

***Why Youth Are Essential Partners in Crime Prevention:
An International View***

by

MARGARET SHAW

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Margaret Shaw¹

Why Youth Are Essential Partners in Crime Prevention: An International View

The theme of this year's German Congress on Crime Prevention *Starke Jugend – Starke Zukunft* (Strong Youth – Strong Future) is a very apt and important one. In many countries there are now increasing proportions of children and young people, and they often constitute up to half the urban poor. Yet cities and communities responding to crime and insecurity often see young people as 'the problem' or their behaviour as inherently anti-social. There is a long history of interventions which target young offenders already in trouble with the law, and those on the margins of becoming involved in gangs, drugs or minor incivilities. While targeting interventions in this way is an important element in a broader youth prevention strategy, projects which incorporate medium and long term goals, which are inclusive rather than exclusive, and have a strong participatory element would appear to have some important advantages.

This paper reviews the growing focus on *participatory* approaches in crime prevention internationally, and discusses some examples of projects and approaches involving the participation of young people in their planning and development. The paper draws on a range of sources, and aims to provide a brief overview of what we have learned in the recent past about youth and their involvement in urban crime, and the experience gained from many countries on crime prevention. It looks at the principles which should guide our responses to young people and urban crime prevention, established by the UN Guidelines for Crime Prevention (ECOSOC 2002/13), and provides some examples of effective and promising strategies and practice from around the world. Some of these were presented at the Workshop on crime prevention in urban areas and for youth at risk, at the 11th UN Congress on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice, held in Bangkok in 2005.²

What is the problem?

Internationally young people may well be seen as the major problem for cities. In 2007, for the first time, the world's urban population has exceeded that living in rural areas.³ This rapid urbanisation especially over the past 15 years, has spurred the growth of a number of mega

¹ The International Centre for the Prevention of Crime (ICPC), 465 rue St Jean, Suite 803, Montreal, Quebec, H2Y 2R6, Canada. shaw@crime-prevention-intl.org. For more information on ICPC see www.crime-prevention-intl.org.

² Shaw & Travers (2007). Strategies and Best Practices in Crime Prevention in particular in relation to Urban Areas and Youth at Risk. Proceedings of the Workshop held at the 11th UN Congress on Crime Prevention & Criminal Justice, Bangkok, Thailand, 18-25th April 2005. Montreal: ICPC.

³ See UN HABITAT's The State of the World's Cities Report 2006/2007 (2006) and Global Report on Human Settlements 2007 (2007).

cities of over 20 million inhabitants. This includes the growth of informal settlements, in which some 1 billion slum dwellers now live in extremely deprived and difficult conditions. In-migration and immigration have increased the numbers of ethnic and cultural minorities living in cities. There are increasing disparities of income and access to services, housing, education, health and security, and there is long-term poverty and unemployment. Children and young people now represent up to 50% of the population of many cities, especially in less developed countries, and constitute up to half the urban poor.

These children and young people are especially vulnerable to exploitation, crime and victimisation, and growing trans-national organised crime, while trafficking in small arms, drugs and persons, have all facilitated their involvement and exacerbated urban violence.⁴ The majority of perpetrators of urban violence are young men aged 15 - 25 years of age, but they are also the majority of victims of that violence. The *World Health Organisation* estimated that some 199,000 youth murders took place globally in 2000, with around 565 children and young people aged 10-29 dying each day of the year. In Brazil, for example, homicides rose from some 13,000 in 1980 to over 50,000 in 2003, and this huge increase is primarily accounted for by the deaths of young, black men, aged 15-25, living in the *favelas*, the poorest areas of big cities. This profile of the victims represents the age, the gender, the colour, and the geography of death, as Silvia Ramos has described it.⁵

In other countries with far lower levels of youth-related homicides, concerns about apparent increases in youth violence seem perennial. A recent increase in deaths of young men in Toronto, associated with guns and drugs, or of youth gun-related crime in England, have been cause for considerable public concern.⁶ Yet even uncivil behaviour by young people has become the target of government intervention, whether at the local authority, regional or national level. In England and Wales, for example, the use of the *Anti-Social Behaviour Order* is an illustration of the tendency in that country in particular to 'define deviance up' and resort to deterrent measures to ensure order and civility.⁷ Such approaches have been referred to as 'swift, summary and straightforward justice', often appealing to both the public and politicians, but have in fact resulted in the increasing criminalisation of young people involved in minor delinquency.⁸

⁴ Bevan & Florquin, 2006.

