

Edward Byrne Memorial Justice Assistance Grant (JAG) Program

Local Evaluation Report (Level 1)

Submitted by:

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October 1, 2019 – March 30, 2023

Project Overview

Safe Streets Program (SSP) is a comprehensive, intensive, and coordinated violent crime reduction project. SSP's target population are gang members/associates and potential gang members/associates (i.e., at-promise youth and young adults) of the ages of 12-24 who reside in Beach County.

SSP project is modeled from an evidence-based violence prevention method known as the Cure Violence Health Model. This model uses a public health approach to treating violence as an epidemic disease and has been shown to reduce gun violence effectively across a variety of communities, cultures, and groups. The Cure Health Model applies three epidemic control strategies to stop and prevent violence: 1) Detecting and interrupting potentially violent conflicts (i.e., transmission). 2) Identifying and treating individuals at the highest risk (i.e., potential transmitters). 3) Mobilizing the community to change group norms regarding violence.

SSP used a two-pronged approach that targets two distinct populations to effectively reduce the impact of criminal street gangs within Beach County. A description of the two components is provided below:

Component 1: Law Enforcement

The law enforcement component focuses on reducing the impact of criminal street gangs in Beach County by arresting, prosecuting, adjudicating, and incarcerating a pre-identified group of the most violent gang members. This component was implemented by the Beach County Sheriff's Office (BCSO) through the BCSO Special Investigations Unit. The BCSO Special Investigations Unit worked with other local law enforcement agencies in criminal intelligence, gang enforcement, narcotics enforcement, and crime analysis to identify potential gang members. All arrests made through the targeted gang suppression activities were submitted to the Beach County District Attorney's Office for vertical prosecution.

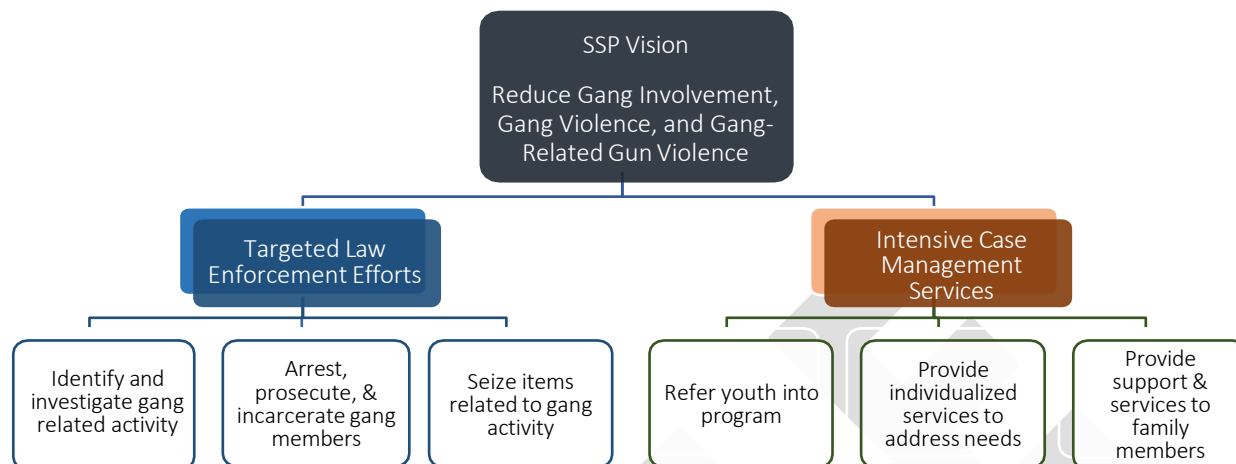
Component 2: Intensive Case Management

The Intensive Case Management (ICM) component, implemented by Positive Impact (a local community-based organization), supports law enforcement efforts by providing alternative interventions to gang members/potential gang members who are 12 to 24 years old. Positive Impact provided individualized ICM services to address the unique needs of each participant. Individualized case plans, known as an Individual Service Strategy (ISS) and/or an Individual Employment Plan (IEP) developed for each participant identified the education, employment, and support services needed for the participant to transition away from gang involvement. These plans were modified to provide services in a timeframe and/or approach that best suits each program participant.

Local partner agencies, including law enforcement, community-based organizations, and schools, were able to make referrals to the program. Referrals were reviewed and

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approved or denied by BCSO, based on a list of predetermined criteria. An infographic is provided below outlining the approach.



