

THE ONS QUARTERLY

2ND Edition Volume II

(April 2013– June 2013)

“Peace is a daily, a weekly, a monthly process – gradually changing opinions, slowly eroding old barriers, quietly building new structures. And however un-dramatic the pursuit of peace, that pursuit must go on.” – JFK

STREET OUTREACH

The primary strategy of the Office of Neighborhood Safety (“ONS”) is its **Street Outreach Strategy**. Each day the city’s street outreach team (Neighborhood Change Agents or “NCA’s”) directly engages those on a face-to-face basis who are most likely to commit gun violence in Richmond (aka -“the ONS population”). NCA’s work to build healthy and consistent relationships with identified individuals, serving as their mentors and credible messengers who provide examples of healthy lifestyles. The ONS also works to expand access to quality opportunities, exposures, resources, and services that build on the identified populations strengths in an effort to reduce their involvement in gun violence.

In the second quarter of 2013 (April –June), **823** outreach contacts were made with **112** individuals identified as being at considerable risk for being involved in gun violence in Richmond, of which 32 individuals contacted were first time contacts with ONS in 2013. NCA’s made **78** referrals where the individual referred was walked into and through a support services opportunity (hard referral) facilitated by a local/regional non-governmental organization. The ONS also made **22** general referrals where individuals referred were directed to a support services opportunity (soft referral) facilitated by a local or regional non-governmental organization.

Additionally, between April –June 2013 the ONS supported **185** formerly incarcerated individuals who were charged with firearm related offenses with receiving community based social service opportunities. **164** of the total contacts during this period required attention intensive support and mentoring by ONS staff.

OPERATION PEACEMAKER FELLOWSHIP

An extension of the ONS street outreach strategy is the **Operation Peacemaker Fellowship program**. “The Fellowship” is a Transformative Mentoring Intervention designed for those most likely to be involved in gun violence. This intervention works to transform the attitudes and behaviors that have given rise to the selected individual’s involvement in gun violence. The Fellowship is representative of those individuals who

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are most resistant to change and/or are chronically unresponsive to the traditional range of services offered or available in the Richmond community. In addition to the public safety concerns that these individuals pose, they are among the most expensive population to serve in policing, incarceration, hospitalization and social services. Enabling them to right their life trajectory will have a collateral and positive effect on their communities, families and peers, in addition to saving tax payer dollars.

The Fellowship provides program incentives for participation and positive behavior as a gateway to developing intrinsic motivation that arises from internal and not external rewards. **All Fellow stipends, supportive services and exposures costs associated with the Fellowship are funded by grant and private resources.**

The 3rd Cohort of the Sr. Fellowship and the 1st Cohort of the Jr. Fellowship have been launched. The Operation Peacemaker Fellowship currently has 20 Jr. Fellows (13-17 years) and 20 Senior Fellows (18-27 years) enrolled.

Additional highlights:

In April 2013 the Office of Neighborhood Safety (ONS), Richmond's non-law enforcement gun violence intervention agency, provided the opening plenary session for the National Forum for Black Public Administrators (NFBPA) FORUM 2013 in Atlanta, Georgia.

The Plenary Session entitled "Chapter 2: Government at Work Keeping Young Men of Color Alive and Free - Reducing Youth [Gun] Violence by Leveraging Relationships and Mobilizing Power Across Artificial Boundaries" was the second in a series planned to introduce Richmond's unique government solution designed to reduce gun violence in urban America. The session provided the City of Richmond's Office of Neighborhood Safety as a case study examining the importance and necessity of leveraging, organizing and mobilizing relationships and networks of power towards advancing promising solutions and practices within and outside of implementing jurisdictions. The Richmond Office of Neighborhood Safety is the only government agency of its kind in the country with a sole focus of reducing firearm assaults from a non-law enforcement lens.

Also featured at this session was the ONS Operation Peacemaker Fellowship strategy. The Fellowship provides intensive outreach and targeted services to those who are the most active firearm offenders in Richmond who have avoided sustained criminal consequences. The goal of the Fellowship is to change individual thinking and unhealthy group norms that give rise to destructive, unhealthy behaviors and actions. The ONS and Fellowship gun violence intervention model have received national attention as promising practices for reducing urban youth gun violence.

