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Process Evaluation for the Office of Neighborhood Safety

JULY 2015

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Acknowledgments

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Photo Credits

All photos (other than on page 1) are provided courtesy of the Office of Neighborhood Safety (ONS). The photos depict selected excursions that are part of the ONS's Operation Peacemaker Fellowship. Excursions are described in detail on p. 18 and 19 of this report.

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Introduction

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 Office of Neighborhood Safety (ONS), located in Richmond. This evaluation report describes the ONS's strategies and processes, with a focus on the office's Operation Peacemaker Fellowship. This report also 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 city of Richmond, California, is home to the Office of Neighborhood Safety.

The Problem of Gun Violence and Youth

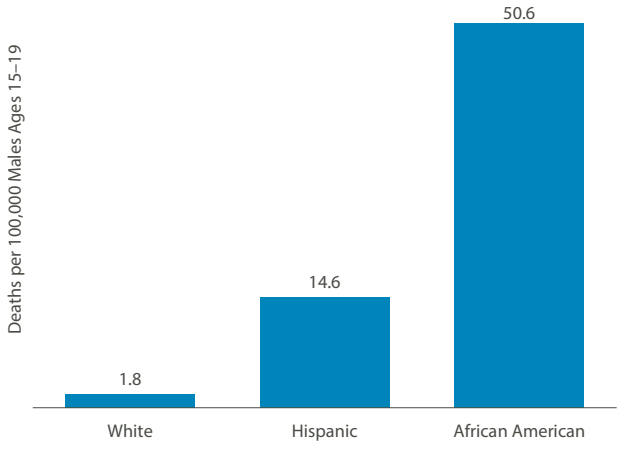
Violent victimization and exposure to gun violence has long-term, even fatal consequences for youth, particularly African American males. Research demonstrates that violence impacts African American youth, particularly boys, at much higher rates than their White and Hispanic counterparts. Nationwide in 2010, African American males between the ages of 15 and 19 were almost 30 times as likely as White males and more than three times as likely as Hispanic males of the same age to be killed in a gun homicide (see Figure 1). 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. Studies have shown that some of the most common risk factors that influence youth's involvement in gun violence are neighborhood disadvantage and exposure to community violence, high levels of early environmental and family stress, early onset of aggressive behavior, academic disengagement and school failure, poor parent-child relationships, exposure to violent media, and unsupervised access to firearms and ammunition (US Department of Health and Human Services, 2001).

Youth who are responsible for gun violence typically also commit other crimes and are commonly victims of violence themselves, encountering long-term developmental consequences.

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).

Figure 1: Homicide Gun Death Rates Among Males 15–19, by Race/Ethnicity, 2010



Source: Children's Defense Fund, 2013

A New Approach to Solving Gun Violence

With innovative services and tailored interventions, 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. By implementing unique services responsive to the Richmond community, the ONS has been able to provide targeted services to youth who would typically fall through the cracks.

The city of Richmond is located in the San Francisco Bay Area region of Northern California, situated about 17 miles northeast of San Francisco. In the years immediately leading up to the establishment of the ONS in 2007, Richmond had approximately 98,000 residents and was home to a diverse population, with the major racial groups at the time including White (34%), African American (31%), and Asian (15%). About one third (34%) of all residents were Hispanic or Latino. Of residents 25 years old and above, about 21% lacked a high school diploma. While the median household income was $50,346, about 22% of families earned less than $25,000 annually (US Census Bureau, 2005–2007). Unemployment stood at approximately 8% in 2007 (City of Richmond Planning and Building Services Department, Seifel Consulting, Inc., & Lisa Wise Consulting, Inc., 2013). As the impact of the recent recession deepened in the region, Richmond experienced double-digit unemployment rates, peaking in 2010 at 18% (City of Richmond et al., 2013). Unemployment tends to disproportionately affect African American and Hispanic/Latino communities (US Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2012).

Violent crime in Richmond also rose during this timeframe. For example, between 2003 and 2006, the number of firearm assault cases rose steadily, reaching a 13-year high in 2006. The number of homicides increased substantially from 2001 to 2007, with 2007 marking the highest number of annual homicides since 1994 (Spiker, Williams, Diggs, Heiser, & Aulston, 2007; US Department of Justice UCR data, 2007 and 2008).

During this time and after, African American youth in Richmond were strongly affected by gun violence and, as a consequence, were in dire need of attention and support from the city and service providers. Richmond homicide data aggregated for 2005 to 2012 show that 88% of homicide victims were male, 73% were African American, and 36% were between 18 and 24 years of age (US Department of Justice UCR data, 2007–2014).

While the profile of the population most affected by gun violence in Richmond remains relatively unchanged, the city's homicide levels have dropped substantially. In 2007, the year the ONS was established, Richmond was considered one of the nation's most dangerous cities, with a homicide rate of 45.9 per 100,000 residents (US Department of Justice UCR data, 2008). The 2007 average homicide rate for similarly sized cities in California, excluding Richmond, was 4.7 per 100,000 (US Department of Justice UCR data, 2008). However, since 2010, Richmond's annual

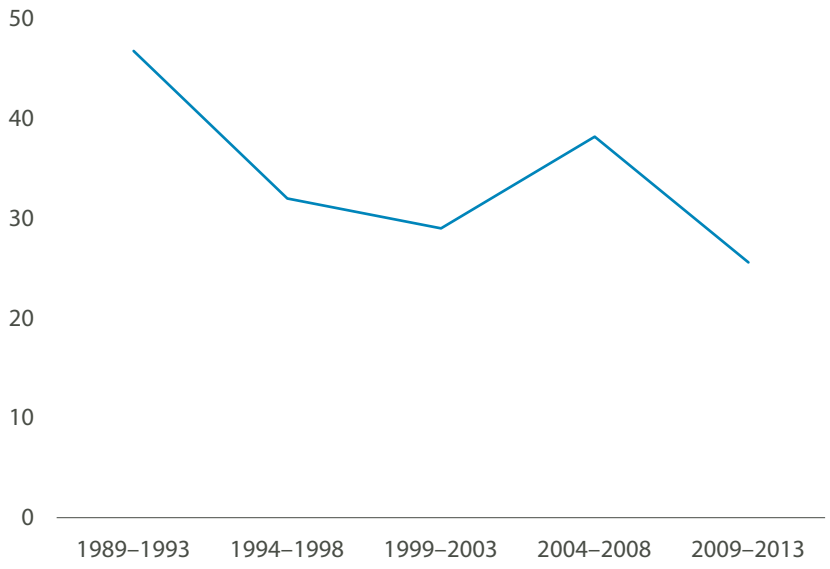
In 2007, the year the ONS was established, Richmond was considered one of the nation's most dangerous cities, with a homicide rate of 45.9 per 100,000 residents (US Department of Justice UCR data, 2008).

homicide count and rate have decreased significantly. In 2013 the city recorded 16 homicides, the lowest number it had seen in 33 years, and its lowest homicide rate—14.9 per 100,000 residents—in the city's recorded history (Rogers, 2014; US Department of Justice UCR data, 2014). While official statistics for 2014 have not yet been released, data indicate that homicides have continued to drop in Richmond, to a reported total of 11 for the year.[1] Similarly, five-year rolling or moving averages for homicides in Richmond for the last two decades indicate an overall downward trend, with some fluctuation (see Figure 2). This trend suggests that the recent declines are part of a general pattern of reduction over time and not isolated incidences. At the same time, while these rates and averages do indicate substantial local improvements, it is important to note that Richmond's homicide rate remains considerably higher than the rate for similarly sized cities. The 2013 average homicide rate for similarly sized cities in California, excluding Richmond, was 2.8 per 100,000 (US Department of Justice UCR data, 2014).

The Creation of the Office of Neighborhood Safety

As gun violence and homicides in Richmond escalated in the early to mid-2000s, it became clear that new solutions were needed to address the ongoing crisis. In 2006 the Richmond City Council created the Office of Violence Prevention (OVP). From 2006 to 2007, the OVP team—composed of consultants from The Mentoring Center, a nonprofit that connects youth to positive and caring adults for change-oriented mentoring—conducted a comprehensive planning process to assess Richmond's existing violence prevention services and gaps in services, review local crime trends and national best practices in violence prevention, and draw on this information to make recommendations for lowering the city's sustained levels of gun violence. The OVP's main findings from the planning process were that violence prevention efforts in Richmond were hindered by an overall lack of capacity, funding, and coordination; and that the

Figure 2: Homicides in Richmond—Five-Year Averages, 1989–2013



Sources: Spiker, Williams, Diggs, Heiser, & Aulston, 2007; FBI Uniform Crime Reports, 1996–2014

[1] This number is provided by ONS Director DeVone Boggan, based on information from the Richmond Police Department.

city was in a position to implement tangible, targeted solutions to stem violence (The Mentoring Center/ Office of Violence Prevention Development Team, 2007).

