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Prison Ministry -  Episcopal Diocese of Rochester

Supporting Central New York's Prisoners & Families

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**Welcome to the E-Newsletter of the Prison Ministry
Advisory Board of the Episcopal Diocese of Rochester**

We offer this newsletter to readers on a periodic basis to highlight recent developments among the various ministries and agencies working with and through our members which relate to care of prisoners and their families, and of the many other issues of relevance to this community.

With this edition we highlight a national program headquartered in Chicago Ill, Cure Violence, Inc., which is headed by its founder, Dr. Gary Slutkin, M.D. Dr. Slutkin is the originator of the "Cure Violence Model", which treats violent behavior - and in particular gun violence -- as a public health issue. Its affiliate in New York State is under the direction of our former district attorney Mike Green. Currently in New York State, there are programs operating in Albany, Buffalo, Mt. Vernon, Nassau County, all the boroughs of New York City, Rochester, Syracuse, Troy and Yonkers. Here in Rochester, an adaptation of this model is practiced by Action for a Better Community under the name "Save Our Youth (SOY)", and as integrated with the work of many other crime fighting and social agencies, appears to be an important contributor toward the overall effort to reduce violent crime in Rochester.

**Save Our Youth -
Intervening to Reduce Gun Violence in Rochester NY.
Written by Michelle Thomas**

Violence as a Public Health Issue - Use of Epidemiological Strategies

During the first half of the 20th Century, public health strategies were focused on eradicating many diseases which devastated the lives of large portions of our population in the United States. Great success in reducing or eliminating diseases such as tuberculosis, polio, diphtheria, etc., often through public health strategies such as improved hygiene, sanitation, new vaccines, and improved diet and exercise, has resulted in huge gains in overall public health. However, as these diseases have been reduced, physical violence has garnered more attention as a public health issue. In addition, modern sociological changes in densely populated urban areas have resulted in large increases in murder and suicide rates, causing many public health professionals to consider employing epidemiological strategies to address violence¹.

All too often, violence in our society is treated as a "moral" issue resulting in punishment for perpetrators, as the main response. Other efforts for reducing violence involve improving the social environment / infrastructure - for example improving schools, neighborhood resources, mental health services, local economy and employment, etc. While such methods produce reductions in crime in the long term, they are often slow to produce immediate results when new disputes are just about to

erupt into violence. As such, interrupting potential violent acts before they occur, and helping those involved to find more peaceful ways of settling disputes, can complement the more traditional long term approaches of removing the "root causes" which are believed to foster crime.²

Cure Violence - A History of Success

A leader in implementing the use of public health strategies to combat interpersonal violence has been Dr. Gary Slutkin, M.D. After having built extensive experience in combating epidemics in third world countries as former head of the Intervention Development Unit for the World Health Organization (WHO), and as Professor of Epidemiology and International Health at the University of Illinois / Chicago, Dr. Slutkin recognized that violence can truly be considered an "epidemic" here in the United States. In 2000, he founded an organization, Cure Violence, Inc., which utilized health strategies to decrease these crimes. His first project was to introduce his methods in the West Garfield Park area of Chicago, one of the most violent communities in Chicago. In a very short period of time, Cure Violence had reduced shootings by 67% in the area over the previous year prior to implementation.³ Since its inception in 2000, Cure Violence has expanded into many cities in the United States.

Characteristics of Epidemics in Relation to Violent Crime

Seen through the eyes of an epidemiologist, epidemics have three main characteristics.

- **Clustering: Initial cases tend to cluster in specific geographic areas.** As with traditional diseases, violent crime often begins in clusters. People are exposed to violence through personal attack, witnessing violent acts, domestic disputes, drug or gang related turf wars, etc. This in turn causes trauma, which can lead to further violence through retaliation, or spreading of abuse to others. As with traditional diseases, the clusters or societal difficulties known to the area often become clues to how the contagion is spread, and then can be interrupted or eliminated.⁴
- **Spreading: The epidemic spreads to neighboring communities.** Without effective intervention strategies, violence, like other diseases spreads until the causes are interrupted.⁵ People exposed to violent crime often suffer from mental or physical trauma which is then transmitted to other victims. In many cases, retaliation occurs against the original perpetrator, or the victim may exhibit aggressive behavior towards others as a result of the original trauma. Hence the violent behavior becomes a "contagion" as it spreads within a population.
- **Transmission: The disease continues to be transmitted until some kind of intervention can control or eradicate the disease.** Strategies for reducing or stopping the spread of violence include interrupting or intervening with potential combatants, mentoring to change behavior, and changing group and community behavior "norms" relative to dealing with disputes.⁶

How the Cure Violence Model Works

Taken directly from the Cure Violence website, the health model strategies translated to addressing violent behavior are listed below:

(See Footnote 7 for the website reference for this entire section.)

