

Operating and Managing Street Outreach Services

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Increasingly, cities have added street outreach to the mix of strategies used in comprehensive gang reduction efforts, drawing upon mounting evidence of impact. Street outreach relies on street workers to support and advocate on behalf of gang members, or those at high risk of joining gang, to change behavior patterns and link them to needed services and institutions. Street outreach workers work day and night to link marginalized and hard-to-serve individuals in communities with high levels of gang activity to social services, and play an important role in diffusing and stopping violence (Decker, Bynum, McDevitt, Farrell, & Varano, 2008; Spergel, 1966; Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention [OJJDP], 2002). These workers reach out to targeted community members at their homes, community events, on street corners, in parks, and in any neighborhood spaces where community members in gangs or at risk of joining gangs spend time (OJJDP, 2002, p. 54). Outreach workers often possess intimate familiarity with the communities in which they work. Their knowledge and skills allow them to work with individuals whom traditional service providers cannot access or support.

California Cities Gang Prevention Network cities (the Network or CCGPN) note that street outreach services are an important piece of their cities' primary intervention strategies, with ties to prevention and enforcement. Cities such as Stockton provide prevention-oriented outreach to clients at risk of gang involvement. Other Network cities, including San Francisco, follow the Chicago CeaseFire model—a violence reduction model that treats violence as a learned behavior that can be prevented using disease control methods. The Chicago Ceasefire approach directs outreach workers to prevent retaliation and intervene in conflicts to prevent escalation to violence.

Like Network cities, High Point, North Carolina, and Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, use outreach services as a promising component of their cities' crime prevention and intervention strategies. As a collaborative, community-based approach aiming to combat open-air drug markets, the High Point initiative employs outreach services to establish relationships and provide services to low-level street drug dealers and their families (Bass, 2009; Kennedy, 2007; Schoofs, 2008). Similarly, in Rio de Janeiro, outreach workers work closely with street children involved with the drug

trade to provide them with housing and services, and to stifle gang activity (Sauma, 2008).

Cities likely face several challenges when implementing and sustaining outreach programs. In particular, they find it challenging to operate and manage outreach services. Operating an outreach program can include dealing with a variety of dangers. Without weapons or bulletproof vests, outreach workers insert themselves into dangerous and violent situations to prevent or stop violence; they risk and sometimes become the targets of gang violence (Bass, 2008; Decker, 2011; Fenton, 2009). Operating an outreach program also involves securing and maintaining healthy relationships with law enforcement and communities. For outreach workers to perform their duties, law enforcement must be supportive and knowledgeable about the role and function of outreach workers. They must also be comfortable working with outreach workers with criminal records, in addition to not pressuring outreach workers to serve as an extension of law enforcement. If law enforcement and outreach programs do not mutually trust each other, it can reduce an outreach organization's credibility among the community it serves and, consequently, its ability to reduce violence (Bass, 2009). A common fear among Network cities is outreach workers being arrested or misrepresenting their outreach organization. Such incidents could create negative credibility for cities and outreach organizations among important partners like the police department, the community, and clients.

Maintaining a fully staffed outreach program is a longstanding challenge. Outreach work is inevitably stressful because it exposes outreach workers to dangerous and traumatic events. Because of the risky and stressful nature of outreach work, many outreach workers leave the profession after only a few years. Consequentially, outreach programs must make every effort to support and sustain current workers, and at the same time prepare to hire and train new outreach workers.

This bulletin briefly explores the different types of outreach services that currently exist. Additionally, with examples from Network cities such as Richmond, San Francisco, and Oakland, as well as from outreach programs in High Point, North Carolina; Boston, Massachusetts; and Chicago, Illinois, this bulletin identifies ways outreach programs can strategically support, care for, and hire outreach workers as a way of managing the challenges of implementing an outreach program.

