

April 29, 2011

To: Public Safety & Education Committee

From: Peter Harris, Central Staff

Re: Evidence of Effectiveness in the Inventory of Crime Prevention Services

Introduction

On May 4, Doug Carey of the Department of Finance will present the Executive's response to the Statement of Legislative Intent (SLI) on the Crime Prevention Review. This memo is a supplement.

The Executive's response accomplishes the first phase of the review called for by the SLI, which is an inventory of direct crime prevention services other than law enforcement. The SLI says,

“A subsequent phase will review the effectiveness of the inventoried services and how they complement the proactive policing efforts called for by the Neighborhood Policing Plan. The Council also intends to continue reviewing the best available crime prevention and crime reduction strategies in law enforcement and otherwise . . .”

Here I will seek to begin the subsequent phase by summarizing what we know so far about the evidence for the effectiveness of a subset of the services, namely, those with the essential purpose of preventing serious crime.

What counts as good evidence of effectiveness in crime prevention?

There are two ways to provide good evidence of program effectiveness. One is to evaluate the program using good standards of evaluation. The other is to carefully replicate a program that has been evaluated elsewhere and shown to be effective. A careful replication applies the very same treatment or intervention in the very same way to an identical or very similar population.

What are good standards of evaluation? A starting point would be the standards used by the Washington State Institute for Public Policy (WSIPP) in its reviews of evaluations of crime prevention programs:

The evaluation must include a control or comparison group. This is the most important standard. Without some form of control group, there is no way to know what would have happened without the intervention or treatment, and thus no way to know whether the program made a difference.

The treatment group must include all persons the program intended to treat, not only those who completed the program or were otherwise successful.

The evaluation must define and measure a crime-related outcome, such as arrests or convictions.

From WSIPP's perspective, evaluations that do not meet all three of these do not provide evidence good enough for state legislative policy making.¹

Another leading center of research on crime prevention is the Blueprints Center for the Study and Prevention of Violence at the University of Colorado. The Blueprints Center has developed a list of 11 model programs and 20 promising programs for youth violence prevention. To qualify as either a model program or a promising program, a program must show evidence of effectiveness from an evaluation with a strong research design. A strong research design is one that includes either a randomly assigned control group or a well-matched control group. The evaluation must also have an adequate sample size, low attrition in the treatment group, and reliable and valid measures.²

Some recent evaluations of City programs have argued that control groups are nice but not essential and often infeasible, and that simply comparing the behavior of program participants before and after intervention is enough. In addition to WSIPP and the Blueprints Center, those who reject this view and who have found high quality evaluation to be both essential and feasible include:

the National Research Council of the National Academy of Sciences, in its reviews of evaluations of the effectiveness of policing strategies;

Lawrence Sherman and his colleagues, who prepared the path-breaking meta-analyses for the U. S. Congress on what works, what doesn't and what's promising in crime prevention;

the California Governor's Office for Gang & Youth Violence Policy, which is attempting to get more value out of the \$2 billion spent on youth crime and violence prevention in that state;

the many jurisdictions that have adopted the Communities That Care approach for youth crime prevention developed by David Hawkins and his colleagues;

David Weisburd and his colleagues at the Center for Evidence-Based Crime Policy at George Mason University, from whom the Council will hear next week; and

Assistant U. S. Attorney General Laurie Robinson, head of the Office of Justice Programs, whose top priority is integrating evidence-based criminal justice research into program and policy decisions and improving the translation of this research into practice, and who has endorsed the Blueprints approach and standards to this end.

What evidence stands behind the City's crime prevention programs?

Table 1 lists a subset of the services described in the SLI response. Services are included in the table if they have the prevention of serious violent or property crime in the community as an essential goal. Among the services not included, for example, are the Housing First program, because its

¹ See Drake, Aos & Miller, "Evidence-based Public Policy Options to Reduce Crime and Criminal Justice Costs: Evidence from Washington State," *Victims & Offenders* 4:170-196, 2009, available at <http://www.wsipp.wa.gov/>.

² See <http://www.colorado.edu/cspv/blueprints/>. Model and promising programs must also have shown sustained effects beyond the treatment period, and model programs must have been replicated and evaluated in multiple sites.

primary goal is breaking the cycle of homelessness, not crime prevention; several programs to assist victims of crime, because avoiding future victimization is only part of the general goal of improving the health and living conditions of the victims; several graffiti prevention programs, because graffiti ordinarily is not regarded as serious crime in itself; and all of the programs classified as Security in the SLI response, because each of these is focused on one or a small number of specific locations, and not a broad part of the community. The one exception is the inclusion of the Nurse-Family Partnership, for which crime prevention is only one goal, because this program is one of the Blueprints model programs for youth violence prevention.

