Evaluation of Strategic Work Plan:
Salinas Comprehensive Strategy for Community-Wide Violence Reduction

Executive Summary

Introduction

Evaluation Purpose and Methods

The National Council on Crime and Delinquency (NCCD), a nonprofit social research organization, conducted a process and outcome evaluation of the Salinas Comprehensive Strategy for Community-Wide Violence Reduction (also known as the Strategic Work Plan) from 2012 to 2014. NCCD looked at elements from both the 2010–2012 Strategic Work Plan and the updated 2013–2018 Strategic Work Plan for the evaluation. The Strategic Work Plan was developed by the Community Alliance for Safety and Peace (CASP), a coalition of organizations and leaders from the Salinas, California, area. The plan aimed to strategically address gang violence issues facing the City of Salinas, with an initial focus on the Hebron Heights neighborhood, a high-density residential area with high levels of crime, violence, and poverty with the potential to undergo significant community transformation. With support from the city, CASP, the Salinas Police Department, and other key community stakeholders, NCCD’s evaluation was guided by the principles of participatory research and community psychology. Evaluation methods included interviewing a range of stakeholders, analyzing a data extract from the Salinas Police Department, and reviewing secondary data.

Responses to Violence in Salinas

For many years, Monterey County and the City of Salinas in particular have faced significant gang and youth violence problems. For much of the last decade, the county’s annual homicide rate has either been similar to or noticeably higher than the statewide homicide rate. After trending upward since 2006, the county’s rate peaked in 2009, with 12.3 homicides per 100,000 population. From 2011 to 2013, the homicide rate increased slightly on a year-to-year basis and remains substantially higher than the corresponding state rate (California Department of Justice, 2013;
The Strategic Work Plan

Development of the Strategic Work Plan

The Strategic Work Plan is the result of diversified partnerships and linkages across many organizations. In 2010, the City of Salinas received federal funds from the National Forum on Youth Violence Prevention to assemble collaborative efforts to combat the community’s youth violence problems. This included consulting with teams from the Middlebury Institute of International Studies at Monterey and the Naval Postgraduate School (NPS), also located in Monterey, California, and convening several community listening sessions with Hebbron Heights residents. Drawing on these interactions, a multidisciplinary subcommittee of CASP led a comprehensive effort to develop the original Strategic Work Plan. Based on further community input, the City of Salinas and CASP updated the plan, resulting in the 2013–2018 Strategic Work Plan.

The Strategic Work Plan is based on four key principles:

1. A single operational structure manages action and progress.
2. Action is research- and data-driven.
3. The youth are at the center.
4. There is deep and meaningful engagement with the community.

CASP members explicitly crafted this plan to focus on principles that aligned mission and service for the community of Salinas to achieve peace. The work plan also outlines goals, strategies, activities, timelines, and performance measures in six critical focus points—or problem areas—related to the underlying causes of youth and gang violence in Salinas:

1. Social and economic conditions
2. Engaging and supervising youth
3. Environmental design and urban planning
4. Law enforcement

California Department of Justice, 2014). In particular, Latino young men in the county are strongly impacted by lethal violence. From 2009 to 2012, 89 youth were homicide victims in Monterey County; 92% of these victims were Hispanic and 93% were male (Violence Policy Center, 2011; Violence Policy Center, 2012; Violence Policy Center, 2013; Violence Policy Center, 2014).

Various strategies have been implemented in response to the violence in Salinas. This includes the formation of CASP and the creation of the City of Salinas’ Community Safety Division. CASP was formed in 2008 by the City of Salinas’ Community Safety Alliance and the Violence Prevention Subcommittee of the Monterey County Children’s Council as a coalition of city and county organizations working collaboratively to reduce violence in the community. As of September 2014, nearly 70 organizations and leaders, including 14 individuals, 41 community-based organizations (CBOs), four city departments, and eight county departments, were CASP members, with approximately 45 of these being active members (e.g., regularly attending CASP meetings). In 2011, following the publication of the Strategic Work Plan, the Salinas City Council created the Salinas Community Safety Division, which manages, organizes, and coordinates the daily operation of CASP and implementation of the work plan.
5. Education and schools
6. Impact of drugs and alcohol

Each critical focus point has one overarching goal designed to address violence with a holistic approach, centering on youth, family, and community.

