

Putting A New Face on Violence Prevention: A Strategy to Prevent Violence in Allegheny County

March 16, 2002 – Dominique Johnson, age 16, was fatally shot over a missing ball cap and clothing during a fight in the Bedford Dwellings housing project in the Hill District. Lando “Ditto” Lynch, age 21, is awaiting trial accused of the murder¹.

April 29, 2002 – Police say George Smith, age 17, a suspected drug dealer from Larimer, shot Justin Perminter, 18, with an assault-rifle for moving in on his drug turf².

August 2, 2003 – Lawrence Bush, 28, was killed one week after he and his brother were acquitted of fatally shooting one man and wounding another in a drive-by shooting in 1994³.

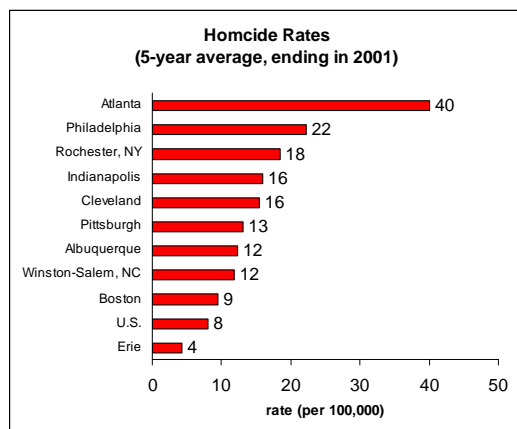
August 13, 2003 – Darion Parker, 16, was shot along with another 16-year-old on the porch of a bullet-riddled row house. Police say the shooting was in retaliation for an earlier attack. A suspect in that shooting, Michael Baccus, 18, was himself killed several days later⁴.

These are the stories that make up the homicide statistics in our neighborhoods, cities, and country. These homicides take place most frequently in poor, crime-ridden areas of our largest cities⁵ tearing apart communities of color at a much higher rate than they do white communities⁶. The cases most often involve young men⁷ and almost always involve firearms.⁸ These are the stories nobody wants to hear, especially not the police, prosecutors, or community members who are sent to sift through the rubble of lost lives. There are rarely viable witnesses to these murders, rarely trails that don’t lead to a dead end, few arrests, and even fewer convictions⁹. And many of these homicides lead to retaliatory assaults or homicides before the police can even clear the first crime scene¹⁰. After years of witnessing these cases, many are skeptical that anything could be done to prevent homicide.

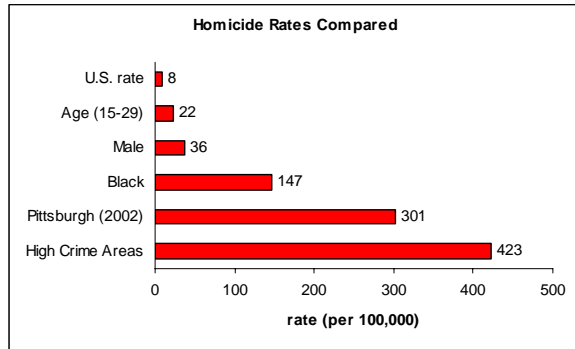
The Allegheny County Violence Prevention Initiative directly challenges this skepticism by starting with the simple but powerful notion that we have the power to prevent the next homicide. Can the decisions we make really affect who will get shot tomorrow night or next week? Yes. By systematically collecting and utilizing street-level intelligence to intervene in seemingly minor disputes, turf battles, gang/group incidents before they become shootings and homicides. This will be accomplished by connecting information and people with resources and solutions.

Our focus – Epidemic Level Violence

Is violence an epidemic in Pittsburgh? The answer is both no and yes. The table below illustrates a familiar comparison. Compared to other major cities, the level of violence (frequently measured by homicide) is low. In 2002, Pittsburgh burnished its long-standing reputation as one of America's safest cities and bucked the national trend with nearly a double-digit decrease in violent crime.



