

## **No Loitering**

### **A User and Discussion Guide**

**“Kids would rather feel something that makes them sick inside than not feeling anything at all.”**

--Dana Chase, participant in *No Loitering*

**“I wanted to create something new for this town, where people could express their creations.”**

--Chasz Didrickson, participant in *No Loitering*

**“You know, I want to change the world through art.”**

--Peter Williams, participant in *No Loitering*

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**“The film is at that limbo place of becoming an adult and how we no longer practice rites of passage to transition ourselves to that place...What stuck out about *No Loitering* is the beauty of the natural background combined with the turmoil and confusion of growing up.”**

--Response from a community screening in Alaska

#### **Introduction and A Brief History of No Loitering, from the filmmaker**

*No Loitering* is a film about teens trying to find a place in the community and create something for themselves. Teens take the camera for some scenes. For others, I an independent filmmaker who has taught photography and video, chaperoned dances and encouraged kids to make noise, create art and feel like they are part of a community, take the camera. The documentary intertwines the stories of individual teens with the story of a group; we created together, in a small town with a large Native American population in the panhandle of Southeast Alaska.

Sitka, a community of approximately 8,500 people, where the film is mostly set, is a place where tourists come to fawn over whales, catch fish and watch Native dancing. A town where the bad kids hang out on "the wall." The story also slips out of Sitka, away from efforts of the kids putting on dances and events, following one teen who has never

left home, to the streets of Denver. Meanwhile, another teen, attending school in Sitka, takes the camera home over the summer break. He proudly portrays life in the remote village of Good News Bay from a local hangout, an overturned boat, to a subsistence trip with his family to gather bird eggs. Despite the setting, which seems unusual compared perhaps to New York City, Seattle, or Chicago, the stories and words resonate to these places as well as tell a unique portrait of some youth in Alaska.

The project actually started, several years before the filmmaking began, with dialogue about the community, both the barriers and the aspects that are positive. It began with a handful of kids and teachers from three high schools in this island town. The teachers left the room one session and the kids said let's stop talking and have a dance. So we did. Then a group formed. Eventually we voted on the name "United Forces."

For the most part, the kids ran the UF meetings and decided what we were going to do. Meanwhile, I was accessible: I worked with kids in the darkroom, did video with other kids and got "fired" if I was late for the UF meetings. We put on more dances and created a "zine." Other adults helped us and became allies to the project.

Some months after we starting meeting and making things happen in our community, the media became filled with news of the school shootings in Columbine and other places. As the horror stories focused on teens became part of the daily news reports, I decided I was ready to make a film with/about kids who felt (as many teens do) left out, marginalized, and disenfranchised. I wanted it to show kids lives unfolding over time, filled with struggles, and achievements, dreams and questions. I wanted it to show that "process" and not create a story that would flash through the media after a tragedy happened.

Though it wasn't just the national news about school shootings that prompted the making of *No Loitering*, it also was the experience of working with teens and being conscious both of the their struggles and the struggles of those who teach, interact with, support and raise our youth. For example; decreasing options for the disenfranchised youth and the ongoing fight of the local alternative school to secure funding and resources. I was aware of how negatively teens can be viewed locally and nationally and how they can be scapegoated and conscious of parents, trying to raise kids and juggle their lives

. One last note, though school is a big part of teen life and there are some scenes in school, this is not a film shot in a high school and focusing directly on classroom issues.

### **Audiences and Use**

**"The program, which emphasizes the concerns of teens and their efforts to overcome their sense of isolation, may inspire other teens to talk about issues of importance. It could be used in guidance, health, psychology and sociology classes."**

-School Library Journal

*No Loitering* is not a film that has drastically changed any laws or programs in the community, state or elsewhere. However, what the film has done, through screenings on PBS, with a primetime slot in Alaska, lots of promotion, repeat broadcasts, national broadcast, community and conference screenings and use in schools and universities, has raised awareness and prodded viewers to think about or simply take new notice of the kids they pass on the street. It has also, for example, been a helpful tool for students in health classes talking about issues of self-esteem and tolerance. It has been used in social science classes, youth programs and for other teenage audiences.

