

THE BOSTON FOUNDATION COMMUNITY SAFETY INITIATIVE

In 2002, the Boston Foundation launched an Initiative to promote safety in Boston neighborhoods. The Community Safety Initiative seeks to reduce violent crime in Boston neighborhoods by maintaining collaborations and relationships among the key actors in the field (e.g., police, corrections agencies, neighborhood-based organizations, faith-based groups, etc.). It also addresses crime-related activities of high risk individuals, especially youth, and promotes reduction of the cultural tolerance of violence. The Community Safety Initiative accomplishes its goals through three types of activities: grantmaking; research and policy advocacy; and community convenings/discussions.

One component of this work is a series of Community Forums hosted by the Boston Foundation during 2003 and 2004. The discussions explore the nature of timely public safety issues, their impact on community life and public policy, and the potential for concerted action. Representatives of community groups, law enforcement organizations and a variety of public agencies join other interested citizens to learn about the issues. These forums are co-sponsored by the Gardiner Howland Shaw Foundation and coordinating partners MassINC and the Crime and Justice Institute.

Community Safety: Overview and Forum

During the late 1980's and early 1990's Boston had a large problem with street gangs, youth violence, and crack cocaine. Youth homicide rates (ages 24 and under) increased drastically, (22 victims in 1987 to 73 victims in 1990), and these rates remained high between 1991-1995 with an average of 44 youth homicides per year (Braga, Kennedy, Waring, Piel, 2001). Youth homicide rates did drop dramatically in the late 1990's, in 1999 there were only 15 youth homicides in the city of Boston (Winship, 2002), and violent crime overall also began to drop. In the Grove Hall neighborhood, the number of violent crime incidents dropped from 645 in 1993 to 377 in 1999, according to statistics from the Boston Police Department (BPD).

A reduction in violence was only one of the changes that occurred in Boston during the late 1990's. Neighborhoods like Grove Hall, where the majority of the violent incidents occurred, began to be viewed in a more positive way. Community members began to take pride in their neighborhood, and were no longer embarrassed about living there. Also, an increase in communication and trust between law enforcement agencies and community members began to develop.

There are many different theories as to how and why these dramatic transformations took place. For example, the national reduction in homicide rates corresponded to improvements in the U.S. economy. Researchers at the Kennedy School of Government have recently been exploring the impact that Boston's crime prevention initiatives had on crime rates during this time period.

During the early 90's several criminal justice initiatives were started. Operation Nightlight, a partnership between the BPD and the Department of Probation, began as a way to make probation more meaningful and effective. This strategy utilized probation officer home visits to youth after curfew to more strongly enforce conditions of probation. Also during this time, the BPD began implementing Operation Ceasefire. Operation Ceasefire is an interagency problem-oriented intervention that targeted a small number of chronically offending gang-involved youth with both social service and criminal justice attention. In addition to these criminal justice initiatives, black churches in Boston began organizing themselves to deal with issues of youth violence during this time and developed the Ten Point Coalition. This coalition also began working with the BPD which provided further legitimacy for the Police Department's initiatives and facilitated trust between the Police Department and community members.

These crime prevention strategies, with particular emphasis on the relationship between law enforcement agencies and community members, were the focus of the fourth community forum held at the New Boston Pilot Middle School in the Grove Hall neighborhood of Boston. This forum, Quality of Life in Our Neighborhoods: Successes and Challenges in Addressing Crime, was held on January 29, 2004 and was coordinated by the Crime and Justice Institute. Opening remarks were made by Paul Grogan of The Boston Foundation, and Elyse Clawson of the Crime and Justice Institute introduced the forum panelists and guest speaker. Anthony Braga, Ph.D. of Harvard University's JFK School of Government and Malcom Weiner Center for Social Policy gave a presentation about the elements of successful crime prevention strategies, and the Reverend Dr. Ray Hammond (Co-Pastor, Bethel AME Church, Co-Founder & Chairman, Ten Point Coalition, and President, Board of Directors, The Boston Foundation) facilitated a panel discussion following the presentation. Panel members included: Daniel F. Conley, Esq., (Suffolk County District Attorney); Lilla Frederick (Project RIGHT Board President; Chair of Devon, Normandy, & Brunswick Streets Residents Association); Paul Joyce (Superintendent, Boston Police Department); and Warren Williams (Community / Outreach worker, Boston Center for Youth and Families). A brief question and answer period followed the panel discussion, and forum concluded with closing remarks from Tom Coury (Executive Director, Gardiner Howland Shaw Foundation).

Community Safety: Crime Prevention Strategies for Urban Communities

"Crime prevention is everyone's problem" Forum Panelist

Partnerships between criminal justice agencies, community-based groups, social service agencies, and citizens are becoming increasingly popular responses to crime problems. One reason for their popularity is that more and more research studies are finding that these approaches work in addressing a variety of crime problems. Dr. Anthony Braga of Harvard University's JFK School of Government and Malcom Weiner Center for Social Policy discussed some of the key ingredients of effective crime prevention initiatives in his forum speech.

