

Process Evaluation for the Office of Neighborhood Safety: Highlights

Overview

Violent victimization and exposure to gun violence has long-term, even fatal, consequences for youth, particularly African American males. Research demonstrates that violence impacts African American youth, particularly boys, at much higher rates than their White and Hispanic counterparts (Children's Defense Fund, 2013). In California, homicide is the second leading cause of death for all youth ages 10 to 24, with the large majority of homicides committed using firearms. However, for African American youth in the same age range, homicide is the leading cause of death (Violence Policy Center, 2014).

Youth who are responsible for gun violence typically also commit other crimes and are commonly victims of violence themselves, encountering long-term developmental consequences (US Department of Health and Human Services, 2001).

While these youth are in urgent need of assistance, there is often a lack of appropriate services available for them. It is very difficult to coordinate and implement comprehensive programming and services that effectively address such a wide range of risk factors and needs, while engaging a population that often refuses traditional community-based services due to isolation or lack of trust (Holden, McGregor, Blanks, & Mahaffey, 2012).

The Office of Neighborhood Safety (ONS) in Richmond, California, seems to have bridged the gap between anti-violence programming and a hard-to-reach population. Faced with rising levels of gun violence and homicides in the early to mid-2000s, the city of Richmond created the ONS in 2007. Housed in the city manager's office, the ONS works to strengthen and improve the safety and well-being of the Richmond community. By implementing unique services responsive to the local community, the ONS has been able to provide targeted services to youth who would typically fall through the cracks.



ONS staff and Operation Peacemaker fellows travel to the ancient city of Teotihuacan while visiting Mexico.



An Operation Peacemaker fellow during an excursion to Los Angeles.

The National Council on Crime and Delinquency (NCCD), a nonprofit research and policy organization, was commissioned by the California Wellness Foundation and the City of Richmond, California, to conduct a process evaluation of the ONS. This evaluation report describes the ONS's strategies and processes, and provides the ONS with feedback from stakeholders and recommendations for continued work in the Richmond community and in the broader field of violence prevention.

The Office of Neighborhood Safety and the Operation Peacemaker Fellowship

The primary short-term goal of the ONS is to reduce gun violence and associated homicides in the city of Richmond. The long-term goal is to eliminate these incidents. The ONS uses strategies that focus on influencing outcomes at both the individual and community levels. The ONS's primary community-level intervention is its Street Outreach Strategy, while its Operation Peacemaker Fellowship targets individuals.

The ONS, whose staff includes several outreach workers known as Neighborhood Change Agents (NCAs), uses several community-based approaches to meet its intended objectives:

- Developing and maintaining relationships with community members;
- Ongoing communication;

- Data-driven decision making; and
- Relationships with government agencies, community-based organizations, and other partners.

The ONS's primary individual-level intervention is the Operation Peacemaker Fellowship. The Fellowship is a non-mandated intensive mentoring intervention lasting for a minimum of 18 months and designed for youth who have been identified as most likely to be involved in gun violence in Richmond. These young men are deeply immersed in Richmond's street life and consequently are difficult to reach through traditional services and approaches. Since few community-based organizations have the capacity to support them, these youth are heavily underserved. They tend to be resistant to change and indifferent toward services, making them a challenge to work with effectively. They also come from communities that have experienced structural unemployment and poverty, which complicate the issues the young men face.

Fellows range in age from 14 to 25 years. The large majority (97%) of fellows are African American. About half of fellows (45%) are fathers. About one fifth (21%) were victims of gun violence prior to participating in the Fellowship. While the Fellowship engages youth at high risk for involvement in gun violence, it is important to note that the Fellowship is not a diversion program. Fellows do not have prosecutable criminal cases. As of 2014, the ONS has had a total of three cohorts and 68 fellows.

The Fellowship is grounded in a framework of positive youth development and approaches violence prevention as a public health issue. The program operates in several ways to provide fellows with the tools, skills, and resources to lead healthy, productive lives. These components include:

- Multiple daily contacts with ONS outreach staff;
- Creating a "life map" that individually assesses a fellow's circumstances, outlines his goals, and describes specific steps for achieving them;

- Case management/social services navigation support and referrals;
- Excursions, allowing fellows to experience life outside of Richmond and safely interact with other fellows from rival neighborhoods;
- Internship opportunities;
- Elders Circle/intergenerational mentoring; and
- Stipend privileges.