But this is only one way of looking at violence in our community. Another way of looking at violence is to examine who is impacted most -- because violence does not affect everyone equally. The graph below makes this point using 2002 data – a year with fewer homicides than the year before or after.



In 2002, the homicide rate in the United States was about 8 per 100,000. In the same year, homicide rates for young people, ages 15-29, was 22 per 100,000, nearly 3 times what it was for everyone else. For young males, it was higher, 36 per 100,000. For young black males in the United States the rate jumped to 147 per 100,000. For young black males living in Pittsburgh, it was a remarkable 301 per 100,000. And for young, black males living in the high crime neighborhoods of the Hill, the East End, Homewood, and the North Side - the rate was 423 per 100,000, over 50 times the U.S. homicide rate. Even in 2002, a year with comparably fewer homicides, it is clear that homicide is an epidemic among some sub-populations and some communities in Pittsburgh. And, it has been for a long time. This didn't begin in 1993 or 2003 – though it was worse in those years. Although this analysis did not include neighborhoods outside the city of Pittsburgh, it is likely that similar per capita homicide rates plague some communities – Penn Hills, Wilkinsburg, Duquesne, McKeesport and Braddock – outside the city.

It appears that these homicides – those that usually involve young black men living in high crime communities – are the incidents that drive our overall homicide numbers. When homicide rates are high, like in 1993 or 2003, there are an unusual number of these incidents.

These are the homicides the Allegheny County Violence Prevention Initiative will work to prevent. Focus is critical. If we want to be successful we cannot work on all problems that influence violence, nor can we work on all violence. At all costs, we will focus on preventing violence among primarily young, black men living in the high-impact neighborhoods (see for example Attachment 1: Action Communities). In 2002, just over 60 percent of Pittsburgh homicides and 40 percent of Allegheny County homicides fall into our focus area. It should be noted that we cannot begin everywhere at once. We will have to pick some focus areas, which may reduce the number of incidents in which we can hope to intervene initially. However, every effort will be made to cover all precipitating violent incidents, while providing more focus to certain neighborhoods.

Our Approach to Preventing Violence

The goal of the Allegheny County Violence Prevention Initiative is to systematically collect and use street-level intelligence to prevent violence. This will be accomplished by: (1) identifying, training, and developing a team of Community Coordinators who will be active in, and informed about, their communities; (2) systematically collecting and utilizing street-level intelligence to intervene in petty disputes, turf battles, gang/group incidents before they become shootings and homicides; and, (3) reaching out to those at risk for violence with services, jobs, and assistance – so they are no longer at risk for violence.

The table below demonstrates the difference between today and tomorrow – the difference before the Allegheny County Violence Prevention initiative and after the initiative is implemented.

