



Criminal Justice Knowledge Bank

An initiative of the Division of Criminal Justice Services



Newburgh: Group Violence Intervention

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Summary:

Newburgh's Group Violence Intervention Program engages directly with violent groups to deter future crime through a law enforcement and community partnership.

Problem

The Newburgh Police Department's main focus is to reduce violent crime, which reached a 10-year high in 2012, with 544 violent crimes reported. In 2012, shootings also increased 29 percent from the previous year, with 36 reported. From 2013 to 2016, the number of shootings ranged from 36 to 43 annually. An analysis of shooting incidents that occurred in 2015 and 2016 attributed more than 70 percent of those incidents to a small number of individuals.

Program Description

In 2015, Newburgh implemented the Group Violence Intervention program, in which law enforcement, community members, and social service providers form a partnership and engage directly with violent groups. Before the program was implemented, the Newburgh Police Department worked closely with the National Network for Safe Communities at John Jay College to identify violent groups to target for intervention. By analyzing shooting incident data, interviewing patrol officers, reviewing criminal histories, and using social network analysis, they determined there were 13 active criminal street groups, most of which were identified as high-violence groups, with approximately 180 group members in the city.

The Department frequently updates the list of currently active high-violence groups and group members using field intelligence and social network analysis. From this analysis, the Department determines which group is committing the most violence in the community, or identifies the group responsible for the most recent shooting incident. This group is selected for an enforcement action, which illustrates the key enforcement message that will be delivered during a call-in with group members. The enforcement action shows other groups that the police department and its partners, including the District Attorney's Office, Probation Office, other law enforcement agencies, and service providers, are committed to ending violence. Newburgh Police Department uses a multi-tier approach to target all types of crime being committed by the group, using various enforcement strategies: enforcing probation or parole conditions, serving outstanding arrest warrants, conducting drug buys and making arrests, checking for unregistered cars, and performing housing code enforcement actions.

These enforcement activities are followed by the call-in, where representatives of law enforcement and social service providers present information to about a dozen group

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members, who are compelled to attend. Law enforcement gives the group a clear warning that any future violence will be met with swift and certain consequences, as the enforcement actions illustrated. A local non-profit organization then provides information on services available to group members and their families, including mental health and substance abuse treatment, education, and employment training and placement, in an effort to assist them in leaving a criminal lifestyle. The Department holds three to four call-ins per year. Police also conduct custom notifications to individuals who do not attend the call-in, or in situations where immediate intervention is necessary.

After the call-in, the Department carefully monitors criminal activity within the city. Any group responsible for increased levels of violence becomes the target of the next enforcement action, repeating the process from the beginning.

Funding

The program is supported in part by funding provided through the state's Gun Involved Violence Elimination (GIVE) initiative, which is administered by the state Division of Criminal Justice Services.

Program Reviews or Evaluations

While no formal review or evaluation has been completed on Newburgh's Group Violence Intervention Program, it has been an important component of the overall strategy to reduce shooting incidents in Newburgh. In 2018, the Newburgh Police Department reported an 86 percent decrease in shootings involving injury compared to 2015 (6 versus 43), and a decrease of 83 percent when compared to the five-year average. This continues the downward trend from 2016 and 2017 with 38 and 17 shootings involving injury, respectively. From 2015 to 2018, the rate of shooting incidents decreased dramatically from 15 incidents per 10,000 people to only two per 10,000 people.

Supportive Research

The Group Violence Intervention Program is based on a [focused deterrence](#) policing strategy, which targets specific criminal behavior committed by a small number of chronic offenders. Law enforcement confronts these offenders to inform them that violence will not be tolerated and offers to link them with services to change their behavior.

Newburgh based the Group Violence Intervention Program on a [crime control and reduction model](#) developed by the National Network for Safe Communities at John Jay College, in conjunction with the Department of Justice, Office of Community Oriented Policing Services.

Critical Success Factors

The promise of strict enforcement actions and the services offered to those who attend the call-in is critical to the program. If the Department does not carry out either or both of these items, then the program may lose credibility in the community.

A strong partnership between law enforcement agencies and social services entities also is critical. The law enforcement and social services component of the program are equally important. Additionally, involving multiple units within the Newburgh Police Department in the enforcement actions created a high level of buy-in from the entire department.

Lessons Learned

Initially, very few group members requested services following the call-in. Most participants needed additional engagement through bi-weekly phone calls and house visits to follow up on the message provided at the call-in. It took time for the program to gain legitimacy in the community before subjects would trust that there were services available to them.

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