Based on its data gathering and research, the OVP presented a series of recommendations to the city council, one of which was the creation of an Office of Neighborhood Safety (ONS). The ONS would replace the OVP and be housed in the city manager's office. The mission of the ONS would be to strengthen and improve the safety and well-being of the Richmond community. As a result of the recommendations, the ONS was created as a city office and began operating as such in October 2007. Currently, the ONS works with 150 to 200 young men per year who have been identified as being at high risk for involvement in gun violence. The ONS offers both community-level and individual-level services.

To serve as a comparison to the work of the ONS and provide a national context of violence prevention programs with similar aims, several large-scale and evidence-based violence prevention programs and strategies are discussed in the next section.

Promising National Models for Violence Prevention and Intervention

Operation Ceasefire

Operation Ceasefire was developed and piloted in Boston from 1996 to 2000 to address the city's dramatic increase in violence and to provide a youth violence prevention model that could be adapted by other jurisdictions. Key elements of the original model include a collaborative working group consisting of frontline staff (e.g., police, probation, corrections, and social services), government agencies, and researchers. The working group used a data-driven approach to identify causes of violence and develop a targeted law-enforcement response. A rigorous evaluation, funded by the National Institute of Justice, found that the intervention was associated with significant monthly decreases in youth gun violence (Kennedy, Braga, Piehl, & Waring, 2001; Braga & Winship, 2005).

Cure Violence

Cure Violence extends the Ceasefire model. As a community outreach program, Cure Violence (originally known as Ceasefire Chicago) treats violence prevention as a public health issue. This includes deploying trained "violence interrupters" and outreach workers to hinder the transmission of violence. The Cure Violence model has been adapted and replicated in numerous cities, and independent evaluations have demonstrated its success (Picard-Fritsche & Cerniglia, 2013; Webster, Whitehill, Vernick, & Parker, 2012).

Operation Ceasefire in Richmond

Following Operation Ceasefire's success in Boston, other communities experiencing high levels of gun violence, including Richmond, have implemented strategies used in the Boston model. Ceasefire has operated in Richmond since 2012. Though the ONS and Ceasefire share goals, there are important differences between the two methods. Potential Ceasefire participants are identified based on general or historical criminal information, such as parole or probation data. Leaders of community-based organizations, representatives from the faith-based community, and the Richmond Police Department take active roles in the daily operation of Ceasefire. According to representatives from Ceasefire, as gun violence has decreased in Richmond, the program has evolved, transitioning from a predominantly law enforcement–focused program to one that is described as team-based (made up of service providers and representatives from the faith-based community who conduct home visits).

Strategic Approaches to Community Safety Initiative

In the late 1990s, the US Department of Justice introduced the Strategic Approaches to Community Safety Initiative (SACSI) in 10 mid-sized cities dealing with high levels of violence. SACSI adapted Operation Ceasefire's approach of using a collaborative, data-driven, and solution-oriented process. Multidisciplinary core groups were convened to identify and simultaneously implement targeted enforcement and prevention interventions. All but one of the SACSI sites focused on addressing homicide and gun violence. A national evaluation of the initiative found that SACSI was related to decreases in targeted violent crimes, in some areas by as much as 50 percent (Roehl et al., 2008). Other similarly sized cities across the United States also experienced decreases in violent crime during the evaluation period of SACSI; however, decreases in violence were larger in cities where SACSI was implemented (Roehl et al., 2008).

Project Safe Neighborhoods

In 2001, drawing on the successful strategies used in projects including Operation Ceasefire and SACSI, the US Department of Justice initiated Project Safe Neighborhoods (PSN). PSN was designed to be a comprehensive gun violence reduction program, focusing on addressing problems with firearm violence. As a national program implemented at the local level, PSN relies on research and partnerships to provide detailed information about the motivations for gun crime within communities. While PSN was implemented in all US Attorney jurisdictions nationwide, data analysis of the cities using PSN strategies found larger reductions in violent crime compared to those cities that did not actively use PSN strategies (McGarrell et al., 2009). Additionally, as the number of PSN strategies and interventions increased, greater declines in violent crime were experienced (McGarrell et al., 2009).

Street Outreach

In addition to the specific federally supported initiatives described in this section, street outreach has been an important feature in a number of gun violence reduction efforts. Street outreach work deploys individuals at the neighborhood level to engage positively with youth who live in areas with high levels of violence or gang activity, typically as part of a larger violence reduction strategy. Street outreach workers are generally employed by community-based organizations (rather than law enforcement agencies) and often have previous experience with gangs or violence. Street outreach workers connect youth with relevant services; they also interact with youth on a regular basis in order to gain knowledge about and disrupt potential violence (Silva & Wolf, 2009). An effective street outreach effort involves navigating a delicate balance of developing and maintaining credibility and trust with both the targeted youth population and with law enforcement and other agencies. While research on current street outreach programs is limited, data suggest that this strategy, particularly when implemented as part of a larger violence reduction effort, is promising and warrants further study (Decker, Bynum, McDevitt, Farrell, & Varrano, 2008; Silva & Wolf, 2009).

An effective street outreach effort involves navigating a delicate balance of developing and maintaining credibility and trust with both the targeted youth population and with law enforcement and other agencies.

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

Overall, the programs and approaches summarized here have shown positive outcomes and significant reductions in violence in the communities in which they were implemented. Although existing evidence pointed to these programs' success, and a broad range of violence prevention work has made valuable strides, a gap remained on the national landscape for programs aimed specifically at reducing gun violence. The ONS and its initiatives have attempted to fill this gap for Richmond. In serving a population that is traditionally underserved and often unreachable, the ONS approach essentially borrows components of several of these promising programs to target those most likely to commit acts of gun violence, or be victims of gun violence, with a multidisciplinary, collaborative approach that combines intensive case management with nontraditional mentoring, along with other initiatives targeted specifically for the Richmond community. In providing both community and individual interventions and services, the ONS aims to adapt elements of these evidence-based approaches, along with their community-oriented model, to transform the city of Richmond into a safe community free of gun violence.

The Office of Neighborhood Safety's Goals

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. It is important to note that the original intention of the ONS was to serve as a clearinghouse for coordinating violence prevention services in Richmond. Over time, however, due to complex factors including a limited amount of resources, the ONS developed a more focused aim: reducing gun violence in Richmond by targeting shooters and those most likely to be shot.

How the ONS Works

The work of the ONS is based on violence prevention theories, practices, and programs identified as effective or promising. 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. Both intervention strategies are informed by the "ecological model," which "[emphasizes] the environmental and policy contexts of behavior, while incorporating social and psychological influences" (Sallis, Owen, & Fisher, 2008, p. 465). ONS programming is designed to intervene on multiple levels and is comprehensive in nature. Interventions shaped by the ecological model have

> *The ONS's aim is to reduce gun violence in Richmond by targeting shooters and those most likely to be shot.*

been successfully implemented for public health promotion (e.g., preventing obesity, child abuse and neglect, and HIV transmission), youth development, and violence prevention (Finnegan Jr. & Viswanath, 2008; Dotterweich, 2006; National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, 2014; National Alliance of Children's Trust and Prevention Funds, 2014).

The ONS Street Outreach Strategy, launched in 2008, draws upon two main outreach models identified as best practices (Decker et al., 2008). The first is the street-based intervention model, which is implemented by ONS outreach staff. Key activities of the Street Outreach Strategy focus on mediating conflict among youth in order to reduce violence and referring youth to services. ONS outreach also includes providing street-level conflict mediation within a specific neighborhood, offering support for community members after a shooting has occurred, and keeping a "finger on the pulse" of the community.

The second model that ONS draws on at the community level is the program-based model, which consists of outreach to youth in order to facilitate program participation. In the ONS's case, outreach staff provide outreach to youth as the primary means of recruiting participants for the Operation Peacemaker Fellowship, the ONS's individual-level intervention targeting gun violence (the Fellowship is described in more detail later in this report).

Operation Peacemaker fellow and ONS Director DeVone Boggan during an excursion to South Africa.

ONS Staffing

There are currently nine full-time ONS staff. Staff manage the administrative functions of the ONS as well as its strategies and programs. ONS staffing has varied somewhat from 2007 to 2014, due primarily to funding availability. Notably, there has been a low level of turnover among all staff positions, including outreach staff.

- ONS director (full-time): ONS has one director. The director's responsibilities include developing, implementing, and monitoring ONS programs and activities. The director also serves as a liaison with community-based organizations, community groups, clients, and federal, state, and city agencies. Other major responsibilities include providing leadership to other ONS staff (including neighborhood change agents, senior peacekeepers, and administrative staff).
- Neighborhood change agent (full-time): Currently, there are four neighborhood change agents (NCAs). NCAs are the primary outreach workers of the organization. Their responsibilities include mediating community conflict and violence, maintaining a constant community presence, and referring fellows to services and employment opportunities. In each of the affected neighborhoods in Richmond, NCAs offer customized outreach services to targeted individuals. The duties of NCAs also include keeping up with information from the neighborhoods, identifying and recruiting prospective fellows, establishing relationships with fellows and their families, interrupting conflict, and giving referrals. Each NCA is assigned to work intensively with 10–15 fellows.