Process Evaluation Methodology and Findings

NCCD's process evaluation examined the ONS's gun violence prevention work and the office's processes and strategies. The goals of the process evaluation were to:

1. Provide the City of Richmond with recommendations for improving the efficiency and effectiveness of the ONS, and outline next steps for further evaluation of specific intervention strategies;
2. Provide capacity for the ONS to document the impact of its work in the Richmond community and the lives of one group of clients (participants in the Operation Peacemaker Fellowship); and
3. Provide a framework for an outcome evaluation of the Fellowship.



Neighborhood Change Agent Sam Vaughn, an Operation Peacemaker fellow, and ONS Director DeVone Boggan at Richmond City Hall.

Methodology

In order to develop a process evaluation that would be reflective of and responsive to the needs of the ONS, the City of Richmond, and other stakeholders, NCCD used a range of data collection methods. These methods included making several site visits to the ONS to gain insight into the office's daily operations and observe activities such as staff meetings and outreach work; conducting more than 55 interviews with key stakeholders including elected officials and key staff from the City of Richmond and Contra Costa County, ONS staff, fellows, law enforcement officers, and representatives from community-based organizations; and reviewing existing data and documentation.

NCCD collected qualitative and quantitative data for the process evaluation. Data collected from interviews were analyzed using a qualitative approach. Interview data were transcribed, coded, and analyzed for key themes. Quantitative data, such as crime data reported to the FBI by the Richmond Police Department, were analyzed using descriptive statistics. Outreach data collected by the ONS were also reviewed and analyzed by NCCD in a similar manner.

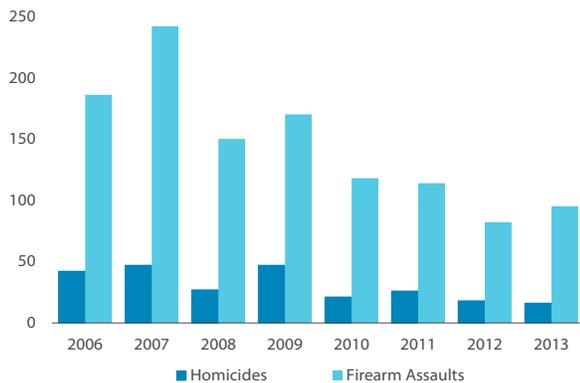
Major Achievements of the ONS

The process evaluation found that the ONS has made several major achievements.

- *Contributing to substantial reductions in gun violence:* In the last several years, gun violence in Richmond has dropped substantially, marking significant progress toward the ONS's goal of reducing this violence. Since 2010, the annual number of firearm assaults and homicides has trended downward, with homicides reaching an all-time per capita low in 2013 (Figure 1). While a number of factors including policy changes, policing efforts, an improving economic climate, and an overall decline in crime may have helped to facilitate this shift, many individuals interviewed for this evaluation cite the work of the ONS as a strong contributing

factor in a collaborative effort to decrease violence in Richmond. It is also important to note that lowered rates of gun violence, and the community's perception of its own safety, suggest that ONS strategies are having an impact, but it is impossible to disentangle the ONS approach from other concurrent citywide violence reduction interventions and strategies.

Figure 1: Homicides and Firearm Assaults, City of Richmond, 2006–2013

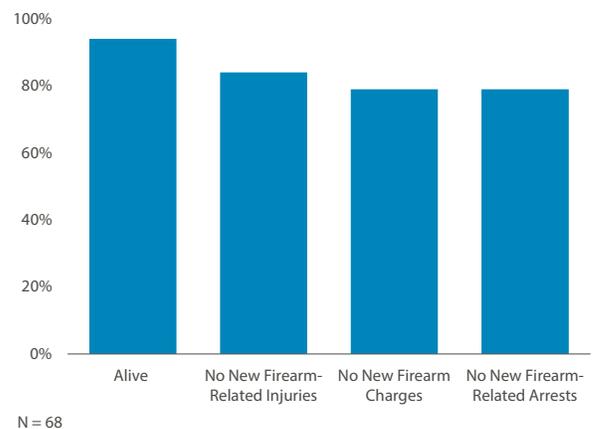


Source: FBI Uniform Crime Reports, 2007–2014; Office of Neighborhood Safety, 2014

- Developing relationships with the ONS target population:* The ONS has demonstrated substantial success in building strong relationships with its target population. Through its street outreach strategy, the ONS has been effective in developing a rapport with Richmond community members affected or at risk of being affected by gun violence. From 2010 to 2013, NCAs annually facilitated an average of 2,994 outreach contacts, provided attention-intensive support and mentoring for an average of 150 individuals, and provided an average of 319 referrals to services.
- Low levels of violence among Fellowship participants:* Since the start of the Fellowship, fellows have experienced low levels of violence and law enforcement contact due to gun activity. As shown in Figure 2, as of April 2015,

the vast majority of fellows (94%, or 64 out of 68) are alive; 84% have not sustained a gun-related injury or been hospitalized for one since becoming fellows; and most (79%) have not been arrested or charged for gun-related activity since becoming fellows. While most social service programs do not count outcomes such as mortality or injury, using these measures is paramount for an effort designed to reduce lethal violence. The fact that the large majority of these young men at high risk of involvement in gun violence are alive and have not sustained injuries due to gun violence suggests that the Fellowship's focus on providing intensive services for this population is working as intended.