⁵ Centre for Studies on Public Security and Citizenship, University of Candido Mendes, Rio de Janeiro. See Ramos, 2006a.

⁶ For Toronto see, for example, the conference Safe Cities for Youth. A culture of smart choice. March 12-13th 2007 www.toronto.ca/scfy/. For England & Wales, 'Killings in Manchester and London raise gang feud fears.' The Guardian Weekly 03.08.07 p.17.

⁷ Crawford, 2006.

⁸ Allen 2006; Newburn, 2007.

The policies which tend to receive most public attention tend to be the short-term or repressive ones, and with increasing use of surveillance and technology. Yet in relation to youth, it is increasingly clear that the escalation in punitive responses to youth violence is unsustainable and ultimately counterproductive. *Mano duro* policies, which have been a primary response to urban youth violence in Latin America and the Caribbean, for example, work against the long term interests of those societies.⁹ Nor should young men be viewed as a population to be feared. There has been a tendency, evident in the case of Africa, and Latin America, to view the growing populations of (male) youth in cities as inevitably to be mistrusted and feared, and requiring 'security-driven responses'.¹⁰

A shift away from repressive approaches, towards more inclusive, participatory and mediating and restorative approaches is evident internationally, nevertheless, and needs to be given much greater public visibility. There are also a number of internationally accepted principles and norms and standards against which to measure the kinds of interventions and initiatives which we develop with young people.

Principles for intervention – the UN Guidelines for Crime Prevention

The UN Guidelines for Crime Prevention adopted in 2002 (ECOSOC 2002/13), provide norms and standards for the development of crime prevention strategies and policies around the world. The Guidelines set out the basic principles for such policies, including the importance of:

- Government leadership
- Socio-economic development and inclusion
- Co-operation and partnerships
- Sustainability and accountability
- Use of a knowledge base
- Human rights and a culture of lawfulness
- Interdependency
- Differentiation

Effective urban crime prevention requires strong leadership from national and local governments; strategic planning based on good analysis of problems and causes; comprehensive strategies which include the whole range of services and institutions affecting peoples daily lives; community-based and problem-solving policing, and strong partnerships between policy makers and providers and civil society. It also requires governments to uphold the human

⁹ Shaw, 2004, UNODC, 2007

¹⁰ Sommers, 2006.

rights of citizens, and to work against the exclusion of vulnerable groups including the urban poor, women and minorities, and children and young people.

In addition to these principles for effective crime prevention, the 1989 *Convention on the Rights of the Child* (CRC) emphasises not only the right to healthy environments and protection; it also promotes the inclusion and acceptance of children. Article 12, for example, gives them the right to a voice, recognising that they are also citizens who should be able to participate in the ordering of their lives.¹¹ Articles 13 and 15 recognise their rights to freedom of expression and of association. Nevertheless, while many countries have ratified the *Convention on the Rights of the Child*, few countries currently recognise children and youth as citizens, or ascribe them the status of equal citizenship within their societies. Without involvement in decision-making, children and youth are excluded, and their rights often unrecognised.

In relation to effective policies and programmes with youth, the 2005 UN Congress workshop concluded that effective strategies for preventing and responding to youth offending and victimisation include the following elements:

- Inclusive approaches which reduce youth marginalisation
- Participatory approaches
- Integrated multi-sectoral strategies
- Balanced strategies which include early intervention, social and educational programmes, restorative approaches and crime control
- Targeted and tailored strategies and programmes to meet the needs of specific at-risk groups
- Approaches which respect the rights of children and young people.

Overall, the lessons learned in the North over the past ten years are that carefully balanced and planned strategies, which adhere to those principles, can work to prevent and reduce youth crime. Viewing violence as a public health problem, for example, opens up a much greater range of responses than those restricted to the criminal justice system, and we do have good evidence of effective prevention alternatives.¹² There are now many good examples of effective and successful strategies and programmes which utilise participatory approaches.

However, not all programmes for youth developed in the North American are theoretically or practically the most appropriate models on which to base policy and interventions in other

¹¹ See Bartlett, S. (2002). 'Building better cities with children and youth.' *Environment & Urbanization*, 14 (2) 3-10.

