

The Boston Strategy

A Story of Unlikely Alliances

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Executive Summary

To paraphrase the words of a philosopher: life must be lived forward, but it can only be understood backward. The objective of this effort to reconstruct the origins and evolution of The Boston Strategy to Prevent Youth Violence is not to dwell in the past, but to make it usable in the present. In order to do so, many individuals gave considerable time and energy to the tasks of recollection and reflection. Each perspective is unique, yet there is strong consensus on key points and fundamental principles. Most importantly, the Boston Strategy partners agree that the city's problem of youth violence is far from solved. Through four years of collaborative effort, culminating in Operation Cease Fire in 1996, Boston won a respite from soaring homicide rates. The appearance of new gangs and a number of gang-related murders in 1990-2000 have made it clear that lasting solutions will require continuing collaboration and innovation, which in turn require sustaining the sense of common purpose that made collaboration possible in the first place. It is easy to describe specific initiatives and how they added up to the Boston Strategy, much more difficult to capture the spirit that inspired and guided them. Yet both are equally important parts of Boston's story.

For more information about The Boston Strategy to Prevent Youth Violence or to obtain an electronic PDF file of this document, please go to the website at: **<http://www.BostonStrategy.com/>**

Introduction

In the 1990s, Boston achieved dramatic success in reducing its level of gang-related gun violence—in particular, youth homicides. That success has brought widespread recognition and attention to what has now become known as The Boston Strategy to Prevent Youth Violence. Other cities have begun to experiment with some of its key programs, in particular Operation Night Light and Operation Cease Fire.

Yet, as all the participants in Boston's anti-violence campaign agree, the effectiveness of those specific initiatives was entirely dependent upon the larger context of cooperation, trust, and respect within which they were developed and which continues to support them today. Only within that context could there be the collaboration among unlikely partners—police, probation officers, African-American clergy, gang outreach workers, and many more—that made a coordinated approach possible. Only within that context could the unusual law-enforcement tactics developed by the partners have widespread support within the community, not only from the inner city ministers who were some of the harshest critics of the police, but even from the families of the young people at whom the police initiatives were aimed. Only within that context has Boston been able to think strategically about how to seize the opportunity afforded by the lower rate of youth homicides to make positive and fundamental changes in the lives of the city's young people.

The creation of that positive context is an integral part of the success achieved in Boston. It began with the efforts of individuals who were dealing with gangs and violence on a daily basis—people who, in frustration and despair over the sustained wave of killings, determined to find a way to do their jobs differently and better, and who decided to try working together. Gradually, out of those initial collaborations emerged a clearer understanding of the dynamics driving gang violence, and of the necessary conditions for a broader partnership capable of mounting an effective campaign against it. The emergence of that understanding is the central thread in the story of how The Boston Strategy came into being.

The Situation in 1990

With 62 homicide victims aged 24 or younger, Boston in 1990 was awash in a rising tide of youth violence, part of a nationwide surge that began in the 1980s with the arrival on the streets of crack cocaine. In the largely poor, largely African-American and Latino neighborhoods of Roxbury, Mattapan, and Dorchester, where most of the victims and their killers lived, the young men

active in gangs were locked in a pattern of violence and fatalism. No one expected to live to see his 30th birthday. The adults who dealt with gang-involved youth—no less than the communities in which they lived and died—felt equally hopeless about the possibility for change.

Gangs, Police, and the Community

With the appearance of crack cocaine in the late 1980s came an upsurge of gang activity and violence in Boston and in cities across the United States. As described by gang members themselves, the seduction of drug dealing was strong—there was so much money to be made. As young boys looking for ways to take care of themselves and their families, they had found most promising role models were gang members. “The guys that helped me out through the tough times were bad,” said Hector, “[but] they were bad to a lot of other people, not to me.” Kids started out on a small scale, perhaps selling marijuana, then graduated to more profitable products, often becoming addicted to drugs and alcohol in the process. When they started to earn more money, they began to worry about protecting themselves and their businesses. Gangs hung together in defense against other gangs. Guns were readily available, and every killing provoked at least one in retaliation. Once a young man entered that world—“the lion’s territory,” Hector called it—it was hard to see a way out. “I saw no other alternative,” recalled Dexter. “The money was there. There was no hope anywhere else. That was my way of life. Shoot-outs every day, waking up, going around the block, hustling. It was almost mechanical.”

Gangs made their neighborhoods into a war zone, where people stayed inside after dark, boarded up their windows, and put their children to bed in bathtubs to protect them against stray bullets. In late 1989, the Carol Stuart murder case divided the city along racial lines and fueled concern across-the-board about escalating violence. Accepting uncritically the story told by Stuart’s husband of an attack by a black man in the Mission Hill section of Roxbury, the Boston Police Department (BPD) instituted a search-on-sight policy for all young men suspected of gang involvement. For a brief time the number of guns on the streets declined, and the community initially supported the policy. But, said one Boston policeman, Mark Buchanan, “when [parents] realized that their son was going to go down the street to get a loaf of bread or a container of milk and run the risk of being stopped in the street and having his pants and his underwear dropped in a search for weapons, then the community was up in arms.” A Superior Court judge threw out a case of a gang member arrested in a search-on-sight action. Boston needed tough law enforcement but could not obtain it by violating individual civil rights.

Frustration and Blame

In the spring of 1990, the BPD formed the Anti-Gang Violence Unit (called the gang unit) with a charge to use community policing approaches, to develop

intelligence about gangs, and to focus on intervention and deterrence. Unit chief Bob Faherty assigned two officers to each gang—to get to know the members and monitor their activities. The approach “was meant to look quite different,” noted gang-unit member Paul Joyce, “but we were not doing much different. We were still focused on making arrests.” The idea was to move beyond just responding to 911 calls. But, with shootings taking place virtually on a weekly basis, there was little more to do than respond. Said Buchanan, who became part of the new unit, “When the stop-and-search policy failed, we were kind of hopeless. We really didn’t know, as a police department, how to deal with the rash of violence that we saw.”

Likewise, the probation officers who dealt with many of the gang members were reduced to a depressing routine of exhorting the young offenders whom they met with every week to “be careful,” “do the right thing,” and “keep out of trouble”—then attending the funerals of those who failed to follow that advice. As gangs brazenly made a show of force in the courtrooms and shot each other on the streets just outside, probation officers felt besieged. “I watched a gun fight at 8:15 in the morning outside my office window,” recalled Dorchester chief probation officer Bernie Fitzgerald. “Two kids on the way to school on opposite sides of Washington Street firing at one another. Another time one of the probation officers jumped on to a bus that had stopped out front. There was a fight on the bus and when he got in there a kid had had his femoral artery slashed and had bled out and died in the bus at 3:00 in the afternoon.” In that environment, most probation officers naturally wanted to meet kids in the relative safety of the courtroom or their offices, go home at 4:30 when the court closed, and try to forget about it. It was “fortress probation,” said Fitzgerald.

The brutal gang rape and murder of Kimberly Ray Harbour, a crack addict and prostitute, on Halloween 1990, brought home just how ineffectual the existing programs to combat youth violence really were. “That was the murder that shook the city,” said Dorchester probation officer Bill Stewart, “because of the [young] age of the defendants and what they had done to a fellow human being.” Three of them had been probationers under his supervision and had had no prior record of violence—they simply had not been able to resist the pressure to go along with the gang. “Clearly,” said Stewart, “the neighborhood was spinning out of control. The ‘gangs’ we had only begun to acknowledge had rooted on the streets and they controlled them. It was apparent that what we were doing with the offenders we were supervising was not working. They were not buying what we were trying to sell them.”[1]

As frustrated as the police and probation officers were, the community was equally frustrated and angry with them. In the crisis, recalled Ray Hammond, pastor of the Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Mattapan, the sense of helplessness people felt was reinforced by a pattern of blame—“a willingness to blame somebody, anybody, for this mess.” Community leaders, noted Hammond, tended to explain the epidemic of violence on larger social problems: the poverty of the neighborhoods; the lack of jobs available to young people, made worse by economic recession; national trends of expanding gang activity and rising crime rates; the invasion of crack cocaine. They blamed political

leaders for failing to address those problems as well as the police for their heavy-handed and ineffectual efforts to stop the killing. Eugene Rivers, who lived and worked in one of the toughest neighborhoods in Dorchester, as founder and pastor of the Asuza Christian Community, concurred: “The black community [in those days], without much thought, deployed the race card to address any number of social problems. Everything was racism, and if you were smarter, it was racism and capitalism.”

On the other side, the police blamed the gang-involved youth, whom they viewed as criminals. And they often blamed youth advocates like Rivers for protecting gang members indiscriminately. The kids also found something to blame: “the system,” which provided no meaningful adult supervision or support. Nothing would change until that pattern of blame was broken and people began to look at their own roles and each other in new ways.

Changing Perceptions

Key changes came in two stages. First, adults working with the gang population began getting out into the streets, interacting directly with young people, and getting to know them better. In taking this approach, three core institutional players—police, probation, and black clergy—were all moving in the same direction. But they were still not collaborating. It was a time when they “were working as hard as they could but not getting anywhere,” recalled Boston Police Director of Strategic Planning, Jim Jordan. The second stage of change came with some significant shifts in perception, through which people working on the front lines began to see how they could do their jobs better, in large part by joining forces.