The panel presentation included, from the Office of Neighborhood Safety, Neighborhood Change Agent Sam Vaughn, ONS student Ambassador Rohnell Robinson and Chief Glenn Sapp, from the Quincy, Florida Police Department. Also traveling from Richmond to Atlanta were ONS staff and ONS youth Ambassador Eric Welch and Sr.

Fellow Kianti Gix. ONS youth Ambassadors are past Sr. Fellows who have “graduated” from the Fellowship with very impressive participation rates and program engagement, and have obtained long-term employment and/or are enrolled in college. ONS student Ambassadors have also made a public declaration of commitment to remain free of involvement in gun violence, and provide support to ONS staff in the further development of the Operation Peacemaker Fellowship and its goals.

The National Forum for Black Public Administrators is America’s premier association for black public leadership. NFBPA’s mission is to strengthen the capacity of state and local government manager’s through intensive training, professional development programs, and the resources of a powerful network of members and supporters.

Youth Ambassador to Serve as Summer Policy Fellow for the Campaign for Youth Justice in Washington, DC

Office of Neighborhood Safety (ONS) Youth Ambassador Eric Welch was chosen to serve as Summer Policy Fellow for the Campaign for Youth Justice (CFYJ) in Washington, DC.

The CFYJ Policy Fellow is a full time intern serving in Washington, DC between June 10th and August 9th. The responsibilities of the fellow will include assisting senior staff with preparing and organizing Capitol Hill visits, providing Congressional members’ education, coordinating conference calls and webinars on Federal Juvenile Justice issues, assisting with drafting and editing action alerts and outreach materials for grasstop and grassroots networks, assisting with implementation of the Campaign’s Alliance of Youth Advocates outreach plan; developing a plan for CFYJ’s new national youth initiative in Washington, organizing events with youth that have been affected by the justice system; supporting outreach plans and dissemination strategies for new report releases including ‘Sharing Your Story’ for the Alliance for Youth Justice members, and periodic writing for the CFYJ blog.

Eric Welch graduated from the ONS Operation Peacemaker Fellowship after more than two years of participating, becoming one of four founding members of the ONS Youth Ambassadorship in September 2012. As described above, ONS Youth Ambassadors are past Sr. Fellows who have “graduated” from the Fellowship with very impressive program participation rates and engagement, and have obtained long-term employment and/or are enrolled in college. ONS Youth Ambassadors have also made a public declaration of commitment to remain free from involvement in gun violence, and provide support to ONS staff in the further development of the Operation Peacemaker Fellowship and its goals.

Upon hearing of the news of his selection, Eric said “I am so excited, I feel tremendously blessed by and grateful for this opportunity. The ONS family has prepared me in such a way that I cannot fail!” ONS Director DeVone Boggan commented that “we are extremely proud of Eric, his hard work, his commitment to making healthier decisions, and his leadership in helping to make the City of Richmond a healthier and safer place to live, learn, work and play. He is a great example for his peers and to anyone who may doubt that people can change and in the virtue of hard work.”

The **Campaign for Youth Justice (CFYJ)** is dedicated to ending the practice of trying, sentencing, and incarcerating youth under 18 in the adult criminal justice system. The Campaign works in partnership with state-based campaigns in a number of states. CFYJ serves as a clearinghouse of information on youth prosecuted as adults and makes tools and resources available to those interested in learning and taking action on an issue that personally affects them.

CFYJ strongly believes that any movement must involve those who are most impacted by the laws and policies. Thus, CFYJ seeks to empower those affected by encouraging them to use their voices and experiences to effect meaningful change.

Summer Activities

- In June 2013, a group of Junior Fellows traveled to San Diego to participate in site-visits and peace-building activities sponsored by funders of the ONS Fellowship. A group of both Sr. and Jr. Fellows will be in Southern California (Anaheim and San Diego) in July for these purposes.
- A group of Senior Fellows traveled to Washington DC and New York City in June 2013. While in Washington, Fellows met with Congressional Representatives George Miller and Barbara Lee. Fellows also met with the New Organizing Institute (NOI). NOI is a community of organizers, and are committed to solving the biggest challenges that stand in the way of change.