Violent Incident	Today*	Tomorrow*
Domenique Johnson, age 16, was fatally shot over a missing ball cap and clothing during a fight in the Bedford Dwellings housing project in the Hill District. Lando “Ditto” Lynch, age 21, is awaiting trial accused of the murder.	The word on the street is that if you mess with “Ditto” you’re really looking for trouble. Domenique Johnson’s mother, brother, or neighbor knows Domenique is in trouble – is in a dispute with a serious individual (someone known to be violent), but they don’t know what to do about it – whom to tell. Domenique’s friends know about and even egg on the dispute, inciting the violence. The dispute lingers for some time, and while it started with a baseball cap, it’s grows more serious, until Domenique is killed.	A Community Coordinator learns of the dispute. He takes it seriously because serious offenders are involved. He reaches out to Ditto and tries to broker a resolution to the conflict. Lets him know that if he and Johnson don’t put this behind them, they will both end up in prison. This is a viable threat because they are both on probation, and the Community Coordinator knows they are both actively selling drugs. He offers to connect them to the resources of the initiative – to a job, education, etc. And lets them know that if there is violence between them or amongst their friends, he will work with law enforcement – including the federal authorities to ensure that they go to prison for a long time. Nobody gets shot.
Police say George Smith, age 17, a suspected drug dealer from Larimer, shot Justin Perminter, 18, with an assault-rifle for moving in on his drug turf	Many people on the street (including law enforcement) are aware of disputes among drug dealers – particularly disputes over turf. Community residents stay inside, and keep their kids from crossing through the turf until the dispute is settled. Everyone knows who’s involved but nobody says anything, even when someone is killed. One scene is barely cleared, when retaliation for the first homicide is achieved. Now there are 2 kids dead.	Community Coordinators become aware of the dispute. Because of the groups involved, and history of previous violence, the Community Coordinators don’t reach out to the groups alone. Working with federal and local law enforcement, all of the gang/group members who are on probation or parole – about 6 – are called into a mandatory meeting. They meet with Community Coordinators and law enforcement and are offered services and a choice – stop the violence, the dispute over territory – or law enforcement will do whatever they can to disrupt their lives, and build a federal case against both groups. Though only one individual seeks help and services, there is no violence. The dispute dissipates.
Lawrence Bush, 28, was killed one week after he and his brother were acquitted of fatally shooting one man and wounding another in a drive-by shooting in 1994.	Before Bush is even acquitted there is a contract out on his life. Bush and his brother know this, and do what they can to stay out of sight. These days, they go out only with lots of protection. Threats are made publicly. If there is an acquittal, someone will have to pay. Nobody does anything and Bush is killed.	Bush tells everyone he can that there is a contract out on his life. The Community Coordinators take him seriously and work with the Allegheny County Jail Collaborative, and others to find Bush temporary housing while reaching out to those threatening him. They are eventually locked up in response to a controlled and strategic drug-buy. Bush is assisted with employment and vows not to engage in violence. He is eventually trained as a Community Coordinator, helping to prevent future violence in his community.
Darion Parker, 16, was shot along with another 16-year-old on the porch of a bullet-riddled row house. Police say the shooting was in retaliation for an earlier attack. A suspect in that shooting, Michael Baccus, 18, was himself killed several days later.	A feud between two groups of young men is played out very publicly. There is an attack, followed by a shooting and a murder and another murder. Though everyone knows, nobody knows what to do or how to intervene.	Our Community Coordinators work to make themselves aware of as many incidents/disputes as possible. But they don’t get everything. They miss the dispute that led to the first incident. But once there was a shooting and a homicide, they are on top of it. Working with law enforcement and other criminal justice professionals, the Community Coordinators find a way to simultaneously get Baccus off the street and bring Parker’s friends into the first steps of rehabilitation. One homicide and another shooting are not prevented, but another, and uncountable others are.

* This information, though hypothetical is based on the authors extensive experience dealing with homicides and violence prevention both in Pittsburgh, and many other cities throughout the United States.

The main differences between today and tomorrow are: (1) focus; (2) the systematic collection and use of street intelligence; and, (3) the proactive, targeted, and strategic interventions driven by data, street-level knowledge, and best practices. These differences are critical and address the shortcomings of past crime prevention efforts.

Focus

Initiatives that lack focus usually result in general crime prevention strategies, like drug demand reduction or gun buybacks. But, it turns out that these types of initiatives are not strategic enough. The following analysis demonstrates this important point.

In Pittsburgh there is a large supply of illegal guns. There is no doubt that getting some of those guns off the street is a desirable goal. However, given the statistically small number of homicides compared with the very large number of guns it will be difficult to have an impact on homicide through general programs designed to remove guns from the street.

In other words, even the best gun programs are not likely to have a significant impact on homicide in the short run. Here are the numbers to back up the example¹¹. 1) Lets say, there are 45 homicides by gun every year. 2) Say you have a reasonably successful general gun program that takes 350 guns off the street every year. 3) And, let's estimate that there are approximately 10,000 guns on the street in Pittsburgh. Then, a) the probability of any particular gun being used in a murder is 45/10,000 or .0045. b) The probability of the gun program getting any particular gun off the street is 350/10,000 or .035. c) Therefore, the probability of the gun program getting a gun that would be used in homicide in a given year is .0045 X .035 or .00016. That means that the odds of the general gun program preventing a homicide in any year are a little more than 1 in 5000. The same analysis holds for general, non-strategic, drug market interventions.