Out in the Streets

Kimberly Harbour’s murder galvanized the Dorchester probation office to begin doing some things differently, and the Youthful Offender Unit (YO Group) came into being as a result. This consisted of three probation officers who focused exclusively on 17- to 24-year-olds, the age group most active in gang violence. They started by working with the court to stiffen the terms of probation, for example, by instituting a curfew and rules against congregating in groups larger than two or in areas identified as their gang’s turf. In addition, the YO Group began collecting information on gangs and their activities more systematically. Those were significant changes but not enough by themselves to have a large impact. That required enforcement of the new terms of probation, and enforcement was the role of the police, not probation officers. Said Billy Stewart, one of the officers in the YO Group, “We expected the police to supervise our terms. But the two agencies did not talk or share information so it just wasn’t going to happen.” The probation officers remained frustrated.

The police officers in the gang unit were in a similar situation. One unit member, John Daly, had begun to computerize information that police gathered from the street and to track gangs more systematically, for example creating lists of gang members, their associates, where they hung out, the cars they drove. They began to add notes from field interrogations, and they began to integrate information from intelligence reports on different areas of the city. Fred Waggett and a few others who joined the unit were good at getting out and talking to kids, and that contributed to the growing base of knowledge. “We progressed slowly,” said Paul Joyce, “but we were progressing.”

Also getting out on the streets at that time was a new, small organization of social workers dedicated specifically to working with gangs—the Boston Streetworkers. Chartered by Mayor Ray Flynn in late 1990, the Streetworkers were young, mostly men, who worked out of Boston’s Community Centers to provide outreach services to gang members. Initially, the co-creators of the organization, Robert Lewis, Jr., and Charlie Rose, recruited young people not too far removed from gang life themselves, who often lived in the neighborhoods where they worked. The Streetworker’s job was to build relationships with at-risk kids, serve as mentors, connect them and their families to social services, and when possible defuse potentially violent situations. In many cases, they went with young offenders to court and argued on their behalf. Because of those relationships, and because they tended to look and talk like the kids they worked with, the Streetworkers were initially distrusted by, and distrustful of, the police and probation, even though they were all working with the same population of kids.

At the same time, the black clergy was also becoming a presence on the streets. Like Eugene Rivers, Bruce Wall, pastor of the Dorchester Temple Baptist Church, acted as an advocate for gang-involved youth in the courts. A program he organized at the Chez Vous skating rink in Dorchester had become a gathering place where young people could relax and feel safe. In the summer of 1991, Wall and Rivers launched the Take Back the Street Crusade, a week-long initiative to reclaim a vacant lot that had been taken over by gangs and made into “a sort of open-end drug supermarket.” The program got the clergy out on the corner at night and ultimately talking directly with gang members. “That was eye-opening,” recalled Ray Hammond. “It became clear that you can be doing lots of good things, even lots of service involvement, and still not have a clue as to really what’s going on in the lives of the kids you’re passing every day.” Hammond became part of a small group that coalesced around Wall and Rivers and began to work on getting to know more about gang members and the street environment. The ministers began to believe that, if they really wanted to address the problem of gang violence, they would have to keep their churches open and be out in the streets when young people were—at night. Only then could they begin to compete with the drug dealers and gangs for kids’ loyalty. Those realizations became the basis of a new ministry of outreach.

Thus—separately—police, probation, Streetworkers, and clergy all began getting more directly involved with the young men who were active in gangs and

the most prone to be involved in gun violence. “The more we worked with the kids,” said Billy Stewart, “the more human they and we became. They were not just a file, because the file now had a soul.”[1] At the same time, they began to identify the others who were getting involved in the same way. Streetworker Tracy Litthcut recalled, “There was always a consistent group of faces that were at the homicide scenes and a consistent group of faces who were working with the toughest of the tough gang members in the city—myself, Reverend Rivers, Reverend Hammond, Reverend Wall, and the guys from the police gang unit, Paul Joyce, Bobby Merner, Bobby Frattalia, Fred Waggett. We would be doing our own thing individually and ‘oh, look, they’re here too, they’re here.’” That mutual recognition was a starting point for the shifts in perception that brought them to the point of working together.

Momentous Events

Over the course of 1992, a number of forces and events came together to change the way key players viewed each other and their shared predicament. One event of tremendous long-term significance was the publication in January of the St. Clair Commission Report. Mayor Ray Flynn had created the eight-member Commission, led by Boston attorney James D. St. Clair, in 1991 amidst complaints of police brutality and mismanagement. Its charge was to undertake a “comprehensive management audit” of the BPD, and its report was scathing, in particular its criticism of the department’s failure to implement community policing. The report added to the sense of crisis around the continuing high rate of youth homicides and to the desire, both inside and outside the BPD, to improve relationships between the police and the community.

Bill Bratton, who came to the BPD as superintendent-in-chief in 1992 and became commissioner in 1993, and Paul Evans, his next-in-command, took the St. Clair report as a mandate to make community policing a reality. Organizationally, that meant significant change throughout the police department. This began with the promotion of a large contingent of new captains, who received intensive training aimed at helping them begin to see themselves, not as police officers in the traditional mold, but as executives and leaders of change. In a major departure for the BPD, Bratton went outside the Police Academy for this training, to the Boston Management Consortium, a non-profit agency funded by local businesses that brokered largely pro-bono services of business people and consultants, to provide management expertise and training to city government agencies. It was the beginning of a long-term partnership between the BPD and the Consortium in a sustained program of organizational development and change. Those ongoing changes—which made the BPD less tradition bound and less rigidly hierarchical within, and more open to collaboration without—were an essential part of the context within which the Boston Strategy emerged.

Another momentous event, in May 1992, brought about a significant shift in attitude within Boston’s religious community. In Morningstar Baptist Church, at

the funeral of a young man shot in the head at a party, some gang members in attendance spotted a member of a rival gang. Enraged by his presence, they chased him around the church, shot at him, caught him, and stabbed him repeatedly, while the congregation of mourners stampeded for the door in fear. The Morningstar incident drove home the idea that had been forming in the small group around Eugene Rivers, that the church needed to take its message to the street—or else the street would bring its message into the church. In the aftermath, approached by a small group of Streetworkers and gang members, a few ministers met directly with the young men responsible and began to talk about the feelings of remorse, grief, guilt, anger, and fear connected with Morningstar and all the violence. “The scriptures say that if somebody offends you, you have to go to them,” said Ray Hammond. “This made it clear to us that we really have to live out our own gospel—not just preach it, not just say it, not even memorize it, but really live it out.”

Morningstar gave the impetus to the formation of the TenPoint Coalition, an alliance of African-American Christian clergy and lay people that coalesced around a ten-point plan developed by Rivers. The plan suggested ten concrete steps for churches to take to mobilize resources and reach out to young people most at risk for drug abuse and violence, for example, by adopting a gang, by working to develop economic alternatives to drug dealing, by sending mediators into situations of potential conflict, by developing partnerships with other institutions offering services to at-risk youth. The Morningstar incident also galvanized a small group of ministers to begin meeting at Rivers’ home on Friday nights and walking the streets of the Four Corners neighborhood, to meet gang members on their own turf, and to provide counseling, mediation, connections to social services, and simply an adult presence on the streets. This became a regular street ministry that ultimately involved over 30 ministers and lay people, working in Dorchester and—through Jeff Brown, minister of the Union Baptist Church—in Cambridge. Participants met Fridays, and some other nights, for prayer and work on the streets until 2:00 AM. During the day they met with police and probation officers, Streetworkers, judges, and each other. Many of them also maintained one-on-one relationships with one or more at-risk kids in their neighborhoods.

Amid the shocked reaction to the Morningstar attack, the broader religious community also began to focus more on the problem of gang violence in Boston and to take note of the efforts of TenPoint clergy to address it. Most notably, Cardinal Bernard Law became a vocal supporter and convened a series of meetings to discuss the TenPoint Coalition’s plan of action. “[He] played a decisive role, given his spiritual and cultural influence over an overwhelmingly Irish Catholic police department,” said Rivers, “and he was a major source of institutional support for the black clergy.”

As they began to receive more recognition and support, the ministers of the TenPoint Coalition also began to realize how much they needed to look outside of their circle for resources. They started to think about forming partnerships with others working on the violence problem—not just the Streetworkers, but schools, probation, and even the police. “One of the things

we began to appreciate,” recalled Hammond, “was that we make a mistake in thinking of institutions as monoliths. So, we talk about The Police Department, when there are a lot of different elements in the police department. Part of the question became, ‘How do you begin to identify people who really want to do community policing and work with them and try to strengthen their hand in the department?’ We wanted to make sure kids understood, and we wanted to make sure the police understood, that we would not be silent about brutality or abuse of police power, but that we also understood that a lot of them were trying to do a hard job and many of them were doing it well.”

Origins of Operation Night Light

In fact, for the police and probation officers dealing with gang-involved youth, the continued high homicide rate made it hard to feel they were doing the job as well as it could be done, and they were struggling to do it better. Said Paul Joyce, of the gang unit: “We were locking up the worst of the bad guys, and things weren’t getting any better. So we would literally sit down and say ‘What can we do different?’” In 1992, unit chief Faherty launched a bi-weekly meeting that brought together officers and detectives from different areas of the city to compare notes on gang activities. This started as a group of seven or eight people around a picnic table on a precinct house roof and rapidly expanded to a city-wide meeting at police headquarters. It was a small step, but a critical one that got police talking to each other and also placed a high value on intelligence from all sources.

