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Katherine Benoit

Solutions for Juvenile Gun Violence in Baltimore City

Katherine M. Benoit

Loyola University Maryland

Abstract

This paper discusses neighborhoods in Baltimore City affected by an increase in juvenile gun violence following the riots of 2015. The riots resulted from the alleged death of Freddie Gray after a 'rough ride' from Baltimore police officers. This proposal gives past solutions to this problem, including what the organizations like the CDC and JHCPYV have done to advocate change. Two solutions are presented in this paper: Positive Opportunities programs for the youth of Baltimore, and community policing in certain neighborhoods.

Keywords: gun violence, Positive Opportunities, community policing

Solutions for Juvenile Gun Violence in Baltimore City

Certain neighborhoods in Baltimore City identified an increase in juvenile delinquency, specifically in regards to gun violence, following the Freddie Gray riots in 2015. After a ‘rough ride’ ended the life of African American man Freddie Gray, disaster struck Baltimore City with chaos; the city police unsuccessful with riot control. The social explosion rocked entire communities and left residents of Baltimore City weary of the effectiveness and demeanor of local police officers. The U.S. Department of Justice (2000) noted, “Today’s teen is more likely to die of a gunshot wound than of disease or other natural causes...” (Par 3). With lenient regulations in neighboring states to purchase a firearm, increasing amounts of unregistered weapons consume the streets of Baltimore. This is creating a hostile and unprecedented environment for all. The Johns Hopkins University Center for the Prevention of Youth Violence (JHCPYV) and the Center for Disease Control (CDC) are two organizations working closely with community leaders and citizens in Baltimore to reduce the number of youth involved in gun violence. Past solutions to this problem include Academic Centers for Excellence (ACE), and a program called Safe Streets, aimed at developing a negative atmosphere around guns. Positive Opportunities and community policing strategies are two possible solutions to decrease juvenile gun violence in Baltimore City, specifically in the Sandtown-Winchester area where Gray lived.

Following the riots in April 2015 when Freddie “Pepper” Gray allegedly died from a ‘rough ride’ by the Baltimore police, chaos erupted in the city. According to Baynard Woods (2016) in *The Guardian*, “The city recorded 344 homicides in 2015, marking the first time since 1999 that the count was over 300. The cumulative total began to rise dramatically after Gray’s

death in April 2015” (Par 15). This is especially relevant to the Sandtown-Winchester area where Gray lived. Unrest suffocated Baltimore’s streets for weeks after the incident, and when the six police officers involved were indicted a year later, disaster broke out again. One of Baltimore City’s landmarks, Camden Yards, became swarmed with protestors and blockades, and threats from Baltimore teenagers of “purges,” or days of complete lawlessness. When cars and a local CVS store went up in flames, city officials diligently declared a state of emergency. The population most affected were youth who either knew Gray, or felt a personal vendetta to defend this unrepairable incident with angst.

To be considered an act of juvenile delinquency, the person must not yet be the age of 18, but find themselves in violation of a law of the United States that would be a crime if committed by an adult. Based off the definition for juvenile delinquency, gun violence in relation to youth in Baltimore is more frequent than ever before. The effect seen on communities is disturbing, Woods (2016) recounts one man’s thoughts that, “We feel like we’re prisoners in our own neighborhood where we grown up” (Par 7). Distrust and lost communication among police officers and their communities rampaged the city. Community members and officers of public safety now live in the largest social disaster Baltimore City has seen for decades. Baltimore residents in the Sandtown-Winchester area have zero trust in the people who are supposed to make them feel safe. The youth in Baltimore see these violent acts, and continue to model the behavior simply because no one is stopping them. Matters escalate with the lackadaisical gun laws right across the border in the state of Virginia, where according to the NRA-ILA (2016) “No state permit is required to otherwise purchase or possess a rifle, shotgun or handgun” (Par 5). If the residents of Baltimore, specifically youth, have means of getting to Virginia, they are able to

purchase a gun. Even without transportation there, gun runners keep the trend of gun violence operating in full swing by bringing the weapons to Baltimore for them.

Do we recognize this problem will persist if nothing is done? Can we cooperate in a time of dire conflict to improve the lives of kids who have so much more potential than they realize? The CDC jump-started pivotal advances in the prevention of youth violence here in Baltimore City. Funding Johns Hopkins University Center for the Prevention of Youth Violence (JHCPYV), the CDC implemented the Safe Streets program in the Lower Park Heights community.