"1. Detect and interrupt potentially violent conflicts

Trained violence interrupters and outreach workers prevent shootings by identifying

and mediating potentially lethal conflicts in the community, and following up to ensure that the conflict does not reignite.

- **Prevent Retaliations:** Whenever a shooting happens, trained workers immediately work in the community and at the hospital to cool down emotions and prevent retaliations - working with the victims, friends and family of the victim, and anyone else is connected with the event.
- **Mediate Ongoing Conflicts:** Workers identify ongoing conflicts by talking to key people in the community about ongoing disputes, recent arrests, recent prison releases, and other situations and use mediation techniques to resolve them peacefully.
- **Keep Conflicts 'Cool':** Workers follow up with conflicts for as long as needed,

sometimes for months, to ensure that the conflict does not become violent.

2. Identify and Treat Highest Risk Conflicts: Trained, culturally appropriate outreach workers, working with people identified as high risk to make them less likely to commit violence by meeting them where they are, talking to them about the costs of using violence, and helping them to obtain the social services they need - such as job training and drug treatment.

- **Access Highest Risk:** Workers utilize trust with high-risk individuals to establish contact, develop relationships, and begin to work with the people most likely to be involved in violence.
- **Provide Treatment:** Workers develop a caseload of clients who they work with intensively - seeing several times a week and assisting with their needs such as drug treatment, employment, leaving gangs.
- **Change Behaviors:** Workers engage with high-risk individuals to convince them to reject the use of violence by discussing the cost and consequences of violence and teaching alternative responses to situations.

3. Mobilize the Community to Change Norms: Workers engage leaders in the community as well as community residents, local business owners, faith leaders, service providers, and high risk situations, conveying the message that the

residents, groups, and the local community, should refrain in the use of violence as normal behavior when conflicts arise.

- **Respond to Every Shooting:** Whenever a shooting occurs, workers organize a response where dozens of community members voice their objection to the shooting.
- **Organize Community:** Workers coordinate with existing and establish new block clubs, tenant councils, and neighborhood associations to assist in discouraging violence.
- **Spread Positive Norms:** The program distributes materials and hosts events to convey the message that violence is not acceptable."⁷

Addressing Gun Violence in Rochester NY - Save Our Youth (SOY)

Here in New York State, Cure Violence, under the regional direction of Rochester's former district attorney Mike Green, and with the support of the New York State Division of Criminal Justice Services, obtained \$4 million "seed money", and opened programs in New York State. These are now operating in Albany, Buffalo, Mt. Vernon, all of Nassau County, all the boroughs of New York City, Rochester, Syracuse, Troy and Yonkers. All of these cities using the Cure Violence Model experienced dramatic reductions in gun related violence. The program in the boroughs of New York City was so successful that in 2015 Mayor Bill DeBlasio obtained an additional \$12.7 million grant for these programs.

Incidentally, in most of these cities, the program operates under the acronym SNUG ("GUNS" spelled backward). However, in Rochester, the operating agency, Action for a Better Community, has made adaptations to the Cure Violence Model to better integrate their work with the police department and other social service agencies, hence they have changed the name to Save Our Youth - SOY.

In Rochester, the program was begun in 2014. It was first implemented only in the Northeast Section of the city. In the first 6 months of operation, this section of Rochester experienced a 40% reduction in gun related violence. According to the Democrat and Chronicle, during the year of 2017 violence in Rochester decreased by 31 percent relative to that for 2016.⁸ Isabel Rosa, the Program Manager for SOY, indicated that "over the first three months of 2018, Save Our Youth staff conducted 22 meditations. With these mediations, both parties were able to

resolve their issues without resorting to violence."

While incorporating the Cure Violence Model pioneered by Dr. Gary Slutkin, here in Rochester, ABC has adapted their program to include many additional social services beyond that of the original model. The staff of the SOY program refers clients to other agencies to help them gain stability, take them to their appointments, help clients set personal goals and then connect them to supporting agencies. Recently, members have begun to visit people's homes as well as continuing community activities. They have also begun more training for self-care, trauma, and other interests that can help decrease gun violence. Since the entire staff is familiar with the community, the members are able to recognize a familiar face as well as to be mentored by someone actually living in their neighborhood.

SOY has also collaborated with other organizations such as the Rochester and other area police departments, Strong Hospital, the Forensic Laboratory, and Pathways to Peace, all in an effort to identify common issues of gang violence, and gun activities affecting Rochester communities. Community connections are also enhanced by special neighborhood events sponsored by SOY.

The program has since been expanded to include the Northwest sections of Rochester as well. Earlier this year (2018) ABC received a \$7.1 million grant from the New York State Division of Criminal Justice Services. In an effort to be closer to the areas of the city they are serving, and to accommodate the expanded program, SOY has just moved into new headquarters located at 279 Smith Street in Rochester.

