
NEWARK COMMUNITY STREET TEAM NARRATIVE EVALUATION

UCLA Social Justice Research Partnership

Jorja Leap, Ph.D.

Karrah Lompa, M.S.W.

Madison Thantu

Whitney Gouche, M.S.Ed.

UCLA Luskin



DECEMBER 2020

Acknowledgements

This entire evaluation was inspired by the leadership of Mayor Ras Baraka and Aqeela Sherrills. We are deeply grateful to Aqeela Sherrills for his support throughout the evaluation process. Under his leadership, this report was made possible thanks to the commitment and hard work of the men and women of the Newark Community Street Team.

We are also grateful for the participation of both the community stakeholders and institutional partners who play a vital role in the NCST. CSP in Boyle Heights and Watts. We deeply indebted to the residents of the South and West Ward of Newark, New Jersey. As they participated in meetings and informal discussions, these residents shared their perceptions, their thoughts and their dreams, ensuring that community voice was a fundamental part of this effort.

We appreciate everyone who engaged in the research process for their devotion to transforming public health and community well-being, ensuring that violence can end and public safety can be ensured.

Finally, while she could not be interviewed or otherwise involved in this research, we acknowledge Elizabeth Ruebman as an important support of the NCST effort.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The narrative evaluation research undertaken by the UCLA Social Justice Research Partnership team was designed to tell the story of an innovative, community-based approach to violence and its impact on public health, neighborhood well-being and violence prevention: the Newark Community Street Team. The first step in the process, a narrative evaluation, will document the origins and development of the Newark Community Street Team (NCST) model and its successful implementation. Along with this focus, the evaluation will also chart the evolution of NCST as it moved from a pilot project to a promising practice. Finally, this report will serve as the foundation for the next step of evaluation: systematically interpreting crime data that NCST has access to through its partnership with the Newark Police Department and the Safer Newark Council. Most significantly, this evaluation will assist in future efforts to replicate this model in other national settings, validating the Newark Community Street Team as a public health-community safety Best Practice.

This report begins with the following research questions:

- (1) What is the Newark Community Street Team (NCST) and how does it operate?
- (2) How does the NCST leadership and staff describe their work and impact on public safety and community wellness?
- (3) Going forward, what does the NCST require to be effective?

In order to answer these questions, a qualitative narrative evaluation was conducted to document what has occurred since the inception of the Newark Community Street Team. This narrative evaluation drew upon multiple methods to effectively “tell the story” of what had occurred in the South and West Wards, combining two approaches: (1) Documentary Narrative and (2) Case Study. These two components formed the basis for designing instruments to conduct ongoing qualitative and quantitative evaluation.

The evaluation research was guided by the effort to gain a better, more holistic understanding of how NCST functions as violence prevention and public safety organization, drawing upon time spent with leadership and staff from NCST as well residents, community-based non-profit organizations, law enforcement, and elected officials. The research process was both participatory and intentional, conducted over three years from March 2017 to January 2020 and included four multi-day visits with follow-up video conferences and interviews as well as telephone interviews. The narrative evaluation carefully considered the historical context of the NCST as well as the research literature relevant to its establishment and implementation. After that, there all aspects of the NCST model were documented, along with a description of training that was augmented by ethnographic observation. This same observation methodology was also utilized to understand the perceptions of residents during the Public Safety Roundtable as well as informal community interactions.

Out of this three-year, multi-faceted evaluation research process, fourteen major themes emerged. These themes were further organized according to four overarching themes portrayed in this table:

Chart 1. Qualitative Themes from NCST Roundtables and Interviews

	Theme
<p style="writing-mode: vertical-rl; transform: rotate(180deg);">NCST Professional Identity, Roles and Effectiveness</p>	<p>Outreach Workers and High Risk Interventionists were strongly identified with their work and the idea of bringing peace and preventing violence in their neighborhoods as well as in the city of Newark.</p>
	<p>All staff attributed much of their effectiveness to professional training and their engagement in learning was apparent from the onset of their involvement with NCST.</p>
	<p>Most NCST staff reported that they were formerly incarcerated and felt that their work represented a chance to help “heal” and “bring peace” to their communities.</p>
	<p>NCST provided its outreach workers and high risk interventionists with a professional identity and legitimized their role in the community. This translated to plans for expansion in both knowledge and job responsibilities.</p>
	<p>The use of women as high risk interventionists and even as outreach workers remains a source of conflict and ambivalence. However, interviews and observation indicate there is no difference in effectiveness as workers or understanding of roles and responsibilities.</p>
<p style="writing-mode: vertical-rl; transform: rotate(180deg);">Community Building and Collective Efficacy</p>	<p>NCST helps to build community capacity. While focusing on community wellness and de-escalating violence, NCST also builds a sense of collective efficacy.</p>
	<p>Communication and relationships between NCST and partner organizations as well as law enforcement and city services have improved over time, largely due to the strengthening of the NCST model and its implementation. However, individuals emphasized that in relation to law enforcement there was still work to do.</p>
	<p>Despite initial uncertainty and mistrust, residents and community stakeholders have embraced NCST and now view it as a vital part of the Newark community; its presence is counted as a community strength.</p>