Another important use of the film is by people who work with youth. It seems to resonate with youth workers and community people who want to create and maintain a program or a classroom where participants are engaged and take ownership versus “serving” or simply “punishing” them. The film, for example, has been screened at the Alaska Juvenile Justice Advisory meetings and at a conference called the Northwest Network on Youth for a network of programs that work with homeless and runaway youth. There is a section below specifically aimed at the youth worker and policy audience.

The film provokes viewers to think about how communities support young people. In Alaska this theme stands out and so does the question of how we as a “far-off” state prepare kids for leaving the state and for coming home. The kids meanwhile, feel the film portrays their world. I was nervous about how one character, Chasz, who shares some sensitive parts of her life, would respond to the first group seeing the film. When I asked after the screening who should see the film, she said “the world.” I felt relieved.

One of the most common reactions to the video is “how articulate the kids are.” This response I discovered talking with the producer of *Poetic License*, a film about youth poetry slams, is not unusual, but it is telling. It is intriguing because in our projects there were no, seemingly, tremendous borders crossed and no language (per se) differences. We were not in a war zone. These kids are accessible and eager to share with those who stop and listen. So what happens with a project like *No Loitering* is that listening and an opportunity to be part of a process that lets people hear another generation speak profoundly and poetically.

These are some of the places *No Loitering* has been used so far:

- Middle Schools and High Schools
- Colleges and coursework including:
  - Social work, education, teacher training, psychology, sociology, anthropology,
  - Native Studies and Art Therapy,
- Teacher Training and In-Services
- Community Groups
- Violence and Suicide Prevention Programs
- Youth Organizations and Centers
- Public Libraries and Churches

## **Before Viewing/Introducing the film**

This brief guide with activities and questions is designed to help in the discussion of the themes explored in the film. Please use as many or as few of the activities as you see fit, crafting the topics and lessons to fit your needs.

An important note: in this film many of the participants are honest about feeling voiceless and excluded from society. Some of the participants share their pains and their efforts to deal with difficult issues such as fragmented families, loss of parents, domestic violence and learning disabilities. One strong suggestion is to set-up this element of honesty about what I heard some call a “darker side,” before showing the film. Things like mental illness, lack of academic success, family instability are often tied to how we negatively stereotype each other. Many of the youth in the film have dreams and will and are going on to college, to have families and do “normal things.” Doubt and insecurity are normal feelings. See also the section on self-mutilation farther along in the guide.

Before starting the film ask viewers to think about, as they watch:

- Which characters they identify with and why.
- How adults are part of, or not, in the youth’s lives.
- What are some of the ways the participants find meaning and value in their world?

## **Pre Screening Activities**

These activities can also be done after the viewing.

### **Defining Identity**

Ask students to write a list of all the different ways they identify themselves. Give examples such as a student, a brother, a decent basketball player, a Muslim, an Alaska Native. Have students share some of what they have written. Guide the group to develop a list of general categories. How do they integrate their multiple identities? How do some identities feel more comfortable than others?

### **Talking about Expression**

Ask students to write a list of all the ways they express themselves, such as writing, dancing, or snowboarding. How does identity and expression overlap? Where do they feel comfortable or allowed to express themselves?

### **Talking about Grouping**

Ask students to talk about and/or write about the groups in their school or community. Ask them to write a brief passage about experiences being “grouped” by others or feeling caught or stereotyped as part of a group. On the other hand have them also talk about the pride of being part of a group, like a culture or team.

## **After Viewing Activities**

The following activities and questions will help viewers discuss the film. Keep in mind you need to balance creating a safe environment in which issues can be talked about, and challenging students to think honestly and critically about their reactions to these issues.