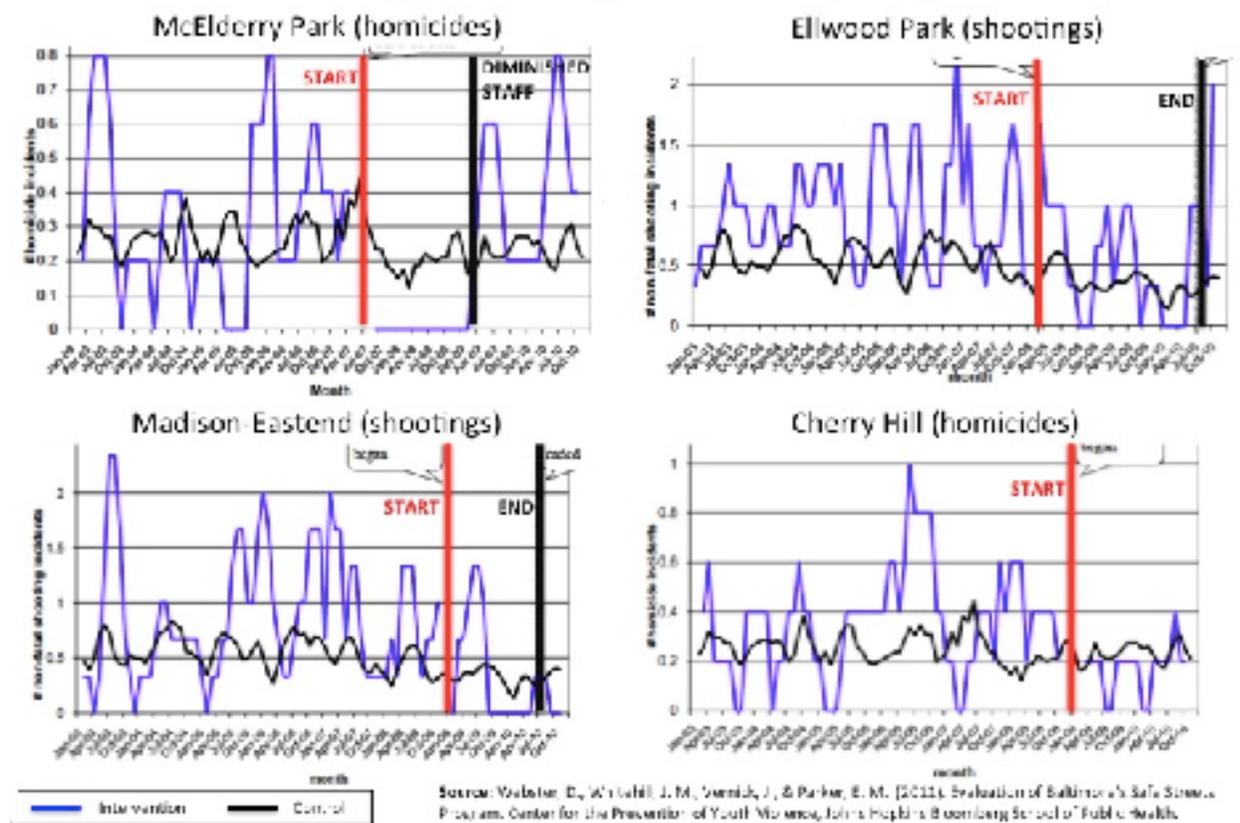


Figure 1: Baltimore Safe Streets Evaluation Results. This figure illustrates the effectiveness of the Safe Streets Program in reducing shootings and killings.

The JHCPYV (2013) describes, “Safe Streets is a replication of Chicago’s Cure Violence program, formerly CeaseFire. It aims to develop non-violent conflict mediation skills and promote changes in cultural norms among youth in areas with high rates of gun violence” (Par 4). With guidance from Baltimore City Governor, Stephanie Rawlings-Blake, and the newly instated police commissioner, Kevin Davis, plans to work closely with these two organizations will advance in the near future.

Based off evidence from the Chicago program, CeaseFire impacted the city by drastically reducing homicide incidents. An evaluation revealed a 41% to 73% reduction in shooting hot spots in Chicago, with an overall 100% reduction in retaliation homicides in 5 of the 8 communities focused on. From this data it is realistic to say Baltimore City would benefit tremendously from a similar program. Strong evidence of a shift in cultural norms relating to gun use and violence began to shape the neighborhoods the JHCPYV targeted. The data shows a drastic decrease in shootings and killings as a result of this program.

