

# San Joaquin County Grand Jury



## Shining Light into the Dark Corners

### Is the Office of Violence Prevention Worth the Money?

2017-2018 Case No. 0817

#### Summary

Stockton, California, is a high-crime city with a higher-than-average homicide rate. Most homicides come from gunshots, and many are committed by gang members. City officials and police have tried a number of approaches over the years to combat gun violence. In 2012 the Marshall Plan was implemented, and part of the plan is Operation Ceasefire, an attempt to reduce gun violence by having “Peacekeepers” as well as police work with violence-prone youth, many in gangs, to reduce shootings. Since late 2015, the Peacekeepers have worked in a city agency called the Office of Violence Prevention (OVP).

The work done by the Peacekeepers in OVP is valuable and necessary but hard to measure in terms of results and success. The office is unfortunately named in that it is impossible to measure the number of homicides that were *prevented*: how does one measure what did *not* happen? Another problem with OVP is that its work is largely unknown and unappreciated by the community. Its work and successes have not been publicized.

In order to better inform the public about its work, the Grand Jury recommends that the Office of Violence Prevention release information and statistics about its work regularly. It also needs to work more closely with Community-Based Organizations (CBO’s) and improve relations with them, which have deteriorated in the last few years. Other recommendations to improve the work of the OVP are made in the body of the report.

#### Background

The city of Stockton has an unfortunately well-earned reputation as a high-crime and violence-prone area. City leaders have made a number of attempts to address the situation over the years. One of them is the Marshall Plan, which was set up in 2012.<sup>1</sup> The city council decided to fund the plan by putting a proposed 3/4 percent sales tax on the ballot as Measures A and B. Voters approved the measures on November 5, 2013, and the tax went into effect in April 2014.

One part of the Marshall Plan is Operation Ceasefire. This program is a violence-reduction model that, according to a 2012 city news release, “has been implemented across the country and is a proven violence reduction strategy in cities such as Boston, Chicago and Cincinnati, resulting in dramatic reductions in firearms violence and homicides.”<sup>2</sup> The city website describes the model as follows: “Operation Ceasefire is a partnership-based violence reduction strategy that employs respectful, direct communication with youth and young adults at highest risk of violence. The primary goal of Operation Ceasefire is to reduce shootings, but it has also been shown to reduce recidivism among participants and improve community-police relations.”<sup>3</sup>

The primary way Operation Ceasefire works is by having outreach workers “respond to areas where violent crimes have occurred to talk with the youth and their families to prevent retaliations.”<sup>4</sup> These outreach workers are called “Peacekeepers” and have, in fact, been working in Stockton for longer than the Marshall Plan has been in existence. As far back as the late 1990’s, Peacekeepers have been on the streets of Stockton, most often under the supervision of a retired Stockton Police Department officer.

Peacekeepers were set up under a grant received by the city in the 1990’s. At that time, outreach was aimed at youth aged 13-18 with the intent to mentor them and divert them from gang life and involvement in the criminal justice system. It was then a prevention strategy. At the end of the grant, only one Peacekeeper remained. In 2006, with a spike in youth-related violence, the mayor created a task force that brought in Anthony Braga of Harvard University. He wrote a report that recommended reinvigorating the Peacekeepers.<sup>5</sup> The city hired three more staff and brought back a retired Stockton Police Department (SPD) captain for a second tour of duty as director.

The director set up Operation Ceasefire at the request of the Stockton chief of police. A major part of the operation is the “Call-in.” Call-ins are held quarterly, and are meetings to which youth and young adults at risk of committing gun violence are invited. In a two-part structure, the Stockton police chief and representatives of other law enforcement agencies such as the FBI, first present to the attendees and their accompanying family members the consequences of their continued engagement in gangs and gun violence: arrest, prosecution, conviction, and imprisonment. The law enforcement authorities then leave and the remaining Peacekeepers, pastors, and service-oriented community-based organizations (CBO’s) present to the attendees the services that are on offer to help them leave their life of violence, find education and employment, and become steadily employed and responsible family members and fathers. If the attendees accept the help on offer, they become clients of the Peacekeepers and users of the services. The Peacekeepers then work closely with the new clients and shepherd them through the various processes of obtaining driver’s licenses, tattoo removal, housing, education, training for employment, and obtaining jobs. This process generally lasts a few years.

