

When You Give a Child a Gun

By Caroline Acuña

A wise one once said, "Until adults learn to love as children do, our children will not be safe"

When we hear the words "children soldiers" we tend to think of children outside the USA borders. We tend to think of war torn and so called "third world countries". We don't think about the children within the borders of the USA.

Today we are training our children to be soldiers here in the United States. We train them in a more "institutionalized way" than chaotic war torn countries, but under the guise of programs that seem more *civilized, neat and tidy*. Most of the youth are kids of color striving for greatness, financial stability, discipline and regularity. They have been numbed and seduced by violence through the fear of adults. The **Explorers Program**, a co-educational affiliate of the Boy Scouts of America is training thousands of young people in skills used to confront terrorism, illegal immigration and escalating Mexican border patrol. This program is considered honorable but it can be seen as institutionalized violence. The Explorer Program uses key buzz words like "youth empowerment" or "serving our country." The language we use here in the United States is different than that used in other countries where it is clear that children are trained as soldiers. Among the participants of the Explorer Program the youngest are 14 years old. The main hub of this program is Imperial County in Southern California, the poorest county in the US.

According to the *New York Times* (May 2009) in article by Jennifer Steinhauer, titled [name of article], membership in the Explorers has been overseen since 1998 by an affiliate of the Boy Scouts called **Learning for Life**, which offers 12 career-related programs, including those focused on aviation, medicine and the sciences. However, 2,000 law enforcement posts across the country are the Explorer's most popular career-related program, accounting for 35,000 of the group's 145,000 young members, said John Anthony, National Director of Learning for Life. Since the attacks of Sept. 11, 2001, and the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, many of the law enforcement posts have taken on an emphasis of fighting terrorism and other less conventional threats.

The training includes chasing down illegal border crossers, facing down terrorists and taking out "active shooters", fighting terrorism, illegal entry into the U.S., drugs and human smuggling. The following are some quotes from adult commander of the Explorers:

"Our end goal is to create more agents," said April McKee, a senior Border Patrol agent and mentor at the session here.

"Before it was more about the basics," said Johnny Longoria, a Border Patrol agent here, "but now our emphasis is on terrorism, illegal entry, drugs and human smuggling."