Beginning in 1995, the timeline of the CeaseFire program involves a five year strategy development period, along with the Cure Violence (2016) detailing of “an extensive multi-year multi-method evaluation supported by the U.S. Department of Justice” (Par 2). This program receives funding from numerous organizations, and has hospital affiliations in four areas of Illinois. The state itself is the main source of funds for this violence-reduction program, however, many programs outside of the direct city have community partners that provide all other necessary resources. An updated evaluation of this program written by Ransford (2016) relays, “This model is based on proven health techniques and is designed to have a *community level effect*, meaning that it does not just change individuals but also changes the entire community

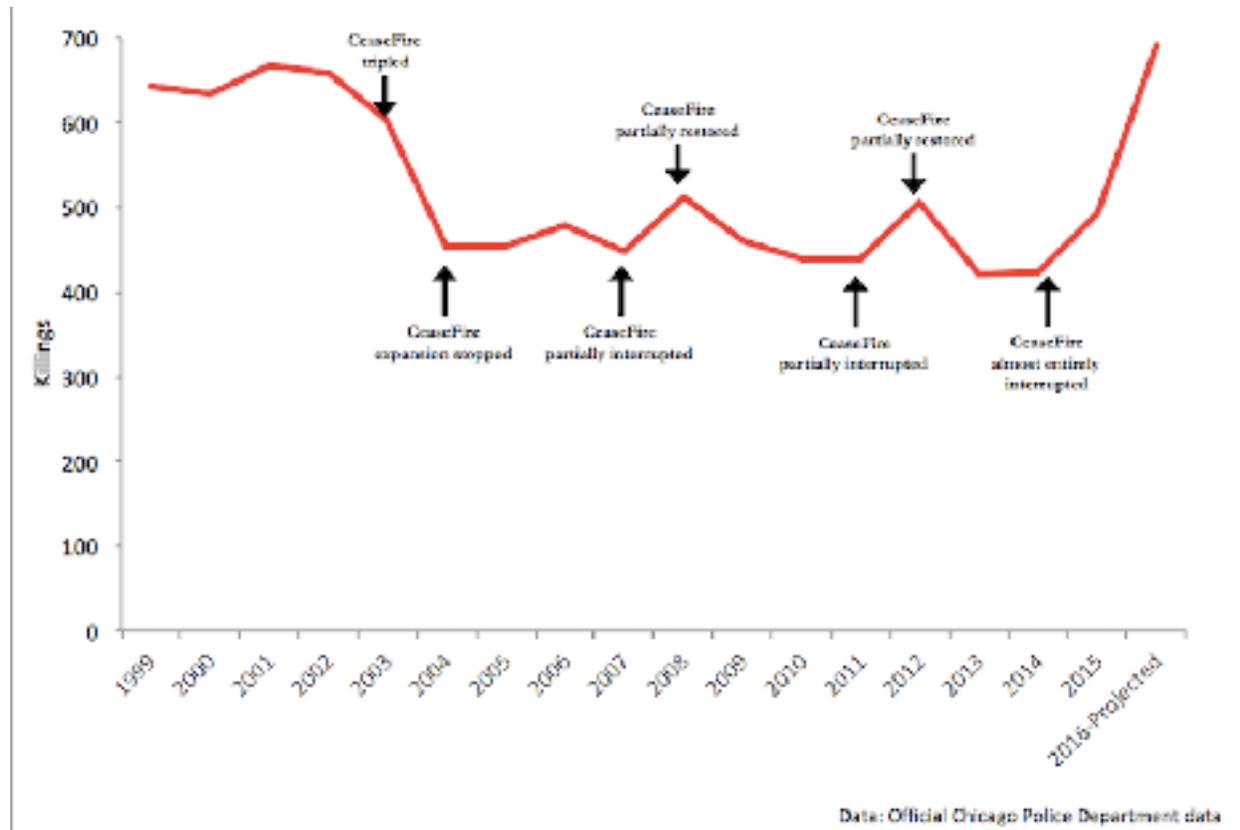


Figure 2: Ceasefire Funding and Killings in Chicago. This figure demonstrates the relationship between funding Ceasefire and numbers of homicides.

outcome as measured by shootings and killings” (Par 2). As long as this program receives funding, the number of homicides in Chicago drastically decreases, and is projected to keep this reduction in subsequent years. When the program was not operating as a mediation for gun violence, Chicago saw drastic spikes in killings. So the statistics are clear; create options for change, or do not expect change at all.