NOI's basic belief is simple: if people have the skills to engage others, the tools to build powerful campaigns, and a community of practice to help them learn and grow, they can win real change, make measurable improvements in people's lives, and restore faith in our government and our democracy. NOI trains organizers to build and manage effective movements by integrating tried-and-true community organizing, cutting-edge digital strategy, and data-driven decision making. NOI provides free access to revolutionary tools, technologies, and research to help campaigns reach the next level. NOI also builds a community of practice that connects organizers across issues, creating a more integrated, more diverse, and more dynamic movement for change. NOI is working to produce the best leaders and strongest movements of our generation. They help campaigns win today, while working to build capacity and infrastructure that will allow us to keep winning into the next generation (see attached article: "You Won't Believe How These Men Ending Gun Violence in Their Deadly Hometown.")

While in New York, Sr. Fellows visited and met with United Nations staff.

- 17 Junior Fellows have been provided Summer Youth Employment Opportunities and are now working in various locations throughout the City of Richmond. These employment slots were made possible by a grant to the Office of Neighborhood Safety from the State of California (CalGRIP).

ONS STAFF TRAINING & CAPACITY BUILDING

The Office of Neighborhood Safety staff members are provided ongoing training opportunities that allow them to increase their knowledge base and skill levels associated with the work they facilitate in order to maximize their output and increase their effectiveness.

In the second quarter of this year, ONS staff participated in the following trainings:

National Forum for Black Public Administrators Forum 2013

Monthly Trauma-Informed Care & Coaching

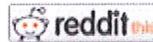
You Won't Believe How These Men Are Ending Gun Violence in Their Deadly Hometown

Jared Milrad in Politics 1 day ago

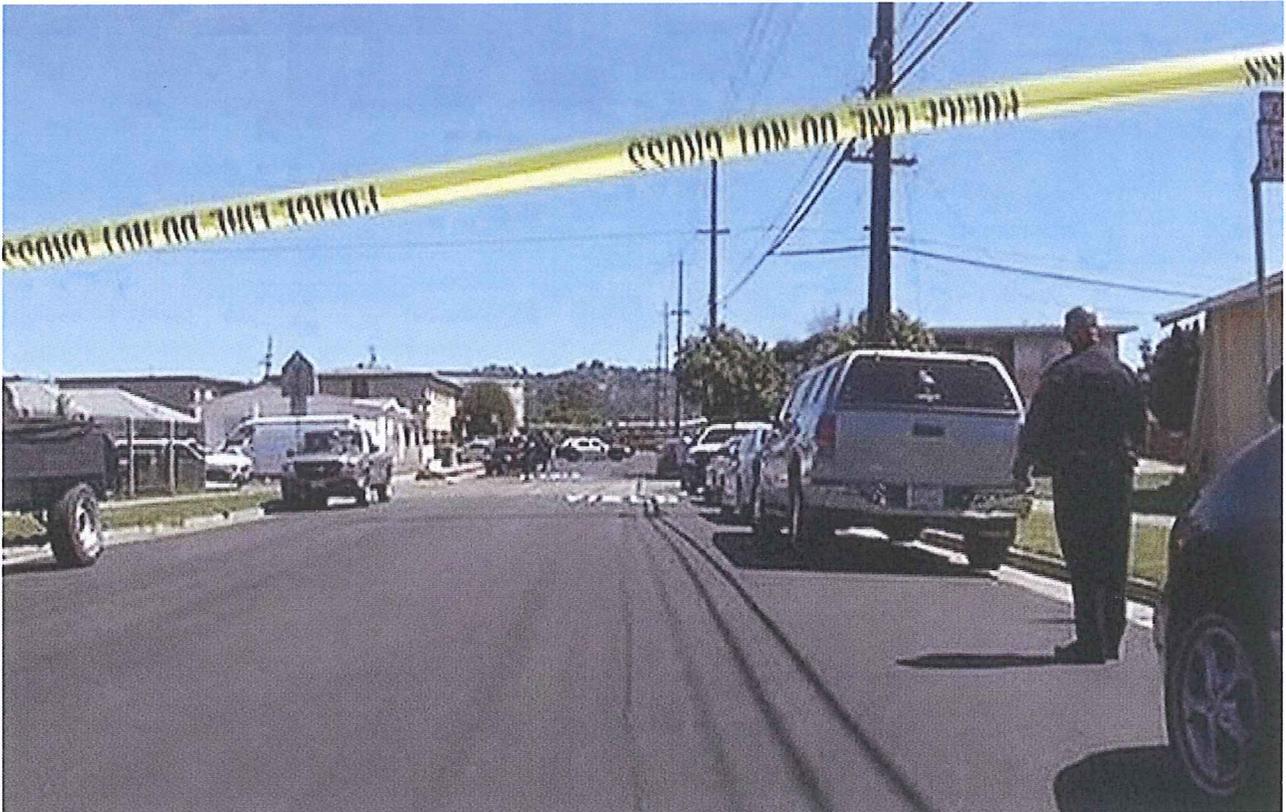
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You Won't Believe How These Men Are Ending Gun Violence in Their Deadly Hometown