Goal 1: Reduce Gang Violence in Beach County Through Targeted Gang Suppression Efforts That Focus on Violent Gang Members

Efforts to achieve Goal 1 had mixed results. Objective A was achieved in 2020 and 2021, and objective B was achieved in 2021.

	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	TOTAL
Goal 1: Reduce gang violence in Ventura County through targeted gang suppression efforts that focus on violent gang members.						
Objective a: A minimum of 50 violent gang members will be arrested through targeted gang suppression efforts during each year of project implementation.	---	97 <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	56 <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	44	8 (Jan-Mar)	205 <small>arrests</small>
Objective b: A minimum of 25 violent gang members will be prosecuted, adjudicated, and incarcerated through targeted gang suppression efforts during each year of project implementation ¹ .	---	18	32 <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	17	---	67 <small>convictions</small>

Over the course of the grant term, 222 investigations of individuals were initiated through the BCSO Special Investigations Unit. As of March 31, 2023, a total of 219 of these investigations were concluded, and the other three were ongoing. A total of 205 arrests were made in association with grant-funded investigations. Additionally, as of March 31, 2023, a total of 12 individuals were classified as pending arrest or have a warrant issued for their arrest. 187 cases had been filed. Over 60% (115 cases) have not received a final disposition status. However, of the 72 cases that have received a final disposition status, 67 (93% of resolved cases) resulted in convictions.

Of the 67 individuals convicted, the most common primary conviction reported was for criminal conspiracy. (However, 37 individuals' primary convictions were not reported.) Convictions can be classified into "PC" (penal code) or "HS" (health and safety violations), with health and safety violation convictions generally implying a conviction related to the possession or sale of controlled substances. Of the cases with primary conviction data available, 17 were associated with penal code (PC) convictions, while

13 were associated with health and safety violations.

Goal 2: Provide Gang Involved and At-Promise Youth Alternatives to Gang Involvement

Efforts to achieve Goal 2 also had mixed results. Objective A was achieved in 2020 and 2021. Objective B was not achieved due to one youth who did not complete an ISS or IEP. Objective C was not achieved. Objective D was achieved, and so was objective E.

	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	TOTAL
Goal 2: Provide gang involved youth and/or "at high risk" of gang involvement members of the target population with alternatives to gang involvement.						
Objective a: A minimum of 60 targeted youth will be provided with comprehensive and intensive case management services during each year of the project.	---	67 <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	79 <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	48	24 (Jan-Mar)	218
						enrollments
Objective b: 100% of youth who participate in ICM will complete an Individual Service Strategy (ISS) and/or an Individual Employment Plan (IEP).	99.5% of youth who participated in ICM completed an ISS or IEP (28 completed IEP, 189 completed ISS, 1 did not complete).					
Objective c: Participants will demonstrate at least a 15% reduction in the number of police contacts/arrests post-enrollment in ICM services.	There were 46 total arrests among ICM-enrolled youth one year prior to ICM enrollment and a total of 42 arrests one year after. (8.6% decrease).					
Objective d: At least 75% of age-appropriate youth who participate in ICM will be retained in or returned to high school, continuation high school, GED classes and/or enrolled in a local college or university.	89% (162) of age-appropriate youth (aged 12-18 years) who participated in ICM were retained or returned to high school, continuation high school, GED classes and/or enrolled in a local college or university. <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>					
Objective e: At least 50% of targeted young adults (aged 16+ years) who participate in ICM will be enrolled in a Work Readiness Program.	66% (81) of young adults (aged 16+ years) who participated in ICM were enrolled in a Work Readiness Program. <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>					

Over the course of the grant term, a total of 481 referrals were made to ICM services across 29 county agencies or partners. Referrals began in February 2020. Of those, 436 (91%) were approved for services by BCSO, and of those, 218 (45%) were ultimately enrolled in ICM services. The 218 enrolled youth participated in a variety of different services provided by Positive Impact and Collaborative Partners beyond case management. The most common services were financial resource assistance and vocational training (45% and 27% of participants, respectively). Most of the enrolled youth were 14 years old. The average age at enrollment was 16 years. Most of the enrolled youth were male (63%), and most identified as Hispanic/Latino (84%).

