



Mayor David N. Cicilline

THE STREET WORKERS PROGRAM

The Street Workers Program teaches the principles of nonviolence and strives to instill in the community the philosophy of responding to potentially violent situations with nonviolent solutions. These principles are based on the Kingian Nonviolence Model, which is the philosophy and methodology developed by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. for reconciling conflict nonviolently.

The Street Workers are certified nonviolence trainers. They are dedicated advocates for young people at risk, helping them to negotiate the systems in which they interact. Street Workers intervene in potentially violent situations, offering mediation and conflict resolution services and help to prevent retaliation for community violence by offering nonviolent solutions. For example, Street Workers visit shooting scenes and emergency rooms in an effort to quickly stem-off retaliation. They also help mediate pressures between the police and the community. Street Workers offer school and community-based crisis intervention, mediation, and serve as mentors to at-risk youth. They provide support to young people as they identify their strengths and needs, and guide them as they craft solutions to their problems. Street Workers have developed a network of social service referrals and are available to provide assistance at all times to those in need.

In Providence, there are seven full-time (and one part-time) Street Workers who alternate shifts to ensure that services are available around the clock seven-days-a-week. Street Workers are assigned to specific gangs and to individual youths. The Providence Police Department and the Street Workers work in tandem to establish a dialogue with some of the most violent city combatants in real or perceived disputes. Street Workers appear in “full force” in times of crisis and in open disputes. By working all “hot-spots,” the Street

Workers are familiar with the feuding sides and are equipped to assist in particular cases.

The Street Workers spend their time in Providence’s most dangerous neighborhoods, emphasizing the futility of violence and attempting to serve as a conduit to meet critical needs such as employment, education and counseling referrals. The immediate task for the Street Workers after an incident of violence is to gain information.

The Street Workers work closely with the Mayor’s Office and its city partners by playing key roles in convening Teen Summits, city-wide athletic events, and after-school projects that offer outreach, intervention and mediation to young people in conflict. This past summer, the Street Workers conceptualized and recruited 27 young people to participate in a summer employment program called the Beloved Community Summer Jobs Program. This program offered the participants life skills and nonviolence training as well as paid employment at various businesses and organizations throughout Providence.

The Street Workers have also brought a ray of hope to community members and the less fortunate because many are ex-offenders and are now being hired to change their neighborhoods. They act as catalysts and have created a ripple effect among the neighborhoods so that people now feel empowered to engage in conflict mediation between youth.

ESTABLISHED

In August 2003, the Street Workers Program was launched in the City of Providence as a result of a particularly violent spate of shootings and homicides. The Street Workers have forged positive relationships with police, schools, families, social service groups, and most importantly, local youth.

EFFECTIVENESS

The program's effectiveness is evaluated by an in-depth review of quarterly programmatic and financial reports. The reports detail the program's progress in reaching its overall goals, objectives, community impact, and expenditures for a specific time period. For example, the reports provide the number of crisis interventions and mediations that occurred on school grounds and in the community in which the Street Workers were utilized. In addition, the Executive Director attends the weekly senior staff meeting at police headquarters to provide updates to recent incidents or potential areas of trouble or concern.

FUNDING

The Street Workers Program is financed by the federal Project Safe Neighborhood Initiative as administered by the Bureau of Justice Assistance within the U.S. Department of Justice. Other funding sources include: the Providence Mayor's Office, the Providence Police Department, and public and private donations.

OTHER INVOLVEMENT

The Mayor's Office, the Providence Police Department, the Providence School Department, Family Service of Rhode Island, the Providence Housing Authority, the business community, and numerous neighborhood and community-based organizations are involved in the program.

The Mayor's Office provides the needed commitment, strong leadership, and assists with funding to support the program. The Police Department welcomes the program's Executive Director at its weekly senior staff meetings where he can interact with the command staff regarding recent violent incidents and areas of concern. The School Department permits the Street Workers to work on campus so they can provide crisis intervention and mediation to prevent potential conflicts from occurring on school grounds. Through the Beloved Community Summer Jobs Program, the business community provided paid summer employment to 27 young people. As a result of the Street Workers' positive impact within Providence, they are now a trusted referral service for Family Services of Rhode Island, the Providence Housing Authority, the city's recreation centers, and other groups with violent and potentially violent youth.

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LESSONS LEARNED

The Street Workers Program requires strong linkages to the community, the police department, the school department, social service organizations, and most importantly, local youth. The program also requires a great deal of trust because Street Workers do not work for the police or any one agency. Street Workers are the only group apart from the police that is free to follow need and is not tied to specific programs or a pre-determined number of youth. They also serve a vital function by neutralizing and mediating conflicts, providing information to police, and helping youth find positive alternatives such as jobs and counseling services during their time of need.

In addition, it is important to monitor and follow up with the people who participate in mediation.

The Street Workers Program requires a strong commitment from city leaders, law enforcement, schools, local businesses and the community. There will be successes associated with the program; however, there will also be challenging times when the community will need to rely on its own linkages, establish trust in its partners, and demonstrate their commitment to young people to assist them through difficult times.