

## PRACTICE BRIEF

# OUTREACH AND SUPPORT: AN EVIDENCE-BASED APPROACH TO SERVICES THAT REDUCES VIOLENCE IN THE NEAR TERM

### INTRODUCTION

**Making a wise investment in services that help reduce violence is difficult.**

Most programs for “at-risk” young people don’t reach individuals at the highest risk of violence – those most likely to shoot someone or be shot. Evaluations of the few initiatives targeting this population, such as street outreach, show mixed records of success.<sup>i</sup> National studies of “reentry” programs suggest that few generate large reductions in recidivism or long-term employment gains.<sup>ii</sup>

**This practice brief introduces a different way of investing in violence prevention** – one that is data-driven, evidence-based and tailored to people at highest risk. This “outreach and support” approach can help local leaders invest social services dollars wisely to reduce serious violence in the near term.

This approach is anchored in partnership-based violence reduction strategies, implemented in Oakland and Stockton since 2012. Both cities faced serious violence problems and strategically invested service resources to make progress on public safety. They grounded this work in five guiding principles:



**Rigorous analysis of violence** helps focus resources where they’re needed most – on individuals at the highest risk of shooting someone or being shot.



Basing services in the **principles of procedural justice** ensures partners treat clients with dignity and respect, value them as community members, provide them with opportunities to share their perspectives and convey trustworthy motives.



Focusing first on **harm reduction** provides the safety and stability high-risk clients need to take advantage of education and employment opportunities.



**Building trusting relationships** to influence clients’ decision-making and help them manage risk is as important as conventional services.



Using a small set of **management tools and performance measures** helps cities ensure they’re making progress.

## ESSENTIAL PROGRAM CAPACITIES

With California Partnership for Safe Communities (CPSC), local leaders in Oakland and Stockton developed the following theory of change and four-step approach:

1

### **ANALYZE VIOLENCE TO IDENTIFY HIGH-RISK CLIENTS.**

Both cities began with a “problem analysis”: a systematic examination of hundreds of shootings. These revealed that less than 0.003% of residents were involved in up to 80% of homicides as a victim or suspect. These individuals were older than often assumed (the average age was 28-30); heavily involved in the justice system (averaging 9-10 prior arrests) and associated with specific networks or gangs.

The cities now conduct weekly “shooting reviews” during which front-line officers assess all recent shootings. In real time, fewer than 100 people are at the highest risk of being shot or shooting someone, citywide. These individuals are the client pool.

2

### **AN ALLIANCE OF COMMUNITY LEADERS ENGAGES POTENTIAL CLIENTS THROUGH DIRECT, RESPECTFUL, “PROCEDURALLY JUST” COMMUNICATION.**

Community, clergy, street outreach and criminal justice leaders gather with 10-20 potential clients, typically in a church or community center. They share their commitment to making neighborhoods safe and keeping these men alive and free, while providing them with clear information about the risks of violence and incarceration, as well as available support. This is known as a “call-in.” When time is short, this message is compressed into a one-on-one conversation with those at risk.

Numerous studies show that this face-to-face communication – informed by procedural justice – can directly reduce the likelihood of further involvement in violence and the justice system.<sup>iii</sup> This communication also introduces clients to “relationship-based” case managers and outreach workers.

3

### **WORK QUICKLY TO ADDRESS SAFETY ISSUES WHILE BUILDING A LONG-TERM, TRUSTING RELATIONSHIP.**

Men at the highest risk of violence are often difficult to find and highly distrustful. Engaging them requires active outreach, constant in-person contact and “quick wins” (such as obtaining government identification or addressing an outstanding warrant). Cash, gift cards, food and other incentives help keep them engaged.

Skilled outreach workers or case managers focus on building trusting relationships and addressing clients’ immediate safety risks – captured in a “Safety Plan” – while developing a long-term plan for stability.

## HOW DO WE REDUCE THE RISK OF VIOLENCE?

Use tailored **Management Tools** to address clients' *specific safety* issues:



**Coordination Meetings** follow a police department's weekly shooting review. These help case managers and outreach workers focus on clients directly connected to recent shootings – *those at highest risk right now*.



While many intake documents focus on employment or housing needs, **Safety Plans** focus on *reducing clients' risk of involvement in violence*. They include conflict mediation, temporary relocation and identifying peers and places the client should avoid.



During regular **Case Conferences**, case managers, outreach workers and community leaders problem-solve issues facing especially challenging clients.

4

### FORMAL SERVICES AND A SUPPORTIVE COMMUNITY HELP WITH THE LONG-TERM WORK OF PERSONAL CHANGE.

Stepping away from violence can mean leaving behind close friends and family, so informal support is critical. Short-term measures to reduce risks stabilize clients in crisis. Next, long-term counseling, mentoring and support groups provide a new peer group and model healthy lifestyles and decision-making.

At the same time, case managers help clients access formal services, such as education, housing and employment. Arranging for priority access to services helps clients maintain a sense of momentum and optimism.

Clients remain connected to their outreach workers or case managers for one to two years. They support clients to accomplish Life Plans – centered on employment, education, parenthood and housing – while ensuring ongoing safety and stability.

## HOW DO WE KNOW IF THIS IS WORKING?

Regularly gather and analyze data – performance indicators – to answer these four questions:



**Are we working with the right people?** Are we serving the highest-risk clients identified in weekly shooting reviews?



**Are we building trust-based relationships with the right people?** Are case managers engaging clients, making frequent in-person contact and keeping them involved?



**Are we improving clients' safety and well-being?** Are clients avoiding victimization and arrest for violent crime?



**Are we helping clients approach long-term stability and opportunity?** Are clients receiving services, such as job training and GED prep? Are these leading to positive outcomes, such as jobs, educational credentials and getting off probation?

## CONCLUSION

Serious violence is a challenging and durable problem. This “outreach and support” approach can help cities leverage scarce resources wisely – by working with the right people in the right way, guided by data and evidence and with a clear framework for measuring progress.

## DESPITE LIMITED RESOURCES, CITIES CAN HAVE AN IMPACT.

In 2015, Oakland served more than 90 high-risk clients with 3 case managers and a small program budget. Four steps can help a city use limited resources well:

- 1 Complete a **problem analysis** to identify your city's highest-risk population.
- 2 Conduct a **resource assessment**. Who in the community or government already works with your target population? How much capacity do they have (service slots, case managers, program budget)?
- 3 Conduct a **needs assessment** with a sample of high-risk individuals to identify their immediate service and support needs.
- 4 **Identify your funding priorities**. Many cities combine *public funding* – for staff salaries and fixed program costs – and *private funding* – for incentives, relocation costs and other “non-traditional” service needs.

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CPSC works with cities that seek to reduce violence while strengthening community-police relations and alleviating over-incarceration. We support cities as they move quickly to reduce violence and help them engineer the institutional and systemic changes needed to sustain such reductions. This brief reflects the courageous work of the City of Oakland, Oakland Unite, Oakland Community Organizations and community partners; the City of Stockton, Office of Violence Prevention, the Peacekeepers and Friends Outside. The support of The Andrus Family Fund, The California Endowment, Kaiser Permanente Northern California Community Benefits and Californians for Safety and Justice made this work possible..

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