As a result, said Robert Merner, he and his partner, Bob Frattalia, began paying a lot more attention to what they could learn from non-police sources, especially probation officers, whom they were seeing every day in court dealing with the same kids. For example, one probation officer, Tom Todd, was keeping track of who bailed whom out. “Now that is not information that police are usually interested in,” said Merner. “But when you’re looking at gangs and associations that stuff becomes very, very interesting. So, Bobby and I would be up at court, and instead of sitting around for our cases to be called, we would be meeting with the probation officers, and we would be taking notes.” The information they gained, they took back to the police gang meetings.

At the same time, Bill Stewart and Rich Skinner in the Dorchester probation YO group were also looking for ways do their job better. Not long before the Morningstar church incident, Stewart recalled, he attended the funeral of one of his probation cases, a 17-year-old boy called Peanut who had been shot to death at a bus stop near the courthouse at 3:00 in the afternoon. “As I went through the line at the funeral,” said Stewart, “I offered my condolences to his mother and she slapped me and said, ‘You let them kill my baby.’ I’m thinking, ‘No I didn’t, I tried everything I could do, I told him not to be there, I told him not to get in the mix.’ Obviously it didn’t work. But then I thought, ‘Maybe I didn’t do all I could do. Maybe we could do more. Maybe we could step up to the plate a little bit more.’”

That line of thought led him to research the law on the powers of probation officers. He found that, in fact, they had more power than police officers in dealing with an individual on probation. In particular they could search or arrest that person without a warrant, based on reasonable suspicion that he was violating the terms of probation. "Bottom line is that when one is sentenced to probation" said Stewart, "he chooses to do his time in the community with limited freedom under the supervision of a probation officer, and the PO has certain rights to ensure full compliance with the terms of probation." With that information, Stewart and Skinner became more aggressive in dealing with their clients. For example, they educated themselves to the signs of alcohol and drug abuse and used the threat of going back to jail to push kids to fight their addictions. [1]

Police officers in the gang unit began to hear that kids on the street took the YO group, and their threats, seriously. At the same time, the information that Merner and Frattalia brought into the gang meetings from probation was clearly valuable. There was still no thought of working together, however. Said Stewart, "Probation officers were seen by police as fuzzy-wuzzy social worker types. We were just 8:30 to 4:30 desk guys." That all changed abruptly in the fall of 1992, when at Faherty's invitation Stewart, Skinner, Todd, and Fitzgerald from the Dorchester court all began attending the bi-weekly gang meetings. That was the beginning of a more active collaboration. "At one of the meetings," recalled Stewart, "an officer related how a group of kids, known to be on probation, were seen out and in a place that they were not supposed to be after curfew. I advised the group that if a probation officer had been there, the kids could have been put under arrest for violation of probation. This was a startling bit of information for the group to digest." [1] After that meeting, Stewart, Skinner, Frattalia, and Merner decided to try riding together at night and working together to enforce the terms of probation. Faherty and Fitzgerald supported the experiment, and Operation Night Light was born.

The first joint police and probation curfew patrol took place on November 12, 1992. Since there were no precedents to follow, the four officers involved agreed to make up procedure as they went along. There were just a few basic rules. When they went into kids' homes, the role of the police would be strictly to ensure the safety of the probation officers. "We were very careful to avoid being seen as pawns of the police," noted Billy Stewart. "That was one of the earliest and loudest criticisms of the program." At the same time, the probation officers agreed to train in how to avoid situations that jeopardized the team's safety; and they all agreed to act like visitors and treat people respectfully, "as we would expect someone to act in our own homes." [1]

Within just a few minutes of starting out that first night, they were called to a shooting scene, where one of Rich Skinner's "clients," Augusto ("Tito") Blanco, lay with a fatal gunshot wound. While Skinner comforted Tito as best he could, Stewart walked through the crowd at the scene and bumped into six kids on probation who were not supposed to be there. Altogether that night they caught thirty young people in violation of their curfews. Probation was not playing by

the old rules, under which probation officers had remained behind their desks and left the responsibility for enforcement to the police. The kids were outraged, noted Stewart. “To me,” he said, “that was the endorsement the program needed.”[1]

Night Light began to take effect immediately—they never found as many kids out in the streets at night again. And it began to build trust between police and probation. With information gathered by Skinner and Stewart, the police were able to solve Tito’s murder quickly. “From that moment, I think the police saw the value to partnering with the probation officers,” said Bernie Fitzgerald. Robert Merner noted another insight gained from Night Light: “We’d make a list of some of the worst kids and some of maybe the second tier kids who were on probation,” recalled Merner. “And I’d be saying to the probation officers, ‘Be careful. This guy’s a shooter. He’s a bad guy.’ But when we walked into the house, we’d see a 17- or 18- or maybe even a 16-year-old kid putting food on the table for his siblings. Who was maybe the head of the household outside of maybe a maternal grandmother, or his mother, who’s working one or two jobs. He’s dressing kids for school. He’s putting food on the table. He’s doing any number of things. And then he’s going out on the corner at night selling crack and protecting his drug business with a hand gun. But this was not a side of him that I ever saw.” For the police to begin to see gang members as struggling kids, not just criminals, was a critical shift, without which the Boston Strategy could not have evolved as it did.

Alliances

Based on such changing perceptions, key alliances formed in 1992, as police officers in the gang unit, probation officers, Streetworkers, and the core group of African-American clergy in the TenPoint Coalition acknowledged each other and began, cautiously, to collaborate. Out of that collaboration emerged consensus that their efforts to stop the killing should focus on providing assistance and alternatives for the gang members who would take them, and on getting those who persisted in violence off the streets. Just as important, there emerged the trust and mutual respect that enabled a collective will to act decisively on the basis of that shared understanding. The partnership and its capacity to effect change expanded significantly in 1993 and 1994, with the creation of the multi-agency Youth Violence Strike Force and the addition of several new, high-level participants: Boston mayor Tom Menino, police commissioner Paul Evans; U.S. Attorney for Massachusetts Don Stern; and Harvard professor David Kennedy. From that expanded group came Operation Cease Fire, launched in May 1996, and the concept of a strategy to prevent youth violence.

Working Partnerships

Building on contacts made in the aftermath of the Morningstar Incident, an active partnership arose between the clergy of the TenPoint Coalition and the Streetworkers. It was an obvious fit: the Streetworkers had connections to kids who needed resources; the churches had the resources and the desire to reach those same kids. For example, in one instance, a Streetworker sought grief counseling for some young men he was working with. Ray Hammond went to talk to them, in a pizza shop, and out of that grew a regular discussion group at Hammond's church. "We had a van, we had space, and he had kids," recalled Hammond. "It was a nice match." Sometimes the churches would raise money to help a Streetworker provide assistance in a rent emergency; and when the clergy wanted to participate in negotiating a truce between gangs, Streetworkers helped them make the necessary contacts. But some of the most critical support from the churches, recalled Streetworker Tracy Litthcut, was some of the most mundane: "They were the only ones to give us vans to transport these bad kids." And they provided tickets for events, "Because even though these kids are carrying guns and selling drugs, they're nothing but kids. You have to give them an opportunity to be a kid again, to see what a kid's life is like. And we didn't have that from anybody but the ministers."

In the wake of the Morningstar Church invasion, connections also began to form between the TenPoint Coalition and the police—perhaps the most unlikely alliance, given the stormy history between the BPD and the black community. Probation officers, now working with both groups, initially helped to bring them together. It also made a big difference that they were both working out in the streets at night. "The only other adult males that we ran into out on the street at night were the TenPoint Coalition," recalled Robert Merner. "So, when we were up at 12:30 or 1:00 in the morning chasing drug dealers [in] areas that were hot, it would be nothing for us to be coming one way and see guys dressed in black walking the other way—Ray Hammond, Gene Rivers, and others. And naturally you'd stand there, and you'd start talking with them." In addition to those informal connections, in April 1993, the TenPoint Coalition launched a more public collaboration, with its first annual Police and Youth Leadership Awards for "exemplary police and youth leaders." This was a significant gesture: just five months before, the Coalition had organized the Police Tribunal, a neighborhood forum for public hearings on charges of police misconduct. But, as they had become more active out in the street, the leaders of the faith community had begun to recognize that they shared a common goal with many police officers—keeping kids alive. They had also recognized, and began to acknowledge publicly, that some of the young men in gangs simply could not be saved on the street; they had to be arrested and removed from the community.

Continuing organizational change within the police department supported the gang unit's efforts to become more collaborative with outsiders. In the fall of 1992, the BPD and the Boston Management Consortium launched an in-service training program on community policing—a week-long course that everyone on the force passed through. On the final day of each week, members of the

Streetworkers program came in to co-teach the course and to answer questions. “At the time,” said Streetworker Ernest Hughes, “the police weren’t recognizing us in any way, because they didn’t know who we were.” Exposure through the course changed that. In that context, the gang unit and the Streetworkers began to share information and actively support each other. That was a turning point for the Streetworkers, who had tended to see the situation only from the kids’ perspective. “Things that we thought we knew,” reflected Litthcut, “we didn’t know fully.” The trust they built up with police and probation greatly strengthened the Streetworkers’ ability to create opportunities for gang members to make different choices, and they became important players in the coalition that was emerging on the front lines of work on the street.

The changing environment within the BPD also helped open the door to another innovation—the Youth Violence Strike Force (YVSF). This 15-person subgroup of the gang unit, created by special order of Commissioner Bratton in 1993, included personnel from a variety of agencies dealing with youthful offenders: Massachusetts State Police; Boston Housing Police; Boston School Safety Services; the Massachusetts Department of Probation; the Department of Youth Services (DYS); the Massachusetts Department of Corrections; the U.S. Attorney’s Office; the Office of the Suffolk County District Attorney; and the federal Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms (ATF); along with members of the BPD gang unit. The history of relations among these groups was more one of turf battles than of cooperation. But, noted Paul Joyce, head of the new unit, its members were all personally committed to doing things differently. Each brought a caseload of youthful offenders from his own agency, and they found in many instances they were dealing with the same kids.