One key ingredient is the use of a "community justice approach" for crime problems. This approach utilizes a long-term preventative orientation for criminal justice agencies

that emphasizes the community and its members. For example, criminal justice agencies utilizing this approach focus on issues that enhance community living (i.e., clean streets, graffiti-free buildings), and reduce fear (i.e., the ability to leave one's home and walk in the neighborhood without fear of becoming a crime victim). This approach is not just a community policing approach, rather it is a change of perspective/focus for all of the components of the criminal justice system.

A second key ingredient is the formation of effective partnerships with a wide-range of stakeholders including criminal justice groups, community-based groups, faith-based organizations, and the business community. Crime is everyone's problem, and the best way to address crime problems, especially during times of fiscal crisis, is to bring all stakeholders together to leverage scarce resources in areas of critical need.

The third key ingredient is the use of a problem-oriented approach to deal with crime problems. Many criminal justice agencies are reactive, they respond to incidents as they arise without thinking about ways to prevent them from occurring the future. A problem-oriented approach takes a more preventive strategy by working to address the causes of crime problems in neighborhoods. For example, there is a sufficient research base that shows that in neighborhoods that suffer from violent crime, only a small percentage of residents in that neighborhood are involved in the violence. A reactive approach to crime would be to identify the small number of individuals and lock them up. A problem-oriented approach however, utilizes a network of community groups, police departments, and other law enforcement agencies to try to understand the nature of what is occurring for the small group of offenders, and determine the best response for each individual. For example, some of these individuals involved with violence may be able to benefit from prevention activities (i.e., interventions like job training or education), while others may need to be arrested and held accountable for their crime.

Some examples of programs in Boston utilizing these three areas (community justice, partnerships, and problem-oriented approaches) include:

BPD's Neighborhood Policing Program – this program fostered partnerships between the BPD, community members, and business members to deal with neighborhood problems that are concerns for everyone.

Safe Neighborhoods Initiative - a program with the offices of the Suffolk County District Attorney and Massachusetts Attorney General which uses community prosecution strategies (i.e., a focus on the prosecution of issues specific to an area rather than prosecution of whomever was in the caseload) to address community problems.

Summer of Opportunity Program – a joint program between the BPD and John Hancock Mutual Life Insurance company to develop a comprehensive jobs program for urban youth.

Prisoner Reentry Program – A Suffolk County House of Corrections program that fostered a coalition of mentors from faith-based community, non-profit organizations such as SNAP, The Workplace, and Youth Service Providers Network that are partnered with criminal justice agencies such as the BPD, Probation, and Parole to try to support offenders returning to the community.

Community Safety: Lessons Learned from Boston's Experience

"Hard work and stay together, that's the key" Forum Panelist

Anthony Braga in his presentation stated that the City of Boston and the State of Massachusetts are recognized as national leaders in the three areas mentioned above. The crime prevention initiatives and partnerships between criminal justice agencies, faith-based groups, and community-based organizations developed in Boston and in Massachusetts have been used as models for other cities and states. Some lessons learned in the past 10 years from Boston's experience include:

Collaboration with a Wide Array of Partners: Some of Boston's success with crime prevention initiatives can be attributed to collaborative partnerships with a broad range of organizations that include both criminal justice and other agencies. In fact, Paul Joyce, Superintendent, BPD, stated at the forum that the BPD will not undertake any initiative on its own in the future. He stated that every initiative undertaken by the BPD will be multi-agency partnerships because this is what has led to reductions of crime in Boston.

Transparency of the Boston Police Department Efforts: The transparency of the BPD in the various efforts undertaken in the past 10 years has contributed to their success. By including partners in their initiatives at every step of the way, from problem identification to program implementation, the BPD was able to overcome many issues and develop trust with community members.

Communication: Ten years ago community members did not trust law enforcement officers, and different criminal justice agencies did not speak to each other. This was overcome when collaborative partnerships were formed between criminal justice agencies, community organizations, and faith-based groups. The process of bringing stakeholders together to focus on a specific problem that was of concern to everyone broke down many barriers so that the different agencies and groups could begin communicating with each other.

Use of Data to Inform Interventions: Warren Williams, Community / Outreach Worker, Boston Center for Youth and Families Boston Center for Youth and Families, explained that they were able to establish new age-appropriate services that were adaptable to community needs and did not duplicate other services by using the results of a survey of neighborhood youth.

Community Participation: The most important lesson that can be learned from the literature on crime prevention strategies, and the experience of Boston's partnerships is that criminal justice agencies must engage and encourage community participation in crime prevention initiatives. Community involvement in these initiatives develops trust and provides legitimacy to the initiatives. This trust and legitimacy also provides criminal justice agencies with greater opportunities to do more innovative programs because they have the support of the community. Additionally, community involvement creates more transparency to the working of criminal justice agencies and community members begin to understand the rationale behind law enforcement activities because

they are involved in the process; they have opportunities to voice concerns about and generate input on actions that may or may not be taken.

Community Safety: Challenges

Despite the Boston's successes in addressing violent crime, recent trends suggest that there is still more work to be done. Paul Joyce of the BPD stated that a 20% growth in juvenile population in Boston has been predicted, and this percentage is going to be higher in neighborhoods like Grove Hall. This growth in juveniles will present some challenges to ensure that they do not become involved in gangs, drugs, and other criminal behavior.

