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|  | C:\Users\steve collett\AppData\Local\Microsoft\Windows\INetCacheContent.Word\RFSTLogo03.png    ***Interrupting and Managing Violent Offenders***  ***Learning from Community Partner approaches in North America***      A Rhodes Foundation Scholarship (2016)   |  |  | | --- | --- | | **Daniel Diamond** Senior Probation Officer  National Probation Service  (North West) | **Tony Norman**  Detective Inspector  Greater Manchester Police | |  | **February 2017**  **Series Number 49** | |

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**Acknowledgements**

It is important at the outset to state that my visit to New York State was a profound experience and will have a lasting impact on me. It not only served to confirm some longstanding thoughts and beliefs relating to the work I do but it provided a space to reflect on my practice and consider what value I bring to this work personally, the possibility of change and hope for improvement. I therefore, would like to extend my utmost thanks to the board of Trustees of the Rhodes Foundation Scholarship for providing me with such a rewarding opportunity to learn and develop both professionally and personally.

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Finally, I would like to express gratitude to all the staff in the Cure Violence teams in Rochester, Syracuse, Mount Vernon and Jacobi Medical Centre, Rochester Police Department and New York Police Department specifically the team at 43rd Precinct in The Bronx. Thank you to Professor John McCluskey at the Department of Criminal Justice, Rochester Institute of Technology. Special thanks to Karen Volker, of ***Cure Violence*** for such a positive reception to my initial approach to her organisation.

Last, but certainly not least, a very special thank you to State Operations Coordinator Jeff Clark who worked tirelessly on the ground to provide such a rich and rewarding experience and for introducing Tony and I to an incredibly interesting and diverse group of professionals who are passionate about what they do.

**Dan Diamond**

**February 2017**

**Executive Summary**

Having secured a Rhodes Foundation Scholarship, at the end of August 2016 Dan Diamond, Senior Probation Officer from the National Probation Service Northwest, travelled to New York State to spend time with ***Cure Violence*** a non-government organisation established in response to the ongoing high levels of violence and fatal incidents in Chicago, Illinois. Tony Norman, a Detective Inspector, whose trip was funded by Greater Manchester Police, also accompanied Dan on the visit.

The work of Cure Violence is regarded as both unusual and highly innovative because of its unique approach to reducing the risk of violent incidents in the community. Cure Violence seeks to define and treat violence as a contagious disease, therefore viewing the problem as a public health issue. However, the evidence suggests this narrative goes further than a simple metaphor.

As a Senior Probation Officer I have responsibility for the work we do with individuals involved in ‘Serious Group Offending’ an overarching term employed to describe Serious Organised Crime Groups and Urban Street Gangs. My work has developed as the business of the National Probation Service has evolved and responded to a changing criminal justice system. Gangs and Organised Crime receive a high level of public attention and the response to it is mixed. However, individuals involved in group based offending are often involved in violent conflict of which retaliation and escalating violence levels are a significant aspect. Naturally this draws attention from government agencies as they grapple to find solutions and appropriate responses. However, the all too pejorative, yet swiftly applied term ‘gang’ has arguably led some policy-makers to draw fast conclusions on some of the most challenging individuals in our communities, often leading to sweeping generalisations matched by broad tactics of control. In the face of violence and harm such responses may not seem wholly unjustified; nevertheless, many of those identified also reside in our more marginalised communities where voices are not heard and problems less understood. Within this context responding constructively to violence between feuding individuals whether self- defined criminal organisations, entrenched familial crime groups or externally labelled gangs is at best extremely challenging and at worst, predisposed to a feeling of anticipated failure.

The theory which underpins the Cure Violence approach suggests that violence spreads through communities like an infectious disease and therefore requires a disease management response.

Like with any other model, the successful application is very dependent on the skills and abilities of those delivering the work. However, this is not an ordinary ‘off the shelf’ programme, rather, such was role of the frontline worker that they served to embody the very essence of the intervention itself. It was immediately clear that the principles of trust and credibility were prerequisites. Trust between statutory agencies and Cure Violence programme workers and credibility of the Cure Violence workers before the service users. To make sense of these relationships the visit focused on the operational interface between the key partners, and visits and conversations with participating agencies were carried out. This included discussions with frontline staff to statutory officials and academic institutions in a range of locations and during different activities. Whilst the frontline violence interrupters and outreach workers were the ‘change agents’, their role needed the full support and backing of State Officials and Criminal Justice agencies. In short, the statutory agencies were the ‘enablers’.

# Introduction

The research study presented an opportunity to develop understanding about a relatively new approach to an old problem which impacts on communities worldwide and with no exception here in Northwest England. In view of this the following question would form the basis of the study.

