



OFFICE OF THE MAYOR

BEN WALSH, MAYOR

MAYOR'S OFFICE TO REDUCE GUN VIOLENCE Community Violence Intervention Implementation Plan | January 2023

Introduction

The City of Syracuse has persistently high levels of violent crime. Its 2021 murder rate of 19.85 per 100,000 residents is three times that of the United States (6.52). Moreover, despite different interventions from government agencies, society and its non-profit network, the city's average number of homicides per year rose by 31% over the last decade.

The Syracuse Violent Crime Assessment conducted during the summer and fall of 2022, identified three (non-exhaustive) main causes of this problem:

- Law enforcement activity alone is not able to prevent criminal activity.
- Continuous social conflicts between gangs and groups of young people that spiral into gun violence.
- High-risk environmental features and dynamics within neighborhoods.

According to the Central New York Crime Analysis Center, gang-related homicides represented 34% of last decade's homicides. Moreover, conflicts between gangs and gang associates drove the recent increase in violent crime; more than 50% of the last two years' homicides were gang related.

This memo delineates the plan the Mayor's Office to Reduce Gun Violence seeks to pursue to address violent crime produced by gang conflicts. In a few words, we will implement a conflict mediation, socialization, and economic opportunity plan for gang associates. In that sense, we plan to identify and intervene in the various conflicts occurring, help gang associates recognize their negative biases, listen

to their rivals, acknowledge with their points of view, and control their anger and impulses. Furthermore, we intend to insert them into settings where they will be motivated towards prosocial behavior, create positive social bonds, earn income and education, as well as overall opportunities.

The strategic goal of this plan is to reduce conflicts between gangs and groups of young people by engaging with the highest-risk individuals among these groups, those driving the gun related violence in Syracuse, and helping them acquire personal fulfillment and economic opportunities through legitimate means.

Problem description

One of the leading causes driving violent crime in Syracuse is conflicts between gangs and groups of young people. For the purpose of the document, they will be identified as gang associates. This violent dynamic revolves around personal disputes and historic feuds between these groups. Therefore, gun related violence in Syracuse is not most likely a conflict over money or territory; it is about hostile interactions, aggressive reactions, and vengeance.

Our violent crime assessment included workshops and focus groups with community-based organizations that work on these issues. Based on evidence and information gained through these interactions, our implementation plan will focus on the following:

- Cognitive and behavioral health conditions predisposing gang associates to violent behavior. Examples are unaddressed trauma, restless aggressiveness, and cognitive-emotional states of anger, low problem-solving skills, resentment, and defiance.
- School absenteeism, low educational attainment, and scarce professional opportunities.
- High levels of concentrated poverty.
- Gaps in the overall coordination of anti-gun violence service delivery which hinders overall effectiveness of the work of the agencies providing the service. Specially identified gaps include mental health service delivery, education and training, employment networking and housing stability.
- Expanding use of Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) strategies.

We identified that gun violence is heavily concentrated in eleven specific clusters on the city's north, near west, and southwest and lower east side neighborhoods. In those clusters, we detected eight physical features including overgrown vegetation, illegal trash setouts, inadequate lighting, blighted properties, which increase the risk of violent crime in three ways: 1) by increasing opportunities to commit crimes; 2) creating a state of generalized disorder that nudges people into breaking other norms and rules; and 3) damaging the social capital of communities and their capacity to exert social control over their neighborhoods.

Community Violence Intervention (CVI) Plan Description

The CVI plan will start as a pilot program in 2023, engaging with fifty (50) individuals identified by both community gun violence intervention program staff and law enforcement as the drivers of gun violence in Syracuse. This represents about 4% of all people associated with gangs in Syracuse. A pilot approach will allow the Mayor's Office to Reduce Gun Violence to improve current methodology and introduce and test national strategies new to our community. This process will strengthen our ability to further assess and evaluate the services delivered in order to expand services deemed effective and modify or eliminate those that are not. Such an approach allows us to develop an effective and cost-efficient program that meets the ultimate goal of saving lives.

The plan will be implemented primarily through outreach organizations and under the coordination of the Mayor's Office to Reduce Gun Violence. This implementation strategy will increase cooperation among community-based organizations, fill current gaps in their services, and tap into their extensive expertise and legitimacy. Furthermore, it will increase these organizations' capabilities, which is critical to long term service stability.

Lastly, this plan will be reinforced by an effort from multiple city departments to address the physical features that increase violent crime risks in the city's high-crime areas. Through Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED), we propose a series of actions and investments to improve and secure blighted properties, increase street lighting in dark street segments, clean littered areas, and trim overgrown vegetation.

