

An Innovative Government Solution to Reducing Gun Violence

City of Richmond California Office of Neighborhood Safety (ONS)

Name of City:

Richmond, California

Current Population:

104,887

City General Fund Budget:

\$127,300,000

ONS Personnel:

10 FTE (Director, Administrative Manager, Administrative Assistant, Neighborhood Change Agents/Street Outreach Workers [7])

Categories:

Public Safety, Public Health, Social Services, Boys and Men of Color, Gang Prevention, Violence Prevention, Intervention, Interruption, Re-Entry, Gun Violence,

Brief Description of the Program:

Youth related gun violence has persisted in the City of Richmond at an alarming rate for a number of years. In response, the City of Richmond created the Office of Neighborhood Safety (ONS) in October 2007. The ONS was created as a non-law enforcement agency within city government with a sole focus to reduce loss of life associated with firearm offenses. The ONS functions in a fast response mode to quickly interrupt gun violence, and to advance dramatic and sustained reductions in gun violence over time. The ONS facilitates two very important primary strategies to achieve its goals and objectives with active firearm offenders: its Street Outreach Strategy and the Operation Peacemaker Fellowship. By working cooperatively with the Police Department and the broader community, in 2012, the City of Richmond recorded the lowest number of firearm assaults and homicides in more than a decade, and experienced a 61% reduction in such crime from 2007 when the Office of Neighborhood Safety was created.

Narrative:

“The nation’s attention has been focused on the tragic events in Newtown, Connecticut, but the epidemic of gun violence is unfortunately not a new issue for many communities in the Bay Area... Across the United States, more children and teens die from guns every three days than died in the Newtown massacre. The Bay Area’s 15 biggest cities saw 310 homicides last year, up from the 275 homicides in 2011 and 248 in 2010.” - Demian Bulwa and Justin Berton, “Bay Area homicide rate rises in 2012,” January 2013.

Youth related gun violence has persisted in the City of Richmond at an alarming rate for a number of years. In 2009, the City experienced 47 homicides, a rate of 45.9 per 100,000 residents, compared to the statewide rate of 5.4 per 100,000 in the same year. In 2009, Richmond was listed as the 14th most dangerous city in the country in a ranking of the safety of American cities based upon violent crime rates. ("City Crime Rankings: Crime in Metropolitan America," CQ Press, 2009.)

In Richmond, police intelligence indicates that shootings and homicides are driven by a very small group of individuals, primarily African American and Hispanic American young men between the ages of 16 and 25. This group represents 80% or more of those who are engaged in violent activity, or who are the objects of that activity. The majority of the members of this group have experienced previous contact with the criminal/juvenile justice system.

In contrast to the widely dispersed structure of "gangs" found in some urban communities, rival associations in Richmond tend to be strongly geographically based. Membership is often unorganized and tends to be multi-generational rather than hierarchical. Patterns of youth related gun violence in Richmond are frequently shaped by violations of turf or power, which lead to an attack on individuals in rival geographies of the city, followed by multiple cycles of retaliation. These cycles of retribution can take place within days or can extend over a period of years, as one group seeks redress for past wrongs committed by their adversaries.

Narrative Solution:

In October 2007 the City of Richmond created the Office of Neighborhood Safety (ONS). The ONS is a non-law enforcement agency within city government with a sole focus to reduce loss of life associated with firearm offenses. The ONS functions in a fast response mode to quickly interrupt gun violence, and to advance dramatic and sustained reductions over time. The Office provides and coordinates targeted intervention services for those identified as active firearm offenders who have avoided sustained criminal consequences. The ONS outreaches to 150-200 young adults annually, providing attention-intensive engagement, and a support structure designed to improve the social and emotional health and wellness of these individuals. The ONS facilitates two very important primary strategies to achieve its goals and objectives with active firearm offenders; its Street Outreach Strategy and the Operation Peacemaker Fellowship.