For youth who had been enrolled in ICM services for at least one year prior to the grant's end in March 2023 (n=171), additional information about criminal justice involvement was collected for the year prior to and the year after their enrollment in ICM services. The number of police contacts (including field interviews, association with crime reports, traffic reports, etc.), number of arrests, and number of probation violations for these youth were compared one year prior to their ICM enrollment date

and one year after their ICM enrollment date. On average, the number of police contacts differed only slightly from before to after ICM enrollment. Of the 171 youth eligible for this analysis, 32 (19%) experienced one or more police contacts one year prior to enrollment in ICM services, while 35 (21%) experienced one or more police contacts one year after enrollment.

School enrollment information is reported for participants who are considered age-appropriate for school enrollment. This includes youth who are between 12 to 18 years old. 89% (162 of 182) of age-appropriate youth participants either graduated, were retained in school, or returned to school throughout their enrollment in ICM services.

About two-thirds (67%) of age-appropriate participants were enrolled in Work Readiness Programs. "Age-appropriate" is youth who are of legal working age, which includes youth who are 16 years or older. Additionally, 88 of the 121 youth (73%) who were eligible for employment were employed at some point during the program.

Discussion

The TWVC program facilitated the implementation of effective operations and services that had a positive impact on crime reduction and prevention within Beach County. The additional investigations conducted by BCSO (and other collaborating agencies) with the grant funding facilitated the arrest and prosecution of many higher-level gang-related individuals within the county, and facilitated the prevention of other crimes associated with local gang activity.

The large number of at-risk youth referred to and enrolled in intensive case management services helped divert young people away from a gang-affiliated lifestyle through education, employment, counseling, and other related services. The number of youth referred to these programs was a particular highlight, with the program achieving more than double the targeted 180 referrals specified in the objectives. Program activities enabled participants to achieve their goals of graduating from high school, completing probation, obtaining jobs, and overcoming personal struggles. Positive Impact sustained these successes by providing youth resources and knowledge that would support them even after they leave the program. Using person-centered approaches, Positive Impact created pathways tailored to each youth's needs. Together, law enforcement and Positive Impact worked through an individualized lens that appreciates the idea that helping just one individual could make a significant difference in their future and prevent gang-related crime in Beach County.

A key element of both the law enforcement and ICM components of the grant were the relationships developed and expanded on with other local community and government

agencies. Although many collaborative activities were negatively impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic near the beginning of the grant term, referrals and services from more than 20 community and government partnerships still enabled BCSO and Positive Impact to have a larger impact on their respective operations than would have otherwise been possible. BCSO's collaboration with the DA's office and other federal, state, and local (municipal) law enforcement agencies facilitated the resolution of over 200 criminal investigations through intelligence and resource sharing across agencies. Similarly, City Impact's collaborations with schools, employment services, charitable organizations, and counseling service organizations allowed them to provide more holistic support and care for their clients.

COVID-19 contributed to numerous challenges to law enforcement activity. Due to limited in-person staff, proactive activity was limited, and investigative abilities decreased. Jail bookings were also affected as a consequence of the COVID-19 pandemic, in that an increased reliance on cite and release was used to minimize crowding in jails. Additionally, keeping work morale high was difficult throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. Due to anticipated decreases in activity during the COVID-19 pandemic, law enforcement was under budget for the first two years of the grant. As a result, funding had to be reallocated to other sources when not used for investigative purposes. COVID-19 created an increased reliance on remote methods to implement the grant activities. Therefore, Positive Impact faced many challenges in connecting with participants. Youth were less likely to join Zoom than to meet in-person for meetings, thereby decreasing trust between participants and their case managers. Because of the transition to remote formats, employee morale was also difficult to maintain.

In light of the COVID-19 pandemic, stakeholders noted the importance of improving program flexibility to better prepare to face future challenges. COVID-19 created numerous unexpected challenges that may have been more easily addressed had expectations and program steps been more adaptable. As an example, law enforcement agencies may have been able to maintain program goals during the pandemic by transferring unused budgets to after-school programs. Other suggestions for expanding program resources include a need to acquire transitional housing, increase opportunities for jobs and internships, provide counseling services, and establish opportunities for field trips. Opportunities for jobs and internships would likely increase a participant's ability to learn trade skills (e.g., mechanics, construction), whereas field trips to universities or job sites may help youth to see others in successful roles.