Implementation of the Strategic Work Plan Interventions and Services
In 2010, the Salinas Police Department and CASP identified the Hebbron Heights neighborhood of East Salinas as a pilot site for implementing the Strategic Work Plan. The plan’s implementation in Hebbron Heights consists of three primary interventions that complement each other: 1) the Cross Functional Team (CFT); 2) community-based policing; and 3) the Leadership Academy.

Serving Hebbron Youth and Families: CFT
The CFT, created by CASP and NPS, is a team of organizations in the Monterey County and Salinas region that coordinates provision of services for Hebbron Heights residents, focusing on at-risk youth (ages 12 to 18) and their families. The CFT is composed of CASP member organizations who provide or have access to various services in the Salinas community. The CFT meets twice a month to review clients' cases and determine the services and actions that can best provide support for these individuals.

To assess the CFT’s effectiveness, NCCD interviewed six CFT members about their experiences participating in the CFT and CASP. Interviewees stated that both the CFT and CASP provide useful opportunities for networking and collaboration. “The CFT brings together people from [multiple] places. We get people from different agencies working toward the same efforts,” one member said. CFT members also expressed the desire to see more diverse participation in CASP and CFT, particularly by community members. In addition, NCCD interviewed six CFT clients for their perspectives on the services provided through the CFT. Most interviewees were parents of youth receiving services. Overall, most of the client interviewees articulated finding CFT services helpful, especially the relationship developed with the community police officers assigned to Hebbron Heights. Some challenges also emerged from the interviews, including a lack of communication between parents and service providers.

Community Policing in the Hebbron Heights Neighborhood
In order to build stronger relationships and improve trust between the Salinas Police Department and the Hebbron Heights community, the chief of the Salinas Police Department assigned two full-time, culturally competent, bilingual police officers to implement community policing strategies in Hebbron Heights. One of the officers’ main responsibilities is developing relationships with community members, including CFT clients. Relationship building includes providing residents with information about CASP, including CFT services; officers also provide their personal contact information in order to encourage residents to feel safe calling them. Officers recognize the importance of using a culturally competent approach with community members. “Understanding the culture and the fear is very important,” said one officer. “Words can be words, but when [a parent] is trying to express something and they are expressing it with their culture, and you are able to understand them, it helps
Crime Data From the Hebbron Neighborhood

To examine crime trends in Hebbron Heights during implementation of the Strategic Work Plan, NCCD analyzed a data extract from the Salinas Police Department. This dataset, which spans 2011 to 2014, reflects information collected from the two police reporting districts that represent the Hebbron Heights neighborhood. The data indicate a general downward pattern in several crime categories; for example, firearms offenses decreased by 44% from 2011 to 2014, and property crimes dropped 22% during this timeframe. The data also show that gang reports for violent assaults and firearms offenses increased between 2011 and 2012, but have trended downward since then. These changes may be due in part to the efforts of CASP, although no cause and effect relationship between CASP’s work in this neighborhood and any decreases in crime can be determined from this analysis. The trends seen in the data suggest that implementation of the Strategic Work Plan, as well as other local violence reduction interventions and strategies being implemented...
concurrently, may be having an impact in this community. It also is important to note that a number of additional factors, including policy changes, policing efforts, and an improving economic climate, may have contributed to these changes.

**Community Members’ Perceptions of Safety**

NCCD researchers interviewed 35 community members about their perceptions of safety in the Hebron Heights neighborhood. The majority of interviewees said they feel insecure and unsafe in their neighborhood and expressed the need for more police officers and increased vigilance by law enforcement.

**School-Based Indicators Related to Crime and Delinquency**

Some school-based indicators that may help predict involvement in crime and delinquency have shown improvement in recent years and thus may contribute to reductions in violence and improvements in community safety. For example, the high school graduation rate for the Salinas Union High School District has increased or stayed consistent for the last several years, while the dropout rate has generally decreased (California Department of Education, 2015). Suspensions and expulsions for Salinas Union High School District students have also demonstrated overall improvement (Monterey County Health Department, STRYVE).