Utilizing this research from Chicago and other neighborhoods in Baltimore, there are pressing reasons to believe a similar program would be successful for the Sandtown-Winchester neighborhood. One possible solution Baltimore City should consider is Positive Opportunities for children early in their education. Researchers have known for decades that the minds of children are like sponges, soaking up every bit of knowledge they can. An article on Raising Children (2013) recognizes, “In the first five years of life, your child’s brain develops more and faster than at any other time in his life. The early experiences your child has- the things he sees, hears, touches, smells and tastes- stimulate his brain, creating millions of connections” (Par 3). Targeting children entering preschool or kindergarten and teaching them gun violence is intolerable, is the most effective solution to reduce the number of incidents involving gun violence. The younger generation in the Sandtown-Winchester neighborhood have the greatest potential for change because of their unbiased prospectives.

To promote change among the older children, those in middle-school or high-school, there needs to be a program similar to the one implemented in the Lower Park Heights area. Positive Opportunities programs include centers children can go to get off the streets, staffed by volunteers who focus on teaching alternative methods of self-defense, and other vital life skills to enhance the quality of their lives. If we can ensure teenagers feel safe on the streets without the use of a gun, rates of gun violence will drastically decrease. The benefits of this program will outweigh the costs; most of the costs will go into the physical construction of centers and paying for the training of staff in alternative defense strategies. By the data in Chicago’s program, it seems as long as funds are allocated properly and consistently, the research proves it to be effective.

After focusing directly on the youth in Sandtown-Winchester, the next step will reconstruct the relationship between community members and police officers by utilizing a different policing technique. By instituting a community policing approach, the public will regain trust in those who are meant to ensure public safety. The U.S. Department of Justice (1994) defines community policing as, “The neighborhood patrol officer, backed by the police organization, helps community members mobilize support and resources to solve problems and enhance their quality of life. Community members voice their concerns, contribute advice, and take action to address these concerns” (Par 1). To institute this dramatic change in policing in Baltimore City, and specifically the Sandtown-Winchester neighborhood, will take immense effort from both the police force and community members. Both parties have to be willing to make the change, to dedicate their efforts for improving their neighborhood in the hopes of reducing juvenile gun violence and gaining a sense of comfort in their homes again.

Community policing will require trainings for the police officers assigned to the Sandtown-Winchester neighborhood, on top of their regularly scheduled trainings. Public sessions explaining how community members can promote effective community policing should be available at multiple dates and times to ensure a maximum number of people can attend. Police officers will be asked to work more shifts in this neighborhood, making the police force more available should a conflict arise. If the police officers are able to create a positive relationship with the teenagers in this neighborhood, the number of homicides should begin to decrease. This decrease will be the result of teenagers feeling comfortable coming to the police with issues, instead of feeling helpless and resorting to the use of a gun. By utilizing this relationship among the officers and community members, this form of policing will prove to

reduce deadly gun incidents among youth in Sandtown-Winchester, as well as Baltimore City as a whole. Research has shown that surrounding neighborhoods also benefit from this shift in policing, and adopt more trust for their own police officers because of the relationships they see in the towns next to them. While at first this will be extremely challenging, the benefits of implementing this strategy will show to greatly outweigh the costs.

Baltimore City has targeted certain neighborhoods because of their increase in juvenile gun violence following the riots in April 2015. The ‘rough ride’ experienced by African American man Freddie Gray that allegedly led to injuries that ended his life caused mass-chaos to break out on multiple streets of Baltimore. The neighborhood Gray was from, Sandtown-Winchester, saw a drastic increase in homicides after his death, the highest number of incidents since 1999. The effects on Baltimore City have been devastating, causing mistrust and unrest throughout the city. Many people no longer feel they can trust their local police officers. The CDC teamed up with the JHCPYV to implement programs in the Lower Park Heights area of Baltimore to effectively reduce their number of homicide incidents. Chicago also utilized a CeaseFire program proven to be highly beneficial to reduce gun violence in the state of Illinois. To combat this increase in gun violence among youth in Sandtown-Winchester, two solutions are available. The first is implementing Positive Opportunities for the youth to learn alternative methods of self-defense and other relevant life skills. The second solution is a community policing approach in this affected neighborhood to regain the relationship Baltimore City police once had with this population. Knowing that today’s teenager is more likely to die from a wound sustained by gun violence than a disease or natural cause is a sickening statistic. It is our duty as citizens of Baltimore City to prevent gun violence from taking any more innocent lives.

