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# Evaluating Project Safe Neighborhoods in Connecticut: A Youth Opportunity Initiative

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EVALUATING PROJECT SAFE NEIGHBORHOODS IN CONNECTICUT:  
A YOUTH OPPORTUNITY INITIATIVE

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## **Abstract**

Despite containing numerous wealthy geographic areas, the state of Connecticut continues to struggle with social and economic distress, along with gun-related crime. Problem analysis in urban areas revealed a critical need for services aimed at deterring violent and gun-related crime in two target populations: serious juvenile offenders, aged 14-17 years old, and at-risk youth, aged 11-13 years old. Using a quasi-experimental design, this study aimed to evaluate the effect of Project Safe Neighborhood (PSN) on youth in two cities in Connecticut.

Implementation resulted in 133 young people receiving a variety of services in New Haven and Bridgeport. Evaluation research assessed intervention efforts designed to (1) build on the strengths and address the challenges of each juvenile offender, (2) expand community outreach and education efforts to reinforce and reward positive attitudes and behaviors surrounding “no-gun policies,” and (3) utilize data-driven decision-making to guide program implementation and evaluate the results. Our findings suggest that youth who participated in Connecticut’s PSN youth initiative benefited from the services provided and exhibited a decreased involvement in the juvenile justice system following enrollment.

**Key Words:** Project Safe Neighborhoods, crime prevention, juvenile offenders

## Introduction

Although overall violent crime and juvenile violent crime rates steadily declined following the early-to-mid 1990s, reducing levels of gun and gang violence in inner cities continues to be a focus of U.S. criminal and juvenile justice systems (Braga and Weisburd, 2012; Braga et al, 2018; Kennedy, 2009; McGarrell et al, 2013). To quell the previous youth violence epidemic, by the turn of the century almost every state in the U.S. enacted legislation that increased the penalties for gang-related offenses, therefore increasing the number of adolescents who entered the adult criminal justice system (Feld, 2017; Myers, 2005; Zimring, 1998). These laws relied heavily on deterrence to decrease youth gun violence, and they sometimes were combined with school and community prevention and intervention programs to discourage youth involvement in gang-related violence. To illustrate, Project Safe Neighborhoods (PSN) was initiated in 2001 by the U.S. Department of Justice, in conjunction with U.S. Attorneys' Offices nationwide, as a federally funded program designed to reduce gun and gang violence through interagency collaboration in local communities (Grunwald and Papachristos, 2017; McGarrell et al, 2010; Papachristos et al, 2007). In general, the PSN model was developed by combining similar policy interventions designed around focused deterrence and problem-solving strategies.

Theoretically, the PSN model emphasizes deterrence and incapacitation through education and warning about federal and local criminal prosecution for illegal gun possession and violent, gang, and drug-related offenses involving a firearm (Kennedy, 1997; 2009). Consistent with the literature on deterrence (Nagin 2013; Paternoster, 2010; Zimring 1976), this model, through certainty, swiftness, and severity of punishment, should act to deter and, when necessary, incapacitate youth from committing violent gun-related crime. As a means of achieving these goals, PSN involves the collaboration of an interagency task force, including

local, state, and federal criminal justice agencies, together with community organizers, local service providers, and school-based programs. Ideally, these agencies will work together to communicate the model's conceptual deterrence messages to youth and develop data-driven gun violence reduction strategies.

A key component stipulated by the PSN model includes the specification of a local research partner to analyze levels of community gun violence, and together with the task force, provide a proactive plan for gun crime reduction (McGarrell et al, 2018). The research partners also are expected to provide ongoing assistance and evaluation of program effectiveness. The primary goals of the current evaluation were to assess implementation and outcomes achieved through Project Safe Neighborhoods in Connecticut, and to utilize research findings to enhance current and future PSN activities and outcomes.

### **Previous Research**

During the past two decades, there has been a surge in the number of published studies and reports that explore the association between young urban minority males and gun violence (Dahlberg, 1998; Feld, 2017 Lizotte et al, 1996; Myers 2005). This research was prompted by the increasing number of youth homicides that occurred during the late 1980s and early 1990s. Researchers found that gang membership served as a critical determinant in the likelihood that young urban minorities will possess firearms and become perpetrators of violence, more so than other at-risk youth (MacDonald et al, 2005). This pattern of gangs and gun violence was found in communities characterized by diminished economic opportunities and elevated levels of poverty, along with limited investment in schools, the health of the neighborhood, and general services for youth.

Traditionally, the response to gangs and gang-related violence has been concentrated at

the local level. However, more recently, community-based federal programs aimed at preventing youth from joining gangs have surged. In assessing localized homicide patterns and prevention strategies, Wilson, McDonald, and Tita (2010) concluded that programs developed around the specific strengths and weaknesses of local geographic conditions and with collaborative community partnerships are more successful at reducing gun violence. Programs such as Operation Ceasefire (Boston) and other contemporary “focused deterrence” interventions have used this approach to establish gun violence intervention strategies and evaluate reductions in gun crime and other outcomes, which helped shape the PSN model.

### ***Operation Ceasefire***

Implemented in Boston in the mid-1990s, Operation Ceasefire was designed to pair criminal justice agencies with local community groups to develop an individual-level intervention aimed at reducing gang violence and youth gun possession (Braga et al, 2001; Braga and Pierce, 2005; Kennedy et al, 1996, 2001). The deterrent focus of Operation Ceasefire centered around the targeting of specific individuals and groups who were identified in the community as being high-risk for involvement in serious violence. Under this approach, Boston’s police force would assemble the city’s violent youth gangs and deliver the message that violent crime would be punished by all legally available means, a process known as “pulling levers.” The deterrence message was provided to a relatively small audience of gang members, thereby acting to “increase the certainty and severity of punishment, but only in targeted circumstances,” and in turn decrease levels of gang violence in Boston (Nagin, 2013, p. 210).

