

Grant Update

A Summary of Grant Activity

Governor's Crime Commission

NC Criminal Justice Analysis Center

Project SAFE Rockingham County

The goal of Project SAFE Rockingham County (PSRC) is to improve the quality of life for all residents of Rockingham County by employing a comprehensive county-wide strategy aimed at reducing gang-related violent crime and illegal gun possession. Project SAFE Rockingham County is a focused deterrence collaboration between all Rockingham County law enforcement agencies, ReDirections of Rockingham County and various community partners including Goodwill Industries of Central North Carolina, JobLink, Project ReEntry, Rockingham County Aging, Disability and Transit Services and the University of North Carolina at Greensboro.

The Problem

The pervasive problem of Rockingham County gangs was reflected in recent reports by the Governor's Crime Commission (GCC).¹ According to recent analyses of GangNET data, there were 12 gangs identified in Rockingham County with 38 validated gang members reported in 2011. Prior to receiving GCC funding, the county lacked a comprehensive county-wide strategy for addressing the gang problem that involved law enforcement, prosecution, and community partners.

The Grant

The project began in July 2011 and has been funded by two, one-year grants from the Governor's Crime Commission which supported a part-time Law Enforcement Liaison (LEL). The LEL delivers law enforcement coordination services of offender information and tracking, gun screening, and violent crime reporting. Additionally, the LEL provides guidance and leadership to law enforcement agencies, prosecutors, and community partners who are fighting violent crime committed by both chronic and gang-related offenders.

With coordination and leadership efforts provided by the Law Enforcement Liaison (LEL), Project SAFE Rockingham County conducted its first notification in November 2011 where 14 gang offenders, from seven gangs, were notified and warned to stop committing violent crime. Roughly 180 offenders were reached as each of the 14 offenders attending the call-in were provided with the notification to cease illegal activity and were told to spread the message to others associated within their respective group. Since then, three subsequent meetings have been held in May 2012, November 2012, and May 2013. Ensuring notified offenders are compliant with warnings is crucial to the success of the project. The LEL assisted in the



Rockingham County has verified the presence of 12 gangs in the county.

¹ Hayes, R.A. (2012). *Gangs in North Carolina: An Analysis of N.C. GangNET Data (2011 data)*. Retrieved from <http://www.ncdps.gov/div/GCC/PDFs/Pubs/Gangs2013.pdf>

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Project SAFE Rockingham County Advisory Committee members meet to discuss an upcoming call-in and gun screening. Call-ins serve as a forum to notify gang members that violence will not be tolerated and all members will be held accountable for the offenses of any gang member. Gun screenings are conducted to determine if gang-related cases can be referred to a federal prosecutor.

development of an offender flagging system which helps participating agencies monitor the compliance of notified offenders.

However, Project SAFE Rockingham County could not bring the county-wide notification to fruition until considerable planning, discussions and research occurred. To accomplish this task, the LEL organized and conducted a number of meetings with the Federal Prosecutor, District Attorney, UNC-G researchers, local law enforcement officials and community partners.

In conjunction with the notification, the LEL also completed peripheral tasks that enhanced the Project SAFE Rockingham County promotion strategy. Printed materials, including color brochures, a banner and organizational documents were created to educate citizens, promote the Project SAFE Rockingham County mission and support its infrastructure. The LEL has utilized the media, including local newspapers, television and radio to publicize the efforts of PSRC. In fact, the LEL has written several commentary and community education articles that have been published in local newspapers.

Lastly, a significant number of non-validated gang members — typically those who are younger, less-skilled and less-violent — have been identified. It is recognized that a referral program is needed whereby counseling and other prevention and intervention services are employed to deter these youths from criminal lifestyles. Plans are underway to expand Project SAFE Rockingham County into other important areas, most notably intervention and prevention efforts with at-risk juveniles. The LEL has created and implemented a referral form for law enforcement to use in referring at-risk youth to Rockingham County Youth Services and other similar services.

Accomplishments

Project SAFE Rockingham County continues to have an impact on violent crime rates throughout the county. More specifically, violent crime rates dropped 31 percent between 2010 and 2011. Of the approximate 200 offenders who have received the anti-gun violence ultimatum, only 2 have reoffended with a felony firearms offense. Additionally, the program has been featured in the three different county newspapers, as well as on a local TV network. The LEL also continues to utilize local media to promote the problem, the program and the message.