- Senior peacekeeper (full-time): There are currently two ONS senior peacekeepers. They supplement the street outreach work and firearm interruption services provided by the NCAs.[2] They interact with both current and prospective Fellowship participants.
- Operations administrator (full-time): The operations administrator has a variety of responsibilities, including grants administration, office management, and supervision of administrative staff.
- Other administrative positions: In addition to the operations administrator, ONS administrative employees include a full-time accountant and two part-time office assistants. Some of the administrative staff are temporary workers and not considered permanent staff of the ONS.

Staff Training

ONS staff members participate in training on a regular basis. Regular attendance at seminars and conferences allows staff to gain new knowledge and reinforce the acquisition and application of key skills and concepts. ONS outreach staff, for example, attend training that augments their ability to effectively engage and retain the ONS's target population. Outreach staff training may cover topics such as trauma response, anger management, violence prevention, and gang prevention and intervention.

ONS Funding

The ONS receives a variety of public and private funding. As a city government office, it receives an annual allocation from the city's general fund. When the ONS was launched in 2007, the office's general fund allocation was $611,000. The amount of the allocation has grown somewhat as the office has continued to add services, such as the Operation Peacemaker Fellowship, to its portfolio.

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

In fiscal year 2013–14, the ONS's total budget was $3 million, comprising a city allocation of $1.5 million and another $1.5 million raised from other sources such as state and federal grants, foundations, and individual donors. The city funding covers operating expenses such as staff compensation (including salaries and benefits), staff training, equipment, and utilities. Private funding sources underwrite all activities and services for the Fellowship, including stipends, excursions, subsidized internships, apprenticeship dues, and assistance with basic needs.

Community-Level Activities and Outcomes

Since the ONS's inception in 2007, its activities have included incubating programming, convening initiatives and other collaborative efforts, and serving as the fiscal agent for federally and privately funded direct service programming conducted by community partners. Key activities and short-term outcomes of these initiatives and partnerships have included:

- Providing gang prevention services to more than 1,600 young people;

[2] In addition to senior peacekeepers, through June 2014, ONS staff included several community peacekeepers. These were part-time positions designed for mature adult community members, with established community relationships, committed to creating peace in Richmond. The senior peacekeepers served as liaisons between the community peacekeepers and the neighborhood change agents. The community peacekeeper positions were eliminated due to reductions to the city's general fund.

- Providing educational services and assistance to more than 250 young people;
- Connecting about 140 youth with employment experience or apprenticeship programs;
- Spearheading reentry efforts at the city and county level;
- Educating 45 community members and other individuals, through the use of an antiviolence curriculum, on how to support youth in leading nonviolent lives; and
- Hosting 12 summer block parties and other events for more than 600 community members, providing a safe environment for residents vulnerable to gun violence.

ONS Implementation Approaches

In order to meet its objectives, the ONS draws on several interrelated approaches, discussed briefly below, that are grounded in evidence-based practice as well as years of direct experience by ONS staff.

Developing and Maintaining Community Relationships

Building strong, trusting relationships with community members is essential for the ONS to achieve its goal of reducing gun violence. ONS outreach workers have a high degree of familiarity with the Richmond community and the issues faced by residents of neighborhoods with high levels of gun violence. In fact, the majority of ONS outreach workers grew up in Richmond, and many had prior involvement with gun-related activity in the same neighborhoods. These individual experiences contribute to the staff's ability to develop and maintain positive, trusting relationships with community members. ONS outreach staff stay aware of the potential for violence, including retaliatory violence, through intensive, on-the-ground engagement and relationship building with fellows, prospective fellows, and others at risk for violence.

Ongoing Communication

The ONS approach of ongoing, consistent communication works in tandem with its relationship-building efforts. For example, as part of the Fellowship, outreach workers check in individually with each fellow in the morning and evening in order to discuss the fellow's plans for the day, provide encouragement, and finally, debrief on the day's events. Daily contact with fellows is made by phone call, text message, or in person. Just as important, ONS staff members communicate with one another throughout the day to share information that affects the target population. This internal communication includes a daily briefing meeting to discuss recent shootings (if any) and ways to address them, including avoiding possible retaliation. ONS outreach staff also communicate daily with each other about observations made and information gleaned from street outreach work. Finally, the ONS director and a liaison from the Richmond Police Department communicate daily about areas of law enforcement concern regarding local firearm-related activity.

ONS staff and Operation Peacemaker fellows visit Washington, DC.

Outreach staff have extensive on-the-ground knowledge of virtually all facets of the lives of those young men who are deemed potentially most lethal.

Data-Driven Decision Making

The ONS was created and implemented as a result of data-driven decision making: analyzing which young men are most at risk of becoming a perpetrator or victim of gun violence, and then reaching out to engage that population. Current, on-the-ground data are a major driver of the office's daily outreach operations and practices. Using these data, ONS staff, on a daily and even hourly basis, can gather, share, assess, and act on critical information about the potential for gun violence (including retaliatory acts) and proactively respond when gun violence occurs. ONS data are informed by the staff's relationships with the Richmond community. Outreach staff have extensive on-the-ground knowledge of virtually all facets of the lives of those young men who are deemed potentially most lethal. ONS staff know where each young man lives and spends his time; his current activities, including having a job or attending school; what his important relationships are; and information pertaining to the young man's contact history with law enforcement. Having access to real-time data also informs other procedures of the department, such as safety practices for outreach staff.

Government Relationships

The ONS and the Richmond Police Department (RPD) have an ongoing relationship. The RPD appoints a lieutenant-level police officer to be the assigned commander of the RPD Special Investigation Section (SIS). This role includes serving as a liaison between the department and the ONS. The police liaison communicates daily with the ONS director (the police liaison does not communicate with other ONS staff). There is a codified policy regarding the relationship between the two entities. The liaison provides the ONS director with a monthly homicide map, which includes demographic information for victims. The RPD liaison also informs ONS staff if a fellow is arrested. The ONS does not share any information with the RPD. Because of the nature of the work, the relationship between the RPD and the ONS is delicate. Youth are less likely to join the fellowship if they fear that the ONS is connected to the RPD. The frequent turnover of RPD liaisons—four in the space of approximately four years—has presented challenges for the relationship between the ONS and the RPD.

Other Partnerships

The ONS has been able to collaborate with local organizations to take a comprehensive approach to serving its target population. For example, the ONS has partnered with other city government offices and various, albeit few, local community-based organizations to pilot and implement a range of programming. However, because the ONS is one of the only organizations that serves youth most likely to be engaged in gun violence, making referrals to appropriate services often poses a challenge. For example, many organizations do not currently have the capacity to adequately serve the needs of the fellows.

The Operation Peacemaker Fellowship

In order to directly affect individual outcomes, the ONS provides individual-level intervention through the Operation Peacemaker Fellowship. The Fellowship, like the ONS itself, was created as a result of using data-driven decision making to respond to a community problem. As reported by ONS director DeVone Boggan, law enforcement data indicated that a small number of individuals—approximately 30—were responsible for approximately 70% of Richmond's firearm violence in 2009, a finding consistent with literature indicating that the overwhelming majority of serious violent crime is committed by a relatively small group of offenders (Esbensen & Huizinga, 1991; Tolan & Gorman-Smith, 1998; Tracy & Kempf-Leonard, 1996). The Fellowship, launched in 2010, is designed for this population.

> *"[For each person], we knew that we need to engage this young man, or he's going to die or kill someone on these streets."*

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 the most active firearm offenders in Richmond. Upon enrollment, each fellow develops a customized "life map" outlining goals he would like to achieve while in the Fellowship. As fellows complete these goals and participate in various components of the Fellowship, they may be eligible to receive small incentives. As of 2014, the ONS has had a total of three cohorts and 68 fellows.[3]

Youth served by the Fellowship are a unique population. "When we launched the Fellowship, and for subsequent cohorts, we knew who these guys were," said Boggan. "[For each person], we knew that we need to engage this young man, or he's going to die or kill someone on these streets." 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

Voices of the Operation Peacemaker Fellows

To highlight the impact of the ONS's work in the Richmond community and on the lives of Operation Peacemaker fellows, NCCD conducted interviews with 14 current or former fellows to collect information about their experiences in the Fellowship and how their involvement in this program has affected their lives. Interviews focused on exploring the fellows' motivations for joining, service experiences, successes, and challenges. Young men also discussed the impact that the Fellowship has had on the lives of their families and members of the community.

It is important to note that the interviews were arranged by the ONS based on convenience. Results may be biased to include fellows who were available to meet with NCCD and had trusting relationships with the ONS.

Material from these interviews is quoted in the blue boxes throughout this report.

[3] A fourth Fellowship cohort of 26 participants began in March 2015. These participants are not included in the fellowship-related data provided in this report.

