



OLR RESEARCH REPORT

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EFFORTS TO REDUCE YOUTH GANG INVOLVEMENT AND GANG VIOLENCE

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You asked for information about programs in Connecticut and other states aimed at reducing youth involvement in gangs and gang violence.

SUMMARY

We reviewed four programs implemented in several cities to reduce gang violence, youth involvement in gangs, or both. Evaluations have demonstrated that the programs have been partially successful, although no program has proven to be 100% successful.

The Gang Resistance Education and Training (GREAT) Program was originally implemented in Phoenix, Arizona in 1991. The program's goal is to reduce youth gang membership, violence, and criminal activity through education. GREAT-certified law enforcement officers teach a 13-lesson curriculum to middle school students including lessons on conflict resolution and the relationship between gangs, violence, crimes, and drug abuse. Although several Connecticut law enforcement agencies were formerly involved with the program, there are few trained officers in the state currently due to budget cuts. We were unable to verify that officers are currently teaching the GREAT curriculum in any Connecticut middle schools.

The Cure Violence program likens violence to an epidemic that must be treated at its source. The program uses public education campaigns, community events, and mobilization to discourage using violence to resolve conflicts. Violence interrupters and outreach workers help to mediate conflicts and get necessary services for high-risk community members. The program has been implemented in several cities including Baltimore, Chicago, and New York.

The U.S. Department of Justice's Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) developed a Gang Reduction Program that requires community members to use a steering committee to set various goals and objectives to address youth gang problems. The steering committee focuses specifically on primary and secondary prevention efforts, intervention, suppression, and reentry. OJJDP has implemented the program in Los Angeles, California; Richmond, Virginia; Milwaukee, Wisconsin; and North Miami Beach, Florida.

Operation Ceasefire is a program originally implemented in Boston in 1995 and in several other cities since that uses a combination of sanctions and incentives to reduce homicides, specifically targeting gangs and gang violence. Project Longevity, which was recently implemented in New Haven, is based on Operation Ceasefire.

THE GREAT PROGRAM

Overview

Phoenix-area law enforcement officers developed GREAT in 1991 to respond to local gang problems. GREAT's curriculum is aimed at middle school students, although some participating areas also offer elementary school, summer, and family programs.

The program's goal is "to help youth avoid gang membership, prevent violence and criminal activity, and develop a positive relationship with law enforcement, resulting in safer communities." GREAT-certified criminal justice professionals teach the 13-lesson curriculum to sixth, seventh, or eighth grade students. During the first lesson, students are taught about the relationship between crime, violence, drug abuse, and gangs. In subsequent lessons, they practice goal setting and conflict-resolution techniques. They are also taught decision-making, communication, active-listening, anger management, and effective refusal skills.

Evaluation

The National Institute of Justice, the Department of Justice's research, development and evaluation agency, funded an independent evaluation of GREAT's middle school program from 2006 through 2012. Preliminary findings indicated that GREAT middle school participants were, in relation to their peers, more likely to report:

1. positive attitudes about police,
2. less positive attitudes about gangs,
3. more frequent refusal skills use,
4. greater peer pressure resistance, and
5. lower gang membership rates.

The preliminary results also indicated a 54% reduction in gang membership odds among students who completed the middle school GREAT program a year previously compared with their peers. Researchers found no significant differences between the two groups on measures of empathy, risk-seeking, conflict resolution, or self-reported delinquency.

GREAT in Connecticut

According to Sargent Thomas Walsh, regional administrator of GREAT's Mid-West Atlantic Region, 22 Connecticut law enforcement agencies were involved with GREAT at one point, with a total of 85 trained officers. Currently, only Bridgeport, Hartford, and New Haven have any GREAT-certified officers. We attempted to contact the three police departments to verify if officers are actively teaching GREAT but we did not receive any responses. We will follow up this report with any additional information we receive.

More information on GREAT is available at <http://www.great-online.org/>.

CURE VIOLENCE

Overview

Dr. Gary Slutkin, an American epidemiologist, launched the Cure Violence initiative in Chicago in 1995. According to Cure Violence's website, the program is based on the belief that "not unlike AIDS or tuberculosis, violence is a disease. If such a contagious epidemic is ignored, it is not cured, but rather, it spreads...In order to effectively combat peaking societal violence, social norms must be targeted from the source."

Cure Violence's "violence interrupters" are reformed individuals from the community who were gang members, incarcerated, or both. The violence interrupters are trained to detect potential shooting events, mediate conflicts, and keep safe in dangerous situations. They identify potentially lethal conflicts in progress and use conflict mediation techniques to intervene.

Cure Violence outreach workers mentor high-risk community members several times each week and help them to obtain necessary services such as drug abuse counseling or job training. The workers also counsel them individually to reject violence.