Finally, an analysis of jail time served by those offenders who attended the initial call-in in November 2011 shows that due to a drastic decrease in jail time, the program has provided an estimated cost savings that exceeds \$8,700. With the assistance of the LEL, the six local departments have combined resources to reduce violent crime.

Attendees at a gang call-in held on November 7, 2012.



In addition to utilizing call-ins and gun screenings and presenting an ambitious media education campaign, Project SAFE offers assistance to help change lifestyles and to bring about desired results. In an effort to reduce reoffending, Project SAFE Rockingham County partners with Project ReEntry and other community volunteers to coordinate service delivery to notified offenders. The majority of offenders seize the opportunity by accepting assistance with education, transportation, job training, counseling, substance abuse treatment, housing, medical care, parenting and literacy.

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Program Sustainability

With expiration of Governor's Crime Commission funding in June 2013, the need for local funding was immediately recognized. The District Attorney and six law enforcement department heads continue to be in full support of Project SAFE Rockingham County and wish to continue the efforts by funding the part-time position of Law Enforcement Liaison. Simply put, law enforcement executives are committed to the project, believing that it has enhanced the quality of life for Rockingham County residents. Through budgetary support of Project SAFE Rockingham County, leaders are committed to collaborating with Project SAFE Rockingham County in future efforts.



Recently, a 'Memorandum of Support for Funding' was signed by the leaders of each local law enforcement agency within the county. In keeping with their program philosophy of shared expenses and resources, each has agreed to share in the cost of continued funding for the LEL position. The expenditure by each department for the part-time LEL position for fiscal year 2013-14 was determined by the proportion of resident population and local sales tax revenues for each jurisdiction.

Additionally, to help with future efforts, Project SAFE Rockingham County has called on businesses to display posters in windows to show support, offer employment assistance and/or housing, and provide monetary and tangible item donations to the project.

Summary

Project SAFE Rockingham County collaborates with several community partners, in addition to local law enforcement, to improve the quality of life for all residents of Rockingham County by employing a comprehensive county-wide strategy aimed at reducing gang-related violent crime and illegal gun possession. Over the course of the program's lifetime, Rockingham County has seen a sharp decrease in violent crime. In addition, the program has seen low levels of recidivism among offenders who have received prior notifications. The program has focused on project sustainability through media exposure of its progress and achievements. Project SAFE Rockingham County is now fully funded by the six local law enforcement departments throughout the county. This project is a prime example of how Governor's Crime Commission seed money can jump start a successful project that is eventually funded by local revenue sources because of results.

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As part of their promotional strategy, Project SAFE Rockingham County participated in the Eden Business Expo and provided information to more than 500 attendees. Advisory Board member Amelia Dallas (second from right) and Alexey Ferrell, director of ReDirections of Rockingham County speak to Expo attendees about the program.

A gang call-in held on November 7, 2012.



Project SAFE Rockingham County

GRANT SUMMARY

Area Served: Rockingham County

Implementing Agency: ReDirections of Rockingham County

Project Director: Alexey Ferrell

Funding: Total: \$31,740; Federal Share: \$23,805; Match Share: \$7,935

Overview: The goal of Project SAFE Rockingham County is to improve the quality of life for all residents of Rockingham County by employing a comprehensive county-wide strategy aimed to reduce gang-related violent crime and illegal gun possession. Project SAFE Rockingham County is a focused deterrence collaboration between all Rockingham County law enforcement agencies, ReDirections of Rockingham County and various community partners including Goodwill Industries of Central North Carolina, JobLink, Project ReEntry, Rockingham County Aging, Disability & Transit Services, and the University of North Carolina at Greensboro.

Objectives: To identify chronic and gang/group involved violent offenders, particularly those who use firearms to further illegal activity;

To notify those identified, and members of those groups, that it is time to stop the violence;

To assist those who want to change their lifestyle;

To hold chronic offenders for their violent actions and to hold the groups responsible for the actions of their members involved in violence or illegal gun possession; and

To vigorously prosecute in State and Federal court those who are involved in group or gang-related violent crime or other serious criminal behavior.

Accomplishments: Violent crime rates dropped 31 percent from 2010 to 2011 in Rockingham County.

Of the 200 offenders who have received the anti-gun violence ultimatum, only two had reoffended with a felony firearms offense as of July 2013.

The program has been featured in the three different county newspapers as well as on a local TV network through an administrative interview.

Project SAFE is estimated to have saved more than \$8,700 due to the decreased jail time of 16 violent offenders.