



Safe Streets is a public health campaign to reduce shooting and homicides within targeted communities in Baltimore City where homicide is one of the greatest risk factors for teenagers and young adults. Safe Streets works with community-based organizations to develop and implement strategies to reduce and prevent violence, particularly shootings and killings. The program relies on outreach workers, clergy, and community leaders to intervene in conflicts or potential conflicts and promote alternatives to violence. Safe Streets also involves cooperation with the police and it depends heavily on a strong public education campaign to instill in people the message that shootings and violence are not acceptable. Finally, it calls for the strengthening of communities so they have the capacity to exercise informal social control and respond to issues that affect them.

Conflict Mediation

Youth outreach and high-risk conflict mediation are, together, perhaps the most important of the five core components of Safe Streets. Outreach workers are streetwise individuals who are familiar with criminal behavior and/or gang life in the communities where Safe Streets is active. Many of them are former gang members, or individuals who have spent time in prison, but they are now “on this side of the line” and eager to give back and help young people in their neighborhoods. These individuals use their experience and knowledge of the streets to seek out and build relationships with troubled youth who are susceptible to the violent norms that still exist on the streets.

Outreach Workers

Outreach workers have a client base and focus on changing the behaviors and thinking of high-risk youth. They keep in touch with the community and seek to intervene in conflicts before they escalate to violence and also prevent retaliation. They attempt to steer individuals away from violence to more positive endeavors, such as education and employment opportunities. Most outreach workers come from the communities they serve and many are ex-offenders, enabling them to better understand the needs and motivations of high-risk youth.

Five Core Components

Safe Streets is a mix of five core components: community mobilization, outreach, public education, faith-based leader involvement, and criminal justice participation.

Community Mobilization

Community mobilization focuses on residents, local businesses, service organizations, and members of the faith community to build a safer and more viable community.

The purpose of community mobilization is to build and energize a base of support for Safe Streets that involves a variety of efforts to both stop shootings and killings in the near term and to change the underlying conditions that give rise to shootings and killings in the long term.

Violence prevention coordinators take the lead on community mobilization by building neighborhood-based coalitions of local law enforcement, youth organizations, faith leaders, block clubs, and residents. They ensure responses to all shootings, keep up on all relevant data, and distribute public education materials.

Central to the work of the violence prevention coordinator is the development of a violence prevention plan that describes the nature and extent of violence in the partner community, current efforts to respond to violence (including existing community resources) and identifies goals, objectives, and activities that are directed at stopping the shootings and killings.

Outreach

Outreach workers are street-smart individuals who identify and engage individuals who are at high risk of becoming involved in violence in order to prevent shootings and killings from occurring.

Outreach workers are challenged to build sufficient trust with these high risk individuals, many of whom are gang-involved, to be able to influence the ways these young people think and act – and to redirect them to positive pursuits, including jobs, job training, and returning to school.

Outreach workers meet and work with those they assist in non-traditional settings – parks, street corners, places young people gather – during non-traditional hours when local data indicate violence is most likely to occur, particularly evenings and late-night hours and on weekends.

Public Education

Safe Streets employs a broad-based public education campaign to facilitate behavior change and promote nonviolence. Neighborhoods will be saturated with posters, leaflets, flyers, yard signs, bumper stickers, T-shirts, buttons and other materials that disparage violence and carry pointed messages about the consequences of shootings and killings.

Faith-Based Leader Involvement

Faith-based leaders are in a unique position to influence the thinking and behavior of community members and those who are at risk of involvement in shootings and killings. Many people turn to their church, mosque, or synagogue for comfort and strength, seeking a higher power to guide them to a path that will lead them away from a destructive lifestyle to one that is positive and constructive.

Safe Streets works to engage members of the faith community to perform activities that complement those of the outreach workers. The goal is for these faith leaders to open safe havens, talk to high-risk individuals, participate and provide leadership in shooting responses, preach nonviolence, and urge congregants to work to stop shootings and killings.

Criminal Justice Participation

Individuals responsible for shootings and killings need to be held accountable to the community for their actions. This is not an end that can be definitely achieved without the involvement of police, the courts and corrections agencies – until the thinking completely changes.

Safe Streets builds on the partnerships that many communities already have with police and fosters relationships with community residents in neighborhoods where those relationships may have been strained in the past. Safe Streets, residents, and police should all share the common goal of saving lives and making neighborhoods safe.

Safe Streets is based on the highly successful CeaseFire model developed at the University of Illinois School of Public Health in Chicago. The first CeaseFire zone was established in 2000 – in the second most violent police beat in the city – and showed a 67% drop in shootings in the first year. In 2004, CeaseFire expanded from 5 to 15 communities; there was an average reduction in killings of 45% in CeaseFire zones; and Chicago experienced its largest drop in killings in 40 years.

Safe Streets Baltimore is currently operating in two (2) neighborhoods: McElderry Park and Cherry Hill.

For additional information contact:

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