Trusting Relationships as the Key to Success	<p>Strong and stable relationships are critical to the success of NCST.</p>
	<p>It is as a case manager, identifying and managing a case load of five to seven youth and young adults (ages 18-30), that the Outreach Worker truly expands the purpose and impact of NCST.</p>
The Road Ahead	<p>There is interest in support for trauma and other services that focus on mental health needs for the community.</p>
	<p>Outreach workers expressed concern about youth and young adults being able to sustain themselves once case management ended. They emphasized the critical need for resources in the community.</p>
	<p>Outreach workers as well as high risk interventionists discussed their desire for financial stability and health benefits.</p>
	<p>The significance and impact of the Newark Community Street Team was affirmed by all the different groups of individuals interviewed. As part of this discussion, Mayor Baraka was praised for his leadership.</p>

RECOMMENDATIONS

There are three key recommendations that emerged from the themes.

- 1.** The Newark Community Street Team should continue to be funded and developed as a national best practice.
- 2.** There must be a dedicated line item in the city and/or state budget to fund NCST in the years ahead. It should be a permanent part of city services.
- 3.** This narrative evaluation should serve as the foundation for the development of a formalized theory of change. It should also guide the development of outcome measures. In addition, there should be a formal data-sharing agreement with the Newark Police Department that will include crime statistics and related information.

In addition to the three key recommendations, the narrative evaluation gave rise to the following six recommendations regarding the next steps for NCST.

1. There is a need for an ongoing training plan with “in-service” and community-based training to be created and evaluated in partnership with Aquil Basheer.

This should also include training for the Newark Police Department that can potentially follow the best practices that have been instituted in Boston and Los Angeles along with other urban settings. There is a particular need to educate street-level police officers on the value of high risk interventionists and outreach workers.
2. All NCST personnel – interventionists and outreach workers -- should be facilitated and funded to pursue professional development and education. NCST can explore a partnership with local community colleges and/or state universities for certification and degree programs.
3. There is an urgent need for intentional work addressing the trauma that high risk interventionists, outreach workers and NCST staff encounter. There has been some initial effort in this area but it should be extended to alternative strategies surrounding healing and support.
4. It is critical to expand community capacity and responsibility for public safety. In this vein, NCST and its partners must pursue the use of an App that could be used to manage such efforts. One excellent example is the App currently being used by NCST through Aqeela Sherrills’ partnership with Citizen and Andrew Frame: <https://www.forbes.com/sites/stevenbertoni/2019/07/15/murder-muggings-mayhem-how-an-ex-hacker-is-trying-to-use-raw-911-data-to-turn-citizen-into-the-next-billion-dollar-app/#53b232441f8a>
5. NCST should continue with their highly effective leadership development and succession planning. This is integral to the continuation of this Initiative’s important work along with building the capacity of future community leaders.

6.

As outcomes are developed, it will be critical to integrate non-traditional, creative ways of measuring effectiveness. The NCST cannot rely exclusively on crime statistics but instead must work on incorporating them into community feedback and concerns

While there is still work to do, the Newark Community Street Team has effectively decreased crime while increasing community trust as well as public safety. This narrative evaluation represents the first step in transformative work that must go forward.

NCST NARRATIVE EVALUATION

“It keeps me grounded – the men and women in this organization all work hard, are willing to change and save more lives on the street. We all work together to lift each other up and save our community.”