Early research by Braga and colleagues (Braga et al, 2001) revealed a statistically significant decrease in the monthly number of youth homicides in Boston following implementation of Operation Ceasefire. The intervention also was associated with a significant

reduction in gun assaults and police calls for service. Subsequently, Braga and Pierce (2005) examined the impact of Operation Ceasefire on the illegal trade of new guns in Boston. For 5 years prior to the 1996 implementation of the intervention, the percentage of traced handguns with a “fast time-to-crime” had been increasing steadily. Statistical analyses revealed a significant reduction in the use of fast time-to-crime handguns following program implementation, along with significant reductions in the average monthly percentage of all recovered handguns that were new, the average monthly percentage of all recovered youth handguns that were new, the average monthly percentage of illegal possession handguns that were new, and the average monthly percentage of all recovered crime handguns that were new.

Based on the perceived success of Operation Ceasefire, other locations moved to implement and evaluate the pulling levers strategy. Similar supportive findings were uncovered in Indianapolis (Chermak and McGarrell, 2004; McGarrell et al, 2006; Corsaro and McGarrell, 2009), Stockton, California (Braga, 2008), and Lowell, Massachusetts (Braga et al, 2008), with the intervention being associated with significant reductions in homicide, gun homicide, aggravated assaults with a gun, and gang homicide. More recent research by Braga and colleagues (2013, 2014) reevaluated Operation Ceasefire and found the intervention lead to a 31% drop in the total number of shootings involving Boston gangs, and that total shootings went down for both targeted gangs and other gangs who took notice, suggesting a “diffusion of benefits” effect.

### ***Focused Deterrence***

As the popularity and research on Operation Ceasefire grew, similar interventions were implemented across the country. “Pulling levers” initiatives gradually became known as “focused deterrence,” generally based on problem-oriented policing strategies that follow core

principles of deterrence theory and research (Braga and Weisburd, 2012; Braga et al, 2018; Kennedy, 2009; Nagin 2013; Paternoster, 2010). Under this approach, known offenders (such as youth gang members) are targeted and informed that continued criminal behavior will not be tolerated. They also are told how the criminal justice system and its personnel will respond to continued criminal behavior through use of all potential sanctions. Moreover, targeted individuals are provided with the opportunity for compliance rewards and social services, such as education and job training. In other words, focused deterrence strategies seek to enhance offender perceptions of the certainty, swiftness, and severity of punishment, while providing social service opportunities and potential rewards for law-abiding behavior. Interagency workgroups typically select a particular crime problem (e.g., youth homicide, drug trafficking, repeat violent offending), develop a plan for sanctioning and providing social services and community resources, and communicate with known and potential offenders to enhance understanding of why they are receiving special attention.

Continued research on pulling levers and focused deterrence has revealed positive findings in such locations as Chicago (Papachristos and Kirk, 2015), Cincinnati (Engel et al, 2013), and New Orleans (Corsaro and Engel, 2015). Systematic reviews and meta-analyses, primarily by Braga and colleagues (Braga and Weisburd, 2012; Braga et al, 2018) have concluded that methodologically rigorous evaluations of focused deterrence interventions demonstrate an overall statistically significant, moderately sized crime reduction effect, suggesting these strategies should be part of a broader portfolio of crime interventions available to policy-makers and practitioners. This recommendation has been followed to a great extent, as focused deterrence has been incorporated into many federal funded initiatives, such as PSN. However, despite these positive findings and policy implications, there have been at least a few



studies that questioned the impact of Operation Ceasefire (Rosenfeld et al, 2005) or failed to uncover significant effects of focused deterrence on community level violence (Fox and Novak, 2018) and gunshot wounds (Boyle et al, 2010).

### ***Project Safe Neighborhoods (PSN)***

Originating in 2001, PSN is a nationwide, federally funded initiative that aims to deter and incapacitate violent offenders, through interagency collaboration, data-driven problem analysis and decision-making, and coordinated efforts directed at sanctioning and social services (Braga et al, 2006; McGarrell et al, 2010; Papachristos et al, 2007). In addition to the theory and research behind focused deterrence, PSN combines strategies and tactics from other empirically supported interventions, such as Project Exile (in Richmond, Virginia; Makarios and Pratt, 2012; Raphael and Ludwig, 2003; Rosenfeld et al, 2005) and the Strategic Approaches to Community Safety Initiative (SACSI; Coleman et al, 1999). Under SACSI, for example, evaluated sites often utilized offender notification meetings, media advertisement warnings about gun violence, and violent crime incident reviews as part of their overall strategic approach. New Haven, Connecticut, used a process whereby individual gun-related crimes were reviewed by a team of federal and local prosecutors and law enforcement, with the intention of deterring other violent offenders through providing more severe sanctions (Roehl et al., 2006). Under this approach, New Haven experienced a 32% decrease in violent gun crimes and a 45% decrease in calls-for-service for “shots fired,” and other research established that communities introducing SACSI reported as much as a 50% decrease in gun violence (Hartstone and Richetelli, 2003).