The Fellowship as a Family

The most common theme that emerged from interviews with fellows was the identification of ONS outreach workers and other staff as family. Fellows used phrases such as "family," "father figure," and "the brothers I never had" to describe how they viewed ONS staff. One young man stated: "What I love about the Fellowship is that it can help anybody help themselves. It is there for individuals who want to open their eyes. It is a family that cares about each other and the community." Young men talked about the Fellowship as being the only family that they could count on to be supportive and influential in a positive manner: "Feeling like I was never helped before—they care about us."

Fellows stated that ONS outreach workers and other staff treated them with respect and provided much-needed support to change their lives. "[ONS staff] are cool, nice people—when you get around them it's love. People set their problems aside to guide [me] and check in on me and see how I am doing. Now I have known them for years—they are my family."

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. Fellows are assigned to one of two groups based on age at program entry: junior fellows, who range from ages 14 to 18, and senior fellows, ages 18 to 25. 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.

The ONS strives to provide support to these youth to reduce gun violence and to keep the young men alive, with the ultimate goal of eliminating gun violence in Richmond. As a secondary goal, the ONS seeks to fill a gap in services and facilitate young men's successful functioning in the community. Another auxiliary reason for the Fellowship is one of cost—it is expensive to fund increased policing of violent young people's communities, their points of contact with the criminal justice system, and related use of hospitals and social services. The ONS operates with the assumption that successful intervention will allow public funds to be directed elsewhere.

The Fellowship's Approach to Violence Prevention

The Fellowship draws on research and best practices, including consultations with practitioners around the country about what would work best for the program's population. Key theories underlying the Fellowship are those of viewing violence prevention as a public health issue and operating under a perspective of positive youth development. To accomplish its goals, the ONS incorporates cognitive behavioral components and provides positive reinforcement through stipends.

Utilizing a positive youth development framework, the ONS emphasizes relationship building as an important element of the Fellowship. The ONS takes a strengths-based perspective on youth, viewing them as equal participants in the work of the Fellowship. ONS staff describe the importance of relationships in their work, noting that they engage positively with youth in a variety of ways on a daily basis. "We admonish, engage, and challenge the young men every day," said Boggan. "We plant a seed, we laugh, we hug. That's the relationship."

An Operation Peacemaker fellow during an excursion to Los Angeles.

The Fellowship applies the approach of cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT), which involves skill building that "enables an individual to be aware of thoughts and emotions; identify how situations, thoughts, and behaviors influence emotions; and improve feelings by changing dysfunctional thoughts and behaviors" (Cully & Teten, 2008, p. 6). The Fellowship incorporates elements of CBT, including successive approximations towards behavior changes, structured reinforcements, and contingency management. ONS staff and volunteers continuously work with fellows to challenge dysfunctional cognitions and replace those cognitions with healthy, pro-social thought patterns. Contingency management involves anticipating and troubleshooting potential challenges.

Several meta-analyses of the impact of CBT on juvenile and adult offenders have identified it as a treatment modality that has shown great promise in addressing criminal behavior. These studies indicate reductions in recidivism of 20 to 30% between treatment and control groups (Wilson, Bouffard, & MacKenzie, 2005; Pearson, Lipton, Cleland, & Yee, 2002; Landenberger & Lipsey, 2005). Landenberger & Lipsey (2005) also found that the most salient components of CBT treatment are anger management techniques and interpersonal problem-solving skills. Their research also indicated that the highest-risk offenders were more responsive to treatment.

As an extension of the CBT approach, stipends are used to reinforce fellows' positive behaviors and identities. Stipends provide a monetary incentive for young men who may otherwise be reluctant to engage in programming and to become regular and active participants in Fellowship activities. This approach is consistent with research that points to the importance of stipends for incentivizing the academic achievement of low-income youth of color. As Spencer, Noll, and Cassidy (2005) found, stipends validate and reinforce positive identities. The authors also discussed the importance of reinforcing positive identities for youth of color, who face discrimination in a multiplicity of ways.

Who Are the Operation Peacemaker Fellows?

Ths section describes the techniques that ONS outreach staff use to identify, recruit, enroll, and assess fellows (see Figure 3). It also details the criteria for completing the Fellowship.

Figure 3: Fellowship Process

A Desire for a Different Life

Fellows described their motivation for joining the Fellowship as driven by a desire for a different life. Decisions centered on making positive changes in their lives and "bettering themselves." One fellow revealed that he wanted to "do something—make a positive change in my life." Joining the Fellowship signified that he was able to move his life in a more positive direction. One fellow stated, "I decided to join [for the] opportunity to do something. It was an opportunity to leave the streets."

The desire to provide a better life for their children was another reason some fellows joined this program. Interviews revealed that fellows wanted to make changes in their lives because they had children or family members to care for and to live for. "I've seen the path I was on. [The ONS] pulled me from a lot of things. They saved my life. They are committed to me even when I am not. To think about how I was… almost brings a tear to my eye. Now I have a better relationship with family."

Identifying Potential Fellows

The ONS is strategic when identifying youth most likely to shoot. Potential fellows are identified by ONS staff through their own observations and experiences facilitating street outreach work, as well as information obtained from a variety of community stakeholders, including law enforcement. Because their target population is so specific and small in number, the ONS is careful to ensure that only those considered to be the most potentially lethal or most likely to shoot are offered a fellowship opportunity. The ONS cannot accept every at-risk youth interested in the Fellowship.

Making the First Contact With Potential Fellows

NCAs use a variety of approaches to introduce themselves to prospective Fellowship participants and inform them about the Fellowship's services. They talk and spend time with potential fellows in their neighborhoods, as well as interrupting and mediating conflicts, all of which helps to develop trust and rapport between the young men and the NCAs. While most prospective fellows have heard about the ONS, these initial conversations involve educating a youth in more detail about the benefits of the Fellowship program as well as emphasizing the consequences that could result from continued violent behavior. NCAs tell prospective fellows that participating in the Fellowship provides an opportunity to change their lives for the better.

> *"[The ONS] pulled me from a lot of things. They saved my life."*

Inviting New Fellows

After an ONS staff member establishes rapport with a potential fellow, the youth is invited to be part of the Fellowship. Some potential fellows are eager to join, while others are reluctant and wary due to distrust and fear of joining an unknown program. To overcome some prospective fellows' resistance to joining, NCAs spend time building relationships with fellows through repeated contacts. NCAs also emphasize that the Fellowship is not a law enforcement program. The turning point for a youth in deciding to join often occurs when a youth sees his friends or others around him participating in the Fellowship and beginning to make changes in their lives; as a result, youth often decide to give it a try themselves.

Orientation and Intake of New Fellows

During the orientation to the Fellowship, which takes place at City Hall, the NCA formally introduces the fellow to the program. If the fellow has an important adult in his life, this person can be included as well. Subsequent to the orientation, an individual intake is completed by the fellow and his assigned NCA. At intake, the life map is developed and written agreements are signed. Unlike the orientation, the intake typically occurs in the field, in order to meet the fellow in surroundings where he is most comfortable.

What Happens During an Operation Peacemaker Fellowship?

ONS staff describe the Fellowship as consisting of several primary components, which are designed to provide fellows with the tools, skills, and resources to lead healthy, productive lives. These components include:

- Multiple daily contacts with staff;
- Creating a life map/developing goals;
- Case management/social services navigation support and referrals;
- Excursions;
- Internship opportunities;
- Elders Circle/intergenerational mentoring; and
- Stipend privileges.

Multiple Daily Contacts With Staff

The Fellowship offers fellows daily contact with ONS outreach staff in order to facilitate ongoing relationship development and trust building. As mentioned above, NCAs check in individually with each fellow multiple times a day. Daily interaction between staff members and fellows provides support, guidance, encouragement, and mentorship, which are often otherwise absent from fellows' lives. In interviews with fellows conducted for this evaluation, many described the relationship-building with staff members as one of the most valuable elements for their continued participation and growth in the Fellowship.

Creating a Life Map/Developing Goals

Completed by an NCA and the incoming fellow during intake, the life map (or management action plan) provides an individual comprehensive assessment of a fellow's circumstances in key areas, including housing, education, employment, transportation, finances, safety, family/relationships, physical health, mental health, spiritual, and recreational/social. For each of these areas, the life map outlines the fellow's short-term and long-term goals and specific steps for achieving them. For example, short-term goals may include participating in substance abuse treatment or individual counseling, attending parenting classes, or paying outstanding municipal fines. Long-term goals may focus on objectives such as rebuilding family relationships or completing a GED program. Each goal has a timeline associated with it, allowing for close monitoring and evaluation of progress.

The life map is updated every six months, taking into account the fellow's accomplishments as well as areas he may be struggling with. In addition to being an assessment tool, the life map represents a contract between the fellow and the ONS: It is a pact on the fellow's part to make positive changes in his life, and it represents a commitment by the ONS to support the fellow in achieving his goals, setting the foundation for an ongoing, committed alliance between the ONS and the fellow.