The Newark Community Street Team Outreach Worker starts his day representing the Safe Passages program at Shabazz High School at 7:30, before classes even begin. Afterwards he walks the surrounding neighborhood, waving to residents and stopping to talk to people he knows. Then it’s time for paperwork – his least favorite activity, but he knows it’s got to be done and so he gets it out of the way as soon as possible. He enters his activities and makes notes about the youth that he’s seen and talked with over the past 24 hours. The phone rings and he talks to one of his mentees, preparing her for a job interview – she’s nervous but he reassures her she’ll do fine. It’s hard to believe the hours have flown by and it’s time to go back for another practice of Safe Passages which means he walks the perimeter of the school, looking for problems. He stops to chat with a school security officer – they manage to divide their tasks: the officer focuses on school property and the Outreach Worker focuses on literally everything else. After the school empties out, the worker continues on to some local “hot spots” to look for problems that may be developing. If he sees a disagreement starting or the beginnings of a fight, he’ll work to “talk people down” to prevent any acts of violence from occurring. The mediation techniques he learned in NCST training are put to work in these instances and it’s useful to

have their structure. Once he's certain things are calm, it's time to meet with some of the six youth he has on his caseload. Three of them are meeting up with him so they can talk together, the other three are going to call in and face time him on their phones. He wonders if he's got time to eat but the youth are more important so he heads back to the office. After he talks with all six of them, he'll check in with some of the other workers at the office to see if anything is going on. Then maybe he'll go home, get something to eat and play with his children. "Just an average day, every day, here in the South Ward of Newark."

In the midst of a decade which has seen violence rise globally parallel to the demand for just alternatives to traditional law enforcement, one meaningful approach to public safety has emerged to address both of these concerns. Five years ago, in Newark, New Jersey, an individual who had long dealt with violence-based trauma both personally and professionally brought together a small group of committed men and women to try to solve the crime and violence that were raging in a neighborhood known as the South Ward. These early street interventionists and community outreach workers, most of whom had been incarcerated and knew the Newark streets from personal experience, formed what grew into an unusual and successful initiative, the Newark Community Street Team (NCST). As the streets slowly grew less violent and community residents began to feel a sense of safety new to them, the impact of NCST was acknowledged. As part of this, it became imperative to understand just how what the Newark Community Street Team worked. Research was a part of that process – but any evidence driven examination had

to first document just what the Newark Community Street Team Initiative was, how it had emerged, what its model consisted of and most of all, how its high risk interventionists and outreach workers perceived their work, the problem of violence and the communities in which they engaged.

The narrative evaluation research undertaken by the UCLA Social Justice Research Partnership team was designed to tell the story of this innovative, community-based approach to violence and its impact on public health, neighborhood well-being and violence prevention. The first step in the process, a narrative evaluation, will document the origins and development of the Newark Community Street Team (NCST) model and its successful implementation. Along with this focus, the evaluation will also chart the evolution of NCST as it moved from a pilot project to a promising practice. Finally, this report will serve as the foundation for the next step of evaluation: systematically interpreting crime data that NCST has access to through its partnership with the Newark Police Department and the Safer Newark Council. Most significantly, this evaluation will assist in future efforts to replicate this model in other national settings, validating the Newark Community Street Team as a public health-community safety Best Practice.

From its onset, it was clear that the Newark Community Street Teams represented an approach that needed to be understood *in context*. The effectiveness of the Outreach Worker teams could not be separated from the environment in which they operated. Any research clearly required an immersive approach and data collection could not be phoned

in or accomplished at a remote site. Instead, the research requirements of the NCST evaluation matched the approach of the UCLA Social Justice Research Partnership. The UCLA Social Justice Research Partnership (SJRP) is a cross-disciplinary research, evaluation and policy collaborative, composed of a multi-ethnic staff with varied educational backgrounds and areas of expertise. Established in 2012, the SJRP engages in community based participatory research that is committed to the rigorous and authentic portrayal of the thoughts, beliefs and voice of individuals and communities, with researchers embedded in any environment being studied. As a collaborative, SJRP possesses extensive experience in research and evaluation in the fields of criminal justice, public health, education, and social welfare focusing on community wellness, violence prevention and intervention, prison reform and reentry, government-community collaboration, and social policy.