Since 2001, PSN has provided over \$2 billion in funding of local programming, coupled with increased federal prosecution of illegal gun use and possession (McGarrell et al, 2018). Funding is used to hire new federal and state prosecutors, support investigators, provide training,

deter juvenile gun crime, develop and promote community outreach efforts, and support other gun crime and gang violence reduction strategies. Each of the 94 U.S. Attorney districts are eligible to apply for PSN grants, which have generated a great deal of program implementation and corresponding evaluation research. In an initial national study, McGarrell and colleagues (2010) used a quasi-experimental design with longitudinal data from 2000-2006 to compare trends in violent crime in 82 large cities that implemented PSN with 170 large cities that did not. The findings indicated PSN target cities experienced significant reductions in violent crime compared to non-PSN cities, and the results were more pronounced when PSN was implemented with the most intensity and fidelity to the core PSN principles. Evaluation of PSN in Chicago (Grunwald and Papachristos, 2017; Papachristos et al, 2007) revealed similar supportive findings, as did a variety of documented PSN case studies and local level reports (McGarrell et al, 2018). Much of this latter research has not been published in academic journals, however.

Within this nationwide movement, beginning in 2002, Connecticut's PSN program initially was developed and implemented to coordinate innovative and strategic responses to reduce violent gun crime in targeted communities. This effort focuses on three areas:

1. Building on partnerships between federal, state, and local officials to aggressively enforce federal and state firearms laws;
2. Fostering prevention and educational programming within school systems and community-based organizations to emphasize the deadly consequences of gun and gang violence, the need to refrain from illegal gun use, and the promotion of positive opportunities for youth and ex-offenders; and

3. Informing adult and youthful offenders, upon their release from correctional facilities, about the risks of joining street gangs and the consequences of illegally possessing firearms. (The United States Attorney's Office, District of Connecticut, 2017)

In 2012, as part of PSN in Connecticut, Project Longevity was created under the premise that violence can be reduced dramatically when community members and law enforcement join together to directly engage with known and potential offenders, while communicating a credible, moral message against violence; a credible law enforcement message about the consequences of further violence; and a genuine offer of help for those who want it. A partnership of law enforcement, social service providers, and community leaders was assembled to implement face-to-face meetings with gang members, coordinate sanctioning and service-delivery, and collect and analyze data on crime hot spots and the effectiveness of interventions.

In 2014, The Justice Education Center, Inc., received further PSN funding to implement the Connecticut Project Safe Neighborhoods Youth Opportunity Initiative (PSN Youth) in the cities of Bridgeport and New Haven. The objectives of the initiative were to:

1. Extend the work of Project Longevity to engage juvenile offenders (age 14-17).
2. Offer individualized and comprehensive intervention plans, designed to build on the strengths and address the challenges of each juvenile offender.
3. Expand community outreach and education efforts to children ages 11-13, to reinforce positive attitudes and behaviors and a personal commitment to the "no gangs, no guns" philosophy.
4. Engage experienced research partners to provide data, guide implementation, and report results.

The PSN Youth initiative initially sought to reach known juvenile offenders through “call-in sessions”, common in pulling levers and focused deterrence approaches. In addition to targeted deterrence, PSN Youth emphasized providing known offenders (aged 14-17) with prosocial support for making a choice to cease their criminal lifestyles, through intensive advocacy, mentoring, individual career plans, and technical education opportunities. PSN Youth also expanded community outreach and education efforts to reach a younger population of at-risk youth (aged 11-13).

The purpose of this study was to examine a somewhat unique PSN initiative, focused on both at-risk youth and known juvenile offenders. Although focused deterrence was a key aspect, emphasis also was placed on community-based prevention and intervention efforts designed to provide positive alternatives and prosocial opportunities for behavioral success. Researcher involvement was intended to help guide program implementation, assess participant progress, and evaluate outcomes produced by the initiative. The following sections provide a more detailed description of PSN Youth, the evaluation results, and policy implications.

### **PSN Youth in Connecticut**

Despite having one of the highest median household income levels in the country, some of Connecticut’s population of nearly 3,600,000 continues to face extreme poverty, particularly in two of its major cities, Bridgeport and New Haven (American Community Survey, 2017). As shown in Table 1, social and economic disparity remains high in Bridgeport and New Haven, as compared to the state and nation as a whole. In these two cities, minority groups members (based on race and ethnicity) are highly over-represented, although the percentage of the population under the age of 18 is similar to that of the state and nation. All economic indicators suggest lower levels of wealth in Bridgeport and New Haven, along with lower levels of health

insurance and household availability of computers and broadband internet. Educational attainment also is lower in the two target cities, while unemployment and poverty is higher. In sum, children and youth living in Bridgeport and New Haven experience a variety of social and economic risk factors associated with delinquent and violent behavior (Dahlberg, 1998; Feld, 2017; Lizotte et al, 1996; MacDonald et al, 2005; Myers 2005).

Connecticut's juvenile offender population is divided into youth supervised by juvenile probation, which is handled by the Judicial Branch's Court Support Services Division (CSSD), and youth in placement or on aftercare supervision under the umbrella of the Department of Children & Families (DCF). In recent decades, Connecticut's juvenile justice system has experienced significant reform, resulting in dramatic reductions in juvenile commitments to secure facilities, increased use of diversionary programs, and declines in recidivism (Ma et al, 2018). Moreover, in recent years, greater attention has been given to the behavioral health needs of youth, truancy reduction, the school-to-prison pipeline, data collection, youth tracking systems, and community-based services.