*What learning can be taken from Violence Interruption Programmes and how might this be applied in the UK?*

**Cure Violence Approach**

In the October 2012 I was introduced to Gary Slutkin MD, founder of Cure Violence at the Scotland and Violence Conference. As Doctor Slutkin addressed the conference my attention was immediately drawn by his claims that the spread of violence behaves like an infectious disease and therefore the response needs to mirror that of a biological resolution. Simply put this involves, locating the immediate threat of contamination, containing the threat then working to alter the behaviour of those seen as responsible for any further spread. As follows: (Cureviolence.Org)

Identify transmitters

Stop further spread

Change group norms

Violence is acted out in many contexts, from the hidden confines of an intimate relationship to highly visible acts of violence in the pursuit of goods or gain. Violence is commonly employed in acts of revenge both interpersonal or in group rival conflict. Violence is also seen as a legitimate solution to manage political conflicts such as war. In all its forms, somehow, violence seems to serve a purpose and as unpalatable as it may be, it is too often the first response.

Slutkin et al describe a violent response wherein reason and rationale are circumvented by an overwhelming feeling or stimulus to lash out physically on another person. However, violence is also frequently referred to under the subcategories of Expressive Violence and Instrumental Violence, the former being driven by emotion the latter more rationally processed. The Cure Violence model simply regards violence as violence and in so doing sets about its violence reduction programme with a simple yet clear message. Therefore, equal to the importance of the person in possession of the vaccine or antidote to an infectious disease is the conveyor of ‘the message’ which contains a non-violent resolution.

**Methodology**

The visit to Cure Violence incorporated an assortment of activities. Our aim was to obtain a broader view as possible from across the partnership agencies. Given the time constraints this was always going to be a big task but we found ourselves in the company of many individuals from across the professions and organisations and this provided us with a rich source of information.

The body of our work is therefore a summary of what we learned through focus groups, interviews, street-based activities and other meetings. We found value in both the formal and informal nature of the methods we employed and believed this was the most effective approach in the circumstances. We were also provided with a selection of supporting documents which related to Cure Violence programme performance, staff training and development as well a number of articles and academic studies relating to violent crime in New York State.

In order to make sense of the work that was undertaken during the course of the visit I will provide a description of the various activities and interviews along with some personal reflection and understanding. Therefore, the format will be written in a firsthand narrative but I will apply ‘I ‘and ‘we’ throughout depending on the views being shared.

**Interviews and Activities**

# Partner agencies

Central to the Cure Violence model is the requirement for strong effective partnership arrangements. Full cooperation and an appreciation of role, function and efficacy are needed from all key partners. Developing trust and a shared commitment across a multidisciplinary sector presents challenges, but we discovered that where such relationships were established there was evidence of positive results. Programme integrity was also a critical requirement and wherever this was more consistently adhered to, success was more likely.

What follows is an account of the different activities, conversations and meetings we took part in.

# Interviews with Jeff Clark State Operations Director for Outreach Anti Violence Initiatives:

# Conversations with Jeff commenced earlier in the year once the visit had been confirmed. It is important to mention at this point that Jeff’s role in the whole trip was intrinsic to its success; he played a pivotal function in brokering and arranging all the contacts, interviews and activities. My initial face to face contact with Jeff was on a Skype call which I used to scope out the parameters of the visit. I then spoke to Jeff a second time on Skype for the purpose of introducing Detective Inspector Tony Norman to him. These calls provided an ideal introduction to the planned work so when we arrived in Rochester we were able to hit the ground running. Since the visit, Jeff has kindly made himself available for additional Skype calls to provide further information and clarity.

Throughout the visit, we spent many hours in the company of Jeff part of which included driving us to all of the appointments and various locations when we were upstate for the first four days of the visit. Whilst this was very helpful practically, it also gave us ample opportunity to ask many questions and discuss the work Jeff was doing. Jeff’s passion for the work was palpable but prior to his current role he had retired as a Police Commander with the City of Rochester Police Department. Therefore, he brought a fascinating perspective to the work and was able to contextualise much of what we were seeing and hearing during the week.

Due to the sheer size of New York State it meant that Jeff’s span of control was extensive and required him to travel vast distances either by car or plane in order to visit the various sites. All of the time we were acutely aware of the environmental differences both geographically and culturally, which might have been a barrier had we not been reminded repeatedly of the similarities in our work. This common ground served to enable a really productive and empathic dialogue between us and over the course of the visit.

Whilst Jeff was able to provide both a strategic and operational overview of the programme, also significant was the amalgamation of Jeff’s previous work as an experienced police officer at all levels and his current role in managing a violence reduction programme, recruiting ‘credible workers’ for outreach and violence interruption. It is not unusual in the UK for Police to work closely with community groups and intervention providers but the Cure Violence model is a powerful indicator of the necessary shift in thinking if the principles of a programme of this nature are to be embraced elsewhere. As a worker in the UK criminal justice system I have viewed the US systems with some curiosity and even felt troubled when I think of the incarceration levels which are the highest in the world. However, the Cure Violence initiative seems in juxtaposition to those traditional attitudes and approaches to crime, criminals and interventions, a constant theme of this report.