Activities

Conflict Management: This is a mechanism to track, interrupt, and solve conflicts between gangs before violence occurs. Hired outreach workers will stay in constant contact with individuals, tracking possible sources of conflicts and stepping in to solve these issues before they spiral into violence.

This service will be facilitated in spaces where gang associates can openly discuss their disagreements and are humanized in their rivals' eyes. We plan to flesh out the critical elements of the intractable conflicts between these groups and facilitate agreements to address them.

This program should generate a constant stream of peaceful solutions to new and old conflicts between individuals/groups. It will shed light on the underlying factors driving the rivalries and mobilize dialogue among groups and communities to address these causes and reach peaceful agreements.

Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT): Cognitive behavioral therapy helps to reduce self-destructive beliefs and behaviors and promotes positive ones. In it, the therapist works with the individual to identify biased thoughts that result in violent activity, learn new ways to interpret experiences realistically, and control their reactions. In other words, with CBT, individuals become aware that they can be quite wrong in their characterizations of other people, their motives, and the meaning of their actions. Furthermore, the therapist uses tools to help the patient change their thinking and behavior, such as anger management techniques or problem-solving skills. Using these tools, they embark on gradual activities to improve their behavior.

This therapy is highly effective in reducing criminal behavior among high-risk individuals. In a review of 58 treatment programs, Mark W Lipsey, et al. found that CBT reduces recidivism rates by 25% on average. Moreover, the programs with the highest implementation quality achieved reductions of 50% in recidivism rates. Furthermore, CBT shows long-term positive effects.

Culturally appropriate licensed therapists will provide this service. These therapists must be trained in CBT, given how important this is for the long-term effectiveness. The therapy will be provided in groups of five to seven individuals to ensure that social pressure favors the intervention. These groups will be

composed of individuals involved in gang activity. A therapist will lead several groups and provide two to three weekly therapy sessions for eight to twelve weeks.

Mentorship/Case Management: This is a program to provide caring, supervision, guidance, and advocacy/referrals for individuals. Mentors are assigned to each individual to establish a positive relationship, identifying the individual's needs, concerns, strengths, and aspirations. With this information, the mentor must provide emotional support and promote self-efficacy, confidence, and belonging. Also, the mentor must advocate for the individual and guide them through various systems and settings, such as courts or schools, to ensure fair treatment, help them navigate through these, get critical services, and achieve their goals.

Furthermore, the mentor should constantly track their individual's progress through the different programs of this policy and collect critical information. The mentor must ensure that their mentees attend all activities and avoid violent behavior. In that sense, the mentor will also act as a case manager for the individual. This program will produce a mentorship service that provides emotional support, healthy thinking patterns, supervision, and advocacy.

Economic opportunity:

Stipend: This program is a "conditioned monetary transfer" for gang associates of one hundred dollars per week. The primary purpose of this program is to alleviate their poverty condition. As determined by the crime assessment, gun violence is not driven by drug activity. The fact is those involved in drug sales steer clear violent activity as much as possible as it is "bad for business".

By providing them with this stipend, we will ensure that they have a stable source of income to cover their basic needs, allowing them to engage successfully in all other activities of this policy. Cash transfers are one of the most widespread strategies to fight poverty worldwide, with thoroughly documented positive impacts. The condition for receiving the transfer is to avoid violent criminal behavior and engage in all other initiative activities. Therefore, this stipend will act as an accountability mechanism to ensure gang associates engage in positive behavior. Moreover, this stipend is a powerful incentive for participants to enter and stay in our different programs.

Job training and placement: This is a program to teach professional skills and place gang associates in well-paid jobs. They will begin this program after they have gone through part of the socialization interventions of this policy. CNY Works will implement this program.

In that sense, once gang associates have modified their thinking patterns and negative behaviors, they will receive services which establish goals and a professional plan. Multiple job training organizations that will assist with training, guidance, job search, and placement, using their expertise, services, and contact network.

This program has two goals. The first is that gang associates achieve economic independence and personal fulfillment with a stable, well-paid job. The second is establishing a positive reinforcing mechanism that allows them to excel with newly acquired social skills.

School re-entry: This is a complementary activity for the job training and placement program. In it, the mentors will help gang associates re-enter the school/educational system. The Mayor's Office to Reduce Gun Violence will collaborate with the mentors by providing high-level contacts and coordination with the school district and/or appropriate educational setting. This is intended for those gang associates who want or need to earn their high school diploma or GED to enter the job training and placement program.

As a further action for those who want to advance in their academic goals, the Mayor's Office to Reduce Gun Violence and mentors will also assist a subset of the target population interested in pursuing secondary educational institutions.