Figure 2: Fellows' Outcomes Related to Violence



- Improvements in fellows' personal outcomes:* In addition to low levels of death and injury among fellows, the Fellowship has also helped participants make progress in other key personal areas. For example, since enrolling in the Fellowship, 20% of fellows have received their GED or high school diploma, 10% enrolled in college or vocational training, and 50% obtained employment at some point during the fellowship. Fellows interviewed for this evaluation also reported beneficial experiences they have had through the Fellowship, including

setting and meeting goals, developing a sense of responsibility and accountability, and transforming their perspective and worldview, as well as tangible outcomes such as obtaining a driver's license and becoming employed. These improvements contribute to fellows' overall ability to transform their lives, improve their self-esteem, and continue on a healthy, productive path.

Recommendations for the ONS

Based on the findings of the process evaluation, NCCD presents several recommendations for the ONS to consider.

- *Communication and transparency:* NCCD recommends that the ONS continue to increase transparency and understanding in the Richmond community about the ONS, including communicating information about the office's processes and procedures and its relationships with other local entities on the ONS website, in reports, and other formats.
- *Partnerships with other organizations:* NCCD recommends that the ONS continue to develop strong partnerships with other organizations in order to refer youth to additional services and share knowledge with others working with similar populations.
- *Data and evaluation:* NCCD recommends that the ONS continue to prioritize the collection of data on services rendered and client outcomes, using rigorous data collection methods including detailed and longitudinal measures.
- *Providing education on the ONS approach:* The ONS should continue to share this important knowledge base with a broad range of stakeholders, such as community-based organizations, county and city officials, schools, and others who are working to reduce violence in their communities. Crafting a violence prevention program that is responsive to a community's

specific needs represents a valuable strategy that can be shared with other communities facing problems with violence.

Measuring Effectiveness of the ONS Through an Outcome Evaluation

While this process evaluation did not specifically examine outcome variables related to the ONS or the Fellowship, the evaluation did capture data that support the efficacy and promise of the strategies in place in Richmond, underscoring the need to further examine the ONS and its efforts in a rigorous outcome evaluation.

The progressive nature of the work currently being done in Richmond reflects a community in which city government, law enforcement, and community-based organizations collaborate to represent civic leadership at its best. This process evaluation highlighted that 94% of Fellowship participants currently remain alive and 79% of participants have not been arrested or charged for gun-related offenses since enrolling in the Fellowship. Moreover, it revealed that across the board, fellows showed improvements in personal outcomes including education, employment, meeting individual goals, improving self-esteem, and living a healthier lifestyle.



An Operation Peacemaker fellow during a meeting with Congresswoman Barbara Lee in Washington, DC.



ONS staff and fellows meet with Congresswoman Barbara Lee while visiting Washington, DC.

Overall, Fellowship participants reported that involvement in the Fellowship was a transformative experience that altered their worldviews—and subsequently their lives. “[The Fellowship] changed me,” said one fellow. “[Now] I don’t carry guns, and I don’t hang with guys with guns. I push myself away from that.” Another noted, “I have seen I could do better. I see people trying to help me. I have realized that life is bigger than North Richmond and street life. I don’t have to limit myself.” (Read the [full report](#) for additional interview data and quotations from the fellows.)

Further investigation and evaluation of the ONS’s broad-based work may reveal important outcomes that will help push violence prevention work

even further. Elements of the Fellowship such as relationship building, life maps, excursions, stipends, intergenerational mentoring, internships, and guided referrals are likely replicable in other communities. While there may also be challenges related to replication of the Fellowship, such as the dynamic leadership associated with the current model, the framework could be used to improve outcomes for communities across the country. Moreover, this model could provide a template for partnering with youth involved in violent activities, capitalizing on their knowledge and capacity to engage other youth in ways that complement a community’s specific needs around violence. These issues are well worth exploring in future research.

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Read the Full Report

To read the full process evaluation for the Office of Neighborhood Safety, visit http://www.nccdglobal.org/sites/default/files/publication_pdf/ons-process-evaluation.pdf.