# Tour of Rochester Neighbourhoods Jeff Clark

To enable a street view of the problem we were taken on two tours of the more notorious and challenging communities of Rochester. The first was during day time hours where we encountered multiple streets of visible deprivation populated by innumerable individuals of all ages engaged in the selling of illicit drugs. The practice of buying and selling illegal narcotics was facilitated by an open drug market. This is in marked contrast to the UK where such activities are more covert and heavily reliant on the use of mobile phones dedicated to coordinating deals. Every time we pulled up at a stop light or an inter-section we would be aware of individuals on hand to approach vehicles to sell drugs. I was informed that we would have been regarded as unlikely customers and perhaps the cause of some suspicion due to our appearance. Of note was the age of some of these individuals, usually young, some very young. It would be too easy to make sweeping statements about the business and the lives of many of these individuals but our conversations revealed a multi-layered set of issues symptomatic of poor socio economic and intergenerational poverty ultimately bordering dystopian.

As previously mentioned, what drives people to act violently varies significantly. The challenging conditions in which some violent people have to live their lives may lead one to conclude that in order for the violence to be reduced all of these other issues need to be removed first. This argument will have merit but once I was able to witness, albeit to a limited extent, and hear about the depth of the entrenched problems in these communities I could see how this might lead one to a feeling of hopelessness. The Cure Violence model does not ignore these multiple factors but it does not simply seek to define the violence by attributing the violence to these circumstances alone.

An interesting factor which required further understanding was the perception that the levels of violence were not linked to the selling of drugs. That violence was bigger and more sustained and was in response to other features of the community’s problems.

# Ride Along and Observation Rochester Police Department

On our second night in the City of Rochester we were invited to participate in a police ‘ride along’ activity. This took place over a four-hour period 7-11 PM. Both Tony and I travelled apart for this activity, each with a Police Officer in a marked patrol vehicle. This was a real privilege and a very unique opportunity which helped in our continuing efforts to understand the dynamics of how law enforcement agents respond to violent communities. The evening incorporated a general tour of neighbourhoods and then a routine Police response to a firearm discharge.

The evening tour, more or less, took us on the same streets and neighbourhoods of those we saw the previous day during daylight hours. The evening tour was a far more lively experience as the streets were more vibrant and full of activity. The patrol was quite typical in its function but seeing things through the eyes of a regular police officer in a liveried vehicle was interesting to say the least. The first thing that struck me was the extent of the activity. There were high numbers of people, old and young, simply standing around the streets. Drugs were being sold, disputes were taking place and there was a palpable sense of unease. This was quite normal according to my Police escort but given the high levels of violence in the area, especially firearms related, there was a prevailing sense that ‘anything could happen at any time’. Shootings were common and the Police informed me that you can expect to be dealing with anything between 2-8 incidents a shift which can range from firearm discharges, serious injury to fatalities.

We were taken to the Rochester Police Head Quarters midway through the shift to visit the intelligence hub. As we were being shown around the suite there was a short burst of a siren sound followed by an audio recording of six gun shots. This, we were informed, was the ‘Shot Spotter’. Acoustic sensors placed at various locations in neighbourhoods where firearms incidents are at high levels. The device identifies the location of the shots, displays it on a large screen in the hub whilst simultaneously transmitting data to officers out on patrol on hand held devices. With our Police escorts, we immediately returned to the Police vehicles and were conveyed to the location of the shooting. Upon our arrival, there were already several Officers attending the scene. With no apparent victim, a lack of evidence by way of damage or spent cartridges etc the situation was quickly brought to a conclusion with no further action. Of particular note was the speed with which this matter came to a close, it was clear that this was a high frequency incident and as such the response was almost uneventful. Such were the levels of gun related violence in the City of Rochester and whilst the cities in the Northwest of England are no stranger to violence and gun crime this was a contrasting experience.

The discussions I had with my police escort were both frank and open. No attempt was made to gloss over the difficult realities of the challenges facing the police in this particular area. There was a sense however, from our conversations with a number of police officers that things were different these days and a phrase or a line that really spoke volumes to us was the words of one officer who stated *“ one of the main problems is the police are losing the power”.* By this one could deduce that the police, or at least this particular officer, felt at one time they had power. It’s just an interesting thought.

As we looked back on our experience with the Rochester Police it was notable that the appointment of individual Police Officers was not obviously reflective of the community in which they worked. In fact, officers travelled in from other Cities to work and we were left to wonder what this meant for local community Policing. This was in contrast with our experience with Police in New York City where the community footprint was more evident in policing.

# Seminar Rochester Institute of Technology

On our first evening, we were invited to meet with and present to a group of students who were studying for a Masters in Criminology at the Rochester Institute of Technology, together with the department heads. This was a valuable discussion for a number of reasons. The session combined perspectives from our experiences in the UK and then a discussion about group based offending, violence and the general complexities of the violence agenda on the whole. It was here that the issue of race was directly discussed and voice was given to powerful statistics around the discrimination experienced by the African American community in Rochester. The topics of race and crime and how they interact is simply an overwhelming prospect within the limited confines of a seminar but we still found this to be extremely helpful. This information would remain with us and help us consider some of the harder facts facing the marginalised communities of Rochester. One notable factor was the alarmingly low high school graduation rates for African American males (Sanzone et al 2014).

**Criminal Justice Leads Meeting / Focus Group.**

Attendees**:** Executive Deputy Commissioner (previously Monroe County District Attorney), Police Captain, Police Sergeant, Deputy Commissioner, State Violence Reduction Programme Coordinator and Head of Criminal Justice Department Rochester Institute of Technology.

