surrey Arts Centre
Studio Theatre * 13750 88th Ave, Surrey
December 1 - 4 and 7 - 11**

to buy tickets online click on the link:

<http://www.city.surrey.bc.ca/Living+in+Surrey/Arts/Surrey+Arts+Centre+Theatres/default.htm>

Performances at 8pm nightly

Tickets and info: 604-871-0508

<http://www.headlinestheatre.com/>

In recent years, the Lower Mainland Indo-Canadian community has been a target for media attention. The primary focus of report? Gangs. The stories read like real-life versions of *The Sopranos*, rife with power-hungry characters, family alliances, betrayal and death. But what happens behind the sensational headlines? How do young people become involved in violence? How do issues of identity and intergenerational conflict - problems shared by all segments of Canadian society - figure into the equation?

Here and Now investigates the real stories behind the media coverage. It shares the struggles of a community and invites you, the audience, to offer solutions. Headlines' productions always make for an unforgettable evening of provocative theatre, full of surprising insights.

----- End of Forwarded Message

As part of our decision to tap into different ethnic media, my part of the job was to coordinate the Spanish media, taking advantage of the fact that that is my first language. Amorita Rasgado had contacted me seeking a volunteer opportunity, so we agreed that she would establish connections and be available for interviews by different media outlets. I supported her by translating press releases and media packages developed by Jen and preparing written

communications for Amorita (See **Appendix I**). Amorita demonstrated great commitment to the project and was a great addition to the team!

I also networked with my friend Yasmin Tayob, who works at CBC French TV, to coordinate some coverage of the French media. Seth Ranaweera was interviewed by them.

As I mentioned before, we had developed a strategy to ignite the interest in the project in communities other than the Indo-Canadian. The idea was to reach out to the multicultural community at large, and also to really focus on communities that had been the target of the sensationalist media in recent years. I contacted Maria Jose Valenzuela, Family Support Worker at Little Mountain Neighbourhood House. Maria Jose got extremely excited about the project and invited me to one of the LMNH Staff meetings to present the project and ask for support from the other community workers to access their resources and bring their constituency to the shows. In that way, I was able to reach to the organization's multicultural community workers including the Vietnamese, the Child & Youth (who was of Chinese ancestry), and the Latin American, as well as the Settlement Services Coordinator. All of them agreed to spread the word through their own networks.

I made a presentation at the BCPOA 2005 Symposium to about 20 Probation Officers from all over the Fraser Valley and everyone took a fair amount of postcards and posters. At the time I considered that it was a very important connection to make because essentially, **Here and Now** was a violence prevention project. From my point of view, the potential solutions are not in the punishment imposed by the criminal justice upon people involved in criminal behaviour but rather, in finding the roots of the issue.

I finally met with Rob Rai and he invited me to the VIRSA-SAFE Basketball Tournament at Tamanawis Secondary attended by around 150 people including youth at risk. Again, a lot of one-to-one talks about the project, including another direct invitation to Wally Oppal as well as Tamanawis' Principal Ms. Margaux Molson. Dozens of postcards distributed!

The 23rd arrived and I went to the Health Fair at Akail Singh Temple with Manjot to promote the shows. My rough estimate is that we were able to talk directly about the shows and distribute postcards to around 100 people.

Throughout October I designed a slide to be projected at the 5th Avenue Cinemas and most of the magazine and newspaper advertisements for the performances that Jen had booked or Manjot had gotten from sponsoring media. Please see some examples **Appendix J**.

At the end of the month I designed the opening night invites (**Appendix K**) and together with Jen, we mailed out 400 of them. The response was wonderful! To the point that we had to honour many more than we expected and extended the validation date throughout the Ross Street Temple run (I enclosed a copy of the reservation list for the first 3 nights of the show). I came to truly value the opening invites as an excellent tool to sparkle the word of mouth.

November was marked on my timeline to start developing the lobby's display. I had the idea of researching newspaper articles over the last 20 years reflecting the media's sensationalist focus on immigrant communities, specifically the Vietnamese, Chinese, Honduran and Indo-Canadian. I designed 4 panels to be displayed at the theatre's lobby. Please see complete articles and final display in **Appendix L and L.1**

In the meantime, while I called organizations and social services agencies to establish first contact or to ask to spread the word about the shows, I requested they mail me resource materials to go on the lobby's community resource table. Please see samples of brochures at the back of this report.

On the 5th I attended the Diwali, Festival of Lights Grand Finale at the Roundhouse Community Centre in Vancouver. Diwali is a very important Indian festival and several events are organized around the city to mark it every year. The Celebration at the Roundhouse was attended by around 350-400 people of all ethnic backgrounds and I had the opportunity of explaining the project to no less than 100, in brief moments that went from just a quick reference to the performances, to actual short conversations about the project. Many, many postcards went away that afternoon!