The mission of the YVSF starting out was to develop, in Joyce’s words, “a very focused approach to dealing with gang violence.” This initially meant just getting the most violent youth off the streets and into jail by following up some of the 26,000 outstanding arrest warrants in the city, in particular those of DYS, whose cases included most of the shooters and the victims in youth homicides. It was also a fully collaborative approach, noted Joyce. “We sat down with everybody, from the head of DYS to the area supervisor, to the workers, to tell them what we could offer them. And we got their support. That’s how we approached every agency that we worked with.” The YVSF got support for its approach, because its message was compelling: “We want to work on your behalf. You have twenty kids whom you want arrested for violent crimes. We’ll go after those kids. All we ask is are these the impact kids out on the street? If we take them off, will we be making a difference?” In its first year, the YVSF cleared more than 1,500 outstanding warrants. It also began to develop the concept of a focused crackdown on violence-prone groups, which would later evolve into a full-blown strategy of deterrence.

By the mid-1990s, all of these working relationships began to add up to a powerful combination of forces, in part because they all helped each other to do their jobs better. As current gang unit chief Gary French asserted, “We all increase the credibility of our agencies by working in partnership.” For example, while they supported the arrest of some offenders, both the clergy and the

Streetworkers strengthened their ability to intervene with the police or probation on behalf of others; and that enhanced their influence with kids on the street. At the same time, they provided critical support to the police in their stepped-up effort to arrest the most violent kids—for example, by making it no longer acceptable to “play the race card” on this issue. The growing trust among the partners was based in large part on concrete actions, which demonstrated commitment. Said police officer Merner: “The biggest thing with the groups that we worked with—the Streetworkers, the clergy, the cops, and probation—was, if you were called on, you were expected to deliver something.” Yet the bonds were also based on something more intangible—simply seeing the same faces on the street, at crime scenes, and at funerals. “It got to a point of mutual respect,” said Streetworker Litthcut, “because we were all out there when it was bad.”

New Players

The alliances that had formed spontaneously among the people who were “out there” on the front lines settled fairly quickly into effective working relationships, but they became much more effective when joined by powerful new partners. One was Tom Menino, who was elected Mayor in November 1993, after serving several months as acting mayor. A strong supporter of community policing, Menino was also committed to using the resources of city government aggressively in the effort to get the gang violence problem under control. One of his first actions was to inquire what the Boston Streetworker program needed to work more effectively. “I told [the mayor], ‘We need jobs; we need transportation; we need a budget to be able to buy things, to provide families and kids and my workers with certain supplies to do things,’” recalled Tracy Litthcut. Menino provided. The Streetworker program got a \$20,000 annual budget, and its newly appointed administrator, Eleanor Reisenberg, “provided vans out of the woodwork. We had over twenty something vans to pick from,” said Litthcut. “So we didn’t have to worry about providing transportation for these kids.”

Paul Evans, sworn in as Boston Police Commissioner in February 1994, also came to office with a commitment to community policing, which he hoped to deepen and expand on the basis of three key principles: partnership, problem solving, and prevention. Inside the BPD, Evans supported continuing cultural change, in particular moving away from hierarchy and giving greater voice and influence to people working on the front lines. One of the first things he did was to get out into the neighborhoods to talk to cops in the precincts. Recalled Evans: “I went to [places] where we had the violence problem, and I said, what do we need? I was fully expecting to hear ‘more cops, more tough judges,’ but the cops said, ‘We need jobs and alternatives for these kids.’ These were the gang cops! This was informal leadership saying, ‘We’re going to do things differently in order to reach these kids; we’re going to do cutting edge enforcement.’” Deeply impressed, Evans did what he could to strengthen their

efforts. He also actively supported Operation Night Light by arranging for federal grant money to pay for police overtime and make it a full-time program.

Subsequently, Evans continued to provide high-level support, in part by developing community policing in a strategic way. In April 1994, he invited hundreds of community groups to participate in a year-long process of strategic planning, precinct by precinct, so that the specific issues and needs in each neighborhood could be addressed. Evans helped to ensure the participation of key community groups and social-service agencies in the strategic planning process by providing grant money to support them. This initiative led ultimately to a system of “neighborhood policing” based on a dramatic decentralization of police operations and funding that made precinct commanders active collaborators with local communities and accountable to them.

Like Evans, Don Stern, who became U.S. Attorney for Massachusetts in late 1993, took up his post hoping to make a significant impact on the quality of life in Boston and willing to do some things differently in order to do so. He began by taking the unusual step of visiting Evans and asking the police commissioner what role the federal justice department might play in helping to reduce the level of violence in the city. “It was not self evident what the federal contribution could be in a situation like that,” recalled Stern, “because most crime, including violent crime, is handled and prosecuted at the local level.” Following on that first conversation, Stern began to educate himself about the issues around youth violence, getting out of his office and talking to the cops in the gang unit and YVSF, to Hammond and others in the TenPoint Coalition, to Streetworkers, probation officers, young assistant district attorneys. “I wasn’t out there at two in the morning walking the streets with the gang members, so I had to rely on others to filter through what they observed and what they went through,” said Stern. “And I developed a sense of trust, the more I talked to people and got to know them—had a cup of coffee with them. That’s the kind of trust which really goes a long way.” Through his relationship building, Stern crafted a critical supporting role for federal law enforcement agencies in Boston’s response to gang violence.

Actions

Building on the alliances formed in 1992 among police, probation, Streetworkers, and clergy, the people working on the front lines to stop the killing in Boston’s neighborhoods developed an approach based on four principles: 1) identify the incorrigibly violent youth and deal with them; 2) enforce the law; 3) offer alternatives and opportunities; 4) follow through on both threats and promises. By the end of 1994, the alliances had expanded to embrace important new players, and the players had begun to enact their principles in an array of initiatives.

Crackdowns

In 1994, the YVSF raised its approach to violence prevention to a new level with targeted crackdowns on problem groups, aimed specifically at getting them to change their behavior. This idea built on the unit's initial focus on prosecuting outstanding warrants. John Melia, the Boston Housing Police officer attached to the YVSF wanted the unit to help him deal with a serious problem of gang members coming into the Mission Hill housing project to deal and do drugs, terrorizing the residents and making it one of the most violent neighborhoods. After six weeks of careful preparation, including full consultation with Mission Hill management, the unit began issuing warrants for trespassing. Since trespassing is a relatively minor charge, said Paul Joyce, "the reply would usually be to tear it up and throw it away or put it in a pocket." But, in September just as school opened, the YVSF led a warrant sweep: over 120 officers representing twelve different agencies spent three days in Mission Hill making 135 arrests for trespassing, helping to clean up some of the damage in the neighborhood, and escorting children to school.

The Mission Hill warrant sweep was a major milestone for the YVSF. It was an aggressive police action in the neighborhood most alienated by the BPD's handling of the Carol Stuart murder case in 1989. Yet it produced not a single citizen complaint against the police. This outcome was attributable in large part to the preparation that went into the sweep, including extensive consultation with the management of the Mission Hill project. The warrant sweep also had the community's support because it rid the neighborhood of a criminal element that had created a miserable situation for residents, epitomized by a young mother who carried a can of ammonia spray just to walk her children outside in the morning past the junkies lying in her hallway. After the initial sweep, the YVSF did six weeks of follow-up checks for trespassers, since repeat violations could bring a couple of years of jail time.

Subsequently, the YVSF conducted similar warrant sweeps in numerous other housing developments, and they became known collectively as Operation Clean Sweep. Even though trespassing was a minor charge for serious offenders, it worked to move them out of the neighborhoods. The collaboration among law enforcement agencies was also a key factor. "I think the message that got out was we were really exposing people," said the YVSF's Paul Joyce. "Because to see Richie Skinner and Bobby Merner, a kid would look [and] he'd think twice. He'd say 'Okay, I'm on probation with Skinner, Merner knows me from the street, I don't like this.' Because now we were starting to get to know everything about them. Throw in all of the other agencies—and they'd see ten different agencies coming on a sweep—they're feeling kind of suffocated. There's really nowhere to go."

A second initiative, Operation Scrap Iron, originated in a focus on the supply and use of guns in the Uphams Corner neighborhood of Dorchester. Four police officers in the YVSF—Joyce, Merner, Frattalia, and Waggett—began to pay close attention to a sharp rise in shooting incidents in this usually quiet section of the city. Through a tip from probation officer Rich Skinner and intensive

interviewing of kids picked up on drug charges, they learned that a neighborhood youth going to school in Mississippi was illegally purchasing guns there and had shipped something like 250 weapons to his friends in Dorchester. The gangs based in Uphams Corner had formerly been relatively weak; now they were asserting themselves with guns. With the help of ATF, the YVSF traced confiscated guns back to the dealers in Mississippi. They studied all of the police reports on shooting incidents and mapped them, trying to understand the dynamics of the gang conflicts that provoked them. Finally, the YVSF presented its findings to Police Commissioner Evans and then to U.S. Attorney for Massachusetts Don Stern and Suffolk County District Attorney Ralph Martin—making the case for a broader initiative to investigate the sources of guns in the city.