In an attempt to better understand some of the more strategic relationships that sit behind and support the work of violence interruption programmes in the City of Rochester and beyond we were privileged to meet with a group of academics and public agency officials from very senior staff to operational level. This was a two hour meeting and it covered many topics. The open drug market in Rochester was discussed and responses to the UK approach compared. Importantly was the link between the drugs market, street gangs and violence. The ‘offender journey’ was a key point of discussion and the important work around planning for release from prison and the delivery of targeted rehabilitative interventions. What was quite apparent in the room was the shared experience of both the frustrations inherent in the work as well as the vision for potential success.

The buy-in and willingness to support a programme of intervention such as Cure Violence was evident and the relationship between these key stakeholders was encouraging. We were reminded however, that the mandate for this work was the unacceptable high levels of violence and homicide in the City and therefore, any response needed to reach much further than traditional policing.

It seems a reasonable view that there is a dichotomy inherent within elements of the US criminal justice system. With the highest incarceration rates in the world on one side then state funded but privately run radical community based violence interruption programmes on the other. In the face of the facts and the severity of the violence problem there is room for a more radical approach. In the absence of any success by more traditional methods there exists a place to try new ideas and take bigger risks. When the alternative is more violence and the inevitable loss of life there is a bigger appetite to take such risks and this was reflected in the discussion with this particular group of professionals.

As previously mentioned, in the UK we are no stranger to working in partnership with Police and sharing information to assist in the effective management of risk but the question for me was twofold: In an effort to reduce further harm following a critical incident at what point do Police share intelligence and more pertinently, with who?

Throughout the visit, we found our most productive conversations were transactional by nature and this meeting was no different. We provided an overview of MAPPA (multi agency public protection arrangements) as an example of collaborative risk management in the UK which was greeted with keen interest. The imperative to share information was equal but the point at which this was done and how was quite contrasting and although the UK approach to offender management seemed to our US colleagues as more person centred it was quite apparent to us that in relation to this specific agenda we in the UK appeared more cautious, even risk averse. Having said this, legislation such as the 1998 Crime and Disorder Act was a helpful reference point and was there to support the broader need to share. Again, this was of interest to our colleagues in the US.

# Meetings with Cure Violence Neighbourhood Teams

Over the course of the week we met with four separate teams which participated as follows: Rochester Cure Violence Neighbourhood Team. Site based Focus Group

Syracuse Cure Violence Team (SNUG). Site based Focus Group

Jacobi Hospital New York Bronx. Site based Focus Group

Mount Vernon Cure Violence Team. Street based Shooting Response

Over all we met with approximately 35 team members the composition of which were mainly male but each team did include female workers both at manager/supervisor and outreach worker level. The teams were mixed in age range and ethnically were highly representative of the areas in which they operated. Most of the workers were of African American heritage and small number self-identified as Latin American heritage.

From the outset, it was never anticipated that we would be sat face to face with current service users of the various anti violence initiatives, such an ask seemed not only unrealistic but not entirely appropriate for the purposes of this visit. We wanted to meet with the teams themselves, programme managers, supervisors, outreach workers, mentors and violence interrupters. We hoped that from their accounts, stories and experiences as well as our own direct observations we would gain the necessary insight we were seeking to develop.

Whilst the teams were closely aligned in purpose and mission they differed in accordance with the local context. Rochester was a relatively new team and very much still in formation stage. All of the teams were linked to the issues in their respective neighbourhood in one way or another. Being an outreach worker required extensive and relevant experience of the lifestyle of the individuals they were working with. Most had experienced prison first hand and were familiar with the ‘offender journey’ through the criminal justice process. Alignment of the workers to gangs was also an important element which underlined the necessity for them to be drawn from and remain in the communities they worked. By the very nature of the work they were involved in and the lives they lived, death and loss of close family, friends and associates was very much part of the lived experience of these men and women. Hence, credibility was everything.

The team based in Jacobi Medical Centre Bronx, was a unique development on so many levels and by virtue of the location the whole public health message was never more clearly delivered. The team had a resident social worker who was the Programme Director and there was a pediatrician who worked halftime within the general hospital and halftime attached to the unit. The outreach workers remained focused on the community work but the key difference was when there was a shooting or other serious acts of violence linked to the neighbourhoods they were aligned to, the violence interrupters were readily available in the actual hospital to engage the congregating family/friends of the harmed person and commence work on reducing the likelihood of further violence.

To provide some context and to illustrate the size and nature of the task of these teams, the population of Rochester is approximately 210,000 the City of Syracuse is around 145,000, less than the City of Salford in Greater Manchester which is around 244,000. When interviewing the team in Syracuse they described 8 street gangs in operation across the neighbourhoods they worked on, these groups of primarily young people could be up to 50 self-identified and committed to the group, this was minus any peripherally involved individuals. In the preceding 12 months one of these gangs alone lost 6 individuals in gang conflict murders, over 10% of its active membership. This fact alone brought into sharp focus the size of the actual problem these teams were working with. They were not simply detached youth workers or assertive outreach but the providers of an intensive intervention that was as critical to the lives and wellbeing of the communities as any other emergency service.