¹² eg. Welsh, 2005; Shaw, 2005, Guerra, 2005, Allen, 2006.

regions or countries. While the risk, protective and exacerbating factors for involvement in serious youth gang violence, for example, may be similar, not just the scale of the problems, but the complexity of the links with local communities and histories can be very different. The involvement of children and youth in organised armed violence in a number of developing (and developed) countries, often with devastating consequences for their communities and themselves, has been the subject of comparative study in a number of countries.¹³ Such groups have been defined as:

'Children and youth employed or otherwise participating in Organised Armed Violence where there are elements of a command structure and power over territory, local population or resources.' *Dowdney 2005 p.15*

Examples have been identified in Colombia, Ecuador, El Salvador, Jamaica, Nigeria, Northern Ireland, the Philippines and South Africa, as well as parts of the United States. They range from groups which do not openly carry arms, but used them for fights with other groups or the police, to groups which are openly armed and patrol their communities. The latter tend to be found in areas without strong state police or security forces, and in some cases, for example, the *Bakassi Boys* in Nigeria, work with local government forces.

The complexity of such groups is well demonstrated by the experience of organised youth gangs in Cape Flats, South Africa.¹⁴ From a series of detailed studies of the origins and characteristics of such groups, often recruiting young boys from the age of 10 or 12, it is evident that they have strong historical links to the state, often play a significant role in the local economy and its social and cultural life, providing support and some income, and in return receive support from those communities. Repressing or removing such groups is neither simple nor effective, given these complex ties, and the huge and growing populations of children and young people who will take their place. It has been argued, therefore, that organised armed violence is a distinct problem which needs to be recognised by cities and national governments, as well as internationally. The segregation of cities, the clear links between social exclusion of marginalised populations and the development and survival of organised armed groups, and their institutionalisation in some countries and cities, all point to the need to invest in other kinds of preventive approaches.¹⁵

¹³ Dowdney, 2005; Hagedorn, 2005, 2007.

¹⁴ Leggett 2005; Standing, 2003, 2005, 2006.

¹⁵ Hagedorn, 2005; Standing, 2006.

Inclusive and participatory approaches

Participation is a human rights principle, and as such, it is not a gift or privilege bestowed by adults on children, but the right of every child capable of expressing a view. In other words it is a right for all children – especially the most marginalised and vulnerable in society.¹⁶

There has been a major movement in many social, health or environmental fields to recognise the value and power of participatory approaches. International organisations such as UNICEF, UNESCO, UNDP and UN-HABITAT, as well as donors and regional organisations such as the World Bank or the Council of Europe, have tried to promote and integrate participatory approaches in their funding and technical assistance. Numerous guides and examples of child and youth participatory approaches and projects now exist.¹⁷

There has been a movement from the notion of consulting young people, to actual participation in project or initiatives which involve them, or even self-advocacy.¹⁸ Children and young people are increasingly involved in a variety of stages from need assessment to project design, implementation and evaluation as suggested in the list below (Lansdown 2001 : 9)

- Research
- Health monitoring/decisions
- Managing schools etc.
- Evaluating services for younger people
- Peer representation
- Advocacy
- Project design, management
- Campaigning, lobbying
- Analysis & policy development
- Publicity, use of the media
- Conference participation

Some of the most well-known examples are of the inclusion of children and youth through *participatory democracy and budgeting* mechanisms. This approach initially developed in cities in Brazil, provides for a portion of a municipal budget to be allocated to young people, and the establishment of a system of elected youth delegates from all districts, who vote on the use of that budget. A report on the use of participatory budgeting with children and young people in four cities in Brazil, Ecuador and Venezuela, provides clear evidence of their effec-

¹⁶ UNICEF Concept Note on Participation. www.unicef.org/india

¹⁷ Eg. Driscoll (2002); UNICEF (2006) Child and Youth Participation Resource Guide.

¹⁸ Lansdown, 2001.

tiveness in building awareness of citizenship, and of the often simple and innovative nature of young people's ideas and solutions to local problems (Cabannes, 2006).