Despite these qualifications, it is still useful to answer the question, why UCLA? This question naturally arises when considering any research involving a city in the Northeastern United States; simply stated, why choose a research center in a west coast university? However, there are several factors that uniquely equip the UCLA Social Justice Research Partnership to conduct this narrative evaluation research. For over twenty years, as UCLA researchers, the SJRP team has engaged in the process of understanding how best to evaluate any and all type of violence prevention and reduction efforts with a particular focus on community based outreach and intervention. We have been involved in research related to gangs and community violence for almost forty years, honing our

understanding of these phenomena during what is often referred to as “the decade of death” in Los Angeles, when gang crime was epidemic and there was, on average, three homicides per day, the vast majority of these gang-related.

However, our work has not been limited to Los Angeles or even the west coast. We have engaged in national work and global collaboration involving such diverse settings as Boston, Massachusetts; Providence, Rhode Island; Houston, Texas; Barbados, Scotland, and Greece. We are also currently partner members of the United Nations World Health Organization (WHO) Violence Prevention Alliance, engaging in violence prevention projects in Scotland, England, Greece, Bosnia, Macedonia and Kosovo.

As part of our efforts in Newark, we have reached out and met with faculty and scholars from Rutgers University. Their initial work with the NCST, which is discussed later in this evaluation report, proved invaluable in grounding our research effort moving forward.¹ One of the projects we discussed with scholars from Rutgers involved our participation in the multi-year evaluation of the Los Angeles Mayor’s office Gang Reduction Youth Development (GRYD) model and its implementation in gang-impacted zones throughout the city. Since that time, the SJRP has been deeply involved in the ongoing evaluation and implementation of the LAPD Community Safety Partnership (CSP), a model designed to work in collaboration with GRYD. As part of their work, both initiatives communicate

¹ The UCLA team, represented by Dr. Jorja Leap, had numerous conversations with Rutgers researchers, indicating our willingness to partner with them on the evaluation research. However, we ultimately proceeded with this evaluation alone.

and interact with various violence prevention and intervention efforts throughout the United States. However, in considering these efforts, it is critical to note that the work of the UCLA team in Newark began exactly four years ago.

In December 2016, Aqeela Sherrills convened a group of Los Angeles leaders and researchers, including Jorja Leap, Ph.D., to discuss various violence prevention efforts and measures of their effectiveness. In follow-up to that meeting, Dr. Leap traveled to Newark to begin work with the Newark Community Street Team, under the leadership of Mayor Ras Baraka and Aqeela Sherrills. It was clear from the onset that what was occurring in Newark, while related to community-based violence prevention efforts, represented an innovative approach to street work. Both Mayor Baraka and Mr. Sherrills were adamant that evaluation be part of this initiative from its onset. The SJRP team was equally clear that they would be observing and interviewing on site over time in the years that followed. There was no funding for this initial research but it was critical to the expansion of violence prevention that it be undertaken. The SJRP team committed to working with Aqeela Sherrills and NCST.

This report begins with the following research questions:

- (1) What is the Newark Community Street Team (NCST) and how does it operate?
- (2) How does the NCST leadership and staff describe their work and impact on public safety and community wellness?
- (3) Going forward, what does the NCST require to be effective?

METHODOLOGY

In order to answer these questions, a qualitative narrative evaluation was conducted to document what has occurred since the inception of the Newark Community Street Team.

This narrative evaluation drew upon multiple methods to effectively “tell the story” of what had occurred in the South and West Wards, combining two approaches:

(1) Documentary Narrative and (2) Case Study. These two components formed the basis for designing instruments to conduct ongoing qualitative and quantitative evaluation.

As we begin to consider the research questions and the context in which they will be answered, our focus will be on the development, implementation and accomplishments of NCST from 2017 to 2020. Any and all research conducted with the NCST was first and foremost participatory. Alongside that priority, it is critical to understand the two major methodological approaches that will define this narrative evaluation.

Documentary and Narrative Research

The Documentary and Narrative Research methodology offers the opportunity to paint a vivid portrait of the development of violence prevention and intervention efforts in Newark, New Jersey. In using this method to conduct a narrative evaluation, researchers draw upon documents, records, observations and “in-person” accounts to obtain both the historical and personal perspectives of individuals involved in a phenomenon or

program.² In this evaluation, the narrative research approach was drawn upon to review, analyze and depict the experiences of streetworkers in their efforts at both preventing and de-escalating violence in the various neighborhoods of Newark.

Because of its approach, this methodology also offered the opportunity to describe the NCST model in detail, chronicling its development, its key components, the training it involves and its implementation in the Newark community. Beyond this, it was also critical to understand the “on the ground” experience of the high risk interventionists and outreach workers as a complement to the macro view of the documentary narrative. For this, the evaluation team drew upon case study design.