Write the following questions on the board and have students write or share a response:

- Which characters were courageous and what risks were they taking?
- Which part of the video elicited the strongest response from you?
- Did anything in the video surprise you?
- With whom did you identify most strongly in the video?
- How do these kids seem similar or different to you and teens in your community?
- Do kids in your town/community feel like these kids do? Is there a place for young people in your community that kids like to go? Where do kids in your town hang out? Do they feel supported?
- What incidents of intolerance and misunderstanding have you witnessed in your family, school or community?

## **Issues for Discussion**

### **Self-mutilation**

In *No Loitering*, Peter talks about intentionally hurting himself. He says for him, happiness is not real, but "pain is. "For some viewers his discussion is disturbing and surprising. While the film does not divulge if Peter is healed and has stopped hurting himself, it instead follows him as he finds other ways to express himself and feel connected to others.

The reason the discussion was included, was because it became clear working with teenagers that many were or had burnt and cut themselves and found other ways to physically inflicting pain and harm themselves. They are suffering from a condition psychiatrists call a trend of the 1990s -- self-mutilation. This behavior is sometimes compared to anorexia or bulimia. Self-mutilation has been around for a long time. It just hasn't been talked about or shown in the mainstream media until recently.

There are signs a parent or other adult or friend can look for: unexplained, frequent injuries; wearing long pants and sleeves in warm weather; isolation and difficulty handling feelings.

Karen Conterio explains that self-mutilation is "a way in many ways to not feel what one is feeling, that there's such an intolerance it's almost like an attack (on) the thoughts, the feelings, that in order to stop that, they take it out on themselves." Or as Peter and others describe and write about it, creating pain is a way to almost feel more

alive, because everything else seems so confusing or incomprehensible. Conterio has started what is considered the only program in the nation, in Illinois, designed to help self-abusers. It's called SAFE -- for "self-abuse finally ends."

(<http://www.selfinjury.com/founders.html>)

For many people who self-injure, there comes a breakthrough moment when they realize that change is possible, that they can escape, that things can be different. They begin to believe that other tools *do* exist and begin figuring out which of these non-self-destructive ways of coping work for them. For the parent, the teacher, the friend who learns that a young person is intentionally harming him or herself, there are a few guidelines. These include not taking it personally, being supportive and available without reinforcing the behavior, Educating yourself, and acknowledging the pain,

(<http://www.palace.net/~llama/psych/injury.html>)

### **Violence and Anger**

The youth in *No Loitering* are open and honest about issues of neglect, abuse and their own frustration and anger. The band members of “Downspell” in the film talk about letting out “hate.” They also talk about using their music and moshing as way to deal with their anger and hate, as Brad says, “without hurting anyone.”

Anger is typically viewed, by both professionals and the general population, as dangerous and unhelpful. But it is an emotion, one of many inherent in human experience, and as such can offer insight, power, and growth when its energy is harnessed constructively. (<http://www.angerproject.com/>)

Another example of dealing with anger and violence in the film is offered by April. April reads some of her journal and refers to her mother’s abuse and the choices that she is making to have a healthy life. One of the questions the film raises, through the kids, is when is violence and aggression socially acceptable and when is it not.

### **Media Representation of Youth**

How are young people represented in the media? What types of young people do you see on television shows or read about in the headlines? What range of stereotypes do you see or hear? In his book, *Scapegoat Generation*, Mike Males writes about the anti-youth bias in the media and society. He argues that representation of teenage violence, pregnancy, drug-use and behavior are distorted. Teens do commit a disproportionate amount of violent crime. But Males convincingly argues that the major cause is poverty, not any inherent criminality among youth. When poverty rates are held constant, Males shows, the rate of teen violence arrests drops below that of 30-39-year olds, just as in Europe, where young people are not disproportionately poor. He writes:

- In the last 20 years, U.S. child and youth poverty rose by 60%. In contrast, poverty among over-40 adults declined.
- Youths are by far our poorest age group; one in four is impoverished, twice the rate among grownups.