It's been called [one of the most dangerous cities](#) in America and the murder capital of California. Across the bay from San Francisco, Richmond, Calif., has been engaged in what a forthcoming documentary calls "a confused war" — an ongoing, seemingly endless battle between rival communities in the north, south, and central areas of the city. With a crime rate of 55 per 1,000 residents — one of the highest of any community nationwide — the chance of becoming a victim of violent crime in Richmond is 1 in 101. In this city of [just over 100,000 residents](#), [an average of 35](#)

people were murdered each year between 1986 to 2005. Forty-seven people were killed there in 2007 — 10 times the national average.

With statistics as grim as these, many communities might throw up their hands in despair. But [Devone Boggan](#), founding director of the city's [Office of Neighborhood Safety](#) (ONS), had a different idea. A victim of gun violence himself, Boggan believed the problem was not so much a problem of poor policing, but a lack of engagement in the communities directly touched by violence.

So, in October 2007, the ONS team began visiting every murder scene in Richmond and meeting with victims and their families. Modeled on "[Operation Ceasefire](#)" violence intervention programs in Boston and Chicago, ONS offered grief counselors, assistance with funeral costs, and a consistent presence in the community with a consistent message: Don't retaliate and perpetuate the cycle of violence. By 2008, ONS began to see the fruits of its labor. Homicides remained unacceptably high but were reduced significantly, inroads were made in communities long plagued by violence, and confidence that changes were afoot began to build. But a year later, when 47 people were again killed by firearms in the city, Boggan and his team knew they'd have to go back to the drawing board.



Most neighborhood safety programs target individuals downstream from acts of violence, including victims and their families. But when ONS reviewed the homicides in Richmond, one thing became clear: About 15 young men were responsible for nearly all of them, but police couldn't prove it. So rather than working only with youth who were at-risk to become violent, ONS chose a more innovative strategy — to confront the young men who were perpetrating the violence and give them a chance for a better life.

This new approach led to the creation of the [Operation Peacemaker Fellowship](#) ("the Fellowship") in 2010. Through intense mentoring, life coaching, and a positive accountability system supported by a private-public partnership with the City of Richmond, the Fellowship connects the young men who instigate gun violence with real alternatives, including opportunities to attend college and participate in job training programs, as well as a chance to learn from older men who themselves were once involved in a life of violence and ultimately chose a different path.

Indeed, since its launch in 2010, the Fellowship has produced extraordinary results. Homicides in Richmond have declined by 35%. Of the 43 Fellows ONS has served, 42 are still alive, 39 have no related gun hospitalizations, 36 have no new gun charges, and 33 have no new gun violence-related arrests. As one of the Fellowship's outreach workers, Sam Vaughn, explained to me: "The basic concept [of the Fellowship] is to love [the Fellows] and treat them as you would want to be treated in their situation using their logic. You do that for them and they will appreciate you and allow you to help guide their lives."

I wanted to learn more about how the program works, how it's changed lives, and whether its participants could offer any insight on the national policy debate on gun violence, so I interviewed three Fellows currently enrolled in the program: James Barker, (23), Lavonta Crummie (23), and Rasheed Shepherd (22). James, Lavonta, and Rasheed each spoke candidly with me about the dangers of growing up in Richmond; what it's like being surrounded by violence as a child; and how the ONS Fellowship showed them a world of opportunity they could have never imagined — or, in James' words, how to become "a citizen instead of a statistic."

James Barker, 23



Jared Milrad (JM): Can you tell us a bit about growing up in Richmond?