Case Management/Social Services Navigation Support and Referrals

The ONS operates under a framework of case management based on best practices and the state mental health code. The ONS has also developed protocols for making referrals. The office maintains a referral list of organizations with which they have developed relationships. When making a referral for the client, ONS staff assess the client to connect him with

Opportunities Gained

The fellows described many positive goals they set, as well as the opportunities with which they were provided through active participation in the program. Obtaining a driver's license, getting a job, going back to school, and getting a GED were some of the goals that young men recorded in their life maps. "I'm on the verge of trying to get a job. I am going back to school… I want to go to school for real estate, I am in the process of doing these things."

Fellows emphasized that the Fellowship taught them responsibility and accountability. Young men completed life maps, which allowed them to keep track of their goals and achievements as well as the setbacks they encountered in the program. As one fellow said, "My grades are getting better. I am on the best track I can be on right now."

Current and former fellows also described being connected with services and given opportunities for growth and change. They talked about ONS staff assisting them with job placement, taking them to college prep courses, helping with resumes, or even picking them up from county jail. Fellows said their relationships with outreach workers opened doors for them and made success a "new normal." One young man said, "I have a career instead of a regular job… It's amazing what you can do with skills… [You] can be part of something, rebuilding something. It feels amazing to build something. It's a great sense of accomplishment."

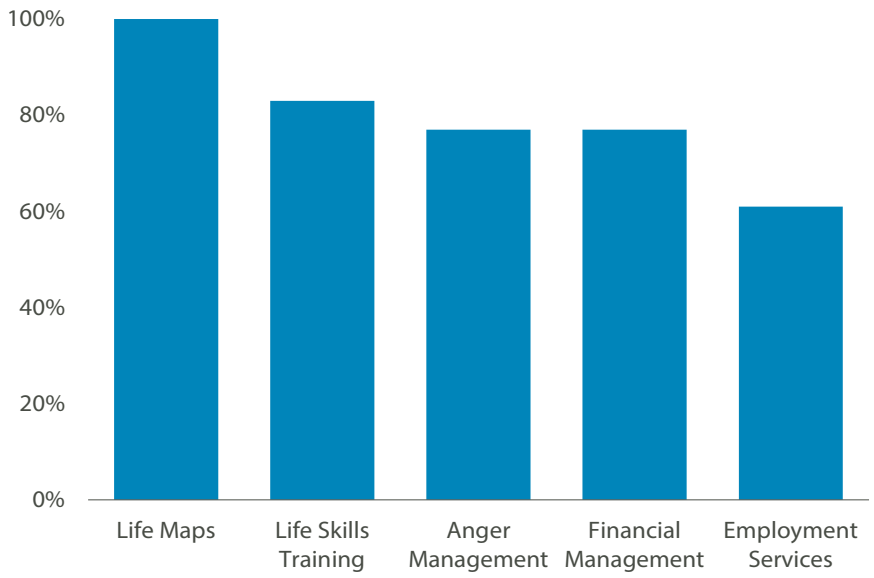
appropriate services that fit his needs and provide him with information about the specific program (such as GED preparation or anger management) to which he is being referred. ONS staff also participate in the referral process by accompanying the young man to the referral agency and providing specific modeling or directions on navigating the service. For example, the NCA will attend the first few meetings of the class or services with the fellow in order to provide onsite support, such as helping the fellow complete enrollment paperwork and become comfortable in the setting. As importantly, the NCA will observe the class content, the instructor or facilitator's interaction with the fellow, and the fellow's participation in the programming. Prior to enrolling in the Fellowship, the fellows typically have not attended community-based services other than school on their own, so this navigation process can help increase their comfort level; it also allows the NCA and fellow to determine together whether the programming and the provider are a good fit for the fellow.

Some of the most common services that fellows have received, both as a result of referrals and as provided by ONS staff, are shown in Figure 4. These include development of life maps (received by 100% of fellows), life skills training (83%), anger management services (77%), help with financial management (77%), and employment services (61%).

> *"My grades are getting better. I am on the best track I can be on right now."*

Other services that fellows received included health care services (46%), mental health services (41%), educational services (40%), recreational services (34%), transportation services (32%), parenting services (31%), substance abuse counseling (16%), and housing services (14%).

Figure 4: Top Services Received by Fellows



Excursions

Excursions provide an opportunity for fellows to experience life outside the city of Richmond and to safely interact with other fellows from rival neighborhoods. Fellows may go on several trips each year. Since the Fellowship's inception, there have been 35 excursions to a variety of locations including San Francisco; Washington, DC; and New York City, and international destinations such as Mexico City, South Africa, and Dubai, with an average of eight trips per year. In order to qualify for an excursion, fellows must be active participants in the program, agree to stop shooting, have completed a life map, and have a relationship with the ONS. For out-of-state travel, fellows must meet all of the above criteria and also be willing to travel with fellows from rival neighborhoods. On excursions, fellows participate in one or more activities, including completing community service projects, taking college tours, attending or presenting at conferences, and meeting with government officials. In addition to engaging fellows in a range of new activities, excursions serve as a time for fellows to connect and even bond with each other—especially with their rivals, an experience that is often transformative. "It just changes the entire way they view one another," an NCA said.

ONS staff and fellows travel in Cape Town, South Africa.

Internship Opportunities

Some fellows have the opportunity to gain job skills through a paid internship. Placement in an internship generally occurs after a fellow has been part of the Fellowship for at least 18 months. This timing allows ONS staff to help a fellow stabilize and address basic needs such as housing or substance use treatment prior to internship placement. To guide placement, ONS staff work individually with a fellow to determine

Broadening Fellows' Worldview Through Excursions

Excursions have emerged as a catalyst for broadening fellows' worldview and shifting their perspectives on rival group members. Fellows described ONS excursions as an opportunity to travel that they had never experienced prior to their participation in the program. To many of these young men, the trips seem to symbolize the ONS's emotional and monetary investment in them personally. One of the fellows described his best days in the Fellowship as, "The days I was getting ready to go to DC, graduating and moving on to better things and quit living the life. I am putting plans together now. They helped me learn to tie a tie, got me suits. They spent a lot of money on me. I ran up a bill for ONS. I was important to them. And they got what they paid for—success."

Trips with the Fellowship have also enabled young men to temporarily leave the Richmond community and the fear of gun violence. One fellow said, "I have been to Mexico City, New York, LA, DC, Florida, and Dallas. Trips are important because it's the only time I have been out of harm's way. It's hard to be around someone that is trying to harm you. But now we've made peace and better the community."

Excursions were an integral factor in the young men's ability to form positive relationships with men from rival groups. One young man described how he had traveled with a person from a rival group in the community, and they had dinner together: "He had shot at me and my people. I didn't think I could do it at first, but now we had to go out together and it can be cool. The program helped me do it." Young men were able to put their differences aside and relate to each other as youth with similar interests and challenges, rather than enemies with intent to kill. "They were cool. We are all basically alike. When you take people out of state, you forget about everything and just want to have fun." One fellow stated, "In New York City, I had a good time. It was real fun, even people from both sides. We acted like we were brothers that night."

the types of occupations that interest him and skills he would like to gain or improve, then facilitate a match with an interested employer. Most internships are 20 hours a week for six months and are located in city departments or agencies and community-based organizations. The ONS subsidizes 100% of the fellow's internship salary through private funding sources. Providing a wage subsidy encourages a potential employer to take on a fellow without incurring financial risk.

NCAs regularly visit fellows on the job to promote job retention. Thirteen fellows have had the opportunity to take advantage of the internship program, and 100% of those who participated have landed long-term employment (lasting more than nine months) as a result of this opportunity. Fellows have obtained positions including warehouse worker, restaurant worker, and office clerk. They have also worked in fields including construction, maintenance, retail, and youth development.

Elders Circle/Intergenerational Mentoring

The Elders Circle, facilitated by the Brotherhood of Elders Network, represents a powerful addition to the daily mentoring that NCAs provide. Formally established in 2011, the Network is a group of male volunteers, ranging in age from 20 to 55+, who provide intergenerational mentorship to boys and men of color in Richmond and Oakland. The Network is a volunteer coalition that functions independently of the ONS. Elders bring a wide range of expertise and knowledge in areas including finance, psychology, public health, and philanthropy, as well as life experience, to the Network.

Within the Fellowship structure, the elders meet with fellows and ONS staff twice a month for a two-hour Elders Circle meeting. After developing trust with participants, elders provide fellows with guidance on topics such as impacts of violence, family dynamics, and family relationships. Elders also offer individualized job search assistance to fellows. Additionally, through the Elders Circle, ONS staff such as NCAs have an opportunity to establish mentoring relationships with the elders, which in turn can provide staff with tools to deal with stress and maintain work/life balance.