Case Study

The case study methodology represents an effective approach to understanding individuals as they work in the community or in specific settings. Combining ethnographic observation, informal discussions, depth interviews and document reviews, case studies provide a holistic understanding of a broader issue through a detailed contextual analysis of real-life scenarios. Baxter and Jack explain the use of case studies when they state:

Qualitative case study is an approach to research that facilitates exploration of a phenomenon within its context using a variety of data sources. This ensures that the issue is not explored through one lens but rather a variety of lenses, which

² Creswell, J. W. and Poth, C. (2018). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches*. Thousand Oaks: Sage.

allows for multiple facets of the phenomenon to be revealed and understood. Case studies ensure that the topic of interest is well explored.”³

This quotation summarizes the guiding rationale for using the case study approach: case studies allow researchers to collect information in the depth necessary to understand individuals, organizations and communities including the processes and changes that comprise their structure and functioning. The evaluation narrative of NCST truly required this sort of “informational depth” to produce and understand the most useful and valid findings that emerged from multiple interviews, observation and document analysis.

Drawing upon this, the case study represented an effort to create a fundamental understanding of the NCST model and its implementation. The case study approach was selected as the best research method to fully capture the outreach workers’ and high risk interventionists experiences, the emotional complexities of their lives, and their involvement with and response to the violence prevention and interruption. Once it is completed, an effective case study presents research findings in hopes that the results will guide both research and intervention involving larger populations and policies. The generalizations that emerge from the case study approach are based upon researchers’ unique knowledge, understandings, and experiences of, “how things are, why they are, how people feel about them, and how these things are likely to be later or in other places” and help the readers learn about “social problems and social programs in a way that accommodates their present understanding through direct and vicarious experience.”⁴

³ Baxter, P. & Jack, S. (2008). “Qualitative Case Study Methodology: Study Design and Implementation for Novice Researchers.” *The Qualitative Report*, 13 (4), p. 544.

⁴ Stake (1978) see Leap and Benson.

As stated above, these two approaches were merged to best understand the specific work of NCST and how it can help pave the way for new approaches to public safety. The

The lessons learned here are meaningful for Newark and all communities intent on dealing with the root causes of violence and the implementation of new models that integrate social justice with public safety.

lessons learned here are meaningful for Newark and all communities intent on dealing with the root causes of violence and the implementation of new models that integrate social justice with public safety.

It was extremely important to be true to the operation of the NCST and the voices of those involved. Extensive data, including on-site observations and in-depth interviews, was collected and analyzed, all in a systematic manner. In addition to providing formal consent to have interviews used for this case study, participants were also asked to indicate whether they consented to being observed and to having any interviews audio-recorded for the sake of ensuring accuracy in the transcription process. All the men and women approached by the embedded researcher consented to having their in-depth interviews recorded. Confidentiality was ensured at all times. The research team engaged in all data collection with respect and sensitivity for the leadership, staff, community residents and stakeholders engaged with NCST.

EVALUATION OVERVIEW

The narrative evaluation carefully documents the NCST work process including the accounts of leadership staff, high risk interventionists, outreach workers, community stakeholders, law enforcement and neighborhood residents. It also includes an account of the history and development of the NCST model as well as the description of key research themes and preliminary outcomes.

The narrative evaluation designed to provide a multi-dimensional portrayal of what occurs throughout the NCST process, detailing both violence prevention and case management, as informed by the public health model. However, in addition to its narrative structure, the evaluation was also structured as

an appreciative inquiry to determine individual and organizational strength as well as eliciting desires and visions for future organizational efforts.

Appreciative inquiry is an approach to organizational and community development that is intended to instill hope, build capacity and most

importantly, bring about positive change. The underlying assumption of appreciative inquiry is that organizations as well as the individuals within them possess assets,

The evaluation was also structured as an appreciative inquiry to determine individual and organizational strength as well as eliciting desires and visions for future organizational efforts. Appreciative inquiry is an approach to organizational and community development that is intended to instill hope, build capacity and most importantly, bring about positive change.

resources and strengths that should be optimized in order to shape a more positive, pro-social future.⁵

With all of this in mind, the main points guiding this participatory research effort include:

- Understanding previous and existing **sociocultural context**;
- Mapping a **history of the organization**: focusing on its development as a violence prevention and public safety organization;
- Creating a **record of engagement** in different settings including schools and neighborhood streets;
- Engaging and interviewing all **NCST staff** – leadership and workers -- with different perspectives and experiences;
- Delineating organization **mission and vision**;
- Documenting the process of **relationship building** – successes and challenges – throughout program implementation;
- Creating a set of **recommendations** for both organizational growth and outcome measurement.