"The concerns articulated by the children...demonstrate their keen awareness of their surroundings and of the problems that affect most people. Their concerns tend to be simple: young people focused on issues basic to their health and well-being. Few unrealistic demands were made. ...They wanted lights in dangerous tunnels, covers for drainage ditches that threatened their safety, window repairs in schools, sports areas that could be completed for a small investment, or a doctor for a local health centre." *Cabannes, 2006 p. 217.*

Thus participatory approaches are applicable with children and young people, both girls and boys, in all kinds of circumstances, including those at risk of crime and victimisation or already involved with the law, as suggested in the table and examples outlined below.

	<i>Young people in cities, schools and communities</i>	<i>Young people at risk and in conflict with the law</i>	<i>Young offenders in custody</i>	<i>Young people returning to the community</i>
<i>Examples of participatory projects and initiatives</i>	Participatory budgeting; youth councils & parliaments	Participatory needs & service assessments, project development, implementation & evaluation	Skills, education and job training, leadership training	Skills and job training, income generation projects, leadership training

In a review of violence prevention in Latin American countries, Moser & McIwaine (2005) recommend an *integrated framework for intervention* which combines analysis of the local context and an asset-based analysis of the causes, costs and consequences of violence.¹⁹

Such an integrated framework of intervention has been put in place in City of Toronto, Canada, in response to the serious increase in youth gun-related violence in recent years. The *Community Safety Plan* established in 2004, is multi-sectoral, targeted, and focuses on youth engagement and cultural competence.²⁰ It has four key priorities: strong neighbourhoods, youth opportunities, youth justice and community crisis response. It focuses on 13 priority neighbourhoods where most of the incidents have occurred, works to strengthen neighbourhood supports, and works in partnerships linking the government, local communities and the

¹⁹ They discuss seven 'ideal' policy approaches each impacting different categories of urban violence: criminal justice; public health, conflict transformation (eg. through peace building), human rights, citizen security, crime prevention through environmental design, social capital/community driven development.

²⁰ www.toronto.ca/community_safety

private sector. There is a strong emphasis on providing opportunities for young people in the targeted neighbourhoods, through education and apprenticeship programmes, recreation and cultural involvement, and building on youth participation and engagement. The City of Montreal has similarly established an integrated plan of action, *Villes-gangs de rue*, which combines the work of local service providers, the police and researchers, and works with street gangs in the five city areas most affected by their activities.²¹

In Tasmania, Australia, the *Chance on Main* project targets 14-19 year-olds at serious risk of crime, dropping out of school or training, or becoming homeless and disconnected from their families. It was developed after extensive local consultation which included the young people themselves. The programme uses mentoring by high profile community and sporting personalities, intensive individual support and counselling, family support and hands-on activity programs on and off site, (for example, metal work and computer training).²² The young people involved are often seen as 'difficult' by mainstream service providers, and the source of concern for police, education and health personnel. The need for an early intervention program for this target group was identified from extensive consultation over the past five years involving all relevant service providers, surveys of the Glenorchy community, but also in-depth consultation with young people. The project activities are developed with the full participation of the young people taking part in the programme.

Elsewhere, in countries with far higher levels of youth-related violence and victimisation, a number of impressive participatory projects can be found. In Brazil, for example, *Luta Pela Paz (Fight for Peace)*, has been developed since 2001 as a partnership project in Rio de Janeiro Brazil, by the organisation Viva Rio.²³ It began in a *favela* with serious problems of poverty, marginalisation and armed gangs. The project is open to all young people in area (including young women), and offers a combination of sports (boxing), citizenship, education, work and leadership skills training to provide alternatives to youth gangs and drugs. Based on the experience of working with young people at risk of, or involved in, organised armed violence in Brazil, Dowdney (2005) suggests that it is important to develop low-level projects to build the resistance of children and youth, while longer-term work to reduce the risk factors is undertaken. The value and impact of involving young people directly in the development of youth gang reduction strategies has been underlined by this and other studies.²⁴ A more recent project developed by Viva Rio which also demonstrates an inclusive and participatory approach is *Viva Favela*, an IT programme which focuses on 'the social and digital inclusion' of children and youth in poor and high crime neighbourhoods.²⁵

²¹ Chamandy, 2006.

²² Glenorchy City Council, Tasmania. See Australian Institute of Criminology Newsletter No. 28 March 2007.

²³ See Marianna Olinger in Shaw & Travers 2007; and Dowdney, 2005.