James Barker: (JB) Growing up in Richmond there was a lot of violence and that's the only outcome you had. That's all you had to look up to ... I was always in and out of jail for little things. Then [ONS staffers] told me: "It's yourself putting you in there. If you change yourself, [things will change for you]." Now I'm a working man, I've got a son who lives with me. Life's just great.

JM: Were you able to stay in school?

JB: No, I dropped out in the ninth grade. Going to school was like going to see an enemy or something [because of the rival gangs in other parts of the city]. I got out of school because I didn't want to die.

JM: When was the first time you were shot?

JB: I was 18 years old. A van pulled up on me and shot me. They just pulled up spraying [bullets]. They shot like 80 times at everyone out there.

It was an ongoing war in the city. A really confused war. One block away could be the enemy zone and we couldn't go there.

JM: When was the first time you met anyone from ONS?

JB: I was fresh out of jail. A few of my friends were in the program and they were getting a stipend. I needed the money. I was 20 or 21. They won't pay me, though, until they saw what I could do — like go to college, get a GED, prove [that I was capable of changing my life]. They didn't see me for a year, but then they saw me at my job. And they were proud, like a father figure. [They'd] ask, "How you been?" I distanced myself from my friends. I changed everything about the way I lived. I started being a citizen instead of a statistic.

JM: How has the program changed what's possible for you?

JB: [Before I got involved in the program] I thought I could be dead or in jail. But now, in five years I want to be getting out of college. I want to study a lot of things. Not sure yet [what I want to study], but I want to go to college.

JM: Do you think this program could be replicated to reduce gun violence in other cities?

JB: Yes, it can be a solution because gang members in other cities would see [that we've been through the same thing]. When they see one person going to college, [it can have a ripple effect] on the rest of the gang and the community.

Lavonta Crummie, 23



JM: What was it like growing up in Richmond?

Lavonta Crummie (LC): Growing in Richmond was different — it was a confused war. It was always segregated from North, South, and Central [Richmond] — meaning the people you were around were all from the same neighborhood. It's impossible for a North Richmond guy to ever be in the same room with a South Richmond guy. We don't even have to have a personal problem, it's just [an ongoing] feud. It was a war that was created before I was even born. I have family members — cousins, uncles — that have been hurt or affected by violence. So the way we grieved and the way we acted out felt civilized.

JM: When was the first time you were exposed to violence? What happened?

LC: I was 9 years old. I rode a bike up the street and saw a drive-by shooting [when] I was going to meet up with another friend. A car pulled up on me. They saw I was a kid and kept going, and then it pulled up on another gentlemen sitting in a car — it was open, rapid gunfire. Even as my first time seeing it, it's sad to say I wasn't shocked or jumpy about it, because it's been going on so long. Even if you haven't seen it, you've heard stories and details [about gun violence].

JM: How has violence personally affected you?

LC: I've been stabbed in my face. I was a victim of a robbery when I was 20-years-old. I had 21 stitches in my face, and this happened in my own neighborhood. The place where I grew up and was supposed to feel safest.

JM: Were you able to stay in school?

LC: Yes.

JM: Have you had friends that have been personally affected by gun violence?

LC: Yeah. I have a best friend who was gunned down in Richmond. He died [when he was] 21 years old.

JM: How did you hear about ONS?

LC: I knew Sam [Vaughn, ONS outreach worker] from growing up, but I heard about the program through word of mouth. They hit the streets really. The first time I heard about the program [was when I saw ONS workers driving] an old police vehicle. I saw 6 or 7 individuals that I knew at the vehicle, and it shocked me — like, “What is going on?” [My friends] were at the car in the window talking to [the ONS workers], so I had to see what it was about.

It’s really a program to help yourself. We are our own men as well as intelligent. [By participating in the Fellowship,] we might be seen [by some in our community] as sell outs or traitors as well as leaders. But ONS wanted to hit where the violence starts, so they didn’t just go after the Average Joe. I think that was a good idea.

JM: How has the program changed your life?

