



FROM CHICAGO TO BROOKLYN

A Case Study in Program Replication



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Emily Gold Senior Planner Center for Court Innovation		

FROM CHICAGO TO BROOKLYN: A CASE STUDY IN PROGRAM REPLICATION

The last 25 years have seen the emergence of a remarkable number of new criminal justice innovations in the United States. Drug courts, family justice centers, HOPE Probation, community policing programs... these and other initiatives have spread from coast to coast. Most of these projects began life as one-of-a-kind experiments before being broadly replicated.

Replication sounds easy, but experience tells us that it is anything but. Just because a program works in one location doesn't mean it will automatically be effective in another. Balancing the demands of model fidelity with the need to adapt to local conditions on the ground is one of the most pressing challenges of replication, but it is far from the only one.

In an effort to highlight some of the issues that replication efforts inevitably face, this paper tells the story of Save Our Streets (S.O.S.) Crown Heights, an effort to bring CeaseFire, a violence reduction project that originated in Chicago, to Brooklyn. The goal is to provide a ground-level view of the replication process from the perspectives of those charged with implementing the model. Along the way, this essay attempts to tease out lessons that will be relevant not just to those interested in the CeaseFire model, but to anyone charged with replicating a model originally created somewhere else.

THE CHICAGO MODEL

The CeaseFire Chicago model is based on the idea that the spread of gun violence can be treated much like the spread of other deadly diseases. As articulated by Dr. Gary Slutkin, a physician trained in infectious disease control, CeaseFire Chicago uses a public health approach to identify and change the behavior of high-risk individuals most likely to be shooters or shooting victims. Building on a similar program that achieved well-documented results in Boston in the 1990s, CeaseFire was launched in a single Chicago neighborhood in 2000. It soon expanded to multiple neighborhoods throughout Chicago and the state of Illinois.

CeaseFire's goal is clear: "We're about stopping the shootings and killings," said Candice Kane, the operations director of the Chicago Project for Violence Prevention, the organization responsible for developing the

CeaseFire model. The program has three basic objectives: (1) changing community norms about violence, (2) educating the community about the costs of violence, and (3) providing on-the-spot alternatives to violence. The model uses a host of interventions, including community mobilization, outreach, and public education to accomplish these ends.

A key part of the model is putting “credible messengers” to work as outreach workers and violence interrupters—formerly incarcerated individuals and others from the neighborhood with direct knowledge of, and connections to, gang members and other perpetrators of violence.

Outreach workers are tasked with working with individuals who meet certain high-risk criteria, such as recent release from incarceration or active participation in a violent street organization or gang. Their role is somewhat analogous to that of sponsors in Alcoholics Anonymous, providing informal mentoring and links to a range of social services.

Violence interrupters are charged with being on-site mediators as conflict arises in the neighborhood. This includes on-the-spot interventions, as violence is escalating, as well as behind-the-scenes negotiations with rival gang members, trying to prevent retaliatory shootings. Violence interrupters also take the pulse of the neighborhood, ferreting out detailed information about potential conflicts and hot spots to prevent further violence.

In 2008, an evaluation conducted by Wesley Skogan at Northwestern University established that six of the seven test sites experienced decreased numbers of shootings and killings over the evaluation period. At three of the sites, the decrease in gun violence was described as “immediate and permanent.” (See Skogan, Wesley G. et al. (2008). “Evaluation of CeaseFire-Chicago.” Northwestern University. Available at: www.northwestern.edu/ipr/publications/ceasefire.html.)

Following these results—and aided by funding from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and the U.S. Department of Justice—CeaseFire Chicago has worked to replicate its model in about a dozen cities around the country. S.O.S. Crown Heights is the first of the CeaseFire replications to be attempted in New York City.

BRINGING IT TO BROOKLYN

Crown Heights is a diverse neighborhood in the heart of central Brooklyn. It is perhaps best known for the three days of rioting and violence involving Hassidic Jews, African Americans, and West Indians that occurred in 1991.

The Crown Heights Community Mediation Center opened in 1998. Originally funded by the City of New York and operated by the Center for Court Innovation, the mediation center seeks to promote peaceful conflict resolution in the community. Operating out of small storefront office, the center provides training to local residents, offers youth development activities, and makes social service referrals.

Project Director Amy Ellenbogen recalled a defining moment that turned the center’s focus to the issue of gun violence: “A local mother showed up at the center one day. Her son had been shot and killed and she wanted help to take action. She had been going door to door in the community, asking for help to address the community’s violence problem. From that point on, we were committed to figuring out a way to address the issue.”

