> *"We have got to find things for kids to do before they get in trouble. It's time to turn that around before they arrest my kid — or yours."*

try, many of whom receive DOJ funding for their local anti-crime work. Another concrete achievement was that CCSPA members left D.C. feeling that they had at least made their presence known, and put the word out nationally that some community members had a different idea of the best way to deal with crime. Through four days of training and action, CCSPA members (who came from six different cities spread from one coast to the other) also built a sense of group solidarity, which any organizer will tell you is an invaluable asset to an organizing campaign.

Drug Money for the Community

While CCSPA organizers were planning national actions, Mark Davis, a researcher hired by CTWO to work with the CCSPA, turned up some interesting information about a program that allows the police to seize the assets of individuals accused of involvement in any way with the use or distribution of illegal drugs. Davis, a tall, gregarious Latino who now works with the National Council of La Raza, discovered that some community groups in the Midwest had figured out how to get some of those assets for themselves. "For the most part, there is no accounting for how the money is spent, or even how much is taken in. Cops use this windfall to buy themselves everything from the latest in super-duper cop gear to a new leather couch for the chief's office."

What National People's Action and other community groups in the Chicago area had done was to force the police in Illinois to use part of the money seized in drug raids for community programs. A few years later, NPA, in collaboration with the Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now (ACORN), convinced the Department of Justice to make this spending part of national asset forfeiture regulations. The new regulations allow (but don't require) local police departments to allocate 15 percent of their asset forfeiture proceeds to community programs for crime prevention.

"This gave us a real handle on the local p.d. [police department]," says Rose Reyes, the lead organizer with People United for a Better Oakland. "It allows us to shift some money from the cops to the community, lets the police know that we are watching them and have a way to hold them accountable, and means that the money gets used for real crime prevention."

According to *Rap Sheet*, the newsletter of the CCSPA, "An estimated $7 billion has been seized through state and federal forfeitures since Congress expanded the asset forfeitures laws as part of the 1984 crime bill." This huge pot of money has been an economic windfall for many police departments, but community groups have successfully argued that since the money came out of the community in the first place, it should be put back into the community in constructive ways.

All five of the CCSPA community organizations have taken up the asset forfeiture fight, with varying degrees of success. The first step is often the hardest — finding out just how much money the police take in and what they use it for. In Sacramento, despite several demonstrations, an accountability session with Chief of Police Arturo Venegas and filing a Freedom of Information Act request, so far STAND has not been able to get the Sacramento Police Department to release the information. In Orangeburg, South Carolina, Tri-County United Action has been turning up the heat on Sheriff C.F. "Smitty" Smith to release department information on asset forfeiture, but so far to no avail. In Oakland, however, Deputy Police Chief Tom Donahue agreed in a public meeting sponsored by PUEBLO to start transferring 15 percent of asset forfeiture funds to community violence prevention programs, and to continue meeting with PUEBLO to evaluate how the transfer is working.

In Providence and Denver, DARE and ABC have also been pushing the asset forfeiture fight and looking for ways to put more pressure on elected officials to endorse a general approach to crime prevention that emphasizes prevention over punishment — or at least gives prevention equal billing. "We've had some success in getting local elected officials to endorse the CCSPA platform that calls for a 50-50 split [in city budget allocations] between prevention and punishment," says ABC organizer David Portillo. "Denver City Councilwoman Martinez has agreed to work with us on this." In addition, CCSPA organizers there are looking for ways to change state and local regulations to require the police to allocate half of all seized drug assets to community programs.

Moving Targets

If you are poor, of color and in trouble with the law, it's a mean season in America. What's more, many of the most punitive law enforcement measures promulgated in recent years by the "tough on crime" politicians and citizens groups have been specifically aimed at young people, most of all young men of color. Anti-loitering ordinances, curfews, gang lists, youth mug books, lowered age limits for prosecution as an adult and dozens of other laws and policies have resulted in an unprecedented number of young men under the control of the criminal justice system.

Seen from another perspective, this get-tough-on-crime explosion has translated into an unlimited number of targets for community groups that want to find more humane and just solutions to community safety problems. While the five grassroots CCSPA organizations participate in national campaigns, they also look hard for specific local handles that will move their agenda. A lot of times they find their communities are most upset with the way youth are treated. In Denver, ABC has been active in stopping the city's curfew detention program, which was being applied almost exclusively in African American and Latino neighborhoods.

PUEBLO's youth component, known as YOU (Youth of Oakland United), has also been looking into law enforcement policies aimed at youth, specifically the city's new anti-loitering ordinance. YOU has not yet made this into a struggle with the police department or the city, but they have been holding their own Issue Study Groups to come up with recommendations.

Looking for New Angles

The new federal crime bill offers a wealth of opportunities for community groups, says CCSPA director Francis Calpotura. Mainly, the CCSPA is investigating the provisions for community policing, the crime prevention Block Grants and Local Partnership Act standards, and new "pattern or practice" provisions that require the U.S. attorney general to investigate police departments that have provable patterns of misconduct. Another option is to push for the United Nations Human Rights Commission to investigate the systemic nature of police brutality and misconduct in the United States.

Community policing is the newest law enforcement buzzword, referring to a practice that puts police officers more in contact with the community (instead of speeding in to respond to a crime, and then speeding out again). Definitions of what constitutes community policing vary widely, but a common denominator is some kind of sustained relationship with community groups as a centerpiece. "The problem with this approach," says Calpotura, "is that most often the cops get to pick whom they meet with, and they simply don't deal with groups critical of policing practices." But since the federal law requires "community participation," CCSPA member organizations are looking for handles to hold their police departments accountable for misconduct and ways to enforce community policing ideas such as problem-solving instead of arrests.

The Block Grants and Local Partnership Act, under the new crime bill, permit local governments wider discretion in determining how crime-prevention money is spent. CCSPA strategists are looking for ways to tighten the criteria by which "prevention" is judged, in order to prevent the money from flowing exclusively to police-supported organizations. The "pattern or practice" provisions of the crime bill allow community organizations to collect data on police misconduct and present the evidence to the Justice Department for action.

Police and Human Rights

Finally, the World Council of Churches has been holding hearings around the country on violations of human rights in the United States by racist and brutal police departments. The council is considering going to the U.N. to seek redress; the CCSPA sees this not so much as a winnable fight but as a way to highlight the pervasiveness of police misconduct and keep the issue in the public eye.

Ron Hampton, director of the National Black Police Officers Association, speaks at a CCSPA press conference in Washington, D.C.

Third Force file photo

It's going to be a long, hard fight, against some of the biggest and most politically powerful forces in the country. If nothing else, CCSPA members (most of whom are from the inner city) want to draw a clear distinction between what they see as socially progressive solutions to violent communities and the regressive "lock 'em up forever" policies being promoted by many community groups.

"Prevention is the key," says STAND member Robbie Smith. "We have got to find things for kids to do before they get in trouble. We've seen what happens when you cut back on all the programs. It's time to turn that around before it's too late and they arrest my kid — or yours." TF