Despite these positive trends, available data suggest some troubling juvenile crime indicators in Connecticut, particularly for certain cities. To begin, Sickmund and Puzanchera's (2014) comprehensive analysis of juvenile justice data revealed Connecticut to be above national averages in the proportion of high school students reporting they carried a weapon to school, used alcohol on school property, used marijuana on school property, and were offered, sold, or given illegal drugs on school property. In addition, Connecticut's juvenile violent crime arrest rates were near the national average, although juvenile property crime arrest rates were noticeably lower. As shown in Table 2, Connecticut data from 2014 indicate the rate of arrest for juveniles in New Haven and Bridgeport was approximately 3.0 to 4.6 times higher than the rest

of the state. Finally, Connecticut Juvenile Court Data from 2014 are summarized in Table 3. These figures suggest the cities of New Haven, Hartford, and Bridgeport stood out, at the time PSN Youth was initiated, in terms of petitioned and non-petitioned delinquency cases, as well as non-petitioned status offenses (Hockenberry et al, 2018). It should be noted that the City of Hartford originally was to be part of PSN Youth, but due to failing to meet early requirements for implementation, was not included in the funded program.

### ***Program Design and Implementation***

Based on the juvenile data presented above, there was a clear need for an intervention aimed at deterring New Haven and Bridgeport youth from violent crime and other forms of delinquency, while providing an opportunity for receiving social services and achieving prosocial behavioral outcomes. In 2014, Connecticut PSN Youth was organized with a task force, consisting of agencies from both New Haven and Bridgeport, to support delinquency prevention and gun violence reduction efforts for at-risk youth and known offenders in the two cities. Task force members included representatives from the following organizations:

- Connecticut Board of Education
- Bullard-Havens Technical High School
- Connecticut Business and Industry Association
- Eli Whitney Technical High School
- Integrated Wellness Group
- New Haven Office of the Mayor
- The Charter Oak Group (research partner)
- The Justice Education Center, Inc. (TJEC)
- University of New Haven (research partner)

- U.S. Attorney's Office
- Workforce Development Board in Bridgeport
- Youth STAT Youth Services Program

As research partners for the project, personnel from The Charter Oak Group and the University of New Haven collaborated on data collection and analysis. Representatives of the research team regularly attended task force meetings (typically held quarterly) and youth call-in sessions, conducted interviews with service providers, and reviewed available program documentation and quarterly reports. The Charter Oak Group was responsible for collecting and maintaining data on all PSN Youth participants. Cleaned and deidentified data later were provided to University of New Haven researchers for analysis and dissemination of findings.

The initial design of Connecticut's PSN Youth involved three cities, New Haven, Bridgeport, and Hartford, with each expected to have approximately 50 youth participants per year, totaling 300 participants during a 2-year grant period. When Hartford failed to meet specific requirements for implementation and was dropped from the funded program, resources were directed to the New Haven and Bridgeport jurisdictions.

Like other PSN initiatives and focused deterrence strategies, Connecticut's PSN Youth focused on the idea that increasing the perceived likelihood of arrest and prosecution for gun offenders will reduce gun crime, through deterrence of potential and known offenders. Initially, regularly scheduled call-in sessions aimed to alert participating youth that gun-related offenses will be prosecuted fully. PSN Youth originally sought call-in referrals from probation and police departments, and occasionally other agencies, like the Department of Children and Families (DCF). The youth call-in process was designed to both emphasize deterrence and provide opportunities for services within the community. Initial referrals were anticipated to produce 42

youth for intensive services. These services entailed program staff conducting a risk assessment, identifying needed services, and developing an individualized service plan. The primary recommended service typically was Career Pathways, with 15 slots per year allotted for vocational training through this program. Other services included summer school, referrals to Youth Stat (a local delinquency prevention program), case management, resume writing, job shadowing, and credit recovery.

Early in the program, it became apparent there was some difficulty identifying enough “justice-involved youth” (i.e., known juvenile offenders) for the program. Therefore, to fill the allotted spaces, the definition of “justice-involved” was revised to include “at-risk” youth who were distinguished through school attendance records, suspensions/expulsions, and class reading proficiency. The primary referral source subsequently changed from probation to schools. This change and expansion of the target population makes PSN Youth different from the original Operation Ceasefire model and other similar focused deterrence strategies, but similar to other evidence-based approaches that emphasize risk assessment, matching youth to services based on risk and needs, data-driven decision-making, inter-agency collaboration, and program evaluation (Howell et al, 2014; Lipsey et al, 2010; Myers, 2013; Seigle et al, 2014).

### ***Youth Call-In Sessions***

PSN Coordinators from TJEC, with the help of local probation offices, school teams, and the Youth Stat initiative in New Haven, worked to engage known juvenile offenders and at-risk youth for PSN Youth programming. A small number of youth who were victims of crime, but believed to be at-risk for offending, also were included (e.g., known gang members who were victimized and believed to be at-risk for retaliatory or future crime). Once identified, youth were invited to voluntary call-in sessions with their parents. Parents were included primarily for



younger at-risk youth, in an effort to enhance family engagement in social services and educational programming. Call-ins took place at a local courthouse, a school, or a specific program location. These meetings typically were held with the following representatives in attendance: a federal prosecutor, a local prosecutor, the PSN coordinator, and local community members having alternatives and opportunities to offer to youth. At most call-ins, a local police officer and a community member who was once a gang member also were present to speak with the youth. Figure A illustrates call-in session goals.

The sessions began with a brief introduction by the PSN Coordinator, followed by youth hearing from federal and state prosecutors. Prosecutors discussed what can happen to youth if they commit (or are with people who commit) crimes involving guns or drugs. Prosecutors often were followed by a police officer offering positive messages regarding the opportunity to succeed, and a community member encouraging youth not to make the same mistakes he made. It should be noted that this part of the call-in session was not a “scared straight” type strategy, as the community member (usually an ex-gang member) was not being confrontational or threatening, but rather positive and engaging. Youth also were able to hear from other community members, social service providers, and therapists who had various services and opportunities available, ranging from vocational training programs, mentoring, job prospects, mental health programs, and other prosocial activities.