The opportunity came in June 2009, when the mediation center was awarded a multi-year grant from the U.S. Department of Justice to replicate the CeaseFire Chicago model. The program—called Save Our Streets (S.O.S.) Crown Heights—officially launched in 2010.

Planning and implementing S.O.S. Crown Heights has presented a range of challenges, some unique to the CeaseFire model and others tied to the task of replication more generally. What follows is a closer look at five of these challenges.

- Hiring the right staff
- Learning the model
- Understanding local street culture
- Building partnerships
- Demonstrating success

Hiring the right staff

Hiring the right outreach workers and violence interrupters—the “credible messengers” that the CeaseFire model calls for—was one of the early hurdles that Crown Heights had to clear. “To get the program started, we needed to hire staff,” Ellenbogen said. “But we needed good staff to even access good candidates, who might be former gang members or recently released from prison.”

Traditional recruiting methods—like online postings—weren’t attracting well-suited applicants; most of the applications coming in were from individuals with more conventional backgrounds who lived outside of the community. Recognizing this, the Crown Heights team started spreading the word in local barber shops and churches. They also chose their words carefully, taking pains to send the signal that individuals with criminal backgrounds and past gang involvement were encouraged to apply.

But hiring staff with these job qualifications is just the start. Once they are onboard, other challenges can quickly emerge. According to Chicago’s Candice Kane: “We had one partner site whose other staff members didn’t trust the CeaseFire staff—let alone the participants—because of their criminal backgrounds. They wouldn’t let staff access the office on evenings or weekends, which is when we do the bulk of our work. It was a big issue; we just hadn’t done our homework.”

Another issue is providing violence interrupters and outreach workers, many of whom lead complicated lives, with the support they need to be successful. Sharon Ife Charles, deputy director of the Crown Heights Mediation Center, observed, “Someone who was recently released from a long period of incarceration may share many of the life experiences of our participants. But you also have to consider what additional support they may need and screen them carefully to ensure that that chapter of their life is over.” In an effort to aid these workers, the project’s management staff looked carefully at the staff’s backgrounds to spot possible problems lurking in their pasts and provide support and resources, when needed. Crown Heights is also working with a psychologist from

New York University to provide group and individual counseling to help staff cope with the stress and trauma of the highly charged and dangerous work they do.

Learning the model

Inherent to replication is the challenge of understanding and remaining faithful to the underlying model. Technical assistance can play an essential role in this process. CeaseFire Chicago has provided guidance and consulting to Crown Heights throughout the planning and implementation process. “It’s a courtship process at first,” said Kane. “We have to ensure it’s a good match. We have learned that it is crucial to put the time in up front, giving partner sites a solid foundation before they launch.”

The Crown Heights team received 40 hours of training before getting started. This has been supplemented by on-going, regular trainings, status calls, and site visits. “Despite all of this support,” Crown Heights Director Ellenbogen said, “it was a slow process to get each staff member to buy into the CeaseFire message completely so they would not waver when conveying that message to the community. It was very helpful to have Chicago on-call to answer our questions along the way.”

Kane explained that Crown Heights had a head start because staff there already had a basic understanding of demonstration projects: “Without that foundation, they would have had a difficult time getting this particular model and adhering to its specifics.” Ellenbogen added: “I think we also had an advantage by not having much history in anti-gun violence or public health programming. It meant that we weren’t trying to rewire ourselves to adapt to the model. I was able to drink the Kool-Aid right from the beginning.”

Understanding local street culture

While model fidelity is important, it is often necessary to tweak the model to suit local needs. Finding the appropriate balance between these two imperatives requires some finesse. “The model really isn’t that rigid,” Ellenbogen said. “You can tinker with the implementation as long as you stay true to the philosophy.”

Understanding and adapting to local street culture was crucial in Crown Heights. The CeaseFire model relies upon an intimate familiarity with the community’s gang infrastructure, but this landscape is different in every city. “Many New York City gangs are changing their organizational structure, fragmenting into smaller cliques without the traditional rules and governing constitutions,” said Ellenbogen. Crown Heights Deputy Director Charles agreed: “Our community’s violence doesn’t stem from a simple red versus blue divide. We’ve got red versus red and blue versus blue problems, too.” Accordingly, program staff have had to do much more ground-work to identify where the “beefs” are—crew by crew and block by block—without the benefit of using larger gang patterns.