Network Publications on Outreach Services

The Network has three additional publications related to outreach services available on its website, ccgpn.org. The California Cities Gang Prevention Network Bulletin 7 spotlights the organizations that have employed former gang members for outreach services and their recommendations regarding street worker programs. Based on site visits to promising programs, a survey of California-based outreach programs, and extensive review of the literature, *Developing a Successful Street Outreach Program: Recommendations and Lessons Learned* offers an extensive set of recommendations for street outreach programs. *Preventing Gang Violence and Building Communities Where Young People Thrive: A Toolkit for Municipal Leaders* provides recommendations and strategies for cities wishing to set up a street outreach program.

New Network Publications on Prevention, Reentry, and Evaluation

The Network has released three new Municipal Action Guides: “Fully Incorporating Prevention in Comprehensive Youth Violence Reduction Strategies,” “Evaluating Comprehensive Strategies to Reduce Gang-related Violence,” and “Reducing Gang Violence Through Reentry Services.”

The Municipal Action Guides aim to support and strengthen Network cities’ comprehensive gang violence prevention strategies, as well as cities interested in implementing comprehensive interventions across the nation. Each Municipal Action Guide identifies specific challenges in violence prevention, program evaluation, and gang reentry. The guides also outline strategies for addressing these challenges, examples of effective city practices and programs, and helpful resources. Network cities featured in the Municipal Action Guides include Los Angeles, Oakland, San Bernardino, San Diego, San Francisco, San Jose, and Santa Rosa.

Supporting and Caring for Outreach Workers

Outreach workers work closely and personally with gang-affiliated individuals. In some cases, they work with clients in violent or stressful situations. It is critical that cities support and care for their outreach workers’ welfare. Devone Boggan, Executive Director of Richmond, California’s Office of Neighborhood Safety (ONS); Kevin Muccular and Sam Vaughn, ONS outreach workers; Diana Oliva-Aroche, Network city leader and the Planning and Policy Manager at the City and County

of San Francisco’s Department of Children, Youth, and Families (DCYF); and Kevin Grant, Oakland’s Street Outreach Program Coordinator, shared perspectives for this Bulletin about how their cities support and care for outreach workers.

On average, outreach workers conduct direct outreach services for a maximum of three years, notes Oliva-Aroche. This turnover rate, symptomatic of the trauma, stress, and burnout that are inevitable parts of the job, indicates the need for outreach programs to have a built-in support system for staff. With adequate support, outreach programs can expand the timeframe and quality of their outreach workers’ employment. For the benefit of workers and the individuals they serve, outreach programs can provide their staff with built-in support systems that include caring for outreach workers’ well-being, career development opportunities, and evidence of their success through evaluation.

Caring for Outreach Workers’ Well-being

The well-being of outreach workers should be a priority for any outreach program. This support demonstrates to outreach workers that their programs care about workers’ welfare just as they care about the welfare of the individuals they serve. Caring for the well-being of outreach workers can be done through counseling, group processing, and access to professional mental help support, particularly in times of trauma and crisis. Whereas these support services may increase the cost of outreach services, cost can be minimal and may be offset by extending the longevity of outreach workers.

Boggan provides his outreach workers with a variety of low-cost and free support services. Currently the ONS cares for the well-being of their outreach workers through counseling services from Presbyterian ministers and traditional therapists, as well as group processing opportunities through an “elders’ circle” and the establishment of a stress reduction protocol at the ONS. However, ONS is, as Mr. Boggan noted, “learning all the time” about the best ways to support outreach workers.

ONS outreach workers have access to two types of counseling services. Because the City of Richmond embedded the ONS as a city office, outreach workers, as city employees, have access to individualized counseling opportunities provided by the city. If interested or needed, outreach workers have the options of seeking these services out. Presbyterian ministers from the Community Presbyterian Counseling Center in Danville, California, also provide Richmond’s outreach workers with free counseling. The Presbyterian ministers and staff come to Richmond and work with ONS staff, in small or large groups, on topical issues including negotiating trauma, addiction, and personality disorders. Once a month, outreach workers go to Danville to receive individualized counseling from the Presbyterian ministers. Unlike the counseling provided by the City of Richmond, counseling services from the Community Presbyterian Counseling Center are mandatory for all ONS outreach staff.