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<sup>1</sup>[http://www.stocktongov.com/files/OpEd\\_MarshallPlan\\_TheRecord\\_2012\\_1\\_08.pdf](http://www.stocktongov.com/files/OpEd_MarshallPlan_TheRecord_2012_1_08.pdf)

<sup>2</sup>[http://www.stocktongov.com/files/News\\_2012\\_9\\_24\\_MarshallPlanUpdateCeaseFire.pdf](http://www.stocktongov.com/files/News_2012_9_24_MarshallPlanUpdateCeaseFire.pdf)

<sup>3</sup><http://www.stocktongov.com/government/departments/manager/vpCeasefire.html>

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.stocktongov.com/government/departments/manager/peacekeepers.html>

<sup>5</sup> [http://www.stocktongov.com/files/BragaReportStockton\\_63Pages.pdf](http://www.stocktongov.com/files/BragaReportStockton_63Pages.pdf)

In 2011, a major change occurred in the Peacekeeper program with the signing into law by Governor Edmund G. Brown Jr. of AB109, the Public Safety Realignment Act. According to the [ca.gov](http://ca.gov) website, “Public Safety Realignment allows non-violent, non-serious, and non sex offenders to serve their sentence in county jails instead of state prisons.”<sup>6</sup> The act offered money to agencies that worked with reentry adults leaving prison and county jails. A consultant to the Peacekeepers recommended that the focus of the program shift away from juveniles to reentry adults from about 18 to 35, and this was done. Also, AB109 contained no funds for prevention work among juveniles.

Disagreeing with the change in focus of the program, the retired SPD captain resigned as director and was succeeded by a few other retired SPD officers for a few years until Jessica Glynn was hired as manager of the newly-created Office of Violence Prevention (OVP) in November 2014. But less than four months into the job, Glynn was fired by the city manager and promptly sued the city, claiming gender and pregnancy discrimination.<sup>7</sup> After a two-week trial, a jury ruled in favor of the city in March 2017.<sup>8</sup>

The Office of Violence Prevention gained a new manager in November 2015 with the hiring of LaTosha Walden.<sup>9</sup> Mrs. Walden has lasted as manager to the present and now presides over an office staff that includes a newly-hired community engagement coordinator, a data analyst, two supervisors, and eight Peacekeepers. The office continues its work to “significantly reduce violence in the City of Stockton through data-driven, partnership-based violence prevention and reduction programs, and strategies rooted in best practices.

“OVP coordinates inter-agency working partnerships with community leaders including:

- clergy, gang outreach, public and community service providers, and
- other stakeholders committed to reducing violence.”<sup>10</sup>

## **Reason for Investigation**

The Grand Jury decided to investigate the Office of Violence Prevention (OVP) in the fall of 2017 after hearing both praise and criticism of it in various presentations by city officials and private citizens. As an example, Stockton Chief of Police Eric Jones told the group that it is valuable as a part of Operation Ceasefire because it intervenes to stop violence with people that the police cannot reach until after they have committed a crime, often gun violence. He believes that it is a necessary organization that complements the work of the police, but that it needs to present believable data. City Manager Kurt Wilson stressed that OVP works for the long-term treatment of Stockton’s historical violence. On the other hand, a citizen with knowledge of the workings of the OVP told us that he does not believe the OVP is accountable to the citizens of Stockton for its spending, especially as it has a budget of around a million dollars a year. He claimed that the annual audits of the Measure A money have not been done as

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<sup>6</sup> <https://www.cdcr.ca.gov/realignment/Community-Local-Custody.html>

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.recordnet.com/article/20150310/NEWS/150319953>

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.recordnet.com/news/20170216/jury-stockton-didnt-discriminate-in-firing>

<sup>9</sup> <http://fox40.com/2015/11/20/stockton-introduces-new-hires-to-office-of-violence-prevention/>

<sup>10</sup> <http://www.stocktongov.com/government/departments/manager/violprev.html>

promised to the voters in the campaign. Furthermore, the OVP has not been able to show data to demonstrate it effectively reduces gun violence, which is its *raison d'être*.

