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## **REDUCING VIOLENCE BY INCREASING LITERACY**

*If you knew you could prevent violence simply by teaching children to read, would you do it?*

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Everyone seems to be talking about violence in our communities. Topics range from school shootings to innocent teens slain in city streets. Nann Leeds, author of the book "Kristl Popp-Kinn Saves the Day" says, "To me, violence in our community stems from low self-esteem. People who don't think well of themselves won't think well of others." According to a report from the Melissa Institute For Violence Prevention and Treatment, students without literacy skills "will develop low self-esteem..... When this happens, antisocial behavior is often the result."

Nann Leeds, a retired elementary school teacher, is adamant that early education is vital in literacy development. She recalls, "I saw how depressed children with low reading ability could become. They wouldn't want to participate in any of the class subjects and often acted out in class. This is why I always tried to find their interests and provide them with opportunities to read about it." Nann has seen children with low reading scores spiral into poor grades, drop out of school, and get into violent situations. "If I could teach a child that they have worth and skill, they would perform better," Nann continues. A study by the National Center for Injury Prevention and Control agrees. They show an increase in self-esteem leads to decrease aggressive or disruptive behaviors, weapon offenses, and the need for adult intervention.

Nann Leeds uses her snowflake character Kristl to show children that they can accept their own uniqueness and the uniqueness of others. She explains, "I wanted children to see that being different is not a bad thing. In fact, being different can even be a blessing in disguise." Nann laughs as she continues, "Accepting myself was a struggle for me as young child in poverty, but along the way I learned an important lesson and taught it to my children and students....love yourself for who you are. This is what Kristl Popp-Kinn is all about." Kristl Popp-Kinn goes from wishing she could melt away, to being proud of her differences.

If literacy can truly help our society, the effort should be on various levels. There are programs that support childhood literacy and programs that support adult literacy. However, the focus should be ideally a multi-faceted family literacy approach. "I taught for over 30 years and I can tell you that schools are only part of the solution. Families, schools, and the community must join together to give our children the best chance for a successful life. And a big part of that success depends on reading and comprehension. That's why I am donating a portion of my book sales to literacy campaigns. We must use every tactic available to reduce the violence."

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Nann Leeds is the author of the children's book, "Kristl Popp-Kinn Saves the Day" (Illustrated by Tony Santiago) - a story of self-acceptance and self-esteem. Nann taught in the Chicago Public School system for 35 years. Now in her 80s, her life-long commitment to education and children has turned her into an author. Nann hopes that her books will encourage personal and social growth within families and our communities. For more information, please visit her website at [www.nannleeds.com](http://www.nannleeds.com) or contact Genese Turner at 630-414-4955.