That a couple of detectives and a sergeant could get a hearing at the highest levels demonstrated the extent to which the BPD had succeeded in becoming less rigidly hierarchical. It also reflected respect for the approach to gang problems emerging from the YVSF, as demonstrated in the Mission Hill warrant sweep. Finally, it reflected the pressure everyone felt to take action against the continuing, horrific, street warfare—34 firearm homicides of Boston youth aged 24 and under from mid-1993 through mid-1994. Robert Merner recalled what it felt like watching the reports on TV: “You’d have some distraught parent or aunt or someone saying, ‘Where did the guns come from? We don’t make them here in Roxbury.’ And we decided, well, maybe someone should answer that question. Where do the guns come from?”

In relation to specific problem in Uphams Corner, the YVSF used its gun trafficking information to pinpoint a particularly violent gang, and then applied the coordinated approach that had been so successful in the warrant sweep. A YVSF team met with gang members in a parking lot and announced there would be a crackdown. Their message, said Merner, was the following: “You people want to keep shooting, don’t light up a joint. You people want to keep shooting, don’t drive with an expired inspection sticker. You people want to keep shooting, don’t open up a cold beer after a basketball game. That’s the way it’s going to be. Shooting stops, the noise stops, we stop bothering you for mundane stuff.” Because these were chronic offenders, their lives could be disrupted in many ways: warrants could be served; probation strictly enforced; drug markets disrupted; kids under DYS supervision pulled off the streets. To drive home this message, representatives from the police, the probation department, and the district attorney’s office were all in attendance. The Streetworkers were also present, to deliver the message that there were alternatives to gang involvement and violence.

Like the warrant sweeps, this crackdown had the effect of changing the behavior of a particular group in a targeted neighborhood. Clean Sweep and Scrap Iron represented a significant breakthrough for Boston—the development of an approach to violence prevention centered on collective action and focused deterrence aimed at chronic offenders.

Alternatives

Another, equally critical, breakthrough in 1994 was the intensification and coordination of efforts to provide kids at risk for gang involvement and violence with alternatives to life on the streets. One striking feature of this development was the extent to which it was driven by the law enforcement officers of the YVSF. This was an unanticipated outcome from the alliances that had formed on the streets, as officer Merner explained: “When we were doing some of this stuff with probation and the clergy, the kids would look us in the face and say, ‘Okay, Bob, I want out. I don’t want to sell drugs; I don’t want to be in the gang any more; what is there for me? What can I do? Where can I go?’” So it was that, when personages such as Commissioner Evans or Senator Kennedy asked YVSF members what resources they needed to build on the good work of Clean Sweep and Scrap Iron, they requested jobs and job training, mentoring programs, special schools, and after-school programs. And, when John Hancock Mutual Life Insurance Company asked Evans how it could contribute in a significant way, he sent members of the YVSF to speak for themselves—five officers in tee shirts and jeans on the 48th floor of the Hancock Building. “We knew that we were out of place,” recalled Merner. “But it was amazing, how much [the business community] wanted to help us. When they saw that it was cops looking to help kids in a different way, everybody jumped on board.”

The Summer of Opportunity was an extraordinary collaboration. John Hancock funded it, representatives from Hancock, the BPD, and Northeastern University designed and ran it, and agencies across the city supported it by recommending young people as participants—not just gang members, but kids at risk for suicide, drugs, alcohol, anything life threatening. In the first year, the program provided 40 young men and women, aged 15 to 17, with four weeks of workshops—on work-related skills and values, conflict resolution, time management, computer skills, life skills, and team building—and four weeks of an internship at Hancock or Northeastern. It also provided each participant with a mentor and a weekly stipend. Over the next two years, the Summer of Opportunity expanded to become a year-round program, with a six-week summer workshop and 10-hour-per-week internships the rest of the year, at Hancock, Northeastern, the BPD, and a variety of public agencies and local businesses. It was a bold move for John Hancock, noted Mayor Menino: “Some companies would have been afraid to bring [these kids] into their buildings because [they] are kids who are on the edge.” It was also an important milestone in the continuing development of key alliances, suggested Paul Evans. “When cops were saying, ‘The solution is jobs,’ as opposed to locking them up, all of a sudden the clergy looks and says, ‘You know what? We’ve been saying that for years.’ It was a big step for this whole comprehensive approach.” Paul Joyce, concurred: “our referral agencies [for the summer program] became the same agencies that we were working with on our law enforcement initiatives and then that's where, I think, you have a comprehensive approach.”

The summer of 1994 was also Boston Freedom Summer—a commemoration of the 30th anniversary of the civil-rights Freedom Summer in Mississippi. A collaboration among the TenPoint Coalition, the Jewish Community Relations Council, and the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Boston, this program brought students of all ages into the two most violent Boston precincts to work on programs for math and science literacy, court advocacy and alternative sentencing, street ministry, voter education and registration, health and healing, and project documentation and evaluation.[2] It was “an example of people coming together to change the urban reality in the same way that workers came together to change the reality of segregation in the South,” said the TenPoint’s Ray Hammond. Like the Summer of Opportunity, this became a multi-year program.

Another major collaborative effort was the Street Smarts Initiative, which combined a number of existing and new programs, coordinated by the Boston Management Consortium. Anchoring this “holistic approach to violence prevention”[3] was the Gun BuyBack/Amnesty Program, a collaboration among the civic group Citizens for Safety, the BPD, the Suffolk County District Attorney, and the City of Boston. In its first year, 1993, the buyback program purchased 1,300 guns, mostly revolvers and semi-automatic pistols. On the alternative side, Street Smarts included the Peace League, a competitive basketball program organized by Streetworkers and some gang members and operating under a negotiated set of cardinal rules—no weapons, no spectators, no disrespect. The December 1993 murder of Louis D. Brown, an innocent high-school student who was shot while walking to a Teens Against Gun Violence meeting, sparked an initiative in the Boston Public Schools to mobilize students through a poster art, rap music, and essay contest on the theme “We Can Stop the Violence.” All of these programs came under the umbrella of Street Smarts in 1994. With the support of local businesses, Street Smarts expanded in subsequent years, providing career counseling and training to Peace League participants, and launching an initiative to train Streetworkers and police officers in conflict resolution and mediation, to be better able to assist gang youth in settling disputes nonviolently.

The Boston Gun Project Working Group

For all the promise of the many outreach programs, and despite the effectiveness of new deterrence tools—warrant sweeps and crackdowns—there remained at the end of 1994 a feeling of despair among the people working on the problem of gang violence. The number of youth homicides went up and down but remained intolerably high. Recalled street worker Tracy Litthcut, “We were all working hard, but we said to each other, ‘Damn, we’re always at homicide scenes together, always in court, it’s always negative.’ We didn’t know what to do except to continue what we were doing.” As long as the killing continued, the city remained in a state of crisis. That was the situation when the Boston Gun Project Working Group began meeting in early 1995.

In late 1994, Police Commissioner Evans launched yet another unlikely alliance by agreeing to BPD participation in the Boston Gun Project. This was a research and action initiative funded by the National Institute of Justice, to be conducted by the Criminal Justice Policy and Management Program of Harvard's John F. Kennedy School of Government. In fact, as noted by David Kennedy, the lead researcher from Harvard, the police played a central role in shaping the project. The Harvard team had been looking at gun traffickers as the critical leverage point against gang violence. "We had our own ideas about what was probably going on in the street that made us think that gangs were not the right way to think about this," said Kennedy. "We didn't want to use a gang framework. And the Commissioner's Office listened politely to us and said, 'Right, please go work with the gang unit.'" That, according to Kennedy, "turned out to be a simply extraordinary opportunity, because we found what was, to my mind, an unparalleled constellation of front-line folks that had been gathered around the gang unit."

The Working Group of the Boston Gun Project began meeting formally in early 1995. It included the Harvard research team, representatives of the law enforcement agencies participating in the YVSF, Streetworkers, and some additional "heavy hitters" in federal law enforcement, for example, the U.S. Drug Enforcement Agency. To make the collaboration work, as virtually all the participants agree, a lot of people had to "leave their egos at the door"—both individual egos and institutional egos. One factor that made this possible was that the group was confined to people working directly with the problem of violence. They shared a common purpose. Each organization represented had a unique role to play. And all were indispensable. Kennedy and his research team created a neutral environment of collective inquiry that encouraged people to set aside institutional rivalries and focus on problem solving.

The front-line "practitioners" confirmed much of what the researchers expected, for example, that the availability of guns was an important factor in the violence. "But," said Kennedy, "we also heard from these practitioners something that we had never heard before, which was that there were not very many kids who were truly involved in this dynamic; that mostly what was happening was that these chronically-offending, gang-involved kids were hurting one another; and that the primary dynamic was one of back-and-forth vendettas among the gangs." Subsequently, the Harvard team confirmed that experience-based analysis with what Kennedy called "a large volume of back-breaking but fairly elementary analysis" of police data. The truly difficult work began with the effort to devise an effective response to that situation.

The challenge was to improve on what was already being done by the YVSF in its crackdowns. "They had been trying to focus on chronic offenders and on defusing gang conflicts," said Kennedy. They were way ahead of everybody else in the sophistication of what they were doing, and they left us, as a group, more than a little lost. Part of the story of the gun project is the willingness of the whole team to spend what turned out to be nine months hammering away at this problem." Tracy Litthcut recalled being skeptical of the process at first: "I don't think any of us really believed—even though we were educated—that

academics could help us.” But the research did help, for example in providing hard data on patterns of violence, as well as on gun trafficking, and in getting the practitioners to develop a detailed street map of gang turfs and activities that became a valuable tool for responding to and anticipating conflicts.