Given these comments, the Grand Jury decided to open an investigation. It realizes that it is hard to show evidence of what did *not* happen. The number of gun deaths and even gun deaths due to group (gang) violence can be measured as it increases or decreases from year to year, but it is impossible to measure the number of gun deaths that did *not* occur. Also, the fact that measurable statistics have not been reported to the public is another reason for a close inspection of the OVP. This report looks at the structure and performance of the Office of Violence Prevention with the intention of shining light into the dark corners and bringing knowledge to the citizens of Stockton. With knowledge in hand, citizens can decide if OVP is worth the money being expended on its work.

## **Method of Investigation**

### **Materials Reviewed**

- Data Dashboard from Office of Violence Prevention
- Peacekeepers Protocols Manual from Office of Violence Prevention
- OVP Outreach Workers Daily Logs, Sample Week June 26-30, 2017
- City of Stockton website: Marshall Plan, Office of Violence Prevention, Operation Peacekeepers, Operation Ceasefire
- Contract between City of Stockton and Solutions, Inc. (David Muhammad)
- Contract between City of Stockton and Bay Area S. E. (BASE) (Daniel Ford)
- Contract between City of Stockton and California Partnership for Safe Communities

### **Interviews Conducted**

- Mayor of Stockton
- Stockton Public Information Officer
- Manager of Office of Violence Prevention
- Former Director of Peacekeepers
- Two Supervisors of Office of Violence Prevention
- Eight Peacekeepers of Office of Violence Prevention
- Former Community Engagement Coordinator of OVP
- SPD Sergeant in Gang Suppression Unit and liaison to OVP
- Former member of Measure A Citizens' Advisory Committee
- Three heads of Community-Based Organizations
- Director of California Partnership for Safe Communities

## **Discussions, Findings, and Recommendations**

### **1.0 Division of the Peacekeepers has recently occurred.**

The eight Peacekeepers working in the Office of Violence Prevention (OVP) were all doing essentially the same job, seeking out violent young men, offering them services and counseling, and staying closely

in touch with them as they transitioned out of gang violence into more socially acceptable and productive lives. At about the beginning of 2018, however, the Peacekeepers were divided into two groups: Outreach workers and Case Managers. The two supervisors were each assigned one of the groups. The Outreach Workers are supposed to do the recruitment of prospective clients, offer them services, and build relationships with them until they are ready (after about six months to a year) to be given a “warm handoff” to a Case Manager, who will then work with the client until he is leading a productive life and no longer in need of services.

Some Peacekeepers are against this division into two groups, but some are neutral about it and willing to give it a try. Some believe that this division interferes with building long-term relationships with clients. They believe clients will drop out of the program because they will feel abandoned by the Outreach Peacekeeper with whom they have built up a relationship of trust. The change into two types of Peacekeepers was made without input from the Peacekeepers themselves, some of whom have a decade of experience doing the work.

## **Findings**

**F1.1** The division into two groups made Peacekeepers frustrated and had a negative effect on morale.

**F1.2** The division was suggested by consultants who claim it is based on “best practices” in similar programs across the nation, but the Grand Jury found no evidence [*insufficient evidence*] for this assertion.

## **Recommendations**

**R1.1.1** The Grand Jury recommends the OVP reassess the division by December 31 with input from the Peacekeepers about whether or not it is effective.

**R1.1.2** In order for this and future policy changes to be effective and workable, the Grand Jury recommends that Peacekeepers be involved in the decision-making process.

**R1.2** By December 31, OVP management show the evidence for the division as it goes contrary to the experience of the longer-serving Peacekeepers, and its validity is not self-evident.

## **2.0 Disharmony exists among the Peacekeepers.**

The investigation uncovered a number of conflicts, some of long standing, among the Peacekeepers. Testimony confirmed that there are racial conflicts among some Peacekeepers. These conflicts have existed for years in certain cases and remain unresolved.