²⁴ eg. Winton, 2004 on the views of youth in Guatemala, UN-HABITAT, 2004.

²⁵ www.stockholmchallenge.se

Another example of strategic and participatory youth violence prevention is the *Gun Free Towns* project supported by UNDP in two cities in El Salvador (San Martin & Ilopango). The project uses a combination of approaches. They include public education against guns, often involving youth in developing media and other campaigns, gun confiscation and restrictions on gun use, and cultural events in 'high-risk' public spaces to help to reclaim them. Since June 2005, a 41% drop in homicides, a 29% reduction in gun-related crimes, and a reduction in the overall crime rate have been reported. The outcomes demonstrate that political will, careful diagnosis, (including in this case of gun incidence and locations); training of national police and city staff to improve inspection and monitoring, as well as good local community management and participatory approaches with young people, can be very effective.²⁶

The *Open School Programme (Escola Aberta)* in Pernambuco, Brazil provides a further example. Mapping violence in Brazil, youth homicides were found to double over weekends compared with weekdays. The project began in 2002 in the State of Pernambuco, with the support of UNESCO and other organisations. It involves the opening of schools at weekends to provide cultural and educational opportunities for young people. Parents are also invited. The pilot programme was found to reduce youth crimes around Recife by 30%, and the programme has now been extended and consolidated into public policy and adopted in six other major cities in Brazil.²⁷

Fica Vivo (Stay Alive) is a youth programme developed in Belo Horizonte, Brazil.²⁸ From 1997 to 2001, there was a 100% increase in the number of homicides, with 3256 violent deaths between 1998 and 2002. They were primarily young males under the age of 24, in the most disadvantaged *favelas*. The programme was developed in 2002, by the Study Centre on Crime and Public Safety (CRISP) at the Federal University at Minas Gerais (UFMG) and implemented in partnership with the City, municipal, federal and military police, the public prosecutor's office, business organisations, NGO's and local communities.

The 'Stay Alive' Programme uses a problem-oriented approach including scanning, crime mapping, analysis and assessment of priorities, and has implemented a series of projects targeting youth in these areas. The projects include social support, educational, leisure and sports, workshops on issues affecting youth, including violence, drugs, sexual transmitted diseases, sports, arts performance and computers. Job training has been provided for more than 3000 young people. Thirty months after the implementation of the project, there has been an overall decrease in violent crimes, especially homicides and attempted homicides in the targeted areas. This included a 47% decrease in homicides, a 65% decrease in attempted homicide, and a 46% decrease in bakery robberies in one of the slum areas. This was over a

²⁶ www.comunidadessegura.org

²⁷ www.comunidadessegura.org

²⁸ Beato, 2004; Shaw & Travers, 2005.

period when there was an 11% increase in violent crime in the non-violent areas of the city. The success of the programme has been attributed mainly to the use of an integrated approach, and to the involvement and participation of community members. This has stimulated the State and Federal government to support the expansion of the 'Stay Alive' Programme to four other clusters of violent slums in the metropolitan area of Belo Horizonte.

Finally, an outstanding example of a strong *youth-initiated* and *youth-led* project which forms part of the 'Stay Alive' programme, is that developed by the hip-hop AfroReggae Cultural Group from Rio de Janeiro. The cultural group was founded in 1993 in the Vigario Geral *favela*, a place very familiar with racism and violence, including that by the police, who had killed 21 residents that year.²⁹ In 2002 they decide to develop a project *with the police*, to bridge the gap between police and youth through dialogue, music and culture. While it was not possible to develop the project with the Rio police, they were invited to do so by the State Police and Secretariat of Social Defence of the State of Minas Gerais. *The Youth and the Police* project was piloted in 2004 in the city of Belo Horizonte, and trains police in percussion, graffiti art, street basketball, street dancing and theatre.³⁰ Since 2006, a permanent group of police work for two weeks every month with young people in the slums, and give joint performances in schools, in public, and in police premises. A major and significant aspect of the project is that the main objective is not to change young people and steer them away from crime, as most youth crime prevention projects do, but to *change the relationships* between the police and young people. On both sides there have been considerable changes in how they view each other.