Sometimes there is a response to *No Loitering* like “why did you show these kids?” “Why let April talk about growing up with violence in her household?” Meaning, why not show the teens who seem to be successful and happy, in band, on a sports team and getting good grades? Could the film be pushing negative stereotypes? In reality, some of those “good” kids actually have experienced some of the same problems or feelings the kids in the film share. And the images of good and happy lives are out there in places, though we all know images and reality can easily diverge.

### **Activities/Resources for those who work with Youth**

This section is aimed at community organizers, youth workers and teachers.

Here are some topics to discuss:

- Encouraging confidence to participate in civic dialogue by marginalized and discouraged members of the community
- Fostering community dialogue on issues like violence, racism and cultural identity.
- Examining rural/urban divisions within society
- Discussing prejudice related to age
- Creating intergenerational events.

### **Questions:**

The following questions are influenced by some of the material included in the Additional Resources section.

- How can schools and other organizations connected to youth, to quote Henry Giroux, "foster public values and not merely advance excessive competitiveness, and intellectual consumerism?"
- “School,” claims John Taylor Gatto, “is an artifice that makes... a pyramidal social order seem inevitable, although such a premise is a fundamental betrayal of the American Revolution” (p.15). How can youth workers and teachers make their classrooms or programs a non pyramidal place for enlarging the power of young people, safe places where youth can learn, gain skills, and find meaning in their work, their projects, in the way they relate to other students and adults?
- How can schools "not lose their connection to the neighborhoods they are intended to serve?" Referring to Gatto again, he writes about community, in which there is open communication and shared participation, and institutional *networks*, which value the individual only in terms of the institution’s particular goals.

- How can organizations with a mission to serve youth make the process empowering, give ownership and remain flexible while maintaining the structure and order that facilitates the functioning of institutions in our society?
- In developing community programs, in the way schools interact with families, are the young people and families so often forgotten in communities once again being left out?

## Community Youth Development

United Forces wasn't organized by an individual or individuals trained to work with youth. UF wasn't part of the local teen center or one of the churches, though both shared resources with the project. It grew out of concerned adults talking about gaps in the community, which led to dialogue, and led to kids being involved in a kind of an experimental project. Here is a relevant framework to what happened with our project:

CYD Assumes the involvement of young people in their own development and that of the community--in partnership with adults--to make use of their talents and increase their investment in community life. CYD is about young people actively involved in the process of developing their own identity, self worth, independence, and sense of belonging, as well as their connection to family, community, the earth, and the sacred. Key principles of CYD include creating a culture of respect and partnership, creating a just and compassionate society, creating safe space, creating a culture of appreciation, transferring practical, usable skills, being conscious stewards of relationships, and finding and living one's true calling. (Della M. Hughes and Susan P. Curnan 1)

## Assets

- In the making of this film, we were also introduced to the concept of assets. For youth workers, teachers, parents or others stepping back to think about what they as adults are providing for youth, or perhaps what is missing in their lives, this framework is also useful. The experience of working with the youth involved in United Forces and *No Loitering* seems to mesh strongly with what are called external assets, the positive experiences young people receive from the world around them that help young people grow up healthy, caring, and responsible. When the youth put on a multi-age event for others in the town, they felt valued, and like they had a role and something to contribute to their town. Here are the four categories of external and internal assets included in the framework:

- \* **Support**-Young people need to experience support, care, and love from their families, neighbors, and many others. They need organizations and institutions that provide positive, supportive environments.

- \* **Empowerment**-Young people need to be valued by their community and have opportunities to contribute to others. For this to occur, they must be safe and feel secure.