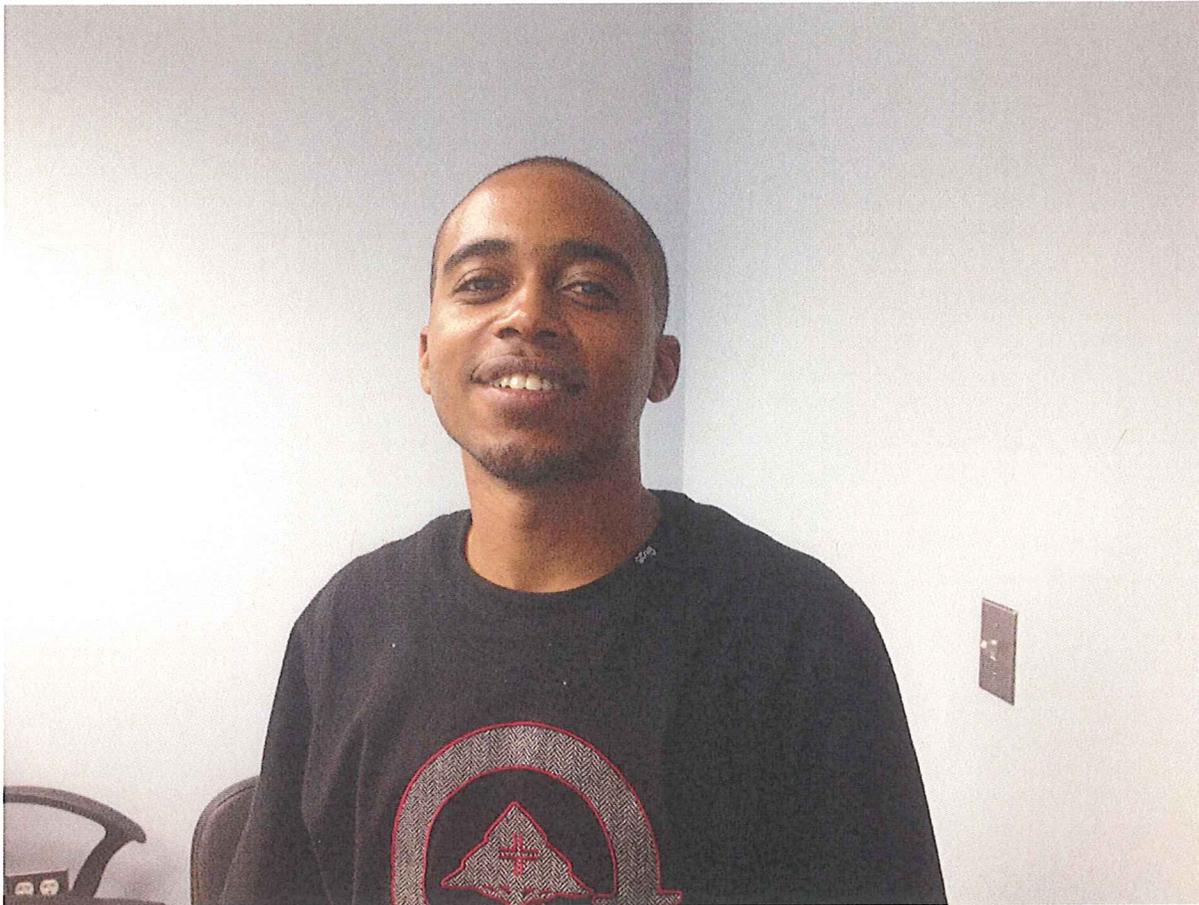
LC: It’s done a lot. It brought my confidence up to know that there is more out there than Richmond. Gang violence kicks up too much dust in Richmond given that it’s such a small city. It’s uncivilized to see [so many murders happening in Richmond].

The program has changed the inner person I am and has groomed me to be a better individual. They give you the opportunity to do what you want to do. They offer jobs as well as internships. They just show that there’s more out there.

JM: Do you want to go to college?

LC: Yes. I’m taking classes now at a community college — I’m going for business management. I might even start a program like this one — something to do with youth empowerment for young black individuals. I could say that there’s better things out there. I could make a difference.

Rasheed Shepherd, 22



JM: Could you tell us a bit about growing up in Richmond?

Rasheed Shepherd (RS): Growing up in Richmond was fun as a kid, because it was more of a community thing. Everyone looked out for each other. There was love and respect. [As a kid] for the most part it was smooth sailing.

JM: Who raised you?

RS: I had both of my parents until I was about 7 or 8-years-old, but from there it was mostly my mother. My mom had me when she was 18 [years old].