The project is being monitored and evaluated, but preliminary results reported by Silvia Ramos (2006b) suggest 'strong positive impact on changing the image of the police, both among young slum-dwellers who have direct contact with policemen, and the population at large, when policemen appear in cultural activities in the media.' The impact among the police services themselves is more mixed, especially among those not directly involved in the project, although a high percentage of police in the State see such cultural activities as encouraging greater integration between the police and communities.

Mediating conflicts and strengthening capacities

Other inclusive approaches include the recruitment and training of young people as social mediation agents. Examples can be found in France, Belgium, the Netherlands, Tanzania, and South Africa among other countries.³¹ In France, for example, social mediation began around 1989, using volunteers to help solve conflicts occurring at schools in high-risk neighbour-

²⁹ Ramos, 2006b.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ See Gray, 2006, Community Safety Workers: An exploratory study of some emerging crime prevention occupations.

hoods. These areas often lacked social cohesion, and local authorities did not always respond to problems. In 1990, public transport companies began using mediation approaches to counter perceived insecurity and incivilities, and a number of youth employment programmes followed suit, to improve relations and resolve conflicts with the help of an impartial third party. By 1997, this mode of intervention was included within the *Contrats locaux de sécurité* to improve conditions in public places, and these mediation techniques are now widely used by local communities, businesses, and public housing and public transport to promote better living conditions among and for citizens.

Many mediation agent positions were created in 1997, as a result of the *emploi jeunes* (youth employment) initiative. This was part of a programme to generate employment in cities, and under a 5-year contract they received 50% of funding from the State. The position of *Adjoints de sécurité* (police auxiliaries) was also created under the youth employment initiative to develop community policing. By the year 2000, there were nearly 20,000 such jobs, providing mediation as well as other services. Many municipalities continued the programme by integrating these services when state funding was cut in 2003.

In South Africa, young people have been recruited as *Community Peace Workers* in a project developed by the German Technical Cooperation (GTZ) and the Department for Safety and Security. The programme's major goals are to prevent crime and support youth development in low-income areas. The project aims to provide young people with the skills to identify and mediate conflict situations in their community. The project was initiated in Nyanga, Western Cape province in 1997, and expanded to Soshanguve in 1999 and Khayelitsha in 2004. The recruits perform volunteer community service for one year, while acquiring experience that may lead to gainful employment. After initial training, half of their day is dedicated to foot patrols, while the other is spent in training sessions where they are given further instruction as conflict mediators and leaders. GTZ gives personal, technical and some financial support for training and operations. This includes the supply of transport and food parcels during duty and training to all workers.

Investing in youth for now and the future

This paper has looked at the principles which should underlie interventions and projects with young people, and guide the development of crime prevention at all levels of government. This includes the importance of undertaking a forward-looking and strategic-planning approach to building strong youth and a strong future for them. These principles and approaches form part of the UN Guidelines for crime prevention, among other norms and standards.

The paper has also explored the expanding range of inclusive and participatory approaches which are being used in many fields, including in relation to crime prevention with young people. Some examples of the use of mediation and capacity-building have also been touched on. The majority of examples discussed in this paper have been drawn from countries outside the European sphere, and often from those with far greater everyday experiences of violent

crime and youth exploitation and victimisation. This underlines the fact that youth are not made strong by repression, but by building relationships and investing in them with long-term plans for their immediate, medium and long-term future.

One absence from much of the discussion in this paper relates to girls and young women. While the majority of actual perpetrators and victims of youth crime, including violence, are young males, they do not exist in an un-gendered landscape. Nor are young women unaffected by the crime and violence in which young men are involved. Young women also form a major part of the traffic in human persons. Much work remains to be accomplished in terms of the participation and inclusion of young women in employment and skills training, in community decision-making, in terms of gender relations and relationships, and to prevent the violence which young women are themselves subjected to in personal or public settings.

Reviewing the critical situation of young people in Rwanda, ten years or more after the genocide and post-genocide period, Sommers also notes the absence of attention to young women in many youth prevention policies and programmes. In relation to young men he has argued:

The answer to the youth challenge is not to further marginalise or paint male youth as fear-some security threats. That can only inspire increased alienation and a sense of being cornered. It is, in fact, quite the opposite: unemployed, undereducated young men require positive engagement and appropriate empowerment, and participatory financial and program support. Doing so, promises to allow the array of assets that youth offer - namely their energy, enthusiasm, creativity, resourcefulness, and adaptability - to flourish.³²

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