**Major Findings of the Strategic Work Plan**

As described previously, the Strategic Work Plan is structured around four key principles. NCCD’s major findings related to each principle are outlined below.

2. **Action is research- and data-driven.** While good initial progress has been made in this area, NCCD’s research indicated that CASP’s emphasis on data-driven action could be further systematized and strengthened, including continuing to solicit information from community members about needs related to violence prevention and ways to meet these needs as well as continuing to apply research and data to the implementation of CASP interventions.

3. **The youth are at the center.** NCCD found that while CASP strives to make youth the focus of its efforts, it could sharpen its approach of situating youth at the center of its work as well as continue to involve parents and other family members in both its planning processes and its interventions.

4. **There is deep and meaningful engagement with the community.** While some CASP initiatives have been helpful in realizing the goal of community engagement, CASP could use a stronger approach in order to truly meet this goal.
Achievements of CASP and the Strategic Work Plan

NCCD’s evaluation illuminated several key findings that point to achievements of CASP and the efforts implemented through the Strategic Work Plan. First, interviewees across stakeholder groups stated that Strategic Work Plan efforts have been helpful in Hebron Heights. For example, Leadership Academy members articulated feeling more prepared to refer other community members to services than prior to their involvement. Second, the evaluation demonstrated that an array of partnerships and relationships are positively impacting CASP and its interventions. A notable achievement is the promotion of collaboration among a range of agencies and organizations. CASP members interviewed for this evaluation indicated that CASP provides useful networking, information-sharing opportunities, and coordination of services across organizations. Finally, NCCD’s interviews show that community members’ relationships with police are improving. A diverse group of interviewees agreed that Hebron Heights’ residents have developed greater trust and confidence in the police as a result of CASP efforts.

Challenges

Several challenges emerged from NCCD’s evaluation. For example, one of the most commonly voiced concerns across all stakeholder groups was the need to increase participation in the work of CASP and the Strategic Work Plan by a broader range of stakeholders. This included a pressing need to increase the involvement and engagement of community members. Some interviewees also felt that the Strategic Work Plan would benefit from greater or more consistent involvement by some partners, including education/schools, probation, and churches, as well as a wider representation of CBOs. Another challenge relates to a need for increased clarity regarding CASP’s next steps in Hebron Heights. In addition, clarity is lacking about a strategy to implement similar work in other Salinas neighborhoods. Finally, a number of interviewees indicated that communication related to Strategic Work Plan processes and interventions could be improved.
Recommendations

In order for CASP and its partners to continue advancing its initiative for community-wide violence reduction, NCCD has developed several specific recommendations for consideration. These recommendations respond directly to the challenges that emerged from the findings of the process and outcome evaluation of the Strategic Work Plan.

- **Increase the Diversity of CASP Partnerships and Participation:** NCCD recommends that CASP increase the diversity and number of partnerships and participants in its general assembly. Findings suggest that the collaborative efforts of CASP and its city and county partners would be greatly enhanced with the inclusion of more community member participants in the further development and implementation of its strategies.

- **Improve Clarity and Marketing About CASP’s Purpose:** NCCD recommends that CASP continue to clarify its purpose and goals and subsequently improve its efforts to communicate that information to stakeholders.

- **Increase the Capacity for Data and Evaluation Management and Tracking:** In order to monitor the plan’s progress and continue to identify areas for improvement, NCCD recommends that CASP increase its capacity for data and evaluation management and tracking.

- **Improve the Capacity of Service Provision in Hebbron Heights:** NCCD advises CFT to continue using existing procedures to improve integrated service delivery and communication between CFT members and clients served.

- **Secure Funding for Continued Work:** NCCD recommends that CASP and the City of Salinas explore avenues for continued funding for implementing the work plan in Hebbron Heights and beyond. Local leaders and champions of this community have directed the success of the work so far, and continued advocacy on this level must persist to secure sustained funding.

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**Photo Credits**

All photos (except those on the cover and page 2) were provided by the Community Safety Division of the City of Salinas. Photos illustrate activities provided through CASP interventions, including the Leadership Academy and community policing.
References