At the call-in sessions, after all speakers completed their messages, youth were encouraged to ask questions of prosecutors, community outreach members, service providers, and anyone else attending the session. A form then was distributed to all youth to complete and return to the PSN Coordinator, identifying what programming they were interested in attending. Immediate access to PSN Youth was available at the call-in sessions, but all youth received a

follow-up contact (either by phone or in person) to further discuss and determine the best opportunities for them individually. Not all youth who attend a call-in will received personalized services, but efforts were made to serve all participating youth.

### ***Assessment***

Upon identification of a youth as a PSN Youth participant, he or she was referred to the Integrated Wellness Group for a Post-Secondary Success (PSS) Screener. A member of the Integrated Wellness Group completed the PSS Screener with the youth and recorded the score the youth received. In addition, for each participant, the Integrated Wellness Group also completed a Test for Adult Basic Education (TABE) and provided the results to the PSN Coordinator, along with the PSS screener score. Additionally, four members of TJEC were trained in January 2016 on the PSS Screener and on TABE administration. Starting in February 2016, TJEC staff administered all PSS and TABE assessment.

### ***Youth Stat***

Youth Stat is a school-based intervention program in New Haven, which seeks to reduce justice involvement and improve health and wellness outcomes of students from elementary to post-secondary education ([https://www.newhavenct.gov/gov/depts/youth\\_services/stat.htm](https://www.newhavenct.gov/gov/depts/youth_services/stat.htm)). The goal of this initiative is to enhance school engagement and academic performance among program-involved youth. Youth Stat identifies youth and connects them to a network of services that are specifically targeted to their individual needs, which includes but is not limited to: tutoring, academic support, gang intervention, mental health assessment and treatment, and employment matching and placement. Youth Stat services were limited to PSN participants in the New Haven school district and were not offered to youth in the Bridgeport region.

### ***Career Pathways Technology Collaborative***

In collaboration with Youth Stat, New Haven and Eli Whitney Technical High Schools introduced a program that provided various levels of support to ensure motivated students are offered technical skills, training, and academic tutoring to achieve success. Services include education in essential reading, writing, and math skills; training in the fields of Carpentry/Weatherization, Plumbing, Manufacturing, and Culinary Arts; and certifications for OSHA-10, CPR/First Aid, ECHO (Empathy, Character, Hope, and Opportunity) Personal Growth, and Youth Employment Skills.

### ***Media Outreach Campaign***

Finally, PSN Youth also partnered with local radio station WZMX Hot 93.7 and television channel WTIC Fox 61 on a media outreach component, advertising the program to Connecticut residents in the target areas of Bridgeport and New Haven. Those respective campaigns produced the results shown in Table 3.

### **Evaluation Results**

Data were collected by the research team through meeting records and observations, assessment results, records and interviews obtained from service providers, and direct observation of call-in sessions. Additionally, official delinquency data for New Haven and Bridgeport youth were obtained from CSSD for analysis. Given limited resources, the primary focus of this evaluation included the tracking of activities as described above and completing corresponding statistical analysis. Resource constraints did not allow for a randomized or matched control group of youth who did not receive PSN services. Funding for this program was provided through a PSN implementation grant, not a research grant, and there were no plans in the grant proposal or funding in the grant to conduct a randomized experiment or even a quasi-

experimental study with a matched comparison group. Data were limited to those youths who were enrolled in PSN programming in either New Haven or Bridgeport and received services between 2014 and 2016.

## **Results**

The served target population included 133 youth between the ages of 13 and 19 years old, with the average age of participants at the start of the program being between 16 and 17 (mean = 16.51). The 133 participating youth were far fewer than the 300 youth originally planned for the program. This was due mainly to the City of Hartford being dropped from the project, along with unexpected difficulty in enrolling known offenders in PSN Youth programming. Other descriptive statistics for program participants appear in Figure B and Table 4. New Haven enrolled a larger number of youth in year 1, while Bridgeport had a larger number of program participants in year 2. About 75% of participating youth were male, with a slightly higher percentage in New Haven. Over 90% of PSN Youth participants were Black, again with a slightly higher percentage in New Haven. More than half of the total youth were Hispanic, with over 90% being Hispanic in Bridgeport. Overrepresentation of Black and Hispanic youth corresponds with the demographic characteristics shown in Table 1. Finally, over 75% of PSN Youth initially participated in a call-in session, and over 80% completed an initial interview with the PSN coordinator. To clarify, some youth were interviewed without having attended a call-in session, and some youth attended a call-in session but did not complete a subsequent interview.

Outcomes of PSN Youth programming are presented in Tables 6 and 7. As shown in Table 6, 56 youth completed an OSHA-10 (Occupational Safety and Health Administration 10-hour training) certificate, 35 completed CPR training, and 11 completed Serv Safe (food and

beverage safe handling) training. Larger numbers of participants completed a certification in New Haven than in Bridgeport. In addition, as presented in Table 7, 70 PSN Youth participants successfully completed Career Pathways, 94 earned credits toward high school graduation, and 28 graduated high school. Thirty-eight youth completed a summer program offered by TJEC in New Haven, and 90 participants produced a resume. Several of the program outcomes had higher achievement frequencies in New Haven, while several others were split roughly equally between the two locations.

In addition to program outcomes, five official outcome measures of delinquency were obtained from CSSD and coded dichotomously (yes, no): Justice involvement since enrollment (i.e., having a juvenile court record since enrollment); Arrest at 6 months post enrollment; Arrest at 12 months post enrollment; Rejudicated at 6 months post enrollment; and Rejudicated at 12 months post enrollment. A measure of youth who were justice involved prior to enrollment (i.e., having a juvenile court record prior to enrollment) in the PSN Youth initiative also was obtained. As shown in Table 8, nearly half of program participants exhibited prior justice involvement, with nearly equal percentages in the two locations.