Annotated Bibliography

ACE Prevention Strategies. (2014, January 14). Retrieved November 20, 2016, from http://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/ace/prevention_strategies.html

This article details the Academic Centers for Excellence implemented by the CDC for reducing juvenile gun violence in certain cities in America. This source proved to be exemplary background information on past solutions and I benefited from its availability.

Bidgood, J. (2016, January 15). The Numbers Behind Baltimore's Record Year in Homicides. Retrieved November 18, 2016, from <http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2016/01/14/us/Baltimore-homicides-record.html>

This article from *The New York Times* offers insight into why Baltimore City saw a spike in homicides in 2015 after the death of Freddie Gray. Despite being a journalistic piece, this source offered many thoughtful comments and explanations that I used to strengthen my proposal.

C. (1994, August). Understanding Community Policing [PDF]. U.S. Department of Justice.

This document was put together at the beginning phase of community policing, laying out its methods, goals, and aspirations. This source provided me with a detailed definition of community policing, which I then used to demonstrate one of my solutions to reducing juvenile gun violence in Baltimore City.

Child development: The first five years. (2013, September 7). Retrieved November 30, 2016, from http://raisingchildren.net.au/articles/child_development.html

This article focuses on the age children are most susceptible to all the stimuli in their environment, and when they learn the most by observation in their lives. This source was useful and allowed my argument for Positive Opportunities to start at a younger age to grow stronger.

Combating Youth Violence in Baltimore, Maryland Through Community Partnerships and Evidence-Based Interventions. (2013, November 1). Retrieved November 18, 2016, from <https://www.healthypeople.gov/2020/healthy-people-in-action/story/combating-youth-violence-baltimore-maryland-through-community-partnerships-and-evidence-based>

This government database details the past methods used to fight juvenile gun violence in Baltimore City. It offered developed information surrounding the pros and cons of certain solutions, and allowed the solutions in my proposal to strengthen,

N. (2016, March 2). NRA-ILA | Virginia Gun Laws. Retrieved November 26, 2016, from <https://www.nraila.org/gun-laws/state-gun-laws/virginia/>

This source defines Virginia's gun laws. It was resourceful and offered definitions applicable to the argument presented in the proposal that Virginia's lenient gun laws allow more weapons to be brought into the homes of Baltimore City residents.

Ransford, C., Johnson, T., & Decker, B. (2016, September). The Relationship between the Cure Violence Model and Citywide Increases and Decreases in Killings in Chicago [PDF]. Chicago: Cure Violence.

This graph illustrates how continual funding to the CeaseFire Program in Chicago directly correlates to the number of homicides the city records every year. It offered excellent data for the funding of a similar program in Baltimore City and the visual adds emphasis to the proposal.

Sheppard, D., Grant, H., Rowe, W., & Jacobs, N. (2000, September). Fighting Juvenile Gun Violence [PDF]. U.S. Department of Justice.

This graph illustrates the effectiveness of the Safe Streets Program in reducing shootings and killings in Baltimore City neighborhoods. It demonstrates that reducing juvenile gun violence is possible, and that in the proposal are plausible solutions for this problem in the Sandtown-Winchester area.

Webster, D., Whitehill, J. M., Vernick, J., & Parker, E. M. (2011). Evaluation of Baltimore's Safe Streets Program. Center for the Prevention of Youth Violence, Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health.

This scholarly source details the funding, methods, and goals of the Safe Streets Program in Baltimore City. The information in this article offered evidence that reducing juvenile gun violence has happened in Baltimore City before and can continue to happen following the two solutions laid out in the proposal.

Woods, B., & Pankhania, M. (2016, April 27). Baltimore timeline: The year since Freddie Gray's arrest. Retrieved November 20, 2016, from <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2016/apr/27/baltimore-freddie-gray-arrest-protest-timeline>

This journalistic source highlights the unrest and riots and when/where they occurred in Baltimore City following the death of Freddie Gray. This source proved helpful in explaining the background of the gun violence, and where the unrest was focused.