- \* **Boundaries and expectations**-Young people need to know what is expected of them and whether activities and behaviors are "in bounds" and "out of bounds."
- \* **Constructive use of time**-Young people need constructive, enriching opportunities for growth through creative activities, youth programs

A community's responsibility for its young people does not end with the provision of external assets. Caring adults must make a similar commitment to nurturing the internal qualities that guide positive choices and foster a sense of confidence, passion, and purpose. The framework includes four categories of internal assets:

- \* **Commitment to learning**- Young people need to develop a lifelong commitment to education and learning.
  - \* **Positive values**-Young people need to develop strong values that guide their choices.
  - \* **Social competencies**-Young people need skills and competencies that equip them to make positive choices, to build relationships, and to succeed in life.
  - \* **Positive identity**-Young people need a strong sense of their own power, purpose, worth, and promise.
- For the complete list of assets in the framework, go to the Search Institute website, listed below.

### **A last note from the filmmaker: Challenges and Connection to Place**

One of the challenges in the project, with the group United Forces portrayed in the film, was bringing together kids who are different together and encouraging them to respect and work with those differences. In our case there were local kids, some in school, some not and kids who attend a state run boarding school. Their schedules, their lives, even their music preferences are quite different.

In Sitka, about a third of the town's population belongs to the Tlingit Tribe. The students, at Mt. Edgecumbe High school come from all over Alaska and from a range of cultural backgrounds. Many come from villages of 50 to 500 people over a thousand miles away. They are Athabascan, Tlingit, Haida, Yupik, Aleut and Inupiat and non-Native. For many of the students the decision to attend the boarding school means leaving families, village life and culture behind for the potential of an education that will open up other opportunities. Working with the students the burden of that choice, not a choice local kids dealt with, became strongly apparent.

With all the kids, local and not, whether they were the teens who sang angry lyrics in the death metal band, or the Yupik girls who share a seemingly peaceful traditional song in the film, I was intrigued by their strong connection to place. That connectedness came out in the conversations we had and in the footage the youth shot. So even with grumblings about being bored and wanting to get off this "rock," even with a sense that the adults were not listening, there was a sense, evident in the way people responded to the film, that the town and their lives had meaning and beauty.

## **Additional Resources**

### **Recommended Reading**

This is a short list and a list of works that have impacted the development of *No Loitering* and the process of creating the group, United Forces,

Gatto, John Taylor. Dumbing Us Down: the Hidden Curriculum of Compulsory Schooling. New Society Pub; 10th edition, 2002.

Giroux, Henry A. Channel Surfing: Race Talk and the Destruction of Today's Youth. 1st Ed. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997.

Hersch, Patricia

A Tribe Apart: A Journey into the Heart of American Adolescence  
New York: Ballantine Books, 1999.

Hughes Della M and Susan P. Curnan. "Community Youth Development: A Framework for Action." Community Youth Development Journal Volume 1, No. 1(Winter 2000): 1-8. (<http://www.cydjournal.org/2000Winter/hughes.html>)

Males, Mike A "Kids & Guns:" How Politicians, Experts, and the Press Fabricate Fear of Youth. Monroe, Maine: Common Courage Press, 2001.

Males, Mike A The Scapegoat Generation: America's War on Adolescents  
Monroe, Maine: Common Courage Press, 1996.

Strong, Marille, A Bright Red Scream: Self-Mutilation and the Language of Pain  
Penguin USA, 1999.

CYD Journal

<http://www.cydjournal.org>

The Community Youth Development Journal promotes youth and adults working together in partnership to create just, safe, and healthy communities by building leadership and influencing public policy.

Rethinking Schools

<http://www.rethinkingschools.org/>

Rethinking Schools is a magazine committed to the vision that public education is central to the creation of a humane, caring, multiracial democracy. While writing for a broad audience, Rethinking Schools emphasizes problems facing urban schools, particularly issues of race. It is an activist publication, with articles written by and for teachers, parents, and students.

## **Some Websites and Organizations**

### **Coalition for Juvenile Justice**

[www.juvjustice.org](http://www.juvjustice.org)

The Coalition for Juvenile Justice (CJJ) serves as a national resource on delinquency prevention and juvenile justice issues.

