

## **Project Safe Neighborhoods: Strengthening Local Partnerships to Reduce Gun Violence**

In 2001, the Department of Justice through their U.S. Attorney's Office, funded the Project Safe Neighborhoods (PSN) initiative aimed at using research-based models to reduce gun crime and violence at the local level through enforcement, deterrence, and prevention. Across the 50 states (and territories), PSN has been implemented in a variety of ways, with the prosecution of illegal gun possession and use being a core component of the multi-agency taskforces. In April 2009, the National Institute of Justice (NIJ) released its report on the impact PSN has had at the local level, providing an overview of the effectiveness of this effort. Overall, NIJ found that there was a greater reduction in violent crime in those cities implementing PSN, compared to those that had not, as well as significant differences in gun crime in the nine cities that were subject to more in-depth analysis<sup>1</sup>. The NIJ report also outlined lessons learned and recommended areas of improvements.

These national findings have local implications as the Southern District of California (San Diego and Imperial Counties) enters its seventh year of implementing PSN and its third year collaborating with the Criminal Justice Research Division of SANDAG as the research partner. Reviewed within the context of the NIJ report, the Southern District PSN Taskforce has incorporated many of those components identified in the report to be associated with the more effective PSN sites: strong leadership from the U.S. Attorney, a collaborative approach, and targeting resources in the highest risk areas (rather than just dispersing throughout the entire region). In addition, the Southern District has taken a multi-pronged approach in implementing PSN including enforcement through police operations and investigations, prosecution, and prevention (e.g., mentoring, media campaign) with an emphasis on targeting at-risk youth and neighborhoods. There has also been a concerted effort to leverage PSN dollars with existing resources in the community that are also intent on reducing violence. Statistics compiled for San Diego County through 2008 revealed that:

- 1,834 gun crimes were reported over the 12-month period, averaging five a day;
- Most gun crimes were either aggravated assaults (43%) or robberies (43%);
- 44 percent of homicides involved a firearm;
- 2,389 arrests involved a gun charge over the 12-month period;
- Almost three-quarters of individuals arrested with at least one gun charge were adults, while 28 percent were juveniles;
- A total of 1,745 guns were confiscated across the region by state and local law enforcement agencies;
- 635 gun cases were filed by the San Diego County District Attorney's Office against adult defendants, 532 of which resulted in convictions (pled or found guilty); and
- 64 gun cases were prosecuted by the U.S. Attorney's Office, an increase of 12 percent in the number of cases and a 17 percent increase in the number of defendants from 2007.

These data, along with additional analysis of time and date of gun crime, have assisted the PSN Taskforce in refining its focus on gun crime and violence reduction strategies. These efforts will continue through 2010. To learn more about PSN, visit the national Web site at [www.psn.gov](http://www.psn.gov).

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<sup>1</sup>McGarrell, E., Hipple, N., Corsaro, V., Bynum, T., Perez, H., Zimmerman, C., & Garmo M. (2009). *Project Safe Neighborhoods-A National Program to Reduce Gun Crime: Final Project Report*. Washington D.C. U.S. Department of Justice, National Institute of Justice.