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Katie Benoit

Katie Benoit

WR100.15

Project 4

Due: December 16, 2016

How I Live Justice at Loyola: Accepting Diversity

My philosophy has always been if you are capable to help another person, there is no reason not to. Through my life experiences and interactions with people in marginalized circumstances, I have developed a deep appreciation for the prosocial behavior accompanying altruistic service. I also admire the profound effects it has on the lives of others. Utilizing the service-learning courses offered at the university, and reflecting my new compassion and acceptance for diversity to being an Outdoor Adventure Experience (OAE) leader, I plan to live justice conscientiously at Loyola. It was Martin Luther King Jr. who preached, "An individual has not started living until he can rise above the narrow confines of his individualistic concerns to the broader concerns of all humanity." I fully believe in order to make a lasting impact in society, the needs of others should be placed before our own. Volunteering with The William and Lanaea C. Featherstone Foundation, I have gotten to know many Latin American immigrants who want to pursue a career in finance, but find themselves facing copious barriers from American society in doing so. Using the privilege I am so grateful to have in attending Loyola, I helped these individuals create a better life for themselves and their families here in Baltimore City. I recall one woman sincerely expressing her gratitude for me taking the time to help her practice simply interviewing with a professional. It does not matter what you do, so much as the passion you do it with. This service-learning experience helped my comprehension of how to live

justice at Loyola by promoting diversity and advocating for other students to take service-learning courses.

Reflecting on this volunteering experience, my subsequent goal is to facilitate a welcoming environment in my position as an OAE leader on campus. By promoting an accepting atmosphere for people of all backgrounds and circumstances, I hope to encourage diversity and challenge the present prejudice against certain populations. As a leader, I hope my participants will acknowledge my humanitarian personality and feel comfortable asking for help no matter who they are or what their struggle may be. Whether it be a day hike along the Appalachian Trail, or a white-water kayaking expedition through the Potomac River, the internal growth participants will feel should reflect the accepting atmosphere I hope to establish. If we cannot construct a feeling of acceptance for all persons at Loyola, we have failed the core values of this prestigious Jesuit university that preaches such a notion. Pulled from the mission, vision, and values of Loyola, diversity is seen as, “an inherent source of richness and a necessary opportunity for learning and growth.” I plan on living justice at Loyola by embodying this vision, and not shying from the different or unknown. To embody the Jesuit value of learning from different cultural traditions is to live justice. To challenge the pre-existing prejudice against minorities is to live justice. To become compassionate and open to diversity is to live justice. To live justice at Loyola, I will uphold all of this.

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Thanks,
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Reducing Juvenile Gun Violence

Katherine Benoit
WR100.15

Make a **change** in the lives of
Baltimore City youth

- I. Death of Freddie Gray
 - II. Social Explosion in Baltimore
 - III. The Center for Disease Control (CDC) and Johns Hopkins Center for the Prevention of Youth Violence (JHCPYV)
 - IV. Positive Opportunities and Community Policing
-

Background

- ❖ 'Rough ride' on April 12
- ❖ Riots following death April 19
- ❖ Protests, Blockades, Purges

Woods (2016) recalls “We feel like we’re **prisoners** in our own neighborhood where we grown up” (Par 3).



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<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-3057819/Baltimore-police-Freddie-Gray-protesters-clash-violently-funeral.html>

The Social Explosion

- ❖ Loss of **trust** in City police officers
- ❖ Youth are living by example
- ❖ Dramatic increase in **homicides**
- ❖ **Hostile** and **dangerous** environment
- ❖ Easy **gun access** for juveniles
- ❖ Sandtown-Winchester neighborhood



http://www.wsj.com/articles/violence-breaks-out-in-baltimore-as-freddie-gray-is-laid-to-rest-1430169131



https://www.occupycorporatism.com/freddie-gray-7-facts-behind-protests-national-guard-ignitators

What has worked in the past?

The CDC implemented Ceasefire in Chicago, creating a **73% reduction** in homicides.

This program is **state funded** and has numerous community organization affiliations.

Change is **possible**.

The JHCPYV initiated **SafeStreets** to model Chicago's program. Homicide rates were virtually **nonexistent**.

Lower Park Heights saw a drastic shift in **cultural norms** surrounding gun violence; it's **unacceptable**.

Change **happened**.

What will work now?



<http://www.3ders.org/articles/20160624-national-science-foundation-funds-3d-printing-center-for-baltimores-inner-city-youth.html>

- ❖ Positive Opportunities targeting **younger** ages
 - Educational centers for **alternative** defense strategies
 - **Prosocial behavior** lessons
- ❖ Community Policing
 - Officers and residents **collaborate**
 - Regaining **trust**

Conclusion

- ❖ Death of Freddie Gray led to a social catastrophe
- ❖ Youth has easy access to guns, and model what they see
- ❖ The CDC and JHCPYV show attainable statistics
- ❖ Positive Opportunities and Community Policing will work

Works Cited

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