The elders' circle, ONS's group processing strategy, provides Richmond's outreach team, the clients they serve, and professional African American men (between the ages of 48 and 75, including retired police officers and university professors) with a safe space in which to address important issues. The group gets together twice a month outside of Richmond to discuss and receive guidance on a myriad of things including stress and the impact of violence. Group participants engage in honest discussions about issues that affect, in some way or other, all of the men regardless of age or class differences. Through these elders' circles, outreach workers are able to establish mentorship relationships with the elders, strengthen their relationship with their clients, and develop life skills for coping with, for example, the impact of stress from relationships and balancing their work and personal life.

To institutionalize the importance of outreach workers' well-being in the ONS, Boggan developed a trauma and stress reduction protocol. The ONS pays its staff to participate in a group activity outside of the City of Richmond on the last Friday of every month. On this weekend outreach workers get the weekend off with pay. They are required to choose a location and an activity that they can all enjoy. On that Saturday and Sunday, staff are free to do what they wish. During these weekends, Boggan takes over his outreach staff's duties. Boggan raises funds to pay for the costs associated with this stress reduction protocol.

With the help of the community and local university, the City and County of San Francisco have also, like Richmond, managed to balance cost-effectiveness and customized individual support for their outreach workers. The City and County provide outreach workers with community-based, culturally specific support, as well as individualized, conventional mental health support.

With the help of the community and local university, the City and County of San Francisco have also, like Richmond, managed to balance cost-effectiveness and customized individual support for their outreach workers. San Francisco's street outreach workers receive community-based, culturally specific support, as well as individualized, conventional mental health support.

With the support of local community and faith-based organizations, outreach workers in San Francisco have access to culturally specific support. The City and County of San Francisco, Department of Children, Youth and Their Families funds, but does not directly manage, two street outreach programs to cover street/crisis response services throughout the city. San Francisco's outreach services and outreach support systems are organized into two very diverse and culturally rich geographical areas. Given the geographic and cultural differences, the support outreach workers receive reflects the community where they work. For example, some community based organizations provide outreach workers with the opportunity to participate in one-on-one consultations with mental health therapists and opportunities to interact in cognitive behavioral therapy groups to assure a place to process all incidences of violence which, in

some cases, include witnessing death. Given the rich diversity of cultures in San Francisco, some providers also encourage less westernized methodologies of therapy; they work closely with spiritual leaders from various denominations to heal the spirit, per say, and to enhance the health and well-being multicultural/multiracial outreach staff.

Additionally, in partnership with the University of California–San Francisco, the City and County of San Francisco also adapted a model originally used for medical students to serve the needs of its outreach workers, titled "Healing the Healers." The American Medical Student Association promotes this program as a way for medical students to care for their own health. The program intends to challenge medical students to explore how they define and care for their own health. In San Francisco, Healing the Healers was designed as a 10-week program that exposed outreach workers to different things they could do for themselves to care for their well-being. During the program, outreach workers and case managers attended different self-care activities, including Eastern medicine, group processing, and conversation with a mental health professional.

Oakland, compared to Richmond and San Francisco, is in the early stages of developing an official support system for its outreach workers. In the past, Oakland would utilize staff check-in meetings to engage in a discussion about the stressors experienced in and outside of the field. However, the city is now working on formalizing its support systems. To rotate outreach staffs' schedules, Oakland has hired more outreach workers. Kevin Grant, Oakland's outreach coordinator, hopes that having a pool of workers to pull from will alleviate the outreach workers' workload and stress. Additionally, Oakland is working with its outreach staff to identify and developing what will become five mandatory trainings on stress and burnout. The City of Oakland is also looking into developing a protocol that would allow outreach workers to take a weekend off every few months.

Supporting Outreach Workers Through Career Development Opportunities

Street outreach program managers acknowledge that a two- to three-year turnover period is an inevitable part of outreach work. Outreach workers should be aware of this turnover rate. Programs can remind and inform staff about the turnover rate by working with them to identify career development opportunities. For staff who may find it difficult to secure employment because of their justice-involved histories, career development opportunities are especially important.