Of the 133 youth were recruited to take part in the PSN intervention, 64 (48%) had juvenile justice system involvement prior to enrolling in the program. This included 28 (47.5%) youth from Bridgeport and 36 (48.6%) from New Haven. Following the PSN intervention, the total number of youth with justice involvement since enrolling in the program decreased to 45 participants (33.8%). A McNemar's test determined that the difference in the proportion of justice involved youth pre- and post-intervention was statistically significant ( $p < .01$ ). Similar results were produced for both New Haven and Bridgeport youth, although recidivism was generally lower in Bridgeport, and the difference in pre- and post-intervention justice

involvement was slightly greater in Bridgeport ( $p < .05$ ) as compared to New Haven ( $p < .10$ ). Although these figures do not control for time at risk in the pre- and post-intervention periods (as well as other possible confounding factors), they suggest that participating youth benefited from the PSN intervention. In addition, arrest and adjudication figures in the 6 and 12-month time periods are relatively low, considering PSN youth typically are higher in risk and needs than the overall Connecticut youth population.

Table 9 focuses on the PSN Youth participants with prior juvenile justice system involvement. Of those 64 participants with prior involvement, there were 38 (59%) with justice involvement following enrollment, of which 14 (50%) were from Bridgeport and 24 (67%) were from New Haven. Eighteen (28%) were arrested within 6 months of enrollment, and 11 (17%) were readjudicated within 6 months. Thirty-one (48%) were arrested within 12 months, and 20 (31%) were readjudicated within 12 months. The rates for New Haven participants were higher than Bridgeport at 6 months; the reverse was true at 12 months.

Six-month rearrest rates for those PSN Youth participants with prior justice involvement (28%) were encouraging and were lower than six-month rearrest rates for all youth referred to juvenile court in the state of Connecticut in 2016 (31%; The Charter Oak Group, 2017). The 12-month rearrest rate (48%) for PSN Youth participants was slightly higher than the overall 12-month rearrest rate for all Connecticut youth referred to juvenile court in 2016 (44%). Given that PSN youth often experience multiple risk factors and present high needs, this 12-month rearrest rate comparison is not surprising. Six and twelve month readjudication rates for PSN youth (17% and 31%, respectively) are perhaps less encouraging, and these figures suggest the need for more sustained follow-up services with justice involved youth.

## **Discussion and Conclusions**

In recent decades, as a response to nationwide concern over gun and gang violence in many urban areas, numerous criminal and juvenile justice initiatives have sought to increase the perceived certainty of prosecution and incarceration, while providing alternatives and opportunities for prosocial services and behavioral success. Beginning with Operation Ceasefire, pulling levers and focused deterrence strategies have used interagency collaboration to provide a uniform message that violent crime will be punished by all means legally available, and social services are available to assist those who choose a law-abiding path to behavioral success. Fueled by supportive research findings in a variety of locations (see, e.g., Corsaro and Engel, 2015; Engel et al, 2013; Papachristos and Kirk, 2015), along with the results of comprehensive meta-analyses (Braga and Weisburd, 2012; Braga et al, 2018), PSN is a federally funded initiative based on targeted deterrence, interagency collaboration, data-driven problem analysis and decision-making, and coordinated efforts directed at sanctioning and social services (Braga et al, 2006; McGarrell et al, 2010, 2018; Papachristos et al, 2007).

The Connecticut PSN Youth initiative is unique in that it included both at-risk youth and known juvenile offenders, including some at younger ages. Following initial call-in sessions, which included deterrence-based messages from justice system professionals, efforts were placed on assessing participants and matching them with a variety of social service and educational programs. Of the 133 PSN Youth participants, 94 (71%) received credits toward graduation, 90 (68%) completed resumes, 70 (53%) completed the Career Pathways program, 56 (42.1%) received OSHA-10 certification, 35 (26.3%) received CPR certification, and 28 (21%) graduated from High School (many were not ready or old enough to graduate).

In addition to positive program outcomes, recidivism analysis also suggested beneficial effects from the intervention. There was a statistically significant reduction in juvenile justice involvement when comparing the pre- and post-enrollment time periods for all PSN Youth participants, with supportive findings in both Bridgeport and New Haven. Six and twelve-month arrest and adjudication rates were relatively low, particularly for those youth without prior juvenile justice system involvement. Recidivism findings were not as encouraging for program participants who had prior justice involvement, perhaps indicating a need for more intensive and sustained services for these youth.

Overall, the findings suggest that when deviating from the standard Operation Ceasefire or focused deterrence approach (in this case by including at-risk youth and focusing more on educational and vocational opportunities), supportive results can be obtained, but greater attention should be given to established evidence-based programs and practices (Howell et al, 2014; Lipsey et al, 2010; Myers, 2013; Seigle et al, 2014). Connecticut's PSN Youth initiative utilized such evidence-based practices as risk assessment, matching youth to services based on risk and needs, data-driven decision-making, inter-agency collaboration, and program evaluation. It appears, however, that medium and higher risk participants (particularly those with prior juvenile justice system involvement) may not have received empirically supported services of satisfactory intensity and duration. In addition, although data collection and monitoring were included in PSN Youth, more rigorous program evaluation was not part of the funding or implementation plan, which points to the research limitations inherent in this study.

To begin, funding, time, and data limitations did not allow for a randomized experiment or even a matched comparison group design. The reported evaluation findings are mainly descriptive, with a before and after statistical comparison of juvenile justice system involvement.