# Interview: Damon Bacote Mount Vernon SNUG . SNUG Training Director

It is understood that the work carried out by these teams can be fraught with risk and number of potential hazards. Whilst there are inherent physical risks this led us to consider the emotional wellbeing of the workers and how this is managed. Previous experience is essential to the worker’s credibility, but ongoing engagement with very same set of issues which once rendered them immersed in a life of violence and crime may at times cause them to relive some of those previous difficulties and traumas. From our discussions with Damon he was acutely aware of this issue and part of his role was to ensure the facilitation of a ‘healthy space’ for consultation and supervision, a significant element of which came from peer on peer support. The roles they performed were stressful and support was vital. This was an important issue for the teams and maintaining a space to talk constructively and work through some of the consequent issues was critical to their effectiveness both as individual workers and as a team. One to one supervision and line management would go some way to dealing with this but it was the team discussions both formally and informally that seemed to provide a real source of support, as well as individual colleague relationships.

Due to the intrinsic nature of the role great emphasis is repeatedly placed on the outreach worker’s credentials and the need for ‘legitimacy’ in order to have a meaningful and respected voice within the community. Negotiating, arbitrating and mediating complex issues in emotionally charged situations whilst retaining credibility and respect seems a tall order but it was happening. We were interested in the risk of compromise which could lead to lapse or complete relapse for the workers themselves, i.e., risk of returning to a criminal lifestyle either willfully or incidentally. This, unfortunately, was a reality of the business and whilst hopefully avoided by most it remained an occupational hazard according to the managers. This area alone is incredibly complicated and demanded a degree of pragmatism on the part of the organisation when considering worker safety, reputational risk and programme integrity. Again, we return to the word ‘trust’ which was proving to be the golden thread of this work. It did seem that in order for the outreach and violence interruption element of this work to be effective the relationships between the State oversight and frontend delivery needed to have built in flexibility and we were impressed with the way in which some of these difficulties were addressed. It was evident that the managers understood what the frontline staff were up against and were able to work through some of this constructively whilst protecting both organisation and worker needs.

To establish the effectiveness and capability of the outreach workers they had specialised training and development requirements. Full induction and training was provided to team members at all levels which addressed the fundamental components of the Cure Violence model and programme implementation. We were provided limited access to the training and induction manual and were able to read for ourselves the extent of the instruction and orientation that is given to recruits. This also included ongoing professional and practice development opportunities.

Of course, investment in the employees was extremely important but we were also interested in the longevity of their role and whether there existed a period of optimum effectiveness and subsequent tailing off. It was apparent that there is a balance between someone doing what they are good at and then admitting this is part of their own progress and rehabilitation and at some point, they too need to move on. But there was no simple solution and was very much a matter of personal consideration. However, we were informed by the coordinator that the role of the Outreach Worker and the Violence Interrupter was between 3-5 years. It was also a fact that modest staff turnover was a reality of the work but a number of workers also experienced promotion and progress within the organisation which was very positive to see. The work carried out by the OW/VI is both specialised and demanding but once an individual had accrued the necessary skills, they were equipped with a very strong contribution to their resume/curriculum vitae for which the programme managers were able to provide a strong and supportive reference for any external job opportunities moving forward.

# Interview: Fausto B Pichardo, Inspector Commanding Officer and Police Colleagues at 43rd Precinct Bronx NYPD:

# As with upstate New York, critical to our understanding and appreciation for the local context was the Police perspective of the community and the violence issue. We were introduced to a number of Police personnel at the 43rd Precinct Bronx and had the opportunity to interview the Police Commander. This was particularly interesting and we were able to observe a notable contrast in the way the Police spoke about the local community and the challenges they faced. Police visibility and assurance was a big issue for the Commander who made it his business to make his presence felt where there were problems and concerns in his neighbourhoods. This was a positive development but not one that was always evident in Police-Community relations previously in Bronx. The commander was mindful of the need to recruit his Police officers from the local community where possible because this developed legitimacy and reduced tensions between Community and Police. Alongside the day to day challenges of managing quite a high crime location, community and public relations were very important and this was reinforced by a citizens training course which provides people with an insight into the work of the Police along with the challenges of local policing, both practically and legally. It was also a way for the NYPD to harvest ideas and potential opportunities to work better with community stakeholders. During the evening activity at the shooting response with the Mount Vernon Cure Violence team we were able to discuss some of these perspectives with one of the Outreach workers who spoke very highly of the Police Commander and his team’s methods. This was of particular importance to us and we were interested in the simple yet powerful influence this perception of the Police was having on this individual who was previously an active ‘gang’ member but now working in Outreach.

# Service User Engagement

It has already been explained that due to the nature of the work of Cure Violence it was not practical to directly observe their practice within the intimate confines of the worker – client relationship. Nevertheless the workers at all grades provided example after example where as a result of their involvement individuals and situations they were able to influence outcomes and in certain cases with dramatic effect. Whilst diversion from retaliation was a critical function of the worker ‘changing group norms’ was a primary focus of the ongoing work. Preventative work therefore, was invested in, which was a culmination of addressing traditional pathways and signposting away from criminal lifestyles.