Outreach programs' provision of career development opportunities also acknowledges the value of outreach workers, their skills, and the transferability of their skills into different fields. Muccular and Vaughn note that creating career growth opportunities (e.g., skill development, networking opportunities, and training) within and outside the organization allows outreach workers to aim toward transferring into other positions within or outside of the organization, as well as viewing outreach work as a stepping stone to a long-term career path. Outreach

workers, for example, can begin training for a managerial position within their current organization or preparing to further their education (e.g., attaining an undergraduate or advanced degree in social work).

Cities can develop career opportunities for outreach workers through training. Currently, there is no standardized curriculum for training outreach workers. Most programs rely on on-the-job training. However, in the last few years, the Advancement Project—a civil rights and policy “action tank”—and Maximum Force Enterprises—a Los Angeles–based, hands-on training institute with a focus on violence abatement, and crisis prevention/intervention—have made great advancements toward the professionalization of street outreach work through formal training.

The Advancement Project developed a 15-week training program, the Urban Peace Institute. As a strategy for changing the way law enforcement prevents and deals with gangs, the Urban Peace Institute develops teams of trained professionals, including outreach workers and law enforcement, to respond to and reduce violence in communities experiencing vast amounts of violence.

The Urban Peace Institute consists of 142 hours of basic training for entry-level gang intervention workers. Courses include orientation, direct practice, personal development, applied theory, broader policy initiatives, and concrete tasks. The advanced intervention coursework, for experienced intervention practitioners, includes fundraising, board management, prison gangs and reentry, hospital-based intervention, and summer safety strategies.

Maximum Force Enterprises, like the Advancement Project, created its own training institute in Los Angeles, the Professional Community Intervention Training Institute. The Institute’s goals are to professionalize gang interventionists and violence intervention specialists, and to develop uniform guidelines for behavior among these workers. The Institute consists of a 16-week training curriculum covering a variety of topics and hands-on exercises. Topics include conflict resolution, anger management, make-up of gangs, legal gang injunctions, legal use of force, family engagement, crisis management, appropriate street behavior, the need for evaluation, and the importance of record keeping. Participants demonstrate their learned skills in scenarios and exams. The training also covers the importance of relationship building among gang/violence intervention specialists, and includes visits from partners such as law enforcement, probation, the public defender’s office, and county social services. The Institute is in the process of developing a manual of operations, including standard operating procedures and standard operating guidelines.

Supporting Outreach Workers Through Feedback and Evaluation

Evaluation can support outreach work by utilizing research to validate and reinforce the positive impact of outreach services on communities and individuals, a helpful reminder for outreach workers who may be frustrated by the inability to see immediate outcomes. Oakland’s evaluation of its city-funded outreach programs, the National Institute of Justice (NIJ)-funded evaluation of North Carolina’s High Point intervention, and Northwestern University’s evaluation of Chicago’s CeaseFire intervention are examples of how evaluation can demonstrate the positive impact outreach services can have on communities. Oakland’s evaluation found that outreach services appeared to reduce violence in two communities. NIJ’s evaluation of the High Point intervention showed that the intervention significantly decreased the violence and crime associated with open-air drug dealing. Northwestern University’s evaluations showed that Chicago’s CeaseFire intervention appeared to reduce violence and that outreach services were a key component of this success.

On May 9 and 10, 2011, the National Council on Crime and Delinquency (NCCD) and the National League of Cities’ Institute for Youth, Education, and Families hosted a meeting with five Network cities that have evaluated their comprehensive violence prevention plans. The purpose of the meeting was to develop “recommendations from the field” for evaluating comprehensive gang prevention and reduction initiatives. As a result of this meeting, a CCGPN publication summarizing evaluation principles for comprehensive efforts will be published this summer.

The City of Oakland (2010) contracted with evaluators to analyze existing data on crime and service provision to understand if outreach services achieved their goal of reducing violence at the neighborhood level. Oakland utilized a crime-trend analysis to examine the impact of its city-funded street outreach teams. Analysis focused on three locations, called “hotspots,” that were known for pervasive violence. Evaluators looked at the relationship between crime trends and the number of hours of outreach service provision in each of the hot spots. They compared crime trends in these hotspots to the average crime in an average Oakland beat. Evaluators also compared crime trends to the number of hours of street outreach dedicated to the hotspot per month.

