Enlisting the Resources of Probation and Parole

Building on the momentum gained from its early participation in the Community Prosecution and Weed and Seed Programs, Marion County, Indiana, has seamlessly incorporated partnerships developed under these initiatives into Project Safe Neighborhoods (PSN) to build a multi-agency approach to reduce gun crime in Indianapolis and the surrounding communities. By recognizing and capitalizing on the unique resources and talents of its many law enforcement-related agencies, including probation and parole, Marion County has successfully expanded the traditional “lever-pulling” approach of notifying high-risk individuals of the severe consequences of continued involvement with firearms while at the same time providing these individuals with access to legitimate community services, including job opportunities.

Marion County has utilized an aggressive, proactive path of multi-agency warrant enforcement sweeps and community-focused meetings to reach chronic offenders and other high-risk potential firearms offenders. In essence, the community has formed an agency coalition to inform offenders that gun crime within Marion County must stop or the community will respond with swift and comprehensive measures. These measures include fast-track prosecution, collaboration between community groups and law enforcement to locate witnesses, and removal to a remote federal prison. This approach has yielded several benefits: a street-level understanding of the immediate consequences of gun crime, increased insight by law enforcement agencies regarding patterns or trends in criminal activity, and community activism targeting gun crime.

Warrant Enforcement

The process of warrant enforcement, in and of itself, is not a new means to reach gun crime offenders or potential offenders. Marion County’s application of this tool, however, is combined with a focused interpretation of incident-related data to surgically direct where and how to strike. Law enforcement’s calls for service and incident reports are strategically mapped to determine local “hot spots.” In addition to the traditional compilation of offender criminal histories, detailed records of homicide suspects, associates and victims are maintained by the Indianapolis Violence Reduction Partnership (IVRP) and are available to law enforcement on a secure web site. Every week a new “hot spot” list is generated based on these data, including a compilation of suspects identified as criminal associates, to assist law enforcement in tracking criminal activities and individual or gang movement trends.

Marion County has also adopted an innovative approach to expand the boundaries of traditionally involved parties to bring a “no tolerance” message regarding gun crime to offenders, potential offenders, and the general public. Representatives of the media are frequently ride along on warrant sweeps and report their findings to their respective audiences. It is not uncommon to see news coverage of law enforcement officers serving warrants on probation violators almost in real time. Crime Stoppers representatives are enlisted to hand out lists with the names or photos of individuals of concern to law enforcement, thereby directly engaging community members in the process of locating offenders or their associates. This effort helps to assure the public that law enforcement is swiftly intervening in the problems within their communities at the grassroots level.

The Marion County Prosecutor’s Office is routinely involved with these organized warrant sweeps. Typically, both a deputy prosecuting attorney and a paralegal from the Street Level Advocacy Division are present to respond immediately to any legal issues which may arise during the sweep. Community-based prosecutors are assigned to every geographic division within the county, allowing community members to recognize and forge strong connections with these prosecutors beyond the courtroom. Their presence sends a clear message to the community that the prosecuting attorney’s office is committed to reducing gun crime in their neighborhoods.

Notification Meetings

In addition to focused warrant sweeps, law enforcement works with the Superior Court of Marion County Probation Department to target probationers or parolees at risk of involvement with gun crime. From this partnership, two distinct types of “lever-pulling” style meetings have developed. One is geographically based in response to specific identified violence, and the other is “associate based,” where violence is tied to an identified group or gang rather than a geographic area. These meetings are routinely held every two weeks. Those invited to an “associate based” meeting are selected by their status as an identified associate of either a victim or suspect involved in a violent crime.
Innovative Practice to Watch: Reverse Cross-Designated Prosecutor

The Eastern District of Virginia has taken an innovative step by designating an Assistant U.S. Attorney to appear in state court on selected firearms cases. The intent of this reverse cross-designation is two-fold: it indicates to the community the solidarity of the U.S. Attorney’s and Commonwealth’s Attorney’s commitment to PSN’s goals of reducing gun crime and, within the courtroom, it sends a powerful message to defendants and defense attorneys about the consistency of strong gun crime prosecution in both federal and state court.

Hitting the Mark Course in High Demand

In response to the overwhelming demand for APRI’s training Hitting the Mark: Implementing and Maintaining Community Gun Violence Prosecution Initiatives, APRI will conduct an additional session in Portland, Oregon, April 27-29, 2004, for prosecutors from the western United States. The course teaches effective strategies to prosecute gun crime cases and assists attendees in utilizing PSN “best practices” to enhance their gun violence prosecution programs. It includes training on prosecuting gun crime cases involving gangs and a session on ethical considerations for prosecutors working closely with the community to reduce gun crime. The downloadable application form is available on APRI’s Web site, www.ndaa-apri.org, along with additional course details. There is no limit to the number of individuals from one jurisdiction who may apply. Please send applications by March 12, 2004.

PSN Task Force Update

Michigan State University (MSU), in collaboration with APRI and the Department of Justice, recently conducted the first of its two-part series of PSN Specialized Workshops for PSN Coordinators and research partners to assist gun crime task forces from each of the federal districts. The course, an extension of MSU’s previous PSN Strategic Problem Solving training, is designed to enable PSN task force representatives to discuss pressing issues in project implementation and coordination, as well as specific firearm crime problems within their individual districts. Participants learn about promising research-based practices from other PSN sites, including working with the community to prevent firearms violence. The second workshop in this series was held February 26 – 27 in San Diego, CA. A third workshop dealing with domestic violence in rural communities will be held April 28 – 29 in San Antonio, TX.