The solution to the problem emerged through identification of two key elements of the successful Uphams Corner crackdown. First, the police and others had communicated directly with the gang members involved that the crackdown was aimed specifically at violence and would continue until the violence stopped. Second, the enforcement agencies had taken advantage of the vulnerability of chronic offenders, “pulling every lever” available to ensure severely unpleasant consequences for continuing violence. Those insights became the basis of the “pulling levers” approach that formed the basis for the initiative that emerged in 1996 as Operation Cease Fire. [4]

Operation Cease Fire

Operation Cease Fire, built on the YVSF’s approach in a number of ways. Instead of localized and episodic crackdowns made in reaction to outbreaks of violence, it was a systematic, city-wide operation with the clear purpose of continuing until the killing stopped. By utilizing the full repertoire of both state and federal powers to “touch” those gang members who persisted in using violence, it augmented the pulling levers strategy by greatly expanding the range and severity of potential consequences. The plan for Cease Fire also included a focused law-enforcement attack on illegal gun traffic in Boston, to run in parallel with the direct intervention strategy and support it by limiting the availability of guns. This effort—the Boston Gun Project—became the model for a broader gun interdiction initiative, launched by the ATF in 17 U.S. cities in 1996. [4]

Operation Cease Fire began in March, 1996, with action against the Vamp Hill Kings, a gang based on Bowdoin Street in Dorchester. A dispute within the gang had produced three homicides in a short period of time, triggering the intervention. Police gang and drug-control units, ATF, probation and parole officers, DYS, the U.S. Attorney, the Suffolk County D.A., and the Boston school police all participated, disrupting the gang’s activities in numerous ways, including arrests and expedited prosecutions on both state and federal charges. By mid-May, the violence within the Vamp Hill Kings had quieted down, and the Gun Project Working Group held a “forum” to explain to gang members what had happened to them. Representatives of each participating agency spoke briefly, describing the agency’s powers and how they would be used in response to further outbreaks of violence.

“The forum was dramatic,” recalled David Kennedy. “In essence, the authorities’ message to the gang members was: we know who you are; we know what you’re doing; we cannot stop all your offending all the time, which you know and we know, but it’s a new day where violence is concerned; violence will simply not be tolerated in Boston any longer; we’re doing this in large part to

protect you; here's how we're going to do business from now on; what happens subsequently is up to you; and go home and tell your friends." The gang members were visibly shaken, Kennedy noted. Tracy Litthcut, whom many of them knew, concluded with an emotional speech: "We'll give you any help you want, but I've been to too many funerals. The violence stops *now*." The kids left the forum with copies of flyers about the Bowdoin Street operation and about Freddy Cardoza, who was arrested for possession of a single bullet and sentenced to nearly twenty years in federal prison with no possibility of parole. [see flyer] Though not officially part of Cease Fire, the Cardoza case helped to demonstrate the severity of punishment awaiting hard-core violent offenders. [4]

Over the summer, police, Streetworkers, and probation officers continued to talk, both to gang members and to the community about the new policies on violence. Those gangs who seemed on the verge of violent conflict received clear warnings of what the consequences would be. This coordinated communications campaign was another central element of the Cease Fire strategy. It was an approach that "turned the law enforcement concept on its head," noted Joy Fallon, assistant to U.S. Attorney Don Stern. "Normally, we think our power is in knowing what we're going to do and not telling anybody, and making sure they, the defendants, don't know what we are doing. This was a very different notion that was based on the premise that people can change, and that people may make decisions based on the consequences, if they understand them."

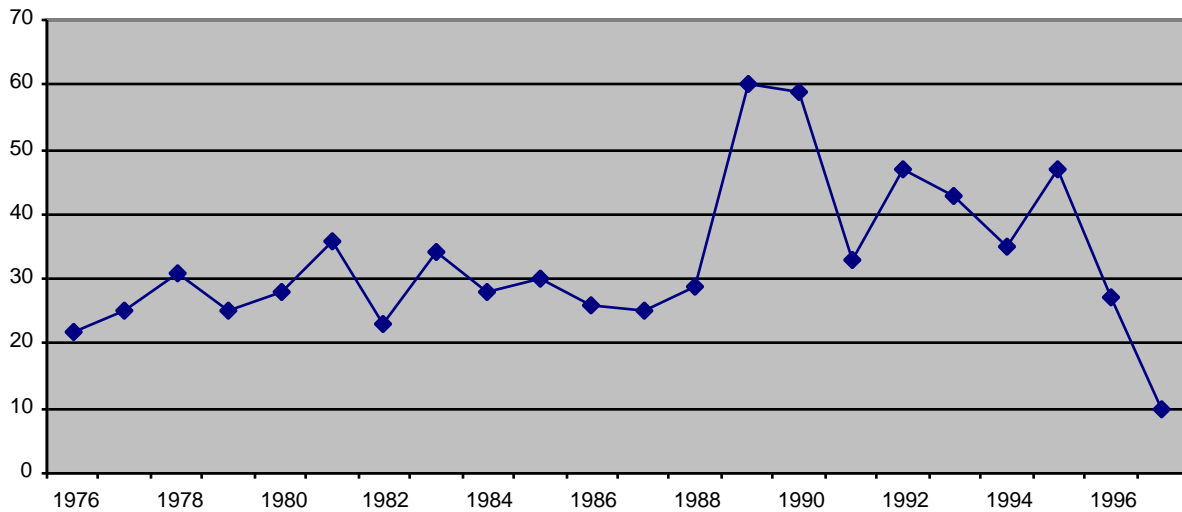
Though not directly involved in the planning or execution of Operation Cease Fire, the clergy of the TenPoint Coalition played a key supporting role. Their solid backing helped to bring the community on board. "We created the political context for tougher police action," said Eugene Rivers. [5] Just as important, while they opened their churches' doors and offered services to gang members who wanted to make a change, they also made it clear that they would not defend those who continued to use violence. For those young people there would be a "prison ministry."

On August 29, 1996, the Boston Gun Project Working Group partners mounted a second full-scale Cease Fire intervention, against the Intervale Posse—a gang that had been warned explicitly but had remained one of the most violent groups in the city. The operation took place just before the opening of school, a time when violence often flared up as gang members came into contact in school. In early morning raids, the DEA arrested fifteen of the gang's leaders on federal drug charges, eight others on state charges. The case was in the papers for weeks, and the Working Group made sure that flyers circulated to gang members so that they would get the message of the action against the Intervale Posse: "GANG VIOLENCE WILL BE STOPPED." [see flyer]

Impact

Building on all of the ongoing law enforcement and intervention initiatives, the two Cease Fire interventions had a dramatic impact on Boston's youth homicide rate. In the twelve months following the first forum with the Vamp Hill Kings in May 1996, the number of youth homicides by firearms, and all youth homicides, fell to pre-crack-era levels. (See graph.) Just as important, the number of killings—and of all violent crimes—has remained low since then.

Boston Homicide Victims Aged 24 and Under



Each data point represents the number of youth homicides from June 1 of that year to May 31 the following year.

Source: Anthony A. Braga, David M. Kennedy, Anne M. Piehl, Elin J. Waring, "The Boston Gun Project: Impact Evaluation Findings." Research Report. Washington, DC: National Institute of Justice, U.S. Department of Justice 2000 (forthcoming).

Stopping young people from killing each other was the key achievement of the broad collaborative effort that emerged from tentative beginnings on the front lines in 1992 and culminated in Operation Cease Fire in 1996. In a real sense, this was only the beginning—the problems of drugs, guns, and gangs, as well as the social conditions that support them, remain. But it was the essential step that created space and energy for tackling those complex underlying issues. At the same time, the reduction in violence put the seal of success on the coordinated "prevention, intervention, and enforcement" approach that had produced it—an approach officially named by the BPD in 1996: The Boston Strategy to Prevent Youth Violence.

Gangs, Police, and the Community

Through the combination of law-enforcement crackdowns and intervention programs, the partners participating in and backing Operating Cease Fire presented gang members with a clearly defined choice—to stop the violence or risk going to prison—and also with some support for choosing correctly. Beyond that, some other choices began to open up. There was “a sea change,” observed Ray Hammond of the discussion groups in his church. “I think people made conscious decisions to put weapons away, tell their friends to put weapons away, try to negotiate and resolve problems rather than play war games. They were starting to think about the future and think about what was going to happen to their young brothers and sisters.” Thinking about the future meant taking advantage of the help being offered, reconnecting with parents and community, taking responsibility for children and for relationships with wives or girlfriends. It could also mean going to school, taking on a career-track job, or becoming a mentor to younger at-risk kids. Above all, it meant beginning to move away from gang life and life on the street. “Basically,” said a former gang member, “I had to choose my friends or my future, and I chose my future.”

Most fundamentally, such choices saved the community and all the adults working with gang-involved youth from the terrible grief of mourning murdered children. They also brought an end to the deadly gang warfare that had made some neighborhoods into a war zone, opening the way to a revival of neighborhood life. “You can go into those communities now and see grandmothers walking the streets and in the parks that the gangs controlled,” said Streetworker Tracy Litthcut. “I can see now, six-, seven-, eight-year-olds in the park playing again, people out on the streets, in their backyards, having cook-outs, [whereas before] they were nervous about a stray bullet hitting them or their family.” In addition, noted Litthcut, adults in the community, who were once too intimidated to leave their homes, became more of a presence in kids’ lives. Those kinds of changes both reflect the degree to which Boston’s neighborhoods have become safer and help to ensure that they will remain safe.