## **Finding**

**F2.1** Management has neither addressed the issues nor resolved them, leading to a tense office environment.

## **Recommendation**

**R2.1** Management needs to establish a code of conduct and enforce it.

### **3.0 The OVP has offsite Management.**

While the Deputy City Manager is the nominal head of the OVP, he has many other duties and agencies to oversee and cannot be expected to manage the day-to-day operations of the office. For those duties, the OVP has a Manager. However, both the Deputy City Manager and the OVP Manager and her small office staff are located in City Hall. The eight Peacekeepers and two supervisors are located at least six blocks away in an obscure and hard-to-find office (for security reasons).

The OVP Manager comes to the Peacekeepers' office only about once a week. As a result, Peacekeepers go to the Manager's City Hall office to talk about concerns and complaints, bypassing the chain of command.

## **Findings**

**F3.1** The separation leads to a lack of close supervision.

**F3.2** Bypassing the chain of command leads to distrust and feelings of favoritism among the Peacekeepers.

## **Recommendations**

**R3.1.1** The Grand Jury recommends that all management and staff be in one location. As Stockton has purchased a large building on the Waterfront to serve as a new City Hall, when city offices move there, the OVP should be in one office or adjacent offices.

**R3.1.2** The OVP Manager needs more frequent contact with the line staff.

**R3.2** Peacekeepers should use the chain of command and filter their complaints through the supervisors.

### **4.0 The Office of Violence Prevention has lacked metrics of success, that is, measurable objectives and outcomes.**

For many years, the OVP has not been able to show statistically in a meaningful way what it has been accomplishing in terms of helping its clients access services, education, jobs, and other measures of success. Finally, at the beginning of 2018 a Data Dashboard was created that gives statistics and other information about the work the OVP is doing. The Data Dashboard is finally up and running, but the information on it is not available to people outside the office. The OVP website has not been updated and does not contain information from the Data Dashboard.

## **Finding**

**F4.1** Communication with the public is not happening, causing a lack of understanding of the work of the OVP.

## **Recommendations**

**R4.1.1** By December 31, the Data Dashboard be made available to Community-Based Organizations (CBO's) and the public.

**R4.1.2** By December 31, the OVP put the Data Dashboard on the website and update it regularly.

**R4.1.3** The OVP find a way to inform the public about its work on a regular basis, either via its website or reports to the city council.

## **5.0 The OVP and the Stockton Police Department hold quarterly “call-ins” under the Operation Ceasefire program.**

In cooperation with the Stockton Police Department and based on recommendations from it and the Probation Department, the OVP holds quarterly “call-ins” at which young adults are invited to attend a meeting and meal. The Police Department and other law enforcement agencies present to the attendees the likely consequences for them if they continue a life of crime and gun violence. Those agencies then leave and the OVP and certain CBO's offer to the attendees the services they may receive if they decide to turn their lives around. These call-ins are the main [*only?*] recruiting tool the OVP uses to gain new clients.

Planning meetings are held to decide which agencies and Community-Based Organizations (CBO's) will attend, but testimony to the Grand Jury indicates that people not invited often show up at the meetings. This results in CBO's being unsure who is actually in charge of running the call-ins. In the early days, many CBO's came to the call-ins, but in time the number of organizations attending has declined.

## **Findings**

**F5.1** It is unclear who is in charge of running the call-ins, resulting in confusion among the CBO's.

**F5.2** “Extra” attendees at the call-ins lead to consternation among the CBO representatives who attended the planning meetings about who makes the final decisions on whom to invite.

## **Recommendations**

**R5.1** The call-ins have a clearly-designated chair, either: 1. the OVP Manager or the Police Chief, 2. both as co-chairs, or 3. another designee as chair.

**R5.2** The people who plan the call-ins should keep tight control on the number of attendees with only essential CBO representatives attending.

## **6.0 No clear system exists for meeting immediate financial needs of clients.**

Clients have needs that come up from time to time, such as being unable to get to work because a car needs a battery or tire replacement. Sometimes clients need to buy clothes for a job interview or work. Such needs call for immediate action. Oftentimes Peacekeepers must pay for such necessities out of their own funds, leading to complaints from their spouses, according to testimony the Grand Jury received.

### **Findings**

**F6.1.1** No system of pre-approved expenditures exists to meet the immediate needs of clients, making it difficult for Peacekeepers to provide these needs.