This example demonstrates the critical need to distinguish between approaches directly addressing homicide and more general approaches which may focus on other areas such as guns or drugs but have a less direct relationship to homicide. General crime reduction strategies will likely have little impact on our homicide problem. This initiative is different in that it will be strategic, narrow, and directly focused on preventing homicide now.

Collection and Use of Intelligence Information

There has been considerable progress in the collection, automation, analysis and sharing of official crime statistics. Most city police departments share this information regularly, on-line. In addition, through programs such as COMSTAT and Problem-Oriented Policing, most large police departments have instituted a process of using crime data to react to spikes, or changes in crime patterns. Unfortunately, as positive as these developments are, official statistics only tell you so much. Without the "ground truthing" of line police officers, probation officers, and Community Coordinators, official statistics tell you little about *what to do about violence*. Specific information is needed about very current dynamics, personalities, events, and situations brewing on the street. This initiative will rely heavily on such information.

Proactivity

By combining focus and information with the vast resources of the county, city, as well as federal governments, proactive interventions can be designed to deal with specific street problems. This is not a one-size-fits-all program model. Retaliations call for one set of interventions; turf issues another; petty disputes, seemingly about nothing, still another. While we won't always get out in front of every homicide, every "warning" incident, shooting, and homicide will be reviewed and an intervention developed and implemented. This moves us away from the reactive programs that have failed in the past.

A Replication of a Successful Model

There is reason to believe that the Allegheny County Violence Prevention Initiative can significantly reduce violence. It is built on a model, which was pilot-tested in 13 cities by the Department of Justice between 1995-2002. The results are so significant, and the model so productive, that it was replicated in all 94 federal districts in 2003.

For example, in Boston, youth homicides, which averaged 44 per year between 1991 and 1995, fell to 26 in 1997 and to 15 in 1998¹². In Indianapolis, homicides leveled off abruptly in April 1999, and street-and-gang homicides (non-domestic homicides with multiple suspects or victims) were controlled to the point that the working group started to move its focus to domestic violence. In High Point, North Carolina, street violence was virtually eliminated and homicides dropped from 15 to 2 in 1999. In Minneapolis, summer homicide victimization fell from a 10-year high of 42 in 1996 to 8 in 1997¹³. Winston-Salem's statistics indicate a steep decline in the use of firearms in violent crimes in targeted areas. In Portland, the data indicate a 74-percent reduction in drive-by shootings from 1995 to 2000 and homicide victims age 24 or under dropped by 82 percent during this same time period¹⁴.

The nation-wide replication is just getting off the ground in Pittsburgh. Chaired by the local U.S. Attorney, this task force has significant resources, over \$800,000 to support gun violence prevention initiatives, and should provide significant leadership and partnership with our efforts.

Blueprint

I. Develop a network of Community Coordinators located in targeted communities.

A Community Coordinator can fit any of the categories below, but the majority of our efforts will be focused on bringing along 90-100 offenders who will serve as leaders and positive role models in their communities.

- Identify a network of community associates:
 - o Community leaders
 - o Youth
 - o Former, reformed offenders
 - o Clergy
 - o Community Organizations

II. Train, support, and utilize the Community Coordinators to collect and share information (street intelligence) that will result in bringing services (e.g.: treatment, job training and placement, education) to at-risk individuals and intervening to prevent violence.