Crown Heights staff also had to reconsider how and where they would interact with the target population. A key engagement strategy in Chicago is doing regular home visits. But given the context of New York City, this was a tough example to follow. “The home visit approach really concerned us at first,” Ellenbogen said. “New York has much more of a street scene, so we weren’t sure it would even be effective. We also couldn’t imagine

becoming comfortable with sending program staff into people's apartments because of the risk of getting swept up in police raids."

Instead of home visits, S.O.S. staff have had greater success engaging potential participants outside of their buildings. About once a month, they pack up a folding table, a bag of educational materials, and some enticing freebies to establish camp in an area identified as a hot spot. "We've even had success approaching groups of gang members in the local parks," said Outreach Supervisor Derick Scott. "S.O.S. is known well enough in the community now that we can walk right up to them and start a conversation."

Building partnerships

Community partnerships are a key tenet of the CeaseFire Chicago model. Because the Crown Heights Community Mediation Center had been in the community for over a decade, they had a head start with many community agencies. But launching S.O.S. also required some new ground to be broken.

In the CeaseFire Chicago model, the relationship with police is important but delicate. Too close of a relationship with law enforcement can be counterproductive if not dangerous. "Both the police and S.O.S. have the same goal: we want the community to be safe," explained Ellenbogen. "But our strategies are very different. The strength of our model is based in a deep relationship of trust with the community that the information we receive will be used to prevent future violence." If the community perceives that S.O.S. staff are reporting crime details back to police, that trust diminishes, as does the potential impact of the program. "We've had to cut back on the community meetings we host that involve the local precinct," explained Crown Heights Deputy Director Charles. "We don't want the community to see officers coming and going from our office and get the wrong impression."

But the model cannot be implemented without support from local police. Getting regular and accurate shooting data is essential to making sure the program is targeting the right individuals and the right places. Police are also asked to sit on hiring panels and to perform background checks for new staff members. For Crown Heights, it has been easier to build relationships at the local level rather than working through centralized administrators. "Some of the most meaningful support comes in the form of individual officers showing up at our events," said Outreach Supervisor Scott. "It's nice to hear that they're appreciative and supportive of our work."

Selling local organizations on the S.O.S. model was an easier task. Religious leaders rallied together to sign a Clergy Covenant for Peace and Action, a commitment to work to end the violence. Community groups were recruited to serve as referral sites for program participants who needed job training or other social services. Numerous local businesses volunteered to post S.O.S. signs in their store windows with messages such as a young child saying, "Don't Shoot. I want to grow up."

The challenge with these partners was not garnering support, but rather making sure that their message was consistent. "Despite all of the community trainings we've led," explained Ellenbogen, "it can be difficult to keep our partners on message. There are so many approaches to non-violence that it's easy for a partner to stand up at a rally and say something that's inconsistent with our approach." She cited examples of people calling for

anti-gun legislation or for residents to come forward with information about local crimes; these may be worthy efforts, but they are not part of the CeaseFire model.

Demonstrating success

Another challenge in Crown Heights has been the difficulty of measuring success. The project will be the subject of an independent evaluation by researchers from John Jay College and Temple University, but the findings from that study will not be available for some time.

In the meantime, the project must continue to harvest data to demonstrate its accountability to both federal funders and to the local community. But there is another reason that Crown Heights is committed to collecting data. Action research—using information as part of an iterative process designed to improve program performance—has been a core institutional value since the program opened its doors.

With the help of researchers from the Center for Court Innovation, Crown Heights regularly tracks a number of performance indicators, including gun-related arrests, the results of risk assessments, and the number of participants linked to supportive services. In addition, Crown Heights conducts a community survey to measure feelings of community efficacy—whether residents feel they are able to affect change in their community.

To aid in this process, CeaseFire Chicago provided Crown Heights with a specialized database that helps chart program activities. “The database has been a huge help, not only for our staff, but also in our partnership with Chicago,” said Ellenbogen. “Because Chicago is able to view it on a regular basis, it keeps us all on the same page about our progress.”

But maintaining a database is one thing; convincing a skeptical public that the program is making a difference is another. Most of the program’s early achievements have been small, private victories: potentially violent situations where nothing ended up happening, individual young people who have opted out of life on the streets and decided to re-enroll in school, etc. The demands of confidentiality prevent program staff from sharing many of these success stories. Even describing a situation vaguely—omitting names and identifying characteristics—can put people at risk. “It means that we often have to go against our own interest. We would love to share more success stories with the media, but it’s just not worth the risk,” Ellenbogen said.

LESSONS

The Crown Heights experiment is still fresh. It is far too soon to determine whether the program has succeeded in duplicating the impacts that CeaseFire seems to have achieved in Chicago. But while the work in Crown Heights is still ongoing, it is already possible to identify some key ingredients that have helped facilitate replication and overcome many of the challenges identified above.