A Cautionary Note About Gun Violence Statistics

In preparing this report on Save Our Youth, there is much reason to believe that the incorporation of the Cure Violence Model in addressing violent "hot spots" in Rochester is having a positive effect on reducing overall gun violence. However, as stated in the Democrat & Chronicle article cited in Footnote #8 written by Sean Lahman, what method is most effective in fighting gun violence is somewhat up for debate, along with a belief that integrating many strategies to fight these crimes may in totality, be the most effective. It is suggested that readers of this newsletter should read carefully the two excerpts from D&C article as shown in the comments with Footnote #8, and also access the entire article using the URL provided with this footnote.

Footnotes:

1 "**The History of Violence as a Public Health Issue**", Linda L. Dahlberg, PhD, James A. Mercy, PhD, from the AMA Virtual Mentor, February 2009, Volume II, No. 2: 167-172. Available, on-line at <http://virtualmentor.ama-assn.org/2009/02/mhst1-0902.html>. Note that Dahlberg and Mercy referenced this information from: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Health Statistics. Leading causes of death, 1900-1998, http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/dvs/lead1900_98.pdf. Accessed November 18, 2008 - **and also** -

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Injury Prevention and Control. Web-based Injury Statistics Query and Reporting System (WISQARS).2009. <http://www.cdc.gov/ncipc/wisqars>. Accessed November 18, 2008.

2 Summarized from www.cureviolence.org; The specific link is: <http://cureviolence.org/understand-violence/violence-as-a-health-issue/>;

3 Summarized from www.cureviolence.org; The specific link is: <http://cureviolence.org/the-model/about-us/> The article on this page is entitled "Cure Violence History".

4 Summarized from www.cureviolence.org; The specific link is <http://cureviolence.org/understand-violence/violence-as-a-health-issue/>.

5 Ibid.

6 Ibid.

7 Summarized from www.cureviolence.org; The specific link is <http://cureviolence.org/the-model/essential-elements/>

8 "Murders in Rochester Drop 31 Percent in 2017", Sean Lahman, Democrat and Chronicle, Jan 1, 2018. URL: <https://www.democratandchronicle.com/story/news/2018/01/01/murders-rochester-drop-31-percent-2017/962425001/>

As quoted from the above D&C article, Rochester Police Chief Michael Ciminelli "pointed to a number of specific anti-violence efforts that have been making an impact, perhaps none more than the state-funded Gun Involved Violence Elimination initiative. It focuses on the seven most crime-riddled neighborhoods in the city." . . . "There's no one approach, no silver bullet that will solve all gun crime." [Nick] Petitti [RPD's top crime research analyst said.] "You really have to look at it from a bunch of different angles."

Want More Information?

For more information on the History of Treating Violence as a Public Health issues, refer to "The History of Violence as a Public Health Issue", Linda L. Dahlberg, PhD, James A. Mercy, PhD, from the AMA Virtual Mentor, February 2009, Volume II, No. 2: 167-172. Available on-line at <http://virtualmentor.ama-assn.org/2009/02/mhst1-0902.html>.

For more information on the Cure Violence Model and the work of Dr. Gary Slutkin, refer to www.cureviolence.org. This website is loaded with detailed explanations, experience, and references for anyone interesting in a deeper investigation into the epidemiological strategy of combating violent crime.

Refer also to a TED talk given by Dr. Slutkin in 2014 <https://ideas.ted.com/visual-treat-violence-like-its-a-contagious-disease/>

Dr. Slutkin's comments on the "Science of Violent Behavior, can be accessed from the link: <http://cureviolence.org/understand-violence/science-of-violent-behavior/>

View the film *The Interrupters*, which shows the Cure Violence Health model in action. Shot over the course of a year out of [Kartemquin Films](#), the film follows Ameena Mathews, Cobe Williams and Eddie Bocanegra as they go about their work, and while doing so reveals their own inspired journeys of hope and redemption. View the film for free by accessing the PBS Frontline website: <https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/frontline/film/interrupters/>

To obtain the Workshop Summary entitled "Violence is a Contagious Disease. Contagion of Violence" by Dr. Gary Slutkin, National Academy Press, 2012, Washington D.C., or retrieve from <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK207245/>

For more information on Action for a Better Community, Inc., contact: Isabel Rosa at irosa@abcinfo.org. or refer to the website for ABC. <http://www.abcinfo.org/youth-services/save-our-youth-soy>
To contact the Save Our Youth Program, contact: Save Our Youth, 279 Smith Street, Rochester, NY 14608. Phone: (585) 576-7269.

For more information on Pathways to Peace, contact: Pathways to Peace, 200 West Avenue Rochester, NY 14611, (585) 428-6339. Refer also to the Website for the City of Rochester URL: <http://www.cityofrochester.gov/pathwaystopeace/>

For more information about the Prison Ministry Advisory Board of the Episcopal Diocese of Rochester and its many related ministries, visit our website, www.prisonministry-edr.org

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