**Envision Learning Corporation**

<http://envisionlearningcorp.home.att.net/>

7565 Ulmerton Road

Largo, FL 33771

727-524-2942

Envision Learning Corporation is committed to providing innovative curriculum and educational tools for families, schools and communities designed to teach non-violent means of self-expression. Envision teaches empathy, anger control, impulse control and conflict resolution skills.

**Focus Adolescent Services**

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

Web site for an organization that is an online clearinghouse of resources, support, and information for teens and families. The article "Anger in Our Teens and in Ourselves" describes anger in teens and its symptoms, how to identify anger and its possible sources, and suggestions for responding to your teenager's anger. A sidecar contains links to other anger resources and articles, including those focused on depression, and counseling and therapy resources and information.

**Safe Schools and Violence Prevention**

[www.cde.ca.gov/spbranch/safety/](http://www.cde.ca.gov/spbranch/safety/)

California Department of Education

660 J Street, Suite 400

Sacramento, CA 95814

916-323-2183

916-323-6061

Safe Schools and Violence Prevention provides training, assists in program planning, and distributes publications, videos and studies and assessment results. SSVP also publishes a handbook on creating a safe school environment.

**Search Institute**

<http://www.search-institute.org>

Search Institute is an independent, nonprofit, nonsectarian organization whose mission is to advance the well being of adolescents and children by generating knowledge and promoting its application. They have developed a useful asset framework,

The developmental asset framework are about supporting and empowering young people, about setting boundaries and expectations, and about positive and constructive use of young people's time. External assets identify important roles that families, schools, congregations, neighborhoods, and youth organizations can play in promoting healthy development.

**Self-injury: You are NOT the only one**

[www.palace.net/~llama/psych/injury.html](http://www.palace.net/~llama/psych/injury.html)

Resources and discussion of causes, therapy, and support of and for people who self-injure.

### **Teen Help**

1-800-840-5704

Teen Help provides a national toll free hotline designed to assist parents, childcare professionals and others in locating appropriate resources for the treatment of struggling adolescents.

### **United Forces**

<http://unitedforces.raventail.com/>

The website for the group portrayed in the film.

### **Credits**

No Loitering is A co-production of Frankenstein Productions and KTOO-TV, Juneau in association with the Independent Television Service ([www.itvs.org](http://www.itvs.org))

The kids who appeared in, photographed, edited and help create *No Loitering*:

Dana Chase • Chasz Didrickson • Jennifer Cole • Jennifer Ulrich • Peter Williams

Jerrick Fulkerson • Carla Nanok • Travis Martin • Marganna Avugiak

April West • Gary Downie

Downspell: Mike Mosier • Greg Peacocke • Jake Phillips • Wayne Price • Eric Raisch

Brad Smith

And: Mike Bishop • Jakob Carroll • Erik Jackson • Patt Price

Jake Hodges • Jenny Sinka • Tabitha House • Becky Shaw • Adam Frank • Carlson

Clarence • Aaron Weddel • Wade Risteen • Hannah Gangle • Bert Johnson • Jason Martin •

Tia Martin • Marcie Beaver • Alexander Thomas • Florence Mark • Liane Kameroff •

Gabrielle Boles • Tanya Quick • Miranda Petruska • Lorissa Motto • Kenneth Hughes •

James Vance • Michelle Johnson • Brandon Ledbetter • Tristan Twohig • Rachael Roy •

Kristine Underwood and many others

Directed, Produced and Edited by Ellen Frankenstein

Executive Producer: Jim Mahan, KTOO-TV, Juneau

Consulting Editor: Shirley Thompson

Original Music composed and performed by Jake Hodges and Chad Lehl

Additional Music: Mouths2Feed & Downspell

"Unuganga." a ceremonial song performed by Marganna, Avugiak, Florence Mark and Alexander Thomas. Used by permission

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