Stipend Privileges

Some fellows have the opportunity to receive monthly stipends for their participation in the program. Out of the 68 fellows that have participated, about 60% have been provided with monetary incentives. Not all fellows are provided with stipends for several reasons, including their not needing financial support, not meeting their life map goals, and/or a determination by staff that stipends may not be appropriate for them (e.g., due to challenges with substance abuse). Eligible fellows are given stipends only if they prove in the initial six months of participation a true desire to improve behavior as evidenced by their time, work, participation levels, life map goal achievements, and peace-building contributions. For those with stipend privileges, stipends are only offered for nine months out of the 18 month minimum Fellowship duration. Fellows can receive stipends of up to $1,000 per month, but the majority of fellows who are eligible receive approximately $300 to $700 monthly. All stipends are provided through private funding sources.

The stipend serves several purposes. First, it provides an incentive for young men who may otherwise be reluctant to engage in programming to be regular and active participants in Fellowship activities. Secondly, while the stipend payment is not large, it serves as an alternative to participating in an illegal activity. Finally, the stipend sends a powerful message to fellows about their worth. Through the stipends, fellows receive validation about changes they are making in their lives, acting as a form of positive reinforcement. Stipends are used not only as incentives, but also to let the fellows know that they are valuable and important.

Assessing Progress to Completion

The ONS draws on a variety of tools and approaches to assess fellows throughout their time in the Fellowship. Assessment instruments and techniques include observations from street outreach conducted by NCAs, the life map, an online academic assessment (the California High School Exit Examination, or CAHSEE), a career assessment, and a life skills assessment.[4]

A fellow must meet several criteria in order to complete the Fellowship. The first requirement is to no longer be involved in gun violence. The second requirement is to participate for a minimum of 18 months in the Fellowship.[5] The third requirement is to complete the goals listed in the life map.

If a young man stops participating in the program and its services, ONS staff members work to support this youth in returning to the Fellowship. ONS staff do not remove a fellow from the program for any reason. If a fellow disappears temporarily, as may happen due to the nature of the work, ONS staff attempt to connect the returning fellow to appropriate resources and services.

[4] Additionally, in March 2015, the ONS began administering pre- and post-participation surveys to incoming fellows. The pre- and post-participation surveys measure fellows' self-reported attitudes and experiences in areas including education, employment, social support, conflict resolution, substance use, community safety, violence and victimization, and future orientation.

[5] Fellows are expected to actively participate in the Fellowship for a minimum of 18 months. The specific duration of each participant's Fellowship experience is determined on a case-by-case basis and depends on individual needs and progress.

Replicating the Operation Peacemaker Fellowship

The innovative strategies implemented through the Operation Peacemaker Fellowship have garnered broad interest from other jurisdictions across the United States that are experiencing high levels of gun violence. This interest naturally leads to the desire to replicate a program such as the Fellowship in other cities.

DeVone Boggan, director of the ONS, believes that several elements of the Fellowship program are replicable in other jurisdictions. These components include relationship-building and ongoing team communication about contacts with fellows. Other key elements of the Fellowship that are replicable include the use of life maps, excursions, stipends, partnering with elders to provide intergenerational mentoring, internships, and referral linkages that pair outreach workers with fellows to walk them through processes. Boggan notes that funding is an essential component of being able to provide these services; he emphasizes the importance of acquiring private funds to subsidize the travel, excursions, and stipends that are part of the program.

Boggan also points out that there are several challenges to consider regarding replication in other communities. The first issue involves program subsistence. Before a program can be replicated in another community, the program must prove to be relevant for successive generations of youth who enter the program, in the community in which the program originates. Boggan emphasizes the need to have the model be a flexible one that serves the changing needs of younger youth. It is important to understand that the culture of violence constantly evolves, Boggan notes, so staff must continually ask, "Is what we are doing with these men still relevant?"

Another challenge related to replication is the unique contextual situation that allows for this type of unorthodox programming even to exist. For example, Boggan says that cities expressing interest in the type of "deep-end" violence prevention work of the ONS are often concerned that their local politics and/or funding will not allow for intervention strategies that are as innovative as the ONS. "We have a lot of latitude, especially as things seem to be working," said Boggan. The close ties and trust established between city government and ONS leadership have provided

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

support for the unconventional strategies used by the ONS. Boggan credits some of the success of the ONS to the city's supportive yet "hands-off" approach to the development and implementation of this intervention.

A third challenge for replication is the high turnover rate of outreach staff that often affects violence prevention organizations. Research indicates that the typical retention rate for an outreach worker is two to three years, which may be due to the stressful nature of this work and the exposure to trauma and violence it entails (Wolf & Gutierrez, 2011). It is notable, then, that most of the ONS's outreach workers have been with the organization since it first deployed outreach workers in 2008. To reduce staff burnout and turnover, the ONS seeks to support outreach workers in various ways, including connecting staff with counseling services, providing group processing opportunities, and developing a stress reduction protocol (Wolf & Gutierrez, 2011). Boggan says that the longevity of outreach staff at the ONS has been instrumental to the success of the program and is likely a contributing factor in Richmond's dramatic reduction in gun violence. No longer involved in violence themselves, these young men work long hours and demonstrate their commitment to the community.

Boggan's final concern about replicating this type of work is the organizational inclination to widen the work's focus. He highlights the fact that the mission and aim of the ONS and the Fellowship is strictly to reduce gun violence in the Richmond community. "The ONS is not an umbrella office for all violence prevention work," Boggan said. "It's important that gun violence reduction work is all we do. That's what makes this office special and unique. When you try to do everything for everybody, you lose your focus on your core mission." In replicating this model of violence deterrence, Boggan recommends that organizations remain focused on the singular goal of reducing gun violence so as not to dilute the mission's emphasis.

The longevity of outreach staff at the ONS has been instrumental to the success of the program and is likely a contributing factor in Richmond's dramatic reduction in gun violence. No longer involved in violence themselves, these young men work long hours and demonstrate their commitment to the community.

Some cities have already begun to replicate elements of the ONS and its programming. The City of Stockton, California, recently created an Office of Violence Prevention, based in the city manager's office. This office's mission is to "significantly reduce violence in the City of Stockton through the implementation of data-driven, partnership-based violence prevention and reduction programs and strategies rooted in best practices." Through its Ceasefire program, Oakland, California, is now seeking to replicate some principles of the ONS, such as identifying and targeting the highest-risk individuals. Oakland Ceasefire has also begun providing incentivized stipends to Ceasefire clients in a similar manner as the ONS, and it also plans to expand its street outreach efforts to include daily contact with high-risk individuals. Oakland Ceasefire is also planning to provide educational and cultural excursions, similar to the ONS.

Process Evaluation Methodology

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).
3. Provide a framework for an outcome evaluation of the Fellowship.

Methodology

The purpose of conducting a process evaluation, as opposed to an outcome evaluation, is to understand the social, political, and economic circumstances that influence the development, implementation, and performance of an organization or program, and the processes that the organization or program uses to achieve its goals. Process evaluations commonly focus on program monitoring and program improvement. Monitoring involves tracking and describing how a program operates, whom it serves, and the activities it provides to a targeted population. This information then provides a basis for developing strategies for program improvement.

A process evaluation can also provide a foundation for designing an outcome evaluation. Outcome evaluations, in contrast to process evaluations, examine the outcomes or results of a program or intervention and explore relationships between the intervention and the changes (if any) experienced by its participants.

As a nonprofit social justice research organization specializing in adult and juvenile justice research, NCCD has conducted process and outcome evaluations for a variety of organizations and has collaborated with many criminal and juvenile justice agencies, as well as community-based organizations, at the local, state, and national levels. To structure data collection and reporting of findings for the ONS process evaluation, NCCD applied a model it has used for a number of local and national evaluations. This model employs a paradigm consisting of five key elements of program development—context, identification, interventions/services, linkages, and goals—and assumes that program implementation is shaped by many contingencies, events, and forces, as well as by explicit internal policy and program decisions. This model also assumes that organizations and programs change and evolve over time. The five elements of this model as applied to the ONS are described below.

- *Context:* The set of environmental forces, organizational issues, and policy assumptions

Congressman George Miller, an Operation Peacemaker fellow, and ONS Director DeVone Boggan.

that conceptually define and shape the distinctive features of the ONS, including policy assumptions that guide its purpose and philosophy. Also considered are political forces, fiscal constraints, and historical or organizational factors.

- *Identification:* The combination of staff training and practice, techniques, procedures, tools, and criteria used to assess city needs and, in particular, to assess individuals at risk of participation in community violence.
- *Intervention/services:* The full range of programs offered, supported, or created by the ONS to meet ONS objectives. These include a range of programs and services the ONS has initiated or supported since its launch, including the Operation Peacemaker Fellowship.
- *Linkages:* Those formal and informal relationships and agreements that may hinder or help the development, implementation, maintenance, institutionalization, and success of ONS. Linkages may include cooperative or conflicting relationships among stakeholders such as social service agencies, providers, families, the community, and governmental entities.
- *Goals:* A determination of the intended measurable outcomes of the ONS, as defined by the stated objectives of the office itself and the City of Richmond.

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, which included conducting site visits, interviewing key stakeholders, and reviewing program documents and other information, are outlined below.