This activity aims to expose gang associates to environments where they will be rewarded for prosocial behavior, acquire positive relationships, find personal fulfillment, and practice their new behaviors and thinking patterns.

Managing the Process

Stakeholders

Mayor's Office to Reduce Gun Violence (MORGV): The city agency in charge of oversight, funding provision, payment authorization, and strategic leadership of this program.

Providers: Every person or organization who participates in service provision within this program's scope. Such as mentorship, conflict management, cognitive-behavioral therapy, credible messaging, job training, job placement, stipend transference, or school re-enrollment. These include community-based organizations specialize in violence prevention and interaction with high-risk youth.

Central New York Crime Analysis Center (CNYCAC): For this program, it is the government agency in charge of providing criminal activity and law enforcement contact data regarding clients. It also provides the preliminary client list and the criteria to define the clients' risk level.

SPD: The primary law enforcement agency of Syracuse, who will provide information and on-the-ground coordination to guarantee the program's success.

Syracuse Community: the ultimate stakeholders needed to support the program.

Communication

The MORGV will establish a shared portal to ensure efficient program communication and provide an email address that will be the main point of communication between them and the providers. All official, non-emergency communications shall go through this email address. The MORGV will also provide a phone number for emergency communications.

Each provider will define a project manager before the start of the contract. This project manager will be the point of contact between the MORGV and the providers and provide an email address that will be the primary contact channel between the provider and the MORGV. Also, the project manager will

provide a phone number for emergencies.

Using the indicators of each part of the program, the MORGV will establish a data-sharing agreement with each provider before the start of the contract. The provider will periodically (on a weekly or biweekly basis) share this information with the MORGV using official communication channels. The data-sharing agreement will establish the format in which this information will be shared.

Tentative Program Meeting Schedule

Coordination:

Purpose: Review progress, identify roadblocks, and adjust actions for each part of the program.

Frequency: Weekly

Attendees: MORGV and each provider responsible for a part of the program. The MORGV will conduct a meeting with each provider separately.

Duration: 30-60 minutes.

Regular contract check-in:

Purpose: Discuss progress against high-priority indicators, follow-up on action items, joint troubleshooting of problems, and summarize learnings.

Frequency: Biweekly.

Attendees: MORGV, CNYCAC, and providers. Also, other relevant stakeholders to solve problems or improve progress.

Duration: 1 hour.

In-depth meetings:

Purpose: Analysis of topics critical for the program's success and establishing action plans

Periodicity: Monthly

Attendees: The MORGV, CNYCAC, and providers. Also, other relevant stakeholders to solve problems or improve progress.

Duration: 1 to 2 hours.

Measuring our Success

Our overall goal is to reduce incidents of gun violence in Syracuse. The program will adopt the mechanism used throughout City of Syracuse operations: Objective and Key Results (OKRs). OKRs are the way we will set goals and use objectives (what we want to achieve) and identify key results (metric to measure objective achievement).

The program will establish performance plans for each contracted organization:

Description: These are plans focused on tackling topics and practices that are critical to success but may not be regularly reported to or reviewed in periodic contract reviews. They are intensely proactive activities that will increase the program's productivity and effectiveness. Topics include key referrals, defining performance metrics, or communication between providers. These roadmaps will distribute responsibilities between providers and the MORGV.

Methodology: These plans and their objectives will be discussed in monthly in-depth meetings. Given the nature of the topics to be addressed, participants will discuss their essential elements, the main stakeholders, and a set of ideas to solve these. Following this discussion, participants will build a 1-month plan to address this problem with weekly milestones and specific responsibilities. These plans will determine core workstreams, problems to solve, and essential deliverables.

Coordination and implementation: The progress of these plans will be checked on the biweekly contract check-ins and the stand-up coordination meetings. The group will adjust the plan as it implements in these meetings. At the end of each month, the results of the plan will be shared in the monthly in-depth meetings, and the team will decide if the plan was successful or not. If it were, they would move on to new topics. If it isn't, they will build another roadmap and adjust according to what they learned until the issue is addressed.

Conclusion

The persistently high levels of violent crime in Syracuse are a unique challenge. Multiple causes drive this issue. Also, it doesn't have a straightforward solution and requires collective action and experimentation. With this policy, we will pilot test solutions this problem requires.

This plan seeks to help gang associates change the trajectory of their lives. The approach relies heavily on collective action and intends to build capabilities within community-based organizations. Ultimately, our goal is to discover an approach to reduce violent conflicts while we strengthen the communities that have suffered violence disproportionately in the past. If we are successful in 2023, we will have a clear path to enduring peace in the streets of Syracuse.