The opening night was approaching and so, the evening programme had to be put together. Jen was in charge of gathering the copy and I had to do the layout. Traditionally, the copy has been completely gathered in the week prior to opening, and we always faced last minute unforeseen technical difficulties and printing issues. **Here and Now's** programme wasn't the exception. My suggestion for future projects to avoid unnecessary stresses on staff and printing quality issues, is to start gathering cast and production team bios, the artistic director's article and community resources for the back of the programme as soon as possible and push to meet a 2-week deadline prior to preview night. **(Appendix M)**

And then, the Preview and Opening Night arrived. Everything went smoothly and I believe they were an absolute success. We were pretty confident about the ticket's sales since the first week of the show was practically sold out one week in advance, including all the invites that were reserved. The word of mouth and the publicity were absolutely everywhere. And yet, the second week of the run at the Ross Street Temple wasn't selling out. David then asked Jen as a last minute contingency plan, to organize a mail out to promote the shows in the postal areas close to the temple. Jen and I had to improvise with house-made materials that lacked the graphic impact of the postcards. Sadly, I had stated early in the process, when I outlined my outreach plan back in December 2004, that selective bilingual mail outs in areas where there was a high concentration of Indo-Canadian residents may have been a valuable tool to reach out directly to their households, but the idea was discarded by David back in December as potentially very expensive and not necessarily effective. Unfortunately, I think that the last minute mail out didn't accomplish its objective and put extra stress on Jen and I, since it lacked the planning it required to have any impact at all.

As usual, we appealed to workshop participants who weren't part of the cast to keep spreading the word of mouth about the shows, they were our best publicity, and most of them were actively supporting the project.

In the middle of my frantic follow up emailing and phoning people to push audiences for the shows we received a Cc email from Anne-Marie Sleeman, a Headlines' old contact who contracted us to facilitate a short workshop back in 1997 and has been on our database since

then. She received our November newsletter and immediately took the initiative to spread the word:

-----Original Message-----

From: Prime Minister/Premier ministre [...]

Sent: November 15, 2005 6:17 AM

To: Sleeman, Anne-Marie [PYR]

Cc: ...

Subject: Gun control - 10

Dear A-M Sleeman:

On behalf of the Right Honourable Paul Martin, I would like to acknowledge receipt of your recent e-mail correspondence, in which you raised an issue that falls within the portfolio of the Honourable Anne McLellan, Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness.

Please be assured that your comments have been carefully reviewed. I have taken the liberty of forwarding your e-mail to the Minister, who, I am certain, will also appreciate being made aware of your views.

Thank you for writing to the Prime Minister.

L.A. Lavell
Executive Correspondence Officer
Agent de correspondance
de la haute direction

>>> Sleeman, Anne-Marie [PYR] <...> 2005/11/15
09:19:11 AM >>>

Hi,

In response to the PM's announcement last week re: efforts to curtail gang violence and gun crime, below is info (in red) on a stellar education effort which uses theatre to bridge cultural gaps, misunderstandings and build rapport, solutions and community. The org goes into the school system as opportunities/funding permit as well. They are internationally acclaimed for their efforts to get behind the Headlines and get people working together toward solutions.

ACTION:

Could you forward this to the relevant minister/departments for follow-up with Headlines Theatre if desired. Merci.

BtW:

I have no financial interest or board duties related to this company. I have just followed their progress for the past 15 years and they continue to thrill and amaze me with their accomplishments.

A-M Sleeman, Communications Advisor
Environment Canada, PYR
Ph: (604) 713-9514

Way to go Anne-Marie!

End of the second week and the show still wasn't selling out. We were feeling absolutely powerless since we had practically exhausted contacts. Why weren't people booking tickets? Everybody mentioned the word was truly out like never before. The amount of publicity pushed by Jen and Manjot was phenomenal and the organizations I kept contacting kept saying they were going to bring groups to the Surrey Arts Centre (SAC) run.

Seeing it in retrospect, I think part of the problem was our internal expectation that with the amount of awareness about the project out there, we must have had full houses every night. We should never lose sight of the fact that socially oriented theatre exploring difficult issues has a different pace and audiences build in different way than conventional theatre.

Another problem that I kept facing was the "selling" of the project to non Indo-Canadian community workers. Their perception was that the play was created and performed by members of the Indo-Canadian community and it was really difficult for me to bring the message across that that was only the starting point, just an excuse to generate meaningful dialogue within and between all of our communities, because after all, we all share the problem.