Although outreach services did not appear to affect one of the three locations evaluated by Oakland, two evaluated locations had promising findings. Evaluators found that the pattern of outreach service was inversely related to crime in an East Oakland hotspot; an increase in outreach services was followed by declines in crime, and decreases in outreach services were

followed by increases in crime. Furthermore, in a West Oakland hotspot, evaluators found that an intensification of outreach services in the month of March appeared to reduce crime in April and May. Although Oakland's evaluation showed mixed results, the predominantly positive findings allowed the city of Oakland to point out specific areas in which outreach services were showing the greatest success.

Like Oakland, the High Point intervention was able to utilize evaluation to publicize its program's success. With the financial support of NIJ, the University of North Carolina at Greensboro began evaluating the intervention in High Point. The evaluation of the High Point intervention focuses on documenting the process that occurred; tracking the intervention's quantitative and qualitative outcomes; and conducting a cost-benefit analysis. Preliminary results are promising. The researchers have found that in the four years since the implementation of the High Point intervention, one High Point neighborhood experienced a decline in violent crime by an average of 39% as well as a 30% decline in drug crime (Kennedy, 2007).

With these promising findings, the evaluation has brought a lot of attention to the High Point intervention. The High Point Police Department received the 2007 Innovations in American Government Award from the Ash Institute for Democratic Governance and Innovation at Harvard University's Kennedy School of Government and \$100,000 to promote replication of its strategy and share best practices around the country (John Jay College of Criminal Justice, 2007). The evaluation findings, the acknowledgement from Harvard, and the opportunity to disseminate the High Point initiative reinforced the effectiveness outreach services have on reducing crime.

As with the High Point and Oakland evaluations, a team of researchers from Northwestern University (Skogan, Hartnett, Bump, & Dubois, 2008) utilized evaluation to examine whether street outreach can reduce violence. The Northwestern University research team conducted a comprehensive three-year study that found definitive evidence that Chicago's CeaseFire program, including its outreach worker component by comparing neighborhood strategies, was reducing violence.

The Northwestern evaluation found that CeaseFire target areas, when compared to similar non-CeaseFire target areas, showed reductions in shootings, gang involvement in homicides, retaliatory murders, and a "cooling" of hotspots. Moreover, the evaluation found that CeaseFire's outreach workers were able to address the needs of gang members and at-risk individuals. Outreach workers helped clients return to school, find jobs, or receive treatment for a drug problem.

The evaluation of Chicago's CeaseFire program showed that outreach work plays an important role in reducing violence. It also positioned the CeaseFire outreach component as an evidence-based approach to violence reduction.

Hiring Outreach Workers

As with supporting and caring for outreach workers, developing organizational standards for hiring and contracting workers is an important and proactive way to manage challenges. Hiring standards can protect the outreach program and its employees' reputation. Additionally, hiring standards can ease the ongoing process of hiring new workers. Oakland's Street Outreach Program Coordinator, Kevin Grant, and Ralph Womack of Stockton, California's Operation Peacekeeper identified six key components for hiring and employing outreach workers:

- *Identify the qualities needed in an outreach worker.* This step is important for filtering applicants and for securing the best match among the hiring or contracting organization, the community being served, and the prospective employee. Generally, the best outreach workers are individuals who are flexible, passionate, and committed to the work that they do. They must also be willing and able to work with law enforcement. Often, the ideal candidates are already doing outreach-like work independently. However, qualifications must also be informed by the contracting or hiring organization's goals and needs. Knowing the goals of the program and its intended clients will help determine who is an appropriate outreach worker. It is also at this stage that the hiring organization should begin to consider whether it has an interest in hiring an individual who is an ex-felon or gang member, and whether the law enforcement community will accept such a person.
- *Create a hiring panel* to establish healthy relationships with stakeholders and to protect the integrity of the hiring organization and its workers. Hiring panels typically include program staff, law enforcement, the probation department, school representatives, and community leaders. These panels play an important role in informing what final candidate should fill the outreach position. For example, law enforcement officials can provide past and current history of candidates with prior gang involvement. Additionally, in the event that a worker is arrested, the organization will be better protected from suspicion of involvement and possible loss of credibility.
- *Screen candidates* via a multi-step process. In the earlier stages of the hiring process, organizations can screen out candidates due to lack of experience or lack of background with outreach work. In some cases—for example, when contracting services or because of funding and partnership restrictions—pre-established criteria automatically screen out candidates. These criteria include sexual offenses, outstanding warrants, and pending criminal charges.