Finally, the success achieved in dealing with the problem of youth homicide—and the way in which it was achieved—permanently changed the jobs of police and probation officers and ushered in a new era of police-community relations. For example, in the years after 1996, when Operation Cease Fire removed the most violent gang members from the streets, the character of Operation Night Light evolved from confrontational to something much more supportive. Probation officer Stewart described, for example, “sitting with the kid on his porch waiting for Domino’s to show up; or sitting with the kid rocking his baby, or changing his baby’s diaper; or just sitting with the mother around the table trying to help her re-institute parental control; or taking the kid for a ride for a hamburger because the mother’s boyfriend beats him up.” As police and probation officers began building relationships with young probationers, the program became a model of human connection, as well as law enforcement. It has spread beyond Dorchester to five other court districts, placing fifty police officers and fifty probation officers out on the streets, seven nights a week. The

probation officers' union has instituted new rules to provide for nighttime work. "Anyone hired as a probation officer after March 1, 1999 is bound to spend at least 20 percent of the work week in the community, in non-traditional hours," noted Dorchester chief probation officer Bernie Fitzgerald. "That's a sea change for us."

Similarly, police work in Boston has come to be as much about prevention and intervention as about law enforcement. Among other things, that shift in emphasis has placed licensed social workers in precinct stations, where they have become part of the resources police can use in dealing with kids in trouble. It has also made the BPD a leading player in finding jobs for kids at risk, in developing funding for social services, and in creating long-term strategies for seemingly intractable problems such as truancy.

"Early on," said YVSF officer Robert Merner, "my partner and I felt that the majority of these kids needed to go to jail. And the clergy—Gene Rivers, Ray Hammond, Jeff Brown—felt that most of the lambs could be saved. We're to the point now in this city, where I'll receive a call from one of the clergy and he'll be saying, 'You know, Bob, this kid has to go to jail.' And I'm talking about getting him into a program—what can we do for him?" As recently as 1990, when the BPD acted and was perceived more like "an occupying force" in minority communities, such a role reversal would have been unthinkable. But, said Eugene Rivers, "We have been greatly educated by the law enforcement community, and most of the thoughtful members of the police department would agree that the faith community has played a constructive role in encouraging them to look at the importance of employment, jobs, and recreational and cultural enrichment. So it has been a mutually beneficial partnership that's evolved. It's not a neat love story, but it's a real story. And Boston is a greater city as a result."

The changes in perception that these statements reflect made possible a coordinated approach to gang violence. The success of that approach effectively institutionalized the changes. It has also laid the foundation for continuing collaboration on a broad range of underlying problems, of which gang violence was the most shocking symptom.

Collaboration and Hope

For the adults working on the front lines with young people at risk for gang involvement and violence, the success of Operation Cease Fire brought a welcome opportunity to expand upon what Harvard researcher David Kennedy has called, "a small, but critically important, piece of shared moral territory"—the desire to keep kids alive.[4] Building from that base, they have worked to preserve and expand key alliances and to sustain momentum while shifting emphasis toward longer term violence prevention and intervention programs. Police, probation, Streetworkers, and clergy have all continued to maintain a presence on the streets, keeping lines of communication open—among

themselves and with gang members—in order to head off violence if possible, and to contain it when it occurs. As a result, while there have been gang-related shootings and homicides since 1996, there have not been the rounds of retaliatory violence that once would have been inevitable.

The Cease Fire partners have also found many new avenues for cooperation as the focus has shifted from law enforcement to intervention. U.S. Attorney Don Stern recalled that, at a meeting with the YVSF to assess the impact of the action against the Intervale Posse, a Streetworker asked him if he was willing to help find jobs for gang members who wanted to change. Stern decided he was, and the seed for the Boston Jobs Project was planted. Stern lined up the police commissioner, the DA, and the state attorney general to lend their credibility and contribute resources; they formed an alliance with the Private Industry Council, the Boston School Committee, social service agencies, and community groups. “Initially it was almost a cut-and-paste way to try to send a message that we’re not just in the business of prosecuting and locking people up,” said Stern. “It was built on the premise that if the Streetworkers, the probation officers, the cops could identify some hard-core offenders who were appropriate for prosecution, these same people might also help identify people who were looking for an alternative, people who were prepared to make a change. And that we, as a law enforcement community, had some I’d almost say moral obligation to play our part in trying to help them.”

Another intervention initiative from the law enforcement community is the Fatherhood Program: a weekly discussion group for probationers who have children, aimed at supporting them in learning to be good fathers. This 12-week program originated in the probation office of the Dedham District Court as a collaboration between probation officers and clergy. Participants share stories and discuss the responsibilities of fatherhood, such as providing affection and “gentle guidance,” as well as financial support. They can have their probation time reduced for perfect, on-time attendance. In the view of Bernie Fitzgerald, chief of probation for the Dorchester District Court and an active participant, it is the most promising, important probation work of all, because it holds the promise of breaking the pattern of violence learned by children at home, either by experience or observation. “Some of these are tough, tough guys,” said Fitzgerald. “And to have 12 or 15 or 18 guys sit around and talk about their children and how much they love their children, and how they want to do the right thing by their children, and how they want to be a proud example for their children, and they want to take responsibility, and how much they want to learn about doing that—it’s absolutely eye-opening. And it’s rejuvenating for somebody like me who’s been around for 28 years. It gives me new hope that things can change.”

Such programs, offering alternatives to gang-involved youth and supporting those who want to change, have been a natural outgrowth of the work with established, extremely violent gangs. To a great extent, however, attention has now shifted to a younger generation of at-risk youth and to intervening earlier in their lives, if possible before they get into a settled pattern of crime and violence. For example, under a U.S. Justice Department Comprehensive

Communities Grant, a city-wide coalition of agencies created the Youth Service Providers Network (YSPN). Beginning in the summer of 1996, YSPN began placing full-time social workers in police precinct houses, to connect kids in trouble and their families to available social services. The Department of Probation and the TenPoint Coalition have expanded upon the concept of Night Light with home visits to first-time offenders. Teams of probation officers and clergy talk to kids and their parents about the potential consequences of crime and violence and the resources available to support different choices.

The YVSF and its partners have taken the Cease Fire format into schools, to present kids who seem to be moving toward gang involvement with a clear message: adults are watching you and are ready to act decisively if you use violence. Another school-focused initiative, sponsored by Ralph Martin, the Suffolk County District Attorney, are Juvenile Justice Roundtables—multi-agency discussion groups convened to talk about kids and issues that are causing concern in high schools. In 1998, an expanded group of partners joined the Boston School Department in mounting a major initiative to improve school attendance, which looked beyond apprehending truants to helping them and their families address some of the underlying problems keeping them out of school.

In short, one of the most significant impacts of the success achieved with the problem of youth homicide is a sense of momentum behind efforts to find solutions to what once seemed insoluble urban problems. This hope rests on people's demonstrated willingness to change and on the new ways of thinking and working that have emerged as a result—on key alliances, and on a broad commitment to collaboration. It also rests on the shared belief that Boston has developed and demonstrated an effective approach for tackling such problems. That approach is The Boston Strategy.

The Boston Strategy

The Boston Strategy to Prevent Youth Violence has three essential elements. The most concrete, visible element consists of programs: key law enforcement programs, Operation Night Light and Operation Cease Fire; and a broad array of prevention and intervention programs. A second key element is the principles that inspire and guide those programs and make them effective. The third element is the most intangible, but also the most indispensable. It is the collaborative, problem-solving process by which the principles and programs were developed.

The purpose of sharing the story of how a strategy emerged in Boston is to bring to light all of the change—changes in thinking and changes in behavior, both individual and institutional—that set the process in motion and made it work. In the words of U.S. Attorney for Massachusetts, Don Stern:

Anybody who thinks that what happened in Boston is an off-the-shelf strategy which then can be adopted for any community, without the human capital investment, is wrong. That is a critical component. And it's time-consuming, and you make mistakes. And sometimes the honesty and trust that are needed to make this work means you hear things you don't like to hear. Such as 'Why are doing this?' or 'Why aren't you listening?' or 'Why aren't you doing this better?' And unless you're prepared to hear that—and not just hear it but pay attention to it and maybe adjust your activities accordingly—then it just isn't going to work.

As Boston's story shows, programs, principles, and process are interrelated. All were critically important to the city's success in reducing the level of youth homicides. At the same time, considered separately, each holds lessons for people who wish to understand, emulate, or adapt and build upon Boston's experience.