The city's street outreach team (Neighborhood Change Agents or "NCA's") directly engages, on a daily, face-to-face basis, those individuals identified as most likely to be perpetrators and/or victims of gun violence in Richmond. NCA's are city employees who work to build healthy and consistent relationships with these individuals, serving as their mentors, credible messengers of healthy information, and examples of positive and healthy lifestyles. Working through these Neighborhood Change Agents, the ONS works to expand access to quality opportunities, exposures, resources, and services that build on the identified populations' strengths in an effort to reduce their involvement in gun violence.

The Operation Peacemaker Fellowship is a non-mandated, intensive Transformative Mentoring Intervention program designed for those individuals, ages 16-25 identified as current catalysts and/or instigators of firearm offences in Richmond. This intervention works to transform the attitudes and behaviors that have given rise to those individuals' involvement in gun violence. The Fellowship actively seeks to include those individuals who have been the most resistant to change, and/or are have been chronically unresponsive to the traditional range of services offered in the Richmond community. In addition to the public safety concerns that these individuals pose, they are among the most expensive population to serve with respect to the costs of policing, incarceration, hospitalization, and social services. Enabling them to right their life trajectory has a collateral and positive effect on their communities, families and peers, in addition to saving tax payer dollars.

Operation Peacemaker Fellows are provided small incentives (including monetary incentives) in exchange for their partnership, active program participation, positive behavior, and meeting a range of life development/skills, education, employment and restorative justice goals. The incentive structure functions to provide a gateway for the advancement of intrinsic motivation that arises from internal and not external rewards.

Narrative Results:

Specific outcomes resulting from the Street Outreach Strategy include:

- 2,422 outreach contacts were facilitated by Neighborhood Change Agents;
- 212 individuals who are at high risk of being involved in gun violence provided culturally competent and responsive services including intensive support and mentoring/life coaching;
- 154 service referrals were facilitated by Neighborhood Change Agents;
- 39 individuals who are at high risk of being involved in gun violence participated in life skills training facilitated by Neighborhood Change Agents.

There have been two Peacemaker Fellowship cohorts since 2010, with specific outcomes that include:

Of the 43 Fellows enrolled:

- 43 developed individualized life plans (LifeMaps);
- 41 are Alive;
- 34 have no new gun charges since becoming a Fellow;
- 32 have no gun violence related arrests since becoming Fellow;
- 37 have no gun related injuries or hospitalization since becoming a Fellow;

The combined results of the Office of Neighborhood Safety in terms of reducing the incidence of gun violence are summarized below:

Richmond Firearm Activity – Pre & Post Office of Neighborhood Safety:

YEAR	HOMICIDES	FIREARM ASSAULTS
2007	47	242
2008	28	150
2009	45	170
Pre - Totals	120 (+54)	562 (+248)
2010	22	118
2011	26	114
2012	18	82
Post - Totals	66 (-45%)	314 (-44%)

In 2012, the City of Richmond recorded the lowest number of firearm assaults and homicides in more than a decade, and experienced a 61% reduction in such crime from 2007 when the Office of Neighborhood Safety was created.

The work of the City of Richmond Office of Neighborhood Safety could not be successfully accomplished without the support and partnership of local and regional law enforcement agencies. These agencies are instrumental in ensuring that the ONS is focusing its limited resources on the right people to achieve maximum impact from each ONS strategy. A select group of community based organizations have also been important to the successful facilitation of ONS work. Community based service providers who are willing and able to provide helpful and viable supportive services for the target population is critical for any success accomplished.

The Office of Neighborhood Safety could not facilitate the Operation Peacemaker Fellowship without the generous support of its philanthropic partners. Private foundations and donors generously fund the incentive structure of the Fellowship Program.

Most importantly, the Office is grateful to the young men who participate in the Operation Peacemaker Fellowship. The program's theory of change is that cities must partner in new ways with those who can best influence the elimination of the gun violence. It is they who must decide to stop shooting. The work by the Office of Neighborhood Safety is designed to empower these individuals to do just that, and to provide the assistance that they need to help them achieve this objective.

Contact:

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