Attempting to push the word of mouth, I attended the Filipino Youth Violence Forum on November 26th. It had been organized by the Multicultural Helping House and spearheaded by JR Guerrero and Eleanor Campbell-Guerrero. Vancouver Police Officers were there, including Inspector Kash Heed, and other dignitaries, as well as community workers and members involved in seeking solutions to a recent wave of violence among Filipino youth, especially after the murder of Mao Jomar Lanot. I had a pleasant and big surprise when I arrived in the middle of it to hear people from the speaker's line up and the panel discussing about **Here and Now** as the community-based project in town that was truly exploring the roots of the issue! The word was out, I just needed to reinforce the message and distribute postcards.

We had agreed to rotate shifts during performance nights so at least one Headlines' staff would attend each show. Our most important task was to welcome audience members, invite them to explore the resource table and most importantly, at the end of the show, David would appeal to them to spread the word and we would be there, waiting for the crowd to empty the space not without a brief conversation about the project and several postcards to distribute within their circles.

Panic is the word to describe the first half of **December!** I spent most of my time calling people in organizations who had said they were bringing groups to the show. The ultimate goal was to fill the closing night / tele-webcast. **Here and Now** was going live to the Lower Mainland with the potential to reach 15,000 viewers and to the World Wide Web and we needed an engaged, live full house. Fortunately, people who had promised to bring groups came through and the houses during the second week at the SAC kept growing steadily. The last 2 nights were sold out. Closing night in my opinion was a remarkable, unforgettable success.

Conclusions

I have offered some brief reflective notes about **Here and Now** community outreach process throughout this report. I would like to make some final remarks.

Looking back, I believe that there is still a sense of denial in our communities around the subject matter. During several conversations with members of the Indo-Canadian community and others I kept hearing, yes this is so unfortunate, but is not us it's *them*. People articulated the denial in several forms: *gang involvement happens in non-educated sectors of the community; it happens only in working class sectors; drug trade is associated to extremist Sikh separatists; the issue is big in the Indo-Canadian community now, I'm Chinese/Caucasian, etc, why call me?; my family never experienced it, etc.* The stigma associated with the issue was a huge barrier for many, to some extent during recruitment, but more acutely when trying to bring audiences to the show. Of course, the fact that we chose to focus on the story of the Indo-Canadian community as the starting point for the exploration of the issue was necessary, but added complexity to the articulation of my invitation.

Describing the project as an initiative looking for solutions to the issue was received with skepticism in some cases. There is cynicism in our communities since there have been so many initiatives trying to "solve" the problem and yet, the death toll keeps rising. I became aware of it after the first performances and my articulation evolved to focus on the amazing potential of Forum Theatre to explore the root causes of the issue, explore the human relations' complexities feeding into it and the shows as an opening door to a safe space where ordinary community members could investigate a convoluted topic.

I have a South Asian friend whose cousin attended one of the shows accompanied by her mother. The brother had been involved in gang life for more than 10 years, finding it almost impossible to get out. After watching the show, the mother experienced a true catharsis, being able to voice the tremendous amount of emotional distress and anxiety that had burdened her over the years and is considering to seek help outside the family for the first time. **Here and Now** won't save her son, but it opened a critical space for her own healing.

One other example that truly thrilled me was a conversation I had with an audience member after one performance. She was excited because she finally had managed to intervene that night. She had come to a previous show, found it extremely stimulating but truly complex as well. So, she went home, processed the play and its implications and came back with a clearer picture and ready to interact.

Another barrier was the ever present Headlines' dilemma: the prejudice against the concept of community-based theatre in the larger mainstream community and I think that works against us on many fronts, during outreach and ticket booking. Community-based theatre equals low quality theatre in the eyes of many. Even workshop participants and cast members commented to me during the closing night celebration: "when you were recruiting me, I thought, humm... I don't know about community theatre... and now, after the project is over I'm blown away by the professionalism of the company and the high-end product that we delivered to the public!"

I believe that part of my challenge as Outreach Coordinator -and of Headlines in general- is to convey to the mainstream community an image of the company and the process itself that does justice to the impact and high quality work that the company produces. The big question for future projects is: How do we do it without resorting to glossy marketing tactics while remaining true to the grassroots process?

Our lobby display had a real visual impact on people. It was unmistakably clear to see other communities having been the focus of biased media coverage. The notion that other

communities had been such a target before helped to shatter the sense of isolation and stereotypes.

Our approach through the project was to debunk the stereotype of ethnic gang violence, since media seems to believe that ethnicity is relevant when people from immigrant communities engaged in criminal behaviour. Another audience member told me she used to scan at least 2 or 3 newspapers everyday and now she noticed for the first time that a national newspaper referred to the Hells Angels as a predominantly Caucasian gang. We believe that has been one of ***Here and Now***'s accomplishments: having affected the tone of media discussion around ethnic gang violence.