Modelling appropriate or alternative responses was also important but one example of this was controversial to say the least but once we appreciate the context it makes logical, if uncomfortable, sense.

Worker: ‘A 13 year old male was going off to access a firearm to resolve an ongoing dispute with a rival. He was encouraged and convinced to have a fist fight instead’

Desperate situations warrant desperate measures!

# Shooting Response

This event was an exception to the overall week as we were able to directly observe Cure Violence in a structured activity. Following two very recent successive murders we were invited to attend what is commonly known as a ‘Shooting Response’. This was a visible demonstration where the local team gather, in this case Mount Vernon, and hold a type of vigil but repeatedly announce their opposition to the unnecessary and tragic loss of life. Placards are held bearing the Cure Violence logo, flyers are handed out to slowing traffic and a team member speaks-out through a megaphone issuing a powerful but simple message to passersby. The full involvement of ex-gang members was an important aspect of this which naturally increased the impact of the event. It is usual for there to be a focal point such as photos of the deceased and personal messages. Family and community members are encouraged to attend but in this case despite the advance publicity there was a low turnout which was a message in itself

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It is important to mention that the shooting responses are done with the cooperation of local law enforcement and they are fully aware of the planned event, but do not attend. It is vital that the community own this activity which, it is hoped, makes the message both meaningful and more powerful

# Information Sharing

A continuing theme of work with violent communities is that of ‘community intelligence’. Information about what has happened, what is happening now and what may happen next. Also, how this information is accessed and how, if at all, it can be used. This issue is of high importance to most law enforcement agencies but gaining access to this information is extremely difficult. As we reflected on the UK experience, it was a similar challenge. We could name a number of serious incidents and murders in both Greater Manchester and Merseyside which remain unresolved but where potential witnesses were seemingly in abundance but nothing forthcoming by way of evidence or support.

For a violence interruption worker to have any legitimacy it was paramount that they were not seen or regarded as a simple extension of the overall law enforcement network. Workers were frequently exposed to sensitive information and had to walk a careful path to avoid being an informant on the one hand but on the other in any way collusive. We understand that with any community there is ‘community knowledge’ but this is maintained by special access rights and one cannot simply dip in at will. Such was the sensitivity of the role of the Interrupter at times that this information was at the very core of their personal efficacy and success. Acting on this information to bring about a safe resolution was a big call and returning to the principles of the above scenario , there is a pronounced tension in the decision process.

Managing this issue satisfactorily seemed incredibly complex and it led us to return to a point made previously about exceptional problems requiring exceptional responses. In essence, the workers will have to respond according to their professional judgement and this would be the ultimate exercise in defensible versus defensive decision making. In view of this fact, it is clear why continuing collaboration with the team and site hub was a vital requirement for both OW and VI . This would allow for consultation over sensitive information, nevertheless one would be naive to assume that workers were not retaining bits of difficult information.

Just because the Police share something important does not automatically lead to a tangible payoff. In this relationship, the information sharing by Police may be seen as an end in itself and not a means to another outcome. Of course, violence reduction is the overarching aim but local Police had to accept that such information was now in the hands of these neighbourhood teams and they would put it to best use as possible. The focus is on violence reduction and NOT intelligence gathering.

**Performance Management**

Once the Cure Violence programme is implemented in a new area there would be a back to back three year period comparison. Three years without the programme then three years in from programme inception. Specific figures will not be published within the body of this report due to sensitivities around the data but access was granted to the information for our perusal.

Performance that supports the overarching violence reduction focused on a range of activities and basic programme requirements. These included numbers of client contacts, work with high risk target individuals, education visits, presentations, mediation sessions, interruptions and so on.

Figures are collated for each team across the state and a monthly report is produced. Performance percentages are monitored centrally around both team and individual workers.

Funding the programme comes from State Executive Commissioners of the State Criminal Justice Services, and contracts are awarded based on need and evidence that the location meets the threshold around violence and harm.

**Summary**

On the 4th August 2011, armed officers from London Metropolitan Police shot and killed Mark Duggan, a 29-year-old black British male. This tragic incident seemed to serve as a type of catalyst for a series of civil disturbances up and down the country. In response to this the UK government in 2012 launched the Ending Gang and Youth Violence programme. Much has been documented and said about the overall effectiveness of this programme and this will not be explored any further here. However, in essence the EGYV team spent the next several visiting cities and towns where gangs and group based violence were a perceived feature of the local crime profile. Central to the process was a peer review which involved assessing local arrangements in the designated localities. The following seven principles formed the basis for this peer review as agencies and partners responded to the problem of gang and youth violence.

1. Strong Leadership .
2. Working in Partnership.
3. Mapping the Problem.
4. Targeted and Effective Interventions.
5. Criminal Justice and Breaking the Cycle.
6. Mobilising Communities.
7. Assessment and Referral.

During our brief time in New York State we were able consider our experience against these seven principles and we found strong evidence under most categories. Having carried out a number of EGYV peer reviews in recent years I was fascinated by some of the contrasting results between those experiences in the UK and that of the recent US visit.