Additionally, an increasing number of offenders are being released back to the community from custody of the Department of Youth Services, Massachusetts Department of Corrections, Houses of Correction, and the federal government. These individuals are also returning to their original communities, a very small area which includes the Grove Hall neighborhood. Thus, the challenge for the future is to both move youth away from gangs, drugs, and violent behavior; and to work with offenders to successfully transition back to the community and live crime-free lives. One key component to helping offenders successfully transition back to the community is to begin addressing the barriers created by a CORI (Criminal Offender Record Information), which can often limit offender's ability to secure housing and employment post-release.

In addition, everyone must work to counteract the intergenerational cycle of violence. Research from the BPD found that a small number of individuals were consuming a great amount of resources. They identified 457 people in a community of roughly 20,000 that had generated 12,000 arraignments in the court system, and when health and human services records were examined they found that 72% of these 457 people were multi-agency involved. Thus, roughly 2.4% of the population in Grove Hall were generating a substantial amount of resources. These individuals are members of families that have had long-term criminal justice system involvement and now have children of their own that are beginning to have criminal justice system involvement. Targeting interventions to this small population can have a dramatic impact on future crime.

Community Safety: Opportunities for Action

"Just because we've been able to make biscuits with 1 cup of flour and a little bit of water doesn't mean that I want my biscuits that way all the time." Audience member

Talk to Youth – It's incredibly important that youth know that the adults around them truly want them to succeed. Ask them what they are thinking, talk to them. Youth often wonder if adults are paying attention to them or listening to them. There are many children with smart minds who do stupid or bad things because they feel they are not being heard, have no one who cares about them, or are just lonely. One way to counteract this that was suggested at the forum was for adults to bring youth to community meetings and ask them about their experience. Bringing children to these

types of meetings builds connections to adults in the community, begins to instill a sense of community ownership in youth, and gives them a sense of social consciousness.

Give Youth Skills Not Just Recreational Activities - Youth need skills to succeed in the real world. Oftentimes youth programs are only recreational in nature and not focused on skill development which youth greatly need. Giving youth pro-social experience in the real world to learn and test these skills is very important. Many innercity youth do not have any experience with adults who wake up every morning and go to work.

Work with Offenders on Reentry Issues While Incarcerated – Once individuals leave prison/jail it is too late to begin working them on reentry issues. The window of opportunity to move back into crime can be small as 12 hours post-release, and prisons and jails are often revolving doors for offenders. Paul Joyce, Superintendent, BPD, stated that individuals entering the Suffolk County House of Corrections had an average of three prior incarcerations and an average stay of roughly 10 months. The time to begin working with someone is as soon as they enter prison/jail, they are a captive audience and services can be identified and initiated during this time. Prisons and jails should be educational institutions, vocational training centers, places where people can acquire skills and begin to prepare for what they are going to need when they come out.

Begin Addressing CORI Issues – Resources and support are needed for employers willing to hire individuals with a criminal record. Employers may be more willing to take a chance on someone if they have a support network of people. For example, an employer might feel more comfortable hiring an ex-offender if there was a police officer, clergy member, or street worker who they could contact if there was a problem. Additionally, incentives, such as tax breaks for employers that hire ex-offenders, can also help to break down the barrier caused by having a CORI. Lastly, legislation is needed to address many of the barriers that offenders face due to the CORI.

Continue Networking and Collaborating – In the current era of budget cuts and fiscal problems, everyone must make better use of their existing resources. Thus, networking and collaboration are essential to this process. Each human service agency within the city of Boston provides a wide array of services. If one agency cannot provide a particular service, another agency probably can and collaborations between agencies can alleviate these service gaps. The goal is to work together for a greater good.

Continue Focusing on “Impact Players” – A current strategy of the BPD is to focus interventions on the small number people that are committing the majority of the crime. This has proven to be an effective strategy and should be continued.

Community Safety: Conclusion

“We can begin to change the system, reform the system but it takes hard work and people have to have the staying power.” Tom Coury, Executive Director, Gardiner Howland Shaw Foundation

The city of Boston has a history to be proud of, it effectively responded to violence that was out of control in the late 80's and early 90's through innovative initiatives and stakeholder collaborations. One of the greatest strengths of these initiatives was the involvement of community members. The people of the Grove Hall neighborhood decided 10 years ago that they were tired of the violence and fear and were going to stand up and take control of their neighborhood, and they were successful. The current fiscal crisis is forcing agencies to be smarter about the work that needs to be accomplished. One area that demands further attention, discussion, and analysis is the CORI because of the substantial impact it has on the successful transition of many offenders back to their communities. Another is to focus on providing youth and ex-offenders with skills necessary for employment.

The city of Boston is well positioned to respond to these new challenges despite the current fiscal crisis because of its strong partnerships. In the early 1990's resources were more plentiful but the city lacked solid relationships among its different agencies. These partnerships, which have become more solid over the last 10 years, can now help Boston communities to rally around specific public safety issues despite current resource restrictions

References

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