JM: When did you first encounter violence?

RS: There have been so many [acts of violence], I can't even remember the first time I saw one. In elementary school, around 4th or 5th grade, we had a birthday party in my front yard for one of my cousins, and somebody had a problem with the area I was living in, so they came and did a drive-by shooting in front of the kids. They were shooting at my uncle. I thought, "I gotta fight back for my uncle. I can't let nobody hurt anybody in my community."

I grew up in a family full of violence. My uncles were the top drug dealers of Richmond, so I grew up around that type of lifestyle as far as seeing flashy cars and clothes. We were able to go places that other kids couldn't go because my uncle had money. I liked that [lifestyle], so that's why I went into the street.

JM: When did you start hanging out with a crowd that was involved in violence and drugs?

RS: Middle school, around 7th grade. I was able to walk past and really mingle in the streets. That was my chance to take advantage of it. There was money to be made. There was a market. Things started to get crazy for Richmond. Now you're involved because you're guilty by association.

My mom's brothers and sisters lived off the street life. When I got out in 7th grade, my mom had to go to work, so it let me out to hang out with my cousins and stuff. Their friends had flashy cars and stuff. I was like, "I want that," [so I started selling drugs].

JM: Did you carry a gun at all times?

RS: It was mandatory [because of the violence in my neighborhood].

JM: What kind of gun did you carry?

RS: Whatever I could get my hands on.

JM: When did you start carrying a gun?

RS: Around middle school.

JM: Where you ever scared to use it?

RS: No.

JM: Have any of your family or friends been shot or killed?

RS: I've lost a lot of family and friends. More than two hands could count.

JM: Were you able to stay in school?

RS: No. My mom ended up moving out of Richmond when I was 13 or 14, but my life was in Richmond. That's all I knew, so I went back to my dad and my grandma. That's what I was more comfortable around. I used to act like I was going to school and would go straight back to the neighborhood.

But when this program kicked off, it came in mind, "You've got a safe haven. You need to take advantage of it."

JM: How did you first hear about the program?

RS: I was 19 [years old]. [The ONS workers] basically came and got us off the block. I was on the block hustlin', and a black Impala pulled up. We wondered if it was the police or someone trying to get us. They pulled up and said they wanted to talk to us about a program [that would] help us help ourselves.

At the first meeting we had at the City Hall, I asked if [the ONS workers] were police. I'd never dealt with people in suits. The only time [in Richmond you deal with people in suits] is with church people, the Feds, or the coroner coming to tell you somebody died. When I first put on a suit, my mom cried. She said she didn't expect to see me in a suit until I was in a casket.

JM: How has the program changed your life?

RS: I've been able to go places I'd never thought I'd go — Dubai, South Africa. They told me, "If you dedicate yourself to this program, we'll put the money behind you to help you do what you want to do." I did my training to become a merchant seaman. I wanted to be a security guard too, so they paid for me to become a security guard and finish up my GED.

[This program] makes you want to change. It's like getting into an alley — you see it's more dark than light. It felt like at the end of this alley was death or jail. And for me it was more likely to be death.

JM: How can we end gun violence in our society?

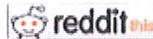
RS: You see, gun violence will always be around. It's kind of like video games. Once people have them, they're hard to take away. I think education about what a gun is for [is more important] than taking guns away from people. I never got the right education [about guns] growing up. I was told that guns are to protect and serve your family in your household. I was taught to go to war with it. So the right education and the right laws would be the best way to go.

Picture Credit: *KGO-TV, San Francisco*

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The Discussion



Jared Milrad

16 hours ago

Hi Doug,

Thanks for writing. I share your views about the importance of this type of program. The Richmond Fellowship is only in its third year, so time will tell its full effect, but thus far the program has been a resounding success. As I note in the article, the vast majority of the young men involved in the program have had no subsequent arrests and most have completely changed their lives, with plans to enroll in college and pursue new careers. While violence continues in Richmond, these young men now have a new lease on life.

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Douglas Goodman

20 hours ago

Jared,

Programs like this is how the cycle is broken. It takes people who have experienced it and escaped to go back and show others how it can be done. Any idea on the program's recidivism rate? James said "I've got a son who lives with me." Not only has he broken the cycle but will ensure his son never gets close to going back. That's two success stories in one.