The Process that Produced The Boston Strategy

Solutions emerged on the front lines:

- When adults were open to looking at the situation, themselves, and other people in new ways; and when they began to act differently as a result
- When cross-boundary conversations began at the street level
- When supervisors permitted and supported experimentation

A coordinated approach emerged:

- When cross-boundary conversations began at high levels
- When front-line solutions received high-level attention
- When a focused problem-solving initiative brought together the right mix of people in a neutral, analytical, action-oriented exercise

Collaboration was possible because:

- Adults set aside all the things they disagreed on for the one thing they all agreed on: that children shouldn't die
- People were willing to leave their egos—personal and organizational—"at the door," and to acknowledge that no one agency could solve the problem of youth violence on its own
- Individuals forged informal relationships: they responded to requests for help and they delivered on what they promised

Principles Behind the Programs

- Gang members are young people in trouble: they do not want to die; they need help from adults
- Adults can begin to help when they work together toward a single, shared goal—keeping kids alive
- In the right circumstances, most young people will make good decisions: adults can create those circumstances by providing realistic alternatives to the life of violence in the streets, as well as unpleasant consequences for those who choose violence

Law Enforcement Programs

Operation Night Light

- Teams of probation and police officers conduct nighttime street patrols and curfew checks on youth probationers
- When levels of gang violence are high, strict enforcement of the terms of probation, with jail sentences for violations, helps to get kids off the street and out of trouble
- Long-term, the focus of the program is on providing an excuse for kids to stay home at night and on building relationships that support them in making good choices

Operation Cease Fire

- A communications program delivers a clear message: we know who you are and are watching; we are ready to help you if you choose to be helped; but we will not tolerate violence; if you choose violence, the consequences will be as severe as state and federal law can make them—that is, very severe
- Local, state, and federal law enforcement agencies mount joint crackdowns on gangs that persist in violence, using, in particular, federal violations to obtain long prison terms for the most hard-core offenders
- Long-term, the program operates in a preventive mode, in which the Cease Fire partners talk to groups of at-risk youth in schools

Prevention and Intervention Programs

This is a selection of the many programs contributing to the Boston Strategy:

- Boston Gun Project
- Boston Jobs Project
- Boston Private Industry Council
- START (Student Attendance)
- Brighter Horizon
- Community Based Juvenile Justice
- The Fatherhood Program
- G.R.E.A.T. Program
- Juvenile Service Providers Team
- MatchPoint
- Operation Cease Fire
- Operation Night Light
- Street Smarts Initiative
- Summer of Opportunity
- Youth Service Providers Network
- Youth Violence Strike Force
- Boston Community Centers Streetworkers Program

Boston Strategy Timeline **1989-1996**

DATE	EVENTS
1988	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Crack-cocaine hits Boston streets; homicide rate begins to rise▪ A young girl, Tiffany Moore is killed in the cross-fire of a drive-by shooting; after this, the Boston Police Department (BPD) publicly acknowledges for the first time that Boston has a gang problem
1989	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ The BPD reassigns its City-wide Anti-crime Unit to neighborhoods of highest gang activity▪ A Superior Court Judge throws out a gun charge against a gang member, citing violation of his 4th amendment rights▪ The Carol Stuart murder heightens tensions between police and the African-American community, following it the BPD implements a search-on-sight policy for all young black men
1990	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Peak year for violence in Boston: 152 homicides, including 62 youth homicides, aged 24 and under▪ The BPD disbands the City-wide Anti-crime Unit amid furor over search-on-sight policy and creates the Anti-Gang Violence Unit (the gang unit) to focus on intervention, deterrence, and prevention, drawing on community policing approaches▪ Mayor Ray Flynn charters the Boston Community Centers Streetworker Program, to provide outreach directly to gang-involved youth▪ The Halloween gang rape and murder of Kimberly Ray Harbour▪ The probation department of Dorchester District Court creates the Youthful Offender (YO) Unit to collect information about gang activity and more rigorously enforce terms of probation of gang-involved youth
1991	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Mayor Flynn appoints an eight-member panel headed by James D. St. Clair to undertake a comprehensive management audit of the BPD, in the wake of widespread claims of police brutality and mismanagement▪ The Take Back the Street Crusade: a week-long initiative by African-American clergy to reclaim a vacant lot taken over by gangs for drug dealing
1992	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ The St. Clair Commission Report severely criticizes the BPD for poor administration and a failure to institute community policing▪ The BPD begins a process of organizational change focused on implementing community policing▪ Gang violence erupts at a funeral at Morningstar Baptist Church; this incident awakens Boston's religious community to the severity of the problem and galvanizes African-American clergy into a more activist street ministry▪ The Boston TenPoint Coalition forms around a plan of action to reach out to youth at risk for drugs and gang violence, launches the Friday night street ministry▪ The BPD, in partnership with the Boston Management Consortium, launches an in-service training program for all personnel; this week-long, off-site program on neighborhood policing principles, including a working session with Streetworkers on gang issues▪ The BPD's gang unit organizes bi-weekly gang meetings to share information across police areas, invites probation officers to attend▪ Operation Night Light begins with two gang-unit officers and two probation officers from the Dorchester YO group riding together at night to enforce probation terms▪ The TenPoint Coalition organizes a neighborhood "police tribunal" to air charges of police misconduct
1993	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Boston Police Commissioner Bratton creates a sub-unit of the Anti-gang Violence Unit, the Youth Violence Strike Force (YVSF): a multi-agency unit to focus specifically on the problem of youth homicides▪ The TenPoint Coalition awards its first annual Police and Youth Leadership Awards, a first public show of support for police working against gang violence▪ Streetworkers and gang members organize the Peace League: a summer program bringing rival gangs together for competitive basketball under three inviolable rules—no weapons, no spectators, no

- disrespect
 - Citizens for Safety, the BPD, the Suffolk County District Attorney, and the City of Boston initiate the Gun BuyBack/Amnesty Program, purchasing some 1,300 guns, mostly revolvers and semi-automatic pistols
 - Acting mayor Thomas M. Menino is elected to a full term, comes into office as a strong supporter of community policing and committed to providing resources to the Streetworkers and other anti-gang violence initiatives
 - Don Stern becomes U.S. Attorney for Massachusetts, begins talking to the BPD and others about how federal prosecutors can contribute to the work on the problem of gang violence
 - Louis D. Brown, a 15-year-old honor student is shot while on his way to an anti-gang violence Christmas party
- 1994
- Freedom Summer: a collaboration among the TenPoint Coalition, the Jewish Community Relations Council, and the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Boston to bring volunteers of all ages into the two most violent Boston precincts to work on programs for math and science literacy, court advocacy and alternative sentencing, street ministry, voter education and registration, health and healing, and project documentation and evaluation
 - The first Summer of Opportunity, sponsored by John Hancock Mutual Life Insurance Company and Northeastern University: a program to give at-risk kids job internships and life skills training in the summer, then follow them into the start of the school year, or help with college and job training
 - The Street Smarts Initiative, coordinated by the Boston Management Consortium, combines a variety of programs into one “holistic approach to violence prevention”—the Peace League, the Gun BuyBack/Amnesty Program, and a multi-arts school contest on the theme “We Can Stop the Violence”
 - A warrant sweep in Mission Hill housing project, with combined forces of 12 agencies, arrest of 135 chronic offenders, with no citizen protest; it becomes the model for 6 more sweeps in projects over the next year—Operation Clean Sweep
 - Operation Scrap Iron: a YVSF crackdown on gun violence in the Uphams Corner neighborhood of Dorchester, combined with a collaborative effort with the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms to get guns out of circulation, break up a gun supply connection
- 1995
- Boston Gun Project Working Group convened: regular group meetings at YVSF offices in an inter-agency problem-solving process to develop an improved approach to deterrence of gang violence; the outcome is Operation Cease Fire
 - The gang unit merges into YVSF, making it a 50-person, night-and-day operation
 - The Peace League, now 19 teams from across Boston, expands to include a career development component, providing skills training and counseling
 - The Street Smarts Initiative expands, with programs to provide career counseling and training to Peace League participants and to train Streetworkers and police officers in conflict resolution and mediation
- 1996
- Operation Cease Fire begins with the first gang-specific crackdown, on Dorchester’s Vamp Hill Kings, and beginning of meetings with gangs; formal announcement of the policy
 - A coalition of agencies creates the Youth Service Providers Network to support police efforts against gang violence, begins placing full-time social workers in police precinct houses, to connect kids in trouble and their families to available social services
 - In a joint action, the BPD and DEA arrest Intervale Posse members on the first day of school

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To learn more about the The Boston Strategy to Prevent Youth Violence or to obtain an electronic PDF copy of this document, please visit our website at:

<http://www.BostonStrategy.com/>

List of Interviews

The following individuals contributed to this narrative of the Boston Strategy story by participating in oral history interviews:

Greg Brown,	Patrolman, Youth Violence Strike Force, Boston Police Department
Jeff Brown,	Pastor, Union Baptist Church, Cambridge
Mark Buchanan,	Patrolman, Youth Violence Strike Force, Boston Police Department
Jeff Butts,	Director of Social Work for the Youth Service Providers Network
Chris Byner,	Program Manager, Boston Community Centers Streetworker Program
Paul Evans,	Police Commissioner of Boston
Joy Fallon,	Executive Assistant U.S. Attorney for Massachusetts
Robert Faherty,	Superintendent in Chief (retired), Boston Police Department
Bernie Fitzgerald,	Chief Probation Officer, Dorchester Court
Gary French,	Lieutenant Detective, Boston Police Department
Ray Hammond,	Pastor, Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church, Mattapan
Ernest Hughes,	Streetworker, Boston Community Centers
James Jordan,	Director, Strategic Planning and Resource Development, Boston Police Department
Paul Joyce,	Superintendent, Boston Police Department
David Kennedy,	Senior Researcher, Criminal Justice Policy and Management, Harvard University, John F. Kennedy School of Government, and Director, Boston Gun Project
Tracy Litthcut,	Director of Youth Services and Recreation, Boston Community Centers
Ralph C. Martin,	Suffolk County District Attorney
Thomas M. Menino,	Mayor, Boston MA
Robert Merner,	Sergeant, Boston Police Department
Eugene Rivers,	Pastor of the Asuza Christian Community, Dorchester, and Co-chairman, National TenPoint Leadership Foundation
Mark Scott,	Director, Ella J. Baker House, Dorchester, Massachusetts
Rich Skinner,	Probation Officer, Hingham District Court
Donald K. Stern,	U.S. Attorney for Massachusetts
William J. Stewart,	Assistant Chief Probation Officer, Dorchester District Court
Tito Whittington,	Detective, Boston Police Department
Warren Williams,	Streetworker, Boston Community Centers