- *Site visits:* NCCD conducted several site visits to the ONS to gain insight into the office's daily operations, observe activities such as staff meetings and outreach work, document program implementation strategies, and conduct interviews.
- *Interviews:* NCCD conducted more than 55 interviews with key stakeholders in order to understand and document the implementation of the ONS. Interview participants included 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.
- *Document review:* NCCD reviewed various sources of existing data and documentation, including ONS policies and procedures and outreach data collected by the ONS staff. NCCD also reviewed crime data for the City of Richmond to examine trends in homicides and gun-related injuries in the Richmond community.

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.

ONS staff and fellows participated in a panel presentation at the annual conference of the National Forum for Black Public Administrators, held in Atlanta, Georgia.

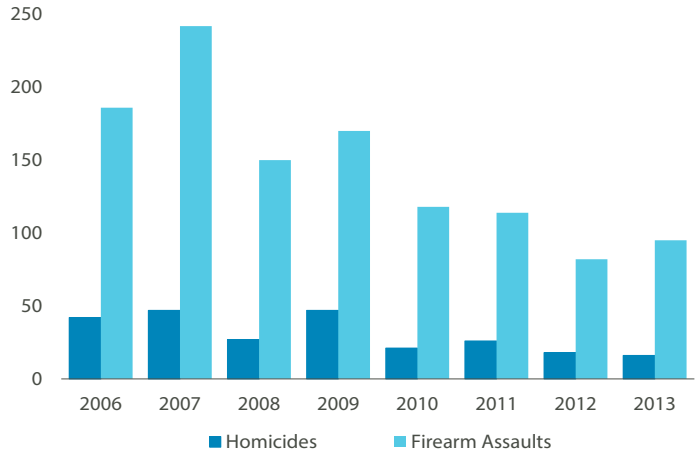
Major Achievements of the ONS

Contributing to Substantial Reductions in Gun Violence

The ONS has developed several core measures of success in its primary goal of reducing gun violence and associated homicides. On an annual basis, regarding Fellowship outcomes, the ONS reports on the number of fellows who are alive; have no new gun charges since becoming a fellow; have no arrests related to gun violence since becoming a fellow; and have incurred no gun-related injuries or hospitalizations since becoming a fellow. The ONS additionally collects data on fellows' achievement of goals outlined in life maps, including the number of fellows who have obtained jobs, are studying for or have earned their GED, and have received a driver's license. Conclusions about the effectiveness of a program cannot be decisively drawn without the resources to design and implement an experimental or quasi-experimental evaluation.[6] However, the data highlighted in this report provide important evidence about the ONS's impact on the community and on program participants.

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 (see Figure 5). 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, which began in late 2007, 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 5: Homicides and Firearm Assaults, City of Richmond, 2006–2013



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

[6] Experimental and quasi-experimental research designs are used to gather evidence about a program's or organization's effectiveness. Experimental research methodology includes the randomized control trial (RCT), which is considered the "gold standard" of rigorous evaluation. RCT randomly assigns a pool of participants to a group that receives an intervention and a group that does not and then compares the results. The quasi-experimental method, which is often more feasible for programs with limited resources, compares results for a group that receives an intervention to a similarly situated group that does not receive the intervention.

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. Through the Fellowship, ONS outreach staff have successfully engaged many of the young men who have been identified as most likely to be involved in gun violence. Whereas other interventions tend to rely on more traditional methods of service provision, through its outreach techniques, the ONS has succeeded in building trust and credibility with a difficult-to-reach population. Data collected for this evaluation, including interviews with fellows, suggest this achievement is due in part to the unique identities of ONS outreach staff and their commitment to the work, providing a consistent, healthy community presence and building credibility with fellows. One fellow said, "[ONS staff] understand what we go through. They actually react and try to help… I look at them as family. They make me comfortable."

> *"I am open to new things because I have been to a different place. 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."*

Transforming Youths' Perspectives on Life

The ONS's ability to change how young men saw their lives—specifically the opportunities available to them—emerged as a theme in the interviews. Fellows described how they were able to reframe their worldview. Many believed their participation in the Fellowship empowered them to have a more positive frame of mind in determining the trajectory of their life: "It works if you want it to work. If you don't want to change, no one will change for you."

Fellows described the Fellowship as having a monumental impact on changing how they thought and related to others. "Yes, it changed me. I don't carry guns, and I don't hang with guys with guns. I push myself away from that." Participation in the Fellowship allowed the young men to broaden their view of what they could accomplish in their lives: "I am open to new things because I have been to a different place. 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."

Fellows also discussed the reduction of gun violence in the community and how the Fellowship has impacted their use of and perspective on gun violence: "My mindframe was changed. They told me about what could happen. The best thing they have done for me is told me that if I don't go looking for things to happen, things won't happen. I think about this a lot."

Low Levels of Violence Among Fellowship Participants

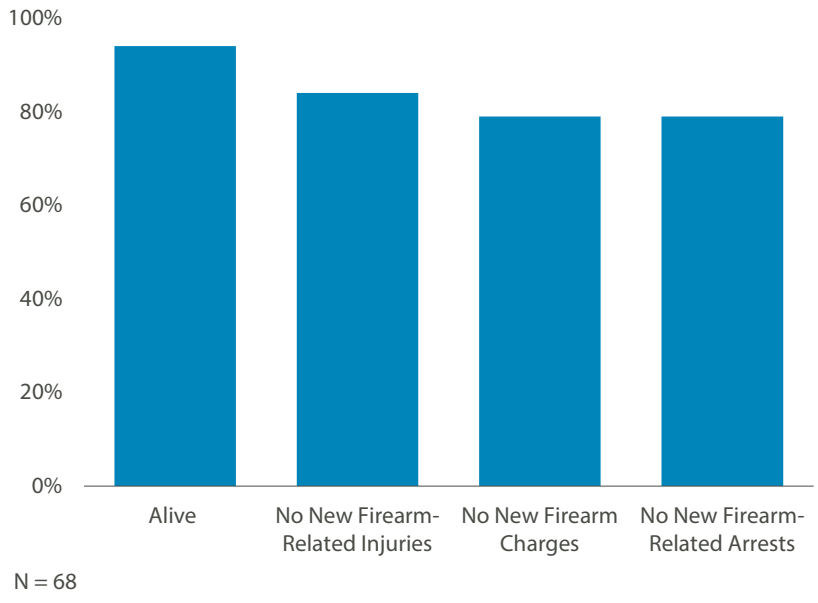
Since the start of the Fellowship, fellows have experienced low levels of violence and law enforcement contact due to gun activity. As shown in Figure 6, as of April 2015, the vast majority of fellows (94%, or 64 out of 68) are alive; 84% have not sustained a gun-related injury or been hospitalized for 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.

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 report 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.

> *"[The Fellowship] changed me. I don't carry guns, and I don't hang with guys with guns."*

Figure 6: Fellows' Outcomes Related to Violence



Challenges for the ONS

In addition to dealing with common challenges that many organizations face, such as a lack of funding and other limited resources, the ONS also has a variety of unique challenges.

Transparency

The ONS exists in the context of its relationships with key stakeholders, including city council members, community members, and leaders of community-based organizations, as well as its clients. The ONS experiences tension between external requests for transparency (stemming in large part from divided city council support) and internal needs for confidentiality. For example, the ONS works with a difficult-to-reach population, which involves building trust with young men through agreements of confidentiality and separation from law enforcement. The ONS, then, regularly negotiates a problematic boundary, needing to situate itself as an agency that is part of a government infrastructure where law enforcement is also situated, and being a community-centered entity that deeply engages an often isolated, disconnected population that is historically distrustful of law enforcement. Additionally, there is some concern about transparency of funding regarding stipends and excursions, an issue that has also emerged from a divided city council.

Defining and Measuring Success

Many violence prevention programs face challenges in defining and measuring the success of their intervention activities (Gottfredson, 2007). It is difficult to isolate which effects are directly related to specific interventions. This is salient for the Richmond community due to the other crime prevention strategies, in addition to the ONS's efforts, that are underway in the city, including Ceasefire and other policing strategies. While program processes and activities, such as numbers served or programming delivered, may be identified with relative ease, it is typically more difficult to create measures, collect data, and draw conclusions about a program's effectiveness. The ONS, which is pioneering unique programming, faces particular difficulty. The lack of comparable programming and corresponding evidence-based evaluation methodologies that directly link program data to measures of effectiveness render it difficult for the ONS to rigorously evaluate its work.

Lack of Services for the ONS Target Population

A lack of appropriate services for the target population, in terms of both content and staffing, affects the ONS's work. While the ONS has a list of local service providers to refer fellows to, only a limited number of agencies have the cultural competency to effectively understand and meet the needs of the fellows. As a result, ONS staff, such as the NCAs, often take on the role of providing needed services to fellows. "There's not a lot of people who have the capacity, the patience, and the courage to deal with the baggage that comes with our young people," said one NCA. As described by ONS staff, these young men have experienced community violence, poverty, and

ONS staff and fellows during a visit to Mexico City.