The later stages of the screening process can be more complex. This is especially true if an agency is interested in hiring an ex-offender or an ex-gang member. In this case, organizations may need to take measures like background checks and drug testing before making the final hiring

decision. It is important to note that there is always the possibility that an ex-offender or ex-gang member may recidivate, regardless of screening.

- *Conduct background checks and drug testing* to help filter candidates. Background checks provide assurance that potential hires are no longer involved in criminal activity. Drug testing may eliminate candidates and ensure that outreach workers are sending a consistent and positive message to the clients with whom they are working. However, some organizations' experience suggests that strict adherence to this requirement can eliminate too many candidates, especially when marijuana use is considered.
- *Think outside of traditional human resources hiring criteria.* As Kevin Grant pointed out on December 15, 2010, during the Network's monthly conference call, the qualifications needed for outreach work, as well as the management of outreach workers, must change and evolve to reflect the needs of the outreach organization and the community. Given the background of some applicants, it is important to maintain an open mind when hiring an outreach worker with gang or criminal experiences.
- *Provide full benefits*, including a fair wage and medical, dental, and life insurance, to retain successful outreach workers and thus increase positive outcomes for clients. Workers with street experience often have a very limited amount of legitimate work experience. Providing workers with a fair wage and benefits, career development opportunities, and caring for their well-being are essential to limiting turnover among staff. More importantly, generous benefits are essential for workers, who often risk their lives for the program.

Implementing these six components can support outreach staff and help optimize program success. Together, these hiring and employment procedures can maintain the reputation of an organization and ensure that outreach workers feel fully supported. This will not only maintain a positive internal organizational environment, but a positive relationship among the outreach organization, local stakeholders, and the community as well.

Conclusion

Although cities providing street outreach services face some challenges, outreach services are an essential part of comprehensive initiatives that incorporate prevention, intervention, and suppression. As the Chicago CeaseFire and High Point evaluations have shown, outreach programs work! Because of this, undertaking the challenge of operating, managing, and sustaining outreach services should be seen as a worthwhile investment.

Resources:

For additional information on programs discussed in this bulletin, please visit:

- Boston Center for Youth and Families' Streetworker Program (Boston, MA)
www.cityofboston.gov/BCYF/
- Chicago CeaseFire (Chicago, IL)
www.ceasefirechicago.org/
- Healing the Healers
www.amsa.org/healingthehealer
- High Point, North Carolina
<http://www.nij.gov/nij/journals/262/high-point-intervention.htm>
- Maximum Force Enterprises (Los Angeles, CA)
www.maximumforceenterprises.com/
- The Advancement Project
www.advancementproject.org/

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The National Council on Crime and Delinquency (NCCD), in partnership with the National League of Cities' Institute for Youth, Education and Families (YEF Institute), launched the California Cities Gang Prevention Network to reduce gang violence and victimization, mortality and morbidity, and to develop a statewide policy agenda to abet promising local efforts. NCCD promotes just and equitable social systems for individuals, families, and communities through research, public policy, and practice. The YEF Institute helps municipal leaders take action on behalf of children, youth, and families.

Major funding for the California Cities Gang Prevention Network Project comes from grants from The California Endowment and The California Wellness Foundation, with support from Kaiser Permanente, the East Bay Community Foundation, the Richmond Children's Foundation, and The Evelyn and Walter Haas Jr. Fund.

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