Based upon these points, the evaluation research was guided by the effort to gain a better, more holistic understanding of how NCST functions as violence prevention and public safety organization, drawing upon time spent with leadership and staff from NCST as well residents, community-based non-profit organizations, law enforcement, and elected officials. The research process was both participatory and intentional, conducted over

⁵ Preskill, Hallie and Tessie Tzavaras Catsambas (2006). *Reframing Evaluation Through Appreciative Inquiry*. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.

three years from March 2017 to January 2020 and included four multi-day visits with follow-up video conferences and interviews as well as telephone interviews. Additionally, a member of the SJRP research team was available at all times to the leadership and staff of NCST.⁶ An interview protocol was constructed to guide the examination of staff and stakeholder/partner experiences. These applied research efforts were all designed to encourage individuals and organizations to clearly identify how NCST helped to transform individual lives and public safety. Overall, the NCST evaluation research was comprised of the following foci:

- Depth interviews with the NCST Leadership Team, high risk interventionists and outreach workers that included but were not limited to questions about the NCST structure, responsibilities, roles, its emerging model, NCST working styles and worker-community interactions. The list of individuals interviewed was developed in collaboration with NCST and enlarged through opportunistic and snowball sampling. Certain individuals were interviewed more than one time and there were extended follow-up discussions after these interviews;
- Review of materials (documents, reports, logs) provided by NCST staff as well as interviewees;
- In-person group conversation with NCST staff to discuss steps of research process;
- Ethnographic observation of all training sessions, community meetings, roundtables and gatherings;

⁶ One final evaluation visit was scheduled for Summer 2020 but was cancelled due to the pandemic.

- Depth interviews with community residents, nonprofit community-based organizations, law enforcement professionals, and elected officials;
- Creation of the first narrative evaluation report through a collaborative process, involving SJRP team members and the NCST staff in an ongoing partnership and learning exchange. This was facilitated by in-person meetings and ongoing dialogue.

All of this material depended on four key sources of information as portrayed in this diagram.

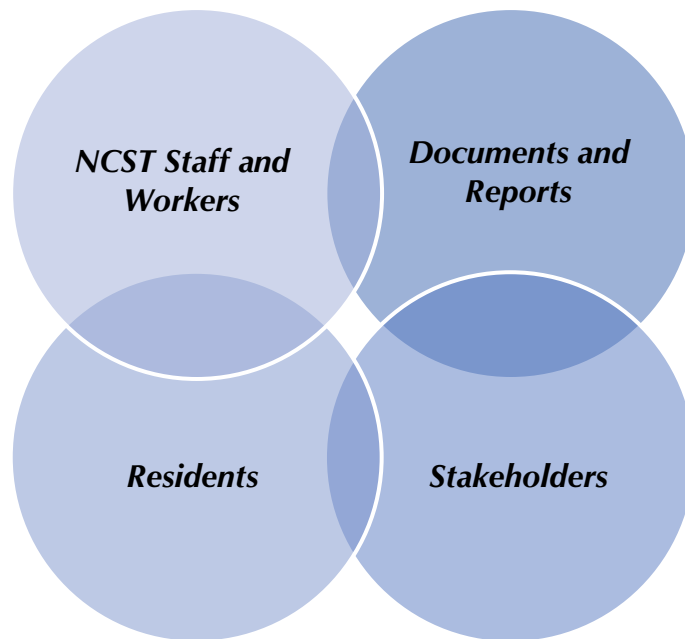


Diagram 1. Information Categories

All of the UCLA research strategies were designed to examine the experiences and history that comprised the NCST, including perceptions of strengths and challenges. During depth interviews as well as ethnographic observation, there was focused, sensitive

questioning regarding the NCST model and its implementation. Research participants were offered the opportunity to express their general thoughts and observations with the assurance of complete confidentiality. As part of this process, the NCST Leadership Team, high risk interventionists and outreach workers referred researchers to other individuals and groups that could be observed and/or interviewed, a strategy often referred to as snowball sampling.⁷ The snowball sampling technique relies on well-informed study participants suggesting future interviewees from among their personal and/or professional acquaintances who not only meet the eligibility criteria (in this case involvement with the NCST) but who would also contribute important information to the study. In many instances, there were several individuals mentioned multiple times, (we would hear the words, “you gotta interview [person’s name] – they’ll tell you a lot”) and the individual would be contacted. The research team followed this chain of contacts to ensure inclusivity and reliability. This process of contacting individuals is ongoing and will be incorporated into future study.