**Strong Leadership**

Without the expressed vision and endorsement of senior decision makers no amount of technical expertise or enthusiasm on the frontline will produce sustainable outcomes or success. Our conversations with the Executive Deputy Commissioner and colleagues evidenced that meaningful and effective relationships existed across the partnership at an appropriate level. There was a shared commitment to the overarching strategic aims of the programme as well as the operating principles upon which it needed to be delivered. Managing public perception was also significant to this group because Cure Violence was not an ordinary intervention or approach and will have required some significant negotiation in order for progress to be made. Communicating with both hearts and minds was essential and we were under no illusion that this will have been quite a difficult task. This point was highlighted by some of the contrasting discussions we had with practitioners from different partner agencies and where there was longevity there was more confidence in the validity of the programme.

**Working in Partnership**

No principle stands above another, they are all intrinsically connected. However, working in partnership is perhaps the lifeblood of the Cure Violence programme. All participant agencies had a shared responsibility to bring about positive outcomes both at agency and service user level. Recognising and enabling the use of bespoke skills and expertise was fundamental to the daily operations and accepting that no single agency or person could do it alone was equally important. As we listened to the individual stories and experiences of workers at all levels and from various disciplines it was also made manifest that there were many value bases and political perspectives which naturally impact on the overall dynamics of the programme. Such contrasting experiences and perspectives needed to be harmonized or at least properly managed in order to produce a robust framework which ensured safety and assurance to all stakeholders. Satisfying both statutory partner and community member expectations was a tall order but from the limited time we spent we witnessed some very encouraging indications that this was happening but obviously not without its challenges.

**Mapping the Problem**

Programmes were only established where there was an identified and fully evidenced problem. Violence in upstate New York cities was amongst the highest rates in the country. However, even within a city such as Rochester, there needed to be a targeted location where the resources matched the demand. It is arguable that the principles of a programme of this nature would stand to benefit many neighbourhoods but with limited funds available there had to be a carefully managed commissioning process. In view of this, crime statistics and local threat assessments were utilised to support the process.

**Targeted and Effective Interventions**

We observed a wide range of interventions during the week. Individual outreach/mentoring support packages were provided to service users who were being targeted due to risk and need. The hospital team at Jacobi Medical Centre was highly innovative and the epitome of a targeted approach. Street based community ‘Shooting Responses’ are a demonstrative and powerful method of both challenging group norms and enabling the community voice. Mediations and Violence Interruptions were perhaps at the sharper end of delivery and were seen as critical options which were endorsed by all agencies including Police. In contrast the same workers were involved in a number of engagement and diversionary activities one of which was called ‘Guns Down Bikes Up’.

**Criminal Justice and Breaking the Cycle**

Assimilating information about the broader criminal justice processes was quite challenging. Discussions with the various officials presented an interesting picture and it was clear that the dynamics of the State-wide context provided a layer of complexity when attempting to track the ‘offender journey’. Custodial pre-release provision was less consistent but Cure Violence teams had a clear mandate to work ‘thru-the-gate’ where possible so that individuals returning to the streets following terms of imprisonment were afforded the opportunity to integrate in timely manner.

**Mobilising Communities**

The target community is at the very heart of the Cure Violence approach and there were numerous examples of the critical links between the programme team and the community in which they were operating. Teams were located in the neighbourhoods they were working with and as mentioned already the team are drawn from the same community where they are both known and respected and possessed the all-important credibility. By virtue of the makeup of the teams, the Cure Violence model achieves this all important principle by doing the work ‘with the community’ and not ‘to the community’ whilst remaining within the parameters of the current Police target operating model.

In simple terms this diagram illustrates the broader context of the target individual. Each element sits within the influence of another for both positive and negative ends. The overarching aim to enable the community to work together with partner agencies is a principle that cannot be overstated here. However, it was our observations that this concept was taken to a different level in the locations where the Cure Violence programme model was established and whilst this breadth of engagement might seem more aspirational to some than others it was central to the narrative in all the conversations we had with those involved or responsible for the programme.

**Assessment Referral**

In as much as the programme locations were established on the basis of homicide statistics, of equal importance was ensuring that the correct individuals were kept in scope. When targeting an area of high crime and deprivation there would always be meaningful work opportunities with individuals and families but it was the business of the teams to target those individuals and groups at risk of violence and who present a high risk of harm to self and others. The neighbourhoods presented a very dynamic picture therefore, up to date information was necessary to ensure the focus always remained relevant to the programme objectives. Ongoing communication and consultation was highlighted by all those we spoke to. We heard how continued collaboration and consultation was an important part of the induction and training programme for Outreach Workers and Violence Interrupters. Police intelligence played an important role in this process and regular updates provided to the team manager would be handled sensitively and shared on a case by case basis. Within this process individuals at risk were identified and strategies to engage them were developed by the teams.