Living a Life Without Fear

Fellows said that participating in the Fellowship had allowed them to "live a life without fear." By forging bonds with rival group members during excursions and benefiting from the consistent support and mentorship provided by ONS staff, elders, and other positive role models, these young men transformed their lives. A majority of the fellows interviewed discussed how the Fellowship had equipped them with the skills and tools to go through their daily lives without fear of being shot and killed.

"Life is totally different now. I ride around with no fear of police or enemies. Before ONS I had to stay strapped [carry a gun]. I was going to end up behind bars or in a casket, and you can't take that back .... I didn't want to be a statistic. Now I work hard, am productive, no incidents, not even a traffic ticket. I don't want to hurt no one, and I don't want to be hurt."

discrimination, all of which contribute to their specific needs and mistrust of services. To fill this gap, NCAs may teach classes on topics such as parenting or financial literacy, or lead a grief counseling group.

Tensions Between Law Enforcement and the ONS

NCCD's findings indicate that tensions may exist between the ONS and the Richmond Police Department (RPD) due to the organizations' different approaches to addressing gun violence. While the ONS and the RPD share a similar goal and target population, their methods differ. As a city and service organization, the ONS uses a non-law enforcement approach to engage with young men deeply involved with violence. The RPD, on the other hand, is focused on using criminal justice sanctions or the threat of incarceration to work with the same population to reduce violence. In spite of this complex relationship, stakeholders interviewed for this evaluation acknowledged that the RPD does, on occasion, refer clients to the ONS—a symbol of cooperation between the two organizations. One stakeholder suggested that the relationship between the RPD and the ONS could benefit from increased communication and from attending relevant training together.

ONS Evolution

The ONS has been working to reduce gun violence in Richmond for nearly eight years and has seen many positive outcomes during this time, at both the individual and community levels. However, despite these encouraging developments, ONS director DeVone Boggan cautions that there is more work to be done to further diminish firearm assaults and associated homicides in the city.

The ONS's vision for its future focuses on a few main areas. One goal is to explore the possibility of implementing elements of its approach, such as its Street Outreach Strategy, at the community level. Boggan said that while it is critical to effectively reach and address the needs of a new generation of young men who could become actively involved in gun violence, the ONS lacks the resources to fully focus on this emerging population. He would like the ONS to help community-based organizations in the Richmond area develop the capacity to actively seek out and engage these young men, a process that will likely involve recruiting staff who have a particular set of skills and experiences. He also sees the potential for other elements of the Fellowship, such as life maps and excursions, to be offered by community-based organizations.

Boggan noted that, due to changes in the amount and nature of violent crime that Richmond is now experiencing, the Fellowship itself will likely change as well to acknowledge these shifts. While no new direction has been finalized, the ONS's approach may be framed differently in terms of services provided or the age group targeted.

Recommendations for the ONS

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

Communication and Transparency

The ONS has developed a variety of channels for communicating with its internal and external stakeholders, and NCCD recommends that the ONS continue to use these approaches—and consider additional strategies—to increase transparency and understanding in the Richmond community about the ONS. For clients such as fellows, current communication strategies include providing a set of clear expectations for participation when a fellow joins the program. In terms of external communications, strategies include sending email updates, creating annual reports, and hosting conferences. To further improve transparency, NCCD recommends that ONS consider developing written information regarding Fellowship policies on topics like appropriate use of stipend funds or admission processes. This information could be shared with prospective fellows and with the general public upon request. Additionally, information about the ONS's processes and procedures, the evolution of its goals and mission, and its relationship with entities such as the RPD, community-based organizations, and the City of Richmond could be communicated on the ONS website, in reports, and in other formats.

Challenges and Next Steps for the Fellowship: In Fellows' Voices

During individual interviews, fellows identified two of the biggest challenges of being in the Fellowship as (1) their personal fears of returning to a violent lifestyle and (2) interacting with young men from rival groups. Many felt that associating with youth from other neighborhoods—for example, during excursions—was often both an obstacle and an advantage. "The biggest challenge for me is going on trips with other people from the other side [rivals]," said one fellow. Similarly, another fellow observed, "Getting more people to associate with someone you don't think you should be [associating with is a challenge], but you can't spend your whole life being a coward." One young man also stated that youth who are unwilling or not ready to change might present a challenge to the work that the ONS does in Richmond. "The biggest challenge at ONS is getting people that are refusing help or not willing to help to do things. For me, it is not easy. I try my hardest to do it. Some fellows relapse, even I have. I don't want to relapse. There are people who give up on what they are doing."

In terms of next steps, fellows identified growing the Fellowship as a priority for the work in Richmond. The majority of fellows interviewed stated that their desires for the program's future centered on increased funding to serve more youth who engage in gun violence: "I wish they were around when I was younger. I would like them to let me do what they do and be part of the outreach team and get paid for it."

Young men also stated that they would like to see the ONS in other communities across the country. One fellow reiterated the theme of growing the ONS program to reach more youth:

"Fellows need to be in the hood talking to kids in the neighborhood now. It's up to ONS to take that fear away. We were influenced by the OGs back then, we can be influenced by [fellows] now.* I have really positive things to tell the kids. Fellows need to be leaders in control. Some of them are really influential in their neighborhood."

*"OG" means "original gangster," connoting an individual who has been a well-established part of community and/or street life.

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. While developing partnerships may be a challenge as many community-based organizations are not yet equipped to most appropriately help youth at risk for involvement in gun violence, NCCD recommends that the ONS continue to build two-way, collaborative relationships in which conversations about how to best support this population of youth take place. Developing partnerships and being able to refer youth to organizations with different specialties can further enhance youth well-being and ability to remain disengaged from gun violence.

Additionally, developing partnerships on the local and national levels will allow the ONS to share its expertise in effective strategies for working with the target population. Ultimately, the ONS and other local entities may choose to collaboratively pursue a "collective impact" approach to achieve the common goal of reducing gun violence in Richmond. Collective impact is a specific model of collaboration that brings together a wide range of partners to address social issues. It is founded on the premise that achieving social change on a large scale is based on improved coordination across sectors, rather than on the often isolated efforts of various organizations. As importantly, in order to be successful, this model may necessitate significant behavior change by diverse stakeholders including local government, businesses, schools, community-based organizations, and others (Kania & Kramer, 2011).

Data and Evaluation

To enhance communication with the public and for the purpose of replication, 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. Additionally, to explore the effectiveness of ONS programming including the Fellowship, NCCD recommends that the ONS seek funding for a quasi-experimental design to evaluate the effectiveness of its intervention strategies and establish this program as an evidence-based violence prevention program focused on reducing gun violence.

Providing Education on the ONS Approach

Since its inception, the ONS has tested and implemented a variety of innovative outreach methods and intervention strategies targeted to a hard-to-reach population. NCCD recommends that the ONS 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. This information could be disseminated through relatively low-cost avenues such as articles, webinars, videos, blog posts, and other media. In addition to general knowledge-sharing around the innovative outreach methods used, the ONS could share information about its framework for building a sustainable program to address specific violence needs. Crafting a violence prevention program that is responsive to the specific needs of the community and those served represents a valuable strategy that can be shared with other communities facing problems with violence.

Measuring Effectiveness of the ONS Through an Outcome Evaluation

The completion of the process evaluation provides an opportunity for the ONS to engage in an outcome evaluation. In recent months, the national media has highlighted the vanguard work of the ONS, and the Fellowship, for its nontraditional strategies and interventions. *MSNBC*, *Al Jazeera America, Mother Jones,* and others have all explored the unique violence prevention work currently being done in Richmond and have suggested that this work may be connected with the city's decreasing levels of gun violence. 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. While this evaluation did not reveal outcomes regarding program effectiveness, it did chronicle—in their own voices—the positive impact that the ONS, and the Fellowship in particular, are making on the community, the fellows, and their families. Additionally, 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. Overall, Fellowship participants reported that involvement in the Fellowship was a transformative experience that changed their worldviews—and subsequently their lives.

The framework of the Fellowship could be used to improve outcomes for communities across the country.

Further investigation and evaluation of the ONS's broad-based work may reveal important outcomes that will help push violence prevention work even further. While replication of the Fellowship itself may be more arduous because of the dynamic leadership associated with the current model, the framework of the Fellowship could be used to improve outcomes for communities across the country. The steps taken to craft programming developed with clients in mind, and being responsive to their needs and the needs of the community, can serve as a model. 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 the community's specific needs around violence. These issues are well worth exploring in future research.

Conclusion

The fellows who participated in this research shared their views and thoughts on the success and inspiration that drives the work in the Operation Peacemaker Fellowship. The pride of their involvement resonated through these interviews to reveal a program that capitalizes on the often-overlooked strengths of these young men. ONS staff including outreach workers demonstrate an investment in relationship-building and empowerment that shapes these young men to transform their lives. As one fellow said, "I can leave all the bull—at home and work on being me. I come with my problems, and [the Fellowship] grows you up and makes you a better person for what you got to do in life."

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

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