

Open Letter - A Note to Richmond

"Few things help an individual more than to place responsibility upon him and to let him know that you trust him" – Booker T. Washington

Dear Richmond,

Urban gun violence can be cured! In Richmond and as a nation we MUST FIRST Believe and Expect this conclusion with certainty if this new reality is to manifest! At the City of Richmond's Office of Neighborhood Safety (ONS) not only do we believe it, we live it daily! The young men that we are partnering with to achieve this awesome vision give us a great sense of hope. With each healthy decision many are making every day to resist handling street conflict with a firearm, our belief is strengthened, even more fortified as they further commit to embracing life. Often against great opposition and odds our Peacemaker Fellows are working with us to fashion a beloved community free of gun violence.

Our efforts, chiefly motivated by love and through trusting relationships are beginning to create circumstances that make it possible for those who have traditionally driven gun violence in our city to change and channel their energies toward more positive, healthy and even healing paths. This represents but one small opportunity that we should all commit to ensure continued maintenance, growth and sustainability. The word HOPE is defined as *"a state which promotes the desire of positive outcomes related to events and circumstances in one's life or in the world at large."* Despair is often regarded as the opposite of hope. For the Fellows and many others served by the ONS, HOPE has become an act of looking forward to something healthy with desire and reasonable confidence that it will occur. Our work has been aimed at increasing HOPE through building trust, security, clarity, and maturity in those that we partner with and are honored to serve. Coupled with raising and nurturing high expectations for a positive future we are afforded a humbling opportunity to instill and push large doses of HOPE where despair once hopelessly abounded. This new and fertile HOPE is indeed birthing bold expectation!

The Office of Neighborhood Safety (ONS) Street Outreach and Violence Interruption strategy is preventing shootings and killings in Richmond California. In conjunction with its Operation Peacemaker Fellowship ("the Fellowship"), these efforts provide real alternatives to gun violence. In partnership with those suspected to be most responsible for firearm assaults, we are challenging and changing unhealthy norms, creating conditions that reduce behaviors that produce firearm injury and death, and providing a canvass that engenders Hope for a healthy and dynamic future where the genius (versus the destruction and/or annihilation) of our young people is delivered to both Richmond and the global family. Where we are going and what we are accomplishing today demonstrates the power of an extraordinary belief in and partnership

with young people. Yesterday's outcomes are a product of our city's robust confidence in and implementation of effective public health approaches to preventing gun violence.

Even Bigger Outcomes await Richmond if we remain committed and continue to intentionally and deliberately acknowledge, see, develop, validate and invite the genius out of ALL of our young people, including those caught in the cycle of violence and poverty and exposed to nothing but tools of lethal death. In the words of Malidoma Patrice Somè ***"youth must be assisted in giving birth to the genius that he is born with..."*** as we have seen, particularly by way of the experiences of those individuals who are most likely to commit a shooting or be a victim of one, ***"failure to do so kills that genius along with the person carrying it...the community responsible for the death of an inner genius is like an assassin. The community that is willing and able to develop and receive the person's genius however gives birth to the adult who is able to contribute his healing gifts to that community."*** With our youth and young adult partners we will continue to recognize and awaken, and facilitate the delivery of genius to the Richmond community - giving this youthful genius fertile ground to burst forth and blossom.

To every Richmond Youth and Young Adults – Yes YOU...

As You continue to inspire us to do better on your behalf, never underestimate your POWER to change this city and the world around you! You were born to make a difference in your generation – this generation. A difference that leaves footprints beyond you, that tell us all that you were here and that you contributed in powerful and positive ways – that you mattered. Never doubt that this city will never again be the same because you decided to allow the real you to show up!

Peace,

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DeVone Boggan serves as Neighborhood Safety Director for the City of Richmond and Director of the Office of Neighborhood Safety. The Office of Neighborhood Safety (ONS) is a non-law enforcement [city government] agency with the sole mission to assist in preventing and interrupting firearm assault and associated deaths.

<http://www.ci.richmond.ca.us/index.aspx?nid=271>

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