- Training:
 - o Mentoring
 - o Conflict Resolution
 - o Crisis Management and Intervention
 - o Navigating Human Services
 - o Case Management
 - o Outreach
- Support
 - o Under our close management, direction, and oversight, Community Coordinators will be hired by neighborhood community organizations and will be paid a stipend for their work.
- Utilization
 - o Community Coordinators will be the eyes and ears of the neighborhood
 - o Share information about potential violence and serious disputes
 - o Intervene in disputes and resolve community conflicts
 - o Connect offenders and involved individuals with services and assistance

developed. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of, and description of, proactive plans implemented. • Results monitored. 		
Targeted violence prevented <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Targeted shootings (compared to previous years) • Targeted homicides (compared to previous years) 	Outcome	Project researcher/analyst: official police/coroner statistics
Knowledge and perceptions of Community Coordinators and their effectiveness	Outcome	Project researcher/analyst: Interview/Surveys of targeted community members, law enforcement, etc. (non-scientific)
Knowledge and perceptions of program (services, opportunities, level of violence on the street)	Outcome	Project researcher/analyst working with Community Coordinators: Interview/Surveys of targeted offenders (non-scientific)

Attachments:

- Attachment A: Target Communities
- Attachment B: Timeline
- Attachment C: Budget

End Notes

¹ Conti, David. Homicides in Pittsburgh. Pittsburgh Tribune-Review, January 1, 2003.

² Conti, David. Homicides in Pittsburgh. Pittsburgh Tribune-Review, January 1, 2003.

³ Accessed from the Pittsburgh Post Gazette, http://www.post-gazette.com/images2/083103homicidechart_450.jpg.

⁴ Accessed from the Pittsburgh Post Gazette, http://www.post-gazette.com/images2/083103homicidechart_450.jpg.

⁵ See Sherman, Lawrence W., Patrick R. Gartin, and Michael E. Buerger, “Hot Spots of Predatory Crime: Routine Activities and the Criminology of Place,” *Criminology* 27 (1989). David Weisburd, Lisa Maher, Lawrence Sherman, et al., “Contrasting Criminological and Crime-specific Theory: The Case of Hot Spots of Crime,” *Advances in Criminological Theory* 45 (1992). Eck, John, and David Weisburd, “Crime Places in Crime Theory,” in *Crime and Place*, edited by John Eck and David Weisburd, Monsey, New York: Criminal Justice Press/Willow Tree Press, 1995, 1–33.

⁶ See Cook, Philip, “The Epidemic of Youth Violence,” paper presented for the *Perspectives on Crime and Justice* lecture series, Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Justice, National Institute of Justice, 1998. See also Cook, Philip, and John Laub, “The Unprecedented Epidemic of Youth Violence,” in *Youth Violence*, edited by Michael Tonry and Mark H. Moore, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ See Fox, James Alan, Trends in Juvenile Violence: A Report to the United States Attorney General on Current and Future Rates of Juvenile Offending, NCJ 170379, Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics, 1996.

⁹ Wellford, Charles, and James Cronin, “Clearing Up Homicide Clearance Rates,” *National Institute of Justice Journal*. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Justice, National Institute of Justice, April 2000.

¹⁰ Much qualitative evidence suggests that many homicides in major urban areas are retaliatory in nature. Incident reviews (which will be covered later in the paper) and review of motive in case files support the evidence. However, I have yet to find someone who has quantified this dynamic. At this point, we have little more than anecdotal evidence on how long the average retaliatory dispute lingers, in other words, how much time we have to interrupt the cycle. We also do not know what proportion of assaults leads to retaliation or what are the distinguishable attributes (if there are any) of retaliatory incidents. Additional work in this area is needed.

¹² Braga, Anthony A., David M. Kennedy, Anne M. Piehl, and Elin J. Waring, *Measuring the Impact of Operation Ceasefire: Reducing Gun Violence*, Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Justice, National Institute of Justice, September, 2001.

¹³ Kennedy, David M., and Anthony A. Braga, "Homicide in Minneapolis: Research for Problem Solving," *Homicide Studies* 2:263–290, 1996.

¹⁴ Kapsch, Steve, and Louis Lyman, *Strategic Approaches to Community Safety Research Team Final Report*, submitted to the National Institute of Justice, March 2002, page 22.