

Promising Practices

Ceasefire Spreading Like Wildfire in California

By Ryan Sugden, Guest Contributor

A program known for its local roots is taking flight across California, showing promise for successful state-level promotion of local anti-gang violence strategies. Programs modeled after Operation Ceasefire, of Boston fame for its success combating gang and gun violence, are being implemented across California under the direction of Paul Seave, Director of the Governor's Office of Gang and Youth Violence Policy. Seave's office used rounds of state anti-gang grants to encourage adoption of the Ceasefire model, renaming it the Safe Community Partnership, and obtained \$1 million in private funding for intensive implementation support. Ten projects are currently in planning or implementation stages with one reporting a 50 percent reduction in shootings in the first half of this year.

Seave first encountered Ceasefire in 1997 when, as U.S. Attorney for the Eastern District of California, he was part of a team that implemented the model in Stockton, CA. In a short time, gun homicides had dropped in the city an astounding 43 percent. Once appointed to lead California's anti-gang efforts, Seave pushed to spread the model statewide. Under the model, gang-involved youth posing the highest risk of violence are called in to meet law enforcement officials, community members, and service providers who present them with a life-altering choice: put down their weapons and accept social service and employment assistance or face the full weight of the law. The model requires tight partnerships among government, law enforcement and non-profit agencies spanning a wide spectrum – from education, employment and counseling services to the FBI.

In two rounds of funding, 10 communities received grants with awards ranging from \$192,000 to \$400,000. Currently, Bakersfield, East Palo Alto, Fresno, Modesto, Oakland, Oxnard, Sacramento, Salinas, Stockton and Union City are in various stages of implementation. The applicants were not required to adopt the Ceasefire model; rather, using the model was just one way to gain points for the community's grant application. This approach avoided having communities piece together coalitions solely for the purpose of receiving a grant.

State Promotion, Local Results

California has successfully promoted – at the state level – the adoption of a program that is known for its grassroots origin. Seave strikes an encouraging

tone when asked whether the statewide spread of the model is reproducible. His endorsement is not without one important qualification, however. Seave forecasted that "if you do it – and you do it right – you will see tremendous results. But it's hard work."

Tremendous results indeed. In Salinas, gang-related shootings have been cut in half and homicides have dropped 80%. From January to June this year, there were only 41 shootings – compared to 80 in the first six months of 2009 – a pace that will shatter the city's recent yearly average of attempted murders with a gun (139). Oxnard, which put the Ceasefire model into play late last year, has seen the lowest six-week period of serious crime in recent memory, David Keith, public spokesman for the Oxnard Police Department, said in a recent news article. Other communities are in various early stages of implementation.

Implementation and Technical Assistance as Keys to Success

Credit for the hard work of fighting gangs and reducing gun violence, Seave hastened to add, is properly attributed to local officials. Yet, the involvement of state and professional consultants has been an invaluable – indeed a critical – element of the programs' success. The difference that separates California's approach to other attempts to promote anti-gang and gun models, Seave noted, is intensive and well-funded training and technical assistance.

"The art – or emerging science – of implementation is the hard part" of nearly all evidence-based programs, Seave acknowledged. Grantors are frequently forced to follow one of two paths: awarding grants with the hope that recipients follow the model, or actively participating in implementation by giving local officials the tools to maintain 'fidelity to the model.' California has energetically taken the latter approach. "As opposed to other grants where support for implementation is minimal, in the Safe Community Partnership, it is intensive," Seave noted. "That's the new part."

Three private foundations donated over \$1 million for technical assistance and training. Under the leadership of Stewart Wakeling, an expert in criminal justice research and policy with extensive experience in the Ceasefire strategy, consultants with expertise in the strategy assist local officials in fine-tuning their programs for maximum effectiveness. In Salinas, Wakeling's analysis found that underage shooters have minimal criminal histories. This breaks sharply from other communities where gun offenders typically run up lengthy rap sheets before committing gun crimes. Information such as this proves pivotal in targeting likely offenders.

California's resources for technical assistance were the "fortuitous" result of charitable organizations' awareness of the crime problem and appreciation for violence prevention, Seave said. He acknowledged that not every state will have \$1 million in private donations for technical assistance. However, Seave urged states to reserve as much funding as possible, whether state, federal or private, for technical assistance. The difference is a genuine implementation of the model, which, history has shown, offers a significant and quantifiable return on investment. And, as California is beginning to

demonstrate, such results may be possible in communities statewide.

For more information on California's Safe Community Partnership strategy, click [here](#).

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