CeaseFire Chicago is not a simple model. Rather, it is a complicated intervention with multiple moving parts. The technical assistance provided by the team in Chicago has been crucial to Crown Heights’ ability to get up and running quickly. Initial site visits to Chicago helped to ground Crown Heights staff in the model. These les-

sons have been reinforced by weekly conference calls. And when needed, Chicago staff travel to New York to help brainstorm solutions to difficult problems. The accessibility of the Chicago team combined with the willingness of the Crown Heights team to ask questions and seek out advice has helped to foster a relationship based on mutual trust.

While CeaseFire brought knowledge, perhaps the greatest asset that the Crown Heights Community Mediation Center brought to the table was the reputation it had built over the course of more than a decade of work in the neighborhood. Project staff know the community well and have developed credibility with key local leaders. This meant that they were well-positioned to answer any parochial concerns that may have existed about why Brooklyn should replicate something from Chicago. It also meant that they were sensitive to the local context and understood where and when to adapt the model to meet neighborhood needs.

Another key asset that has eased implementation in Crown Heights is the organizational and fiscal capacity behind the Mediation Center. While the Mediation Center is a small storefront operation, it has the infrastructure and backing of its parent organization, the Center for Court Innovation, to support it. This means that Crown Heights has access to professional fiscal, legal, technology, and research staff that can assist with issues such as employee reimbursements, grant reporting, and contract negotiation. This kind of infrastructure has allowed staff in Crown Heights to concentrate on the challenges of program implementation rather than getting bogged down in administration.

In a perfect world, it would be possible to extract from the Crown Heights experience ironclad rules for program replication that would guarantee successful implementation of any model. But we don't live in a perfect world. The Crown Heights experience with CeaseFire is idiosyncratic—other jurisdictions replicating other model programs will face their own unique challenges.

Nonetheless, the Crown Heights story offers several lessons that any organization should consider as it replicates an established model.

LESSON #1: Don't go it alone. Technical assistance providers are a valuable resource that can help program implementers learn from prior mistakes and avoid re-inventing the wheel. The best technical assistance providers are seasoned professionals who have “been there and done that.” They have lived through the growing pains that a new program will likely experience—including hiring appropriate staff, working with agency partners, and getting everyone on board with the philosophy of the program model. They will also have a shared interest in helping replication sites evaluate their work and publicize success.

LESSON #2: Cultivate local allies. Launching a new program—particularly one that is brought in from “outside”—requires significant local support. A local track record on the ground is just as, if not more, important than solid research results established somewhere else. Establishing

community networks is crucial to hiring staff, finding social service partners, and all the other basics of getting a program off the ground.

LESSON #3: Start with a solid foundation. Successful program implementation is never easy, but it becomes almost impossible if there isn't a stable institutional infrastructure in place. If an organization doesn't have the capacity to handle basic tasks like managing payroll and grant reporting, it is likely to struggle to launch new programs successfully, let alone sustain them over time.

The most basic lesson to be learned from the replication of CeaseFire in Crown Heights is this: replication shouldn't be taken for granted. It is not enough simply to have good ideas. To successfully spread any new reform idea means getting the details of implementation right.

Center for Court Innovation

The winner of the Peter F. Drucker Award for Non-profit Innovation, the Center for Court Innovation is a unique public-private partnership that promotes new thinking about how the justice system can solve difficult problems like addiction, quality-of-life crime, domestic violence, and child neglect. The Center functions as the New York State court system's independent research and development arm, creating demonstration projects that test new approaches to problems that have resisted conventional solutions. The Center's demonstration projects include the nation's first community court (Midtown Community Court), as well as drug courts, domestic violence courts, youth courts, mental health courts, reentry courts and others.

Beyond New York, the Center disseminates the lessons learned from its experiments in New York, helping court reformers around the world test new solutions to local problems. The Center contributes to the international conversation about justice through original research, books, monographs, and roundtable conversations that bring together leading academics and practitioners. The Center also provides hands-on technical assistance, advising innovators about program design, technology and performance measures.

For more information, call 646 386 3100 or e-mail info@courttinnovation.org.

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Center for Court Innovation

520 Eighth Avenue, 18th Floor
New York, New York 10018
646 386 3100 Fax 212 397 0985
www.courtinnovation.org



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Office of Justice Programs
Bureau of Justice Assistance
810 Seventh Street N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20531
202 616 6500 Fax 202 305 1367
www.ojp.usdoj.gov/BJA