Although the results are generally positive, methodological limitations limit the strength of the conclusions and implications that can be formed. However, when combined with previous findings obtained through more scientifically rigorous studies of focused deterrence and PSN, the results of this study add to a fairly large body of empirical support.

This study also relied primarily on available program documentation, official measures of recidivism, and direct observation of call-in sessions. Survey data and qualitative interviews of program participants and various stakeholders would be two ways to enhance the scope and depth of the evaluation findings, by generating more extensive information on the perceptions, experiences, and behaviors of these individuals. In addition to measuring and assessing program fidelity through these data sources, they may also be better at determining the causal mechanisms associated with focused deterrence and PSN initiatives. In other words, the current body of research indicates these approaches “work,” but we do not know as much about why they work. It could be, for example, that targeted deterrence has direct effects on behavior, indirect effects through certain social services and prosocial activities, or some combination of both. Survey and qualitative data would be beneficial in understanding these possible causal mechanisms.

Based on the findings of current and past research, along with the research limitations noted above, efforts to continue and enhance PSN Youth and similar initiatives should assess whether planned and implemented services are in line with evidence-based programs and practices, particularly for medium and higher risk youth (including those with prior juvenile justice system involvement). Participants should be tracked from call-in sessions through program completion and beyond, to measure and assess a variety of process and behavioral outcomes. When possible, more scientifically rigorous program evaluation should occur, but

additional forms of data collection also can enhance understanding of program implementation and effectiveness, even when experimental design is not possible.

As supported by prior research, ongoing efforts should be made to engage youth with prior justice system involvement. While serving at-risk youth is important as well, their risk levels and needs may be different from those of known offenders, and mixing these youth during programming actually could increase the likelihood of delinquent behavior by lower-risk youth (Howell et al, 2014; Lipsey et al, 2010; Myers, 2013; Seigle et al, 2014). Moreover, rearrest and readjudication figures at 12 months, particularly for youth with prior justice system involvement, suggest programs should emphasize longer-term programming and follow-up services, again based on risk and needs. The current analysis of Connecticut's PSN Youth provides a first step for evaluating this initiative, but further research should examine ongoing and modified aspects of PSN programming.

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Table 1: Demographic, Social, and Economic Characteristics of PSN Youth Cities (2017)

<b>Variable</b>	<b>Bridgeport</b>	<b>New Haven</b>	<b>CT</b>	<b>US</b>
<b>Population</b>	147,586	130,884	3,594,478	321,004,407
% Population Nonwhite	59.6%	57.0%	23.3%	27.0%
% Population Hispanic	39.2%	30.4%	15.4%	17.6%
% of population under 18	23.7%	22.1%	21.2%	22.9%
<b>Households</b>	50,341	49,987	1,361,755	118,825,921
Median Household Income	\$44,841	\$39,191	\$73,781	\$57,652
Median Family Income	\$50,356	\$46,671	\$93,800	\$70,850
Per Capita Income	\$22,806	\$24,688	\$41,365	\$31,177
Median Housing Value	\$170,300	\$189,400	\$270,100	\$193,500
% Families in Poverty	17.5%	20.4%	7.0%	10.5%
% Under 18 in Poverty	30.5%	33.6%	13.5%	20.3%
% Food Stamps	28.01%	26%	12.4%	12.6%
% No Health Insurance	16.2%	10.3%	6.4%	10.5%
% Computer Households	83.4%	80.2%	88.2%	87.2%
% Broadband Households	74.6%	71.1%	82.1%	78.1%
<b>Population 25 Years Old+</b>	94,935	81,047	2,480,297	216,271,644
% High School Graduates	75.6%	84.6%	90.2%	87.3%
% College Graduates	18.1%	33.9%	38.4%	30.9%
<b>Population 16 Years Old+</b>	116,323	105,046	2,928,091	255,797,692
% Unemployed	13.8%	10.4%	7.2%	6.6%

Note: Data obtained from the American Community Survey, 2017  
[\(https://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/acs/\)](https://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/acs/)

Table 2: Juvenile Arrests, ages 13-17, 2014

<b>Variable</b>	<b>Bridgeport</b>	<b>New Haven</b>	<b>Balance of State</b>	<b>State of CT</b>
Juvenile Arrests for Violent Crimes	77	41	396	599
Juvenile Arrest Rate per 100,000 Violent Crime	654	434	143	173
Ratio to Balance of State	4.6	3.0	1.0	1.2

Note: Data obtained from the Connecticut Department of Public Safety (<https://www.dpsdata.ct.gov/dps/ucr/ucr.aspx>)

Table 3: Connecticut Juvenile Court Cases, 2014

City	Petitioned Delinquency Cases	Non-Petitioned Delinquency Cases	Petitioned Status Offenses	Non-petitioned Status Offenses
<b><i>Bridgeport</i></b>	<b>772</b>	<b>581</b>	<b>102</b>	<b>540</b>
Danbury	152	243	8	232
<b><i>Hartford</i></b>	<b>1,073</b>	<b>695</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>503</b>
Middletown	332	251	22	243
New Britain	444	481	*	432
<b><i>New Haven</i></b>	<b>1,339</b>	<b>503</b>	<b>*</b>	<b>389</b>
Rockville	342	264	*	158
Stamford	246	227	5	189
Torrington	191	203	*	125
Waterbury	860	393	8	257
Waterford	377	373	8	304
Willimantic	264	206	5	198
Total	6,392	4,400	176	3,570

Note: Adapted from Hockenberry et al, 2018.

