

Minutes:
Safe Neighborhoods Network
Roundtable Meeting
Saturday, January 8, 2011
PCRG

In Attendance:

Emily Anderson, PCRG Staff
Lauren Byrne, Lawrenceville United, SNN Chair
Jen Thoma, Council District 7
Terry Aiello, Bloomfield Development Corp
Harry Johnson, Council District 6
Erin Gill, Fineview Citizens Council
Melissa Gallagher, Fineview Citizens Council
Jeanne McNutt, Uptown Partners
Tom Corcoran, California-Kirkbride Neighbors
Khalif Ali, Pittsburgh Community Services, Inc.
Jana Finder, CeaseFire PA
Dawn Webb Turner, Upland Block Club

Goal for meeting: To discuss and understand the Pittsburgh Initiative to Reduce Crime (PIRC) and the social service commitment involved in dealing with violent groups.

Announcements:

- a. The Safe Neighborhoods Network website is up and running at www.safeneighborhoodsnetwork.com. This site is intended as a clearinghouse of public safety resources (both public and private) in the Pittsburgh region. Please take a look at the site and let Emily know if anything is missing.
- b. PNCIS training dates. Check out http://www.ucsur.pitt.edu/pncis_register.php to find out about upcoming trainings.
- c. SAFE Pittsburgh: Citywide community safety training and resource fair to take place on May 21, 2011. Sponsored by PCRG and CTAC with support from the Mayor's Office. The Mayor and Chief will provide opening remarks; department heads have been invited to present as panelists; new US Attorney David Hickton has been confirmed as our keynote speaker.

Discussion: *What's Going on in Your Neighborhoods?*

Lawrenceville:

- Preventing nuisance bars and promoting responsible hospitality
 - Research/organizing around potential nightclub
 - MOUs with existing bars re: All You Can Drink, cheap shots, etc.
 - Lauren is happy to share the MOUs with any neighborhoods who are looking at doing something similar
 - Working with Councilman Dowd and South Side community groups in this effort
- Some car windows shot out in Lawrenceville (supposedly unrelated to 90 windows that were shot out in Aspinwall)

California-Kirkbride:

- Quiet for the winter

- Dumpsite, success in clean-ups
 - Mistick maintaining a number of lots they own in neighborhood

Bloomfield:

- Shooting in front of gas station
- Otherwise quiet; no real problems

Uptown:

- Prostitution not evident during winter months
- Problem with one resident putting razor wire around his property
- Unlit parking lots always unsafe
- 6 cameras being placed along key spots on Forbes Ave. and Fifth Ave.
- DeRuad St. – one of the most high crime streets in Uptown. It's a problem because it's relatively secluded and in Zone 4, whereas the rest of the neighborhood is located in Zone 2

Fineview:

- Allegheny Dwellings is largest problem- still have shootings there
 - The new fitness center and boxing ring at the Dwellings has reduced crime among youth
- Theft of copper wiring in other areas of the neighborhood
- "Stroll and Patrol"
 - Residents meet at the overlook once a week and walk/patrol the neighborhood for 1.5 hours
 - Report code violations, crime, etc.
 - Have had anywhere from 5-14 people
 - Walks scheduled in warmer months, but as neighbors have gotten to know one another, there's a group that goes out even in the winter months
 - Residents have become "porch people," sitting on porches; speaking to neighbors
 - Resident interviews (of residents, by residents) for Fineview newsletter help facilitate neighbor connections

Manchester

- Public Safety Ambassadors – porch lights are left on once a month; event to get to know your neighbors

Hill District

- CIS grant for 3 cameras along Centre Ave.

Mellon St. (Larimer/Highland Park)

- Nuisance properties
- Drug activity

Guest Speaker: Khalif Ali, PCSI

Khalif joined us from PCSI to explain the Pittsburgh Initiative to Reduce Crime.

What is PIRC?

PIRC is a crime prevention model designed by Professor David Kennedy of the John J. College of Criminal Justice at the City University of New York. It is a communication model built on the premise that violent crime will drop when law enforcement, social service agencies, and the community are able to reach groups inclined to violent crime.

How does the PIRC model work?

It is a "stick and carrot" model that relies on open lines of communication between law enforcement (to include Pittsburgh Police, Allegheny County Police, the District Attorney's office, the US Attorney for this

region, ATF, DEA, IRS and probation officers), social service agencies, and community residents concerned with the safety of their neighborhoods and residents.

PIRC is message-based. The message from the community is “This violence is affecting our communities and hurting our loved ones and we won’t stand for it anymore.” The message to violent groups (gangs, drug crews) from law enforcement is “Retire or we will pursue you and your affiliates with the full force of the law.” The message from social service agencies (PCSI) is “There is another way of life and there are services available to help you transition from the gang life to a career life.”

Does Pittsburgh have a bad gang problem?

We’re told “there are no more gangs in Pittsburgh.” In Chicago, gangs are very sophisticated, like a corporate structure. In Pittsburgh, there’s an overlap between neighborhood crews and drug crews. Neighborhood crews may put up graffiti, but may not be violent. The drug crews are almost always violent.

How does law enforcement identify and pursue violent groups?

The Pittsburgh Police Bureau has an excellent Intelligence unit. They build a database of everyone identified with violent groups/gangs based on one-the-ground research, photos, etc. One Vision One Life also helps identify members through their organizing efforts.

