

Best Practices

The following is a compilation of international best practices addressing particularly the firearms presence in youth gangs.

1. Project Trident Metropolitan London Police, England

www.stopthegun.org

Project Trident was established by the Metropolitan Police of London to address problems of gang violence and difficulties in getting witnesses to testify. The project was a response to members of the black community wanting the police to do something. Its approach is based on a strong partnership. The principles included:

- Meaningful and respectful community councils.
- Build community ownership of the problem through aggressive publicity and outreach.
- "Gunstoppers" information lines to collect information.

The Trident team includes over 300 police officers and 70 support staff that are advised and informed by a group of black community leaders - the Trident Independent Advisory Group.

Trident's commitment to the community is:

- We will work with you to identify and target those involved in gun crime;
- We will investigate and disrupt criminals who use guns;
- We will work with schools, the community and other interested groups to try to prevent young people becoming involved in gun crime;
- We will arrest and prosecute the criminals who provide the guns;
- We will support victims and witnesses of gun crime;
- We will support the work of the Trident Independent Advisory Group and other community led anti-gun crime projects¹

The project has undertaken communication campaigns aimed at, for example, taking the «glamour» off of guns, dissuading 13-19 years old from becoming the gunmen of the future, etc.²

According to evaluations, the impact on violence rates is unclear but the homicide clearance rate increased from 15% - 70% (although the numbers are small). In 2006 – 2007, Trident arrested 697 individuals.

2. Weapon Collection Programs

A strategy developed in different communities to reduce the environment of fear and to achieve the greatest reduction in the number of weapon-carrying youth has been to develop weapons collections programs. Usually paired with a gun amnesty, these programs allow illegal firearms to be returned to authorities without its owner charged for illegal possession.

In Toronto, an innovative program called «Piece Options» addressed the problem in the community that youths and families of youth at risk were not inclined to collaborate with the police. A free and anonymous weapon collection program was developed where defence lawyers are serving as intermediaries to collect illegal weapons. Lawyers, in turn, protect the identity of the individuals who turned the firearms through lawyer/client confidentiality privileges. Programs in other jurisdictions have involved churches and community organizations as intermediaries.

Through the use of partners in the community, these programs have a wider scope of reach, particularly in the population on the periphery of the youth gangs and those at risk of gang involvement.

Piece Options did not receive the support of Toronto Police basing its decision, for example, on possible tampering of evidence and inherent danger. Between December 2004 and February 2007, the program collected 20 firearms including a sawed-off rifle found by a mother in her son's dresser along with 4 shotgun shells and 30 hollow-point bullets.³

3. “Choose Gun Free! Its Your Weapon or Me,” Viva Rio, Brazil

Launched in May 2001, the campaign aims at empowering mothers, sisters, girlfriends, wives and cousins of violent men through providing women with information and arguments to convince men to give up their guns, by de-masculinizing the gun and disassociating guns with security.

The campaign found out that women have multiple roles in the context of gun violence. Their involvement is direct and indirect, including, for example, being in charge of hiding the guns. Viva Rio researched the situation and found that girls' attitudes can encourage gun holding by continuing to see men as having greater status if they carry guns.⁴

Women are victimized both directly and indirectly by guns. While men interviewed by the organizations believed that guns represent status, money and power for young men. For girls, guns have an opposite role. Guns make them feel less safe, at risk for violence. Gun is the weapon most often used to kill women in Brazil. Women are also the primary caretakers of young men who are wounded by guns and may also have to provide economic support and stability for families and communities that have been ravaged by gun violence.

This program is targeted at preventing gun violence on a micro-level and on a daily basis through women's – especially mothers – work to prevent armed violence by stopping youngsters from getting involved. Early on their research, the organization's focus groups told organizers that simply telling people that men with guns are more likely to die would not achieve results. Instead, the campaign took a humorous approach, using well-known and respected female television and music celebrities to transmit the campaign's message.

“On nationally aired TV spots, a famous comedian said, ‘Guys who use guns must have a little problem...’, using a gesture to insinuate that they may be overcompensating for a small penis. Another campaign slogan was a play on words, ‘A good man is one who does not expire before his time’, mixing the ideas of premature ejaculation with dying young.’⁵

The campaign was complemented by the mobilizations of mothers who had lost their sons to gun violence. On the short-term, the campaign was considered quite successful in galvanizing women's support for efforts to reduce gun violence. Research is being undertaken to address the long-term impact of the campaign.

¹ Project Trident. “What is Trident,” available on-line at: <http://www.stoptheguns.org/whatistrident/index.php>

² See examples at: <http://www.stoptheguns.org/advertising/index.php>

³ City News. “Program that allow guns to be turned in to lawyers have police concerned,” February 21, 2007.

⁴ Jessica Galeria, Tatiana Moura, “Women, Girls and Urban Violence: A Case Study On Rio De Janeiro,” Prepared for the Second Biennial Meeting of States on the UN Programme of Action on Small Arms , 14th July 2005.

⁵ “Few Options but the Gun Angry Young Men,” Small Arms Survey 2006, 315.