**F6.1.2** Peacekeepers often must rely on the willingness of Community-Based Organizations to meet clients' pressing needs.

**F6.2** The reimbursement for their own funds Peacekeepers spend on clients is slow and cumbersome.

### **Recommendations**

**R6.1** The OVP should set up an adequate fund in its budget easily accessed by the Peacekeepers with supervisors' approval.

**R6.2** The OVP should streamline approval of reimbursement and/or preauthorize purchases.

## **7.0 Office of Violence Prevention liaison with Community-Based Organizations is sporadic.**

Representatives of some CBO's testified that they have little or no contact with the OVP, that relations with the office have deteriorated over the years, or that they do not believe the OVP is effective in its work. Some CBO's believe that they are doing comparable work to the OVP and do not see the need for such a city agency. A previous community outreach employee, according to testimony given to the Grand Jury, criticized many CBO's and made them not want to work with the OVP. The Community Engagement Coordinator position has been vacant for nearly a year and needs to be filled as soon as possible. Community Engagement Coalition meetings are being held, but it is not clear if they are effective. How relevant the Community Engagement Coalition meetings are to OVP's work needs to be assessed, as well as how they could be enhanced and improved.

### **Finding**

**F7.1** Past conflicts have strained relations between CBO's and the OVP, causing some CBO's to have difficulty working with the OVP.

## **Recommendations**

**R7.1.1** The purpose of the Community Engagement Coordinator is to work with CBO's; the person hired for the position must be skilled and effective in reaching out.

**R7.1.2** The Community Engagement Coordinator must work on mending relations with the CBO's, but the OVP Manager should also be conferring often with them.

### **8.0 A county-wide coalition to reduce gun violence is a possible step to bring together many agencies and organizations.**

A county-wide coalition of various agencies and organizations has been formed to coordinate efforts to deal with the growing problem of homelessness and lack of housing in San Joaquin County. A "homeless czar" and housing made available at the County Jail Honor Farm are two of the results work on the problem by the county. In a similar way and in order to reduce gun violence, Stockton's Office of Violence Prevention might expand its reach and effectiveness by working more closely and with greater coordination with cities, agencies, and CBO's across the county.

## **Finding**

**F8.1** Some CBO's and city officials would like to create a county-wide coalition to coordinate and improve services to reduce group gun violence.

## **Recommendation**

**R8.1** The OVP Manager should bring this idea to city and county government agencies to see if there is merit to the idea, if the time is right to move ahead with this proposal, and if there is appropriate and adequate interest among the various stakeholders.

## **Conclusion**

The work of the Office of Violence Prevention in the city of Stockton is vital and necessary if the city is to see a much-desired decrease in the number of gang-related gun homicides. Yet the OVP is not operating at the highest-possible level of efficiency. The Grand Jury has made a number of recommendations to improve the work of the office. Greater transparency about its work, especially a larger and more frequent release of data, and changes in its internal organization and operations are necessary to justify its existence and the Measure A money it expends each year.

## **Disclaimers**

Grand Jury reports are based on documentary evidence and the testimony of sworn or admonished witnesses, not on conjecture or opinion. However, the Grand Jury is precluded by law from disclosing

such evidence except upon the specific approval of the Presiding Judge of the Superior Court, or another judge appointed by the Presiding Judge (Penal Code Section 911. 924.1 (a) and 929). Similarly, the Grand Jury is precluded by law from disclosing the identity of witnesses except upon an order of the court for narrowly defined purposes (Penal Code Sections 924.2 and 929).

## **Response Requirements**

California Penal Code Sections 933 and 933.05 require that specific responses to all findings and recommendations contained in this report be submitted to the Presiding Judge of the San Joaquin County Superior Court within 90 days of receipt of the report.

The Stockton City Council shall respond to all findings and recommendations.

Please mail or hand deliver a hard copy of the response to:

Honorable Linda L. Lofthus, Presiding Judge  
Superior Court of California, County of San Joaquin  
180 East Weber Avenue, Suite 1306J  
Stockton, CA 95202

Also, please email the response to Ms. Trisa Martinez, Staff Secretary to the Grand Jury at [grandjury@sjcourts.org](mailto:grandjury@sjcourts.org)