These somewhat arbitrary exclusions are in no way a comment on the value of the excluded programs, merely an attempt to focus on the City’s main crime prevention activities outside of law enforcement. Any of the excluded programs could easily be added to the list.

The judgments in the table about whether a service has or will have good evidence of effectiveness from either evaluation or replication are based on the SLI response and other available materials of which I am aware. Because there may be information of which I am not aware, these individual judgments should be regarded as preliminary.

Table 1: Which Crime Prevention Programs Have Good Evidence of Effectiveness?					
#	Program	City FTE	Contract \$	Good evidence from . . .	
				Evaluation	Replication
2	Indigent Batterers’ Treatment	0.25	\$148,650		
6	Co-STARS	0.50	\$400,000		
7	CURB		\$247,000		
8	GOTS		\$317,200		
9	Drug Market Initiative	0.10	\$26,000		
Seattle Youth Violence Prevention Initiative (SYVPI)					
10	SYVPI Case Management	1.75	\$700,000		
11	SYVPI Mentoring (see note 1)		\$130,000		In part
12	SYVPI Aggression Replacement Training (see note 2)		\$60,000		Yes
24	SYVPI Power of Place	3.00			
27	SYVPI Youth Employment Services		\$549,520		
28	SYVPI Neighborhood Matching Fund Sustainment Program		\$77,325		
30	SYVPI Community Matching Grants		\$130,925		
37	SYVPI Gang Resistance Education and Training				
38	SYVPI School Emphasis Truancy and Suspension Reduction				
48	SYVPI Neighborhood Network Coordination, Intake & Referral	1.00	\$513,910		
49	SYVPI Street Outreach & Critical Incident Response		\$301,721		
52	SYVPI School Emphasis Officers	6.00			
SYVPI in its entirety (see note 3)				Pending	

13	South Park Initiative case management and basic life & social skills		\$232,763		
29	South Park Initiative RecTech Teens, boxing and ESL		\$90,178		
16	Methadone Voucher Program (see note 4)		\$526,073		Perhaps
17	Multisystemic Treatment Program (see note 2)		\$86,100		Yes
18	Nurse-Family Partnership (see note 2)		\$539,816		Yes
21	Fire Stoppers (see note 5)	1.00			Perhaps
44	Safe Communities		\$381,330		
47	Seattle Nightlife Initiative	1.25			
53	Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design	1.00			
54	Proactive Gang Unit Program	7.00			
55	Crime Prevention Coordinators	7.00			
56	Community Police Team Officers	21.00			

Notes:

1. One of two SYVPI mentoring services is the Big Brothers Big Sisters program, which is a Blueprints model program for youth violence prevention.
2. Aggression Replacement Training, Multisystemic Therapy and the Nurse-Family Partnership are all found by WSIPP to have good evaluations showing crime prevention benefits in excess of costs. The latter two are Blueprints model programs for youth violence prevention. Whether they are effective in Seattle depends on the quality of the replication.
3. SYVPI is collecting data for an evaluation by researchers in the Department of Epidemiology of the UCLA School of Public Health. If successful, this evaluation will tell us whether the initiative is effective as a whole. It will not tell us which individual elements are effective.
4. The SLI response describes outcomes for methadone treatment related to drug use. I believe there is good evidence that methadone treatment is effective for crime prevention, but I do not have a reference at hand.
5. The SLI response description of the Fire Stoppers program refers to a study comparing the recidivism of youth completing the program to that of youth not involved in the program. I have not yet located a copy of this study.

Conclusion

Based on the information presented in the SLI response and other existing materials on the evidence behind some of the services listed in Table 1, it seems fair to say that the City is not yet using much of what has been learned from rigorous evaluation over the last couple of decades about what works in crime prevention.

The overall cost effectiveness of the City's expenditures for crime prevention depends not only on whether the individual programs are effective, but also on whether they are focused on the most serious crime problems. Just as the total community impact of an individual treatment program depends on whether it focuses on those at highest risk, the total community impact of the City's crime prevention portfolio depends on whether it focuses on the greatest opportunities for prevention. The greatest opportunities will be found where the crime problems are large and the available tested programs are effective in reducing them. Where these opportunities lie may be a good question for the next phase of the review.

If you have any questions, please let me know.