

## **An Innovative Government Solution to Reducing Gun Violence**

### **City of Richmond California Office of Neighborhood Safety (ONS)**

**Name of City:**

Richmond California

**Current Population:**

105,000

**City General Fund Budget:**

\$134,000,000.00

**ONS Agency Budget from General Fund:**

\$1,500,000.00

**ONS Agency Personnel:**

11 FTE

12 PTE

**Categories:**

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

**Brief Description of Strategy/Agency:**

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 proactively and 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 a broad community of public system, community based and philanthropic stakeholders, in 2013, the City of Richmond recorded the lowest number of firearm assaults and homicides in more than three decades, and experienced a 66% reduction in such crime from 2007 when the Office was of Neighborhood Safety was created.

## **Narrative**

Youth related gun violence has persisted in the city of Richmond at an alarming rate for a number of years. In 2007, the City of Richmond experienced 47 homicides, a rate of 47.9 per 100,000 residents. That number compares to a statewide rate of 5.4 per 100,000 in the same year. In 2009 the City of Richmond was identified as the 14<sup>th</sup> most dangerous city in the country in a ranking of the safety of 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 however most have never been convicted of a firearm offense.

In contrast to the widely dispersed structure of “gangs” found in some urban communities, rival associations in Richmond tend to be 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 proactively and 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 “NCAs”) directly engages on a daily face-to-face basis, those individuals identified as the most lethal and likely to be perpetrators and/or victims of gun violence in Richmond. NCAs 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 and customized opportunities, exposures,

resources, and services that build on the identified populations' strengths in an effort to reduce their involvement in gun violence.

An example of the city's street outreach practice in Richmond is "Occupy North Richmond" its 2012 Summertime Gun Violence Interruption Initiative. Most gun related homicides are retaliatory in nature, and many gun related homicides result from some sort of altercation. In 2011, the City of Richmond experienced twenty-six homicides citywide, and seventeen of these occurred between the months of June and August. It is widely speculated, and was commonly communicated, that most shootings during this period, and many of the resulting homicides recorded, were a product of ongoing conflicts/feuds and/or retaliatory acts between warring factions from North and Central Richmond.

In response to this challenge, the ONS intensified its street outreach presence, increased ONS street outreach assets, and worked to stimulate a heightened level of community engagement in North Richmond in an effort to reduce conflicts that produce or fuel increased gun violence between North and Central Richmond factions. In addition to engaging the community and the high risk individuals, ONS Neighborhood Change Agents posted themselves on the corners of the only five entrances and exits of North Richmond. This often resulted in NCAs identifying Central Richmond crews coming into to North Richmond and convincing them to turn around.

At the conclusion of the initiative on August 31<sup>st</sup>, four firearm related homicides and twenty-seven firearm assaults had occurred during the summer months of 2012. ***This represented a 76% reduction in summertime firearm related homicides, and a 16% reduction in summertime firearm assaults over the previous year.*** NOT ONE FIREARM RELATED HOMICIDE OCCURRED IN NORTH RICHMOND DURING SUMMER 2012.

The Operation Peacemaker Fellowship is a non-mandated, intensive Transformative Mentoring Intervention program designed for those individuals, ages 13-25 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 chronically unresponsive to the traditional range of services offered or available 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 taxpayer 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 (2013):

- Over 2,500 outreach contacts were facilitated by Neighborhood Change Agents;
- Over 400 individuals who are at high risk of being involved in gun violence were provided services, including intensive mentoring and life coaching;
- Over 500 formerly incarcerated individuals with firearm convictions were provided support;
- Over 350 service referrals were facilitated by Neighborhood Change Agents;

There have been two completed Peacemaker Fellowship cohorts and one currently in process over the last 43 months. Each cohort is 18-months in length, with specific outcomes that include

Of the 68 Fellows enrolled over the 43 months:

- 65 remain alive;
- 64 have no gun related injuries or hospitalization since becoming a Fellow;
- 57 have no new gun charges since becoming a Fellow;
- 57 have no gun violence related arrests since becoming 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 Fellowship

YEAR	HOMICIDES	FIREARM ASSAULTS
2006	42	186
2007	47	242
2008	28	150
2009	45	170
Pre-Totals	162	748
2010	22	118
2011	26	114
2012	18	82
2013	16	95
Post-Totals	82   -80   (-49%)	409   -33%   (-45%)

*In 2013, the City of Richmond recorded the lowest number of firearm assaults and homicides in more than three decades, and celebrates a 66% reduction 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 appropriate support and partnership of local and regional law enforcement agencies. These agencies are instrumental to 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 philanthropic and 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, customized and viable supportive services for the target population is critical for any success accomplished.

Most importantly, we are grateful to the young men who participate in the Operation Peacemaker Fellowship. The strategy 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.

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