Additionally, Cure Violence uses public education campaigns, community events, and community mobilization to discourage the use of violence to resolve conflicts.

The Cure Violence program has been replicated in several cities including Baltimore, New Orleans, New York City, and Oakland. In 2009, the New York State Legislature allocated \$4 million to implement Cure Violence statewide. Four sites currently operate in New York City boroughs and three additional sites throughout the state. There are no Cure Violence programs in Connecticut.

Evaluation

The National Institute of Justice independently evaluated Chicago's Cure Violence program in 2008. In six of seven sites observed, the program areas had grown noticeably safer. In four of the safer sites, "there was evidence that decreases in the size and intensity of shooting hot spots were linked to the introduction of [the program]." In the other two safer sites, researchers could not conclusively link the decrease in violence to the program. Researchers also noted that violence in the city

overall had dropped since 1992, and it was not possible to account for all the contributing factors.

More information on Cure Violence is available at <http://cureviolence.org/>.

OJJDP GANG REDUCTION PROGRAM

Overview

The OJJDP developed a Gang Reduction Program (GRP) aimed at (1) reducing youth gang violence and (2) determining how to create a community environment that reduces youth gang crime and violence in targeted neighborhoods. In order to reach these goals, OJJDP created a Comprehensive Gang Model based on research by Dr. Irving Spertzel and his colleagues at the University of Chicago.

The program requires a community and its leaders to (1) acknowledge the youth gang problem, (2) assess the problem's scope and identify target communities and populations, and (3) use a steering committee to set goals and objectives to address the problems, focusing specifically on:

1. primary prevention by establishing "one-stop resource centers" in high-risk, high-crime communities to provide services such as prenatal and infant care, afterschool activities, truancy and dropout prevention, and job programs;
2. secondary prevention by providing services for young children at high risk to deter them from delinquency and gang involvement;
3. intervention through providing outreach and recruitment activity to help gang members and their close associates get support services and make positive choices;
4. suppression by identifying and removing the most dangerous gang members in the community; and
5. reentry by monitoring serious offenders returning to the community after incarceration and providing them with appropriate services.

Finally, the steering committee must evaluate response effectiveness, reassess, and modify approaches, as needed.

Evaluation

In 2003, OJJDP implemented a five year (2003-2008) GRP initiative in four cities: Los Angeles, Milwaukee, North Miami Beach, and Richmond. OJJDP provided each site with \$2.5 million and a local GRP coordinator in fall 2003 to plan, develop, and implement the program.

The Urban Institute independently evaluated the GRP initiative and found that all four sites successfully implemented the five-step model. Three of the four sites had also implemented plans to sustain the programs after the federal funding expired. The Institute also noted that “successful outcomes related to crime reduction were seen in most of the sites although results varied.”

More information on OJJDP’s Comprehensive Gang Model is available at <http://www.ojjdp.gov/publications/PubAbstract.asp?pubi=253257>.

OPERATION CEASEFIRE

Overview

Operation Ceasefire uses a combination of sanctions and incentives to reduce homicides, specifically targeting gangs. Originally implemented in Boston in 1995, the program has since been implemented in dozens of other cities including Cincinnati, Los Angeles, Pittsburgh, and Providence.

Law enforcement officers bring known gang members on probation on parole in for a meeting, referred to as a “call-in.” The members hear from:

1. community members who inform them of the enormous damage they are doing to the community and ask them to stop,
2. community providers who give them phone numbers to get services such as GED assistance and drug rehabilitation, and
3. law enforcement officers who tell them that the call-in is not a negotiation and that the police will be focusing on the most violent groups and the first homicide after the call-in will result in a group crackdown.

Every two to three months, law enforcement officers hold subsequent meetings at which they reiterate the warning they offered at the first meeting and tell the gang members what actions they took towards the first gang associated with a homicide since the last call-in. Providers and community members also reiterate their messages from the initial meeting.

Evaluation

David Kennedy, the project's creator recently explained that continued police interaction with the community is essential for the program's success. He noted that the program has consistently led to at least a one-third reduction in gang-associated violence, but without ongoing maintenance, the violence rate eventually escalates again.

An evaluation of Boston's Operation Ceasefire is available at:
<https://www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/nij/188741.pdf>.

Project Longevity

New Haven recently launched Project Longevity, its own version of Operation Ceasefire. David Kennedy collaborated with Yale Law School to design the project with an emphasis on sustaining the program long-term. New Haven law enforcement officers held the first two "call-ins" in November, 2012. The program is funded by federal, state and local sources and there are currently plans to expand it to Hartford and Bridgeport.

More information on Project Longevity is available at:
<http://www.governor.ct.gov/malloy/cwp/view.asp?A=4010&Q=514602>

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