**Learning and Looking Forward**

In the Northwest of England, criminal groups continue to engage in violent conflict when settling disputes, ongoing feuds, debts and random acts of revenge. Often these hostilities employ the use of weapons including knives and firearms. Managing violent offenders who present a risk to both themselves, people close to them and ultimately to those with whom they are in direct conflict is a significant challenge for public protection agencies. It is also an ongoing challenge to gain the support and cooperation of vulnerable/marginalised communities as well as the support of key individuals who have the credibility and positions of influence.

Enlisting the support and expertise of ex-offenders to work with current offenders takes place already in the UK. Probation Services are familiar with this practice and have encouraged it where appropriate, even whilst the worker/mentor has also been subject to their own ongoing period of statutory supervision. This does not rest comfortably with everyone and there has been a reluctance to support such approaches from our experience but both Probation and Police in Greater Manchester and Merseyside have previously collaborated to enable such an arrangement with positive outcomes. Utilising key individuals to interrupt the process of escalating conflict and subsequent violence, especially in our urban areas, would be a brave step for any agency, but we believe there may be value in this and is therefore, the submission of this report that further exploration and consideration should be afforded the Cure Violence model or at least principles of it.

As we considered ways that these operating principles might be adopted we realized that there are hotspots in our communities and areas in our partnership working arrangements that would be adaptable. One area could be the Accident and Emergency Departments in our Northwest Hospitals. However, we looked at two examples that were perhaps more within our immediate grasp.

**Situation One: Police Gold Meeting**

Police ‘Gold Meetings’ are usually convened following certain violent incidents to facilitate an appropriate multi agency response to mitigate further impact and harm to the community. In these meetings, much time is spent considering the group threats and issues around safeguarding vulnerable people. The suite of options available typically follow an enforcement theme, which is understandable. To support the objectives of the meeting relevant information/intelligence could be shared with an agency/individual that coordinates violence interruption and outreach relevant to the locality of the risk. An external dialogue at this juncture may provide an opportunity to avert further violence.

**Situation Two: Conflict Rivalry in Merseyside**

At time of preparing this report Merseyside Police state there has been a 250% increase in illicit firearms activity compared to the same four month period last year. This problem is mainly focused on the City of Liverpool but does include neighbourhoods in Sefton and Knowsley. There is an escalating problem between rival Organised Crime Groups and tit-for-tat assaults and shootings both injurious and fatal. This spike in gun crime is also attracting significant media attention at both local and national levels.

Serious violence like this will not diminish overnight but there is a need for immediate action which will no doubt invoke a range of enforcement options but police and community safety partnerships have learnt that you cannot enforce your way out of the problem. Even so, in the wake of increase public concern the Police opted to do a ‘show of strength’ by driving a large convoy of liveried vehicles through the City as a message to the residents.

An appreciation of the size and nature of a problem of this requires careful analysis and profiling, however it is understood that a significant element of it is at street level and not necessarily the interactions between particularly sophisticated crime groups. With this in mind a situation of this scale and problem presents an obvious opportunity to consider an alternative community based violence reduction strategy.

Such ideas naturally raise many more questions but these are simplified summaries of, what would in reality be, a highly complex piece of work requiring careful planning, explicit working agreements and agreed protocols which won’t be further explored here. However, it is our suggestion that the principles of Cure Violence be considered by senior decision makers and at the very least a dialogue commenced.

**Conclusion**

Establishing trust and developing rapport are mainstays in the business of offender engagement and behavior change and therefore, do not present as new concepts. Nevertheless, we observed something in New York that was not just innovative but also quite unique. It was our experience that the uniqueness of the Cure Violence model is matched only by the nature of the actual problem it is designed to address. With this in mind the replication of such a programme would not necessarily translate to areas where the precise same set of challenges do not exist. The UK has the highest prison population in Europe but its’ incarceration rates remain significantly lower than that of the United States of America. The UK is also challenged by violent crime and inter-group violence, where criminal territory and rival affiliation are defining features of the violence problem. However, with homicide rates significantly higher in the US, aided by the ready access and use of firearms there is an obvious imperative to consider a more radical solution.

Whether or not a model of this nature would be suitable or even applicable here in the Northwest of England is not necessarily the take away question from the visit. We observed a set of arrangements that were extraordinary by design and purpose and we wanted to understand what the fundamental nature of this was. What were the driving principles and what could we learn from them? As stated in the beginning of this report, the Violence Interrupters and Outreach Workers were the ‘Change Agents’ and we witnessed why this was the case. The workers were credible voices in the violent communities in which they worked. They had access to people, situations, conversations, disputes and the daily lives of the individuals of concern. Through these relationships, they were able to influence change, divert individuals from harm and navigate a safer way for those prepared to engage. The decision makers, commissioners, statutory partners and other key stake holders including those in academia, were the ‘Enablers’ who had the collective vision, aspiration and bravery to provide an alternative response to a serious problem.

“Conflict mediation stops shootings today, changing the mindset stops shootings tomorrow”

(the work of the Violence Interrupter and Outreach Worker respectively)

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Rochester Team



Mount Vernon Shooting Response



Jacobi Medical Centre (Hospital)



Rocheste

Syracuse SNUG

r Institute of Technology



Commander 43rd Precinct Bronx



Police ride-along (Tony in car ahead)



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