\* less than five offenses

Table 4: Media Campaign Results

<b>WZMX Hot 93.7</b>	<b>WTIC Fox 61</b>
<hr/> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Reached 13.7% of residents in the Hartford/New Haven area on average 2 times each.</li><li>• Advertisement was heard approximately 260,500 times.</li><li>• Ran in key areas, specifically morning and evening commutes.</li></ul>	<hr/> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Reached 67.8% of residents in the Hartford/New Haven area on average 2 times each.</li><li>• Delivered 221 spots with \$5,000 of added value.</li><li>• Ran in all key areas including prime time, late news, and early morning news.</li><li>• Advertisement was seen approximately 1,783,000 times.</li></ul>

Table 5: Participant Characteristics (n=133)

	<b>Total Youth</b>	<b>Bridgeport</b>	<b>New Haven</b>
<b>Gender</b>			
Male	97 (74%)	39 (67.2%)	58 (79.5%)
Female	34 (26%)	19 (32.8%)	15 (20.5%)
<b>Race</b>			
Black	81 (91%)	37 (84.1%)	44 (97.8%)
White	7 (7.9%)	6 (13.6%)	1 (12.2%)
<b>Ethnicity</b>			
Hispanic	56 (54.9%)	29 (90.6%)	27 (38.6%)
Non-Hispanic	46 (45.1%)	3 (9.4%)	43 (61.4%)
<b>Participant Site</b>			
	133 (100%)	59 (44.4%)	74 (55.6%)
<b>Call-In Session Participation</b>			
	103 (77.4%)	22 (78.6%)	24 (66.7%)
<b>Initial Interview Participation</b>			
	112 (84.2%)	28 (100%)	31 (86.1%)

Table 6: Certifications Received

<b>Certification Type</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Bridgeport</b>	<b>New Haven</b>
OSHA	56	22 (36.1%)	34 (47.2%)
CPR	35	N/A	35 (48.6%)
Serv Safe	11	N/A	11 (15.3%)

Table 7: Process Outcomes

<b>Outcome</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Bridgeport</b>	<b>New Haven</b>
Summer Program Completion	38	N/A	38 (52.8%)
Career Pathways Completion	70	36 (59.0%)	34 (47.2%)
Credits Toward Graduation	94	36 (59.0%)	58 (80.6%)
Graduated High School	28	5 (8.2%)	23 (31.9%)
Resumes Completed	90	47 (77.0%)	43 (58.1%)



Table 8: PSN Participant Outcomes (n=133)

Variables	Total Youth (n=133)	Bridgeport (n=59)	New Haven (n=74)
Justice Involvement Prior to Enrollment	64 (48.1%) <sup>a</sup>	28 (47.5%) <sup>b</sup>	36 (48.6%) <sup>c</sup>
Justice Involvement Since Enrollment	45 (33.8%) <sup>a</sup>	17 (28.8%) <sup>b</sup>	28 (37.8%) <sup>c</sup>
Arrested within 6 months	21 (15.8%)	6 (10.2%)	15 (20.3%)
Adjudicated within 6 months	14 (10.5%)	3 (5.1%)	11 (14.9%)
Arrested within 12 months	35 (26.3%)	15 (25.4%)	20 (27.0%)
Adjudicated within 12 months	23 (17.3%)	9 (15.3%)	14 (18.9%)

Note: <sup>a</sup> p < .01, <sup>b</sup> p < .05, <sup>c</sup> p < .10

Table 9: PSN Participant Outcomes for Youth with Prior Justice Involvement (n=64)

Variables	Total Youth (n=64)	Bridgeport (n=28)	New Haven (n=36)
Justice Involvement Since Enrollment	38 (59.4%)	14 (50.0%)	24 (66.7%)
Arrested within 6 months	18 (28.1%)	6 (21.4%)	12 (33.3%)
Readjudicated within 6 months	11 (17.2%)	3 (10.7%)	8 (22.2%)
Arrested within 12 months	31 (48.4%)	14 (50.0%)	17 (47.2%)
Readjudicated within 12 months	20 (31.3%)	9 (32.1%)	11 (30.6%)

Figure A: Call-In Session Goals

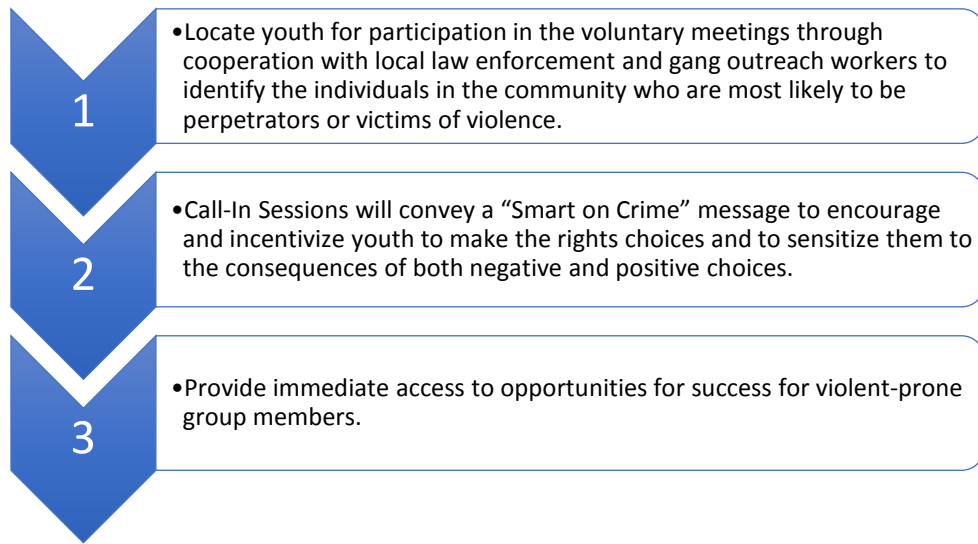


Figure B. Participant Summary