Probation/parole officers have been the most aggressive arm of law enforcement. When a violent crime is committed by a known member of a group, the entire group is targeted. Every known member of the group who is on parole or probation has his home searched and, typically, these searches result in arrests for parole violations. For example, there was a homicide by one of the Race St. Crips in Homewood, so there were “door knocks” on 20 members of the gang. From those 20 door knocks, 6 arrests were made for things like arms possession and drug possession. A member of the gang whose house had been searched, called PCSI based on this event to see what he could do to get out of this life.

How are gang members educated about PIRC?

A few times a year, all the probationers/parolees on the “target list” are required by terms of their parole/probation to attend a “Call-In.” The Call-In is a large meeting in which the messages from all three groups involved in the PIRC effort deliver their collective messages.

Last year, there were 2 Call-Ins. A woman whose 2 sons were killed due to gang violence talked to the audience of probationers/parolees about the impact that violent events have on families and communities. Chief Harper and his partners at the State and Federal government deliver the message that if this activity does not stop, members will be pursued with the full force of the law. At the Call-Ins, PCSI delivers their message and provides the participants with cards so that they can call the hotline if they want out of this way of life.

The hope is that participants in the Call-In will carry the message back to their gangs that this criminal behavior will not be tolerated. The power of the US Attorney definitely scares many of them because a Federal conviction means Federal prison, often in other parts of the country, such as Kansas or Colorado.

Following the Call-In, One Vision One Life is on-the-ground, working in communities with serious gang problems and continuing to deliver the message. They steer a lot of folks toward the services offered by PCSI.

PCSI's Role: Transitioning ex-members to a career life

Once members of violent groups have made the decision to transition to career, getting them on track can be a slow and arduous process. Many of these guys are starting out with nothing. The first 5 guys Khalif worked with did not even have Social Security cards. On a basic level, a person must have an identification in order to receive social services, find employment, etc. So, the first step is often making sure that these guys have identification and that they show up to appointments.

PCSI helps participants make a budget that will allow them to pay any fines, legal fees, etc. and helps participants earn their GED. PCSI also holds job fairs for employers who will hire ex-felons.

The challenge is that many former gang members have no work ethic. They've grown up thinking that the way to make money and be respected is through selling drugs, etc. PCSI helps ex-members put together a "life change plan" to make the transition from their old life. This is not just about finding a job for someone with a felony record – these guys go through counseling and workforce development before they can be employed. PCSI tries to match their career to their interests. There has to be a clear path to a career life – not just a job – or else participants will get discouraged and go back to their old way of life.

Who is in the program?

Most program participants are young men between the ages of 19 and 24. Many of them have young children or girlfriends are a pregnant, which likely propels them to make some life changes. There has been one young woman enrolled.

Could a participant be "ejected" from the program?

Once an individual calls PCSI and enrolls in the program, his name is removed from the "target" list, so if his former gang is targeted following a violent crime, the participant will not be targeted. However, he or she will still be beholden to the conditions of his or her parole. It's unclear whether the participant would be ejected from the program if he or she had a parole violation, such as a positive drug test.

Khalif did have an individual who was arrested for a domestic dispute, but allowed to remain in the program.

Is there an education/intervention program for youth in schools?

Often times, members of these violent groups grew up in a broken household – many without either parent. Many lived with a legal guardian, such as a grandmother and thus have learned not to be accountable to anyone. Popular culture and neighborhood culture often times reinforce this lifestyle. Therefore, there is a need for intervention with youth before they go down this road.

There are many issues that incubate, including the need for instant money and instant gratification, as well as a need for the sense of belonging. Drugs are an underlying issue that exacerbates the problem.

Jana suggested that gun violence prevention groups such as CeaseFire PA could get involved in school intervention programs.

Khalif mentions that there are also opportunities for mentorship. The key is that mentors hold participants accountable for their actions. PCSI is working with PIIN (Pgh Interfaith Impact Network) on a partnership.

Community activism, connection is the key to controlling an environment that breeds crime.

Khalif recommends a book by Peter Block, "Community: The Structure of Belonging."

What is the plan for longevity with PIRC?

Council approved funding through June 2011, but will need to reapprove for funding to continue. PIRC could also get foundation funding.

Khalif mentioned that what makes the initiative effective is communication. Even if Council doesn't reapprove funding for the service agencies, law enforcement is talking to social service agencies and to the community, and in the long run, that will be sustained.

Additional Information? Questions?

Call PIRC Coordinator, Jay Gilmer, at 412.255.6774.

Announcements:

Jana: CeaseFire PA is an organization focused on reducing illegal handgun possession. They are looking for ways to partner with other groups focused on safety, crime prevention, etc. CeaseFire PA is starting up a roundtable for health practitioners around the impacts of gun violence. Also working on legislation to combat the Florida loophole, which allows Pennsylvania residents to register firearms in Florida and carry them in Pennsylvania. A sign-up sheet went around for the agency's regional newsletter.

Emily asked Jana to keep SNN in the loop about relevant projects and legislation as there may be opportunities to plug into those efforts.

Harry: The next Zone 2 public safety meeting will be held at the Hill House Association at 6pm on January 27th.

Councilman Lavelle's year-end newsletter is available online.

Next meeting: Saturday, March 12, 2011 at 9:00 am

Meeting Adjourned