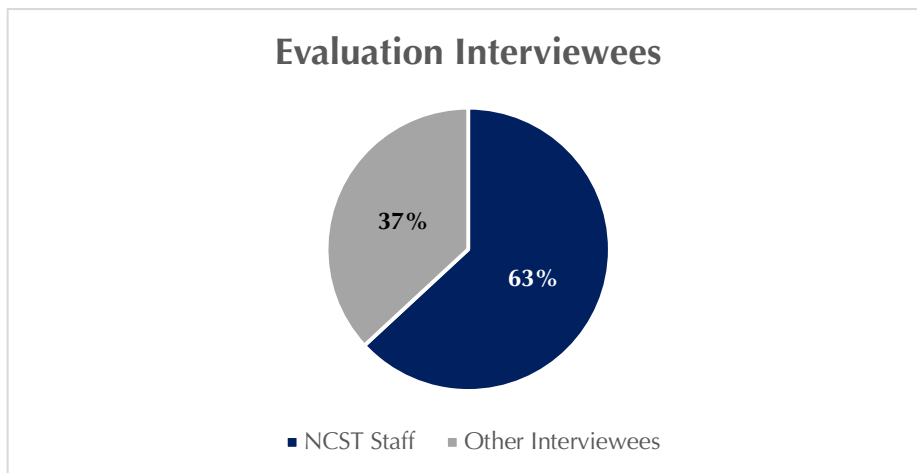
Data Collection, Coding and Analysis

Multiple strategies were employed to ensure the validity and reliability of the data collected. First, the SJRP lead researcher was responsible for conducting all interviews and was experienced with in-depth interviewing techniques derived from best practices. Second, all members of the SJRP research team, including those not involved directly in

⁷ Heckathorn, D.D. (1997). “Respondent-Driven Sampling: A New Approach to the Study of Hidden Populations.” *Social Problems* 44(2): 174-199.

this project, are required to complete mandated online training sponsored by the UCLA Institutional Review Board (UCLA IRB) to recognize and guard against implicit bias. Third, key data analysis was not completed by the lead researcher in order to further ensure validity and reliability. Finally, data for this report was collected over a lengthy time period beginning March 2017 and ending January 2020. During this period, the leader researcher conducted multiple observations of NCST on site as detailed in the observation section below.

Participation in the evaluation was completely voluntary and confidential. A total of 103 individuals were interviewed over a four year period, either in person or by phone. The majority of these individuals were part of the NCST Leadership Team and/or served as high risk interventionists and outreach workers at one time during the five year period from 2015 to 2020, comprising a total of 65 interviewees. Of these 65 interviewees, 28 were interviewed more than one time. In addition, 38 individuals who were residents, stakeholders and/or partners with NCST were interviewed; out of these 12 individuals were interviewed more than one time during the five year period from 2015 to 2020.



The research team sampled to the point of informational redundancy or saturation. That is, researchers gathered information to the point of diminishing returns; they stopped when there was no new information to be gleaned at this point in the research effort.⁸

After asking participants for their permission, all interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed. Following this, the interview transcriptions were subjected to an intensive process of data analysis, comprised of a three-stage coding procedure. It was determined that hand coding rather than coding software be utilized due to the sensitivity of the data and the different language styles used. In order to guard against interviewer bias in the research process, the coding was conducted by two independent coders who did not participate in any of the interviews. In addition, the coders were not aware of the overall study design or goals. Instead, the coders were given very specific information regarding the coding process. These research strategies were used to ensure both the reliability and validity of the data analysis. The coders began their work with the process of *open coding*. Open coding allows the individual coder to develop categories of information. At this point, the two coders met together and compared their categories of information to one another to ensure alignment and to eliminate any errors in the data or in the NCST accounts. The categories of information were then subjected to *axial coding*. Axial coding allows the coders to build the ideas into a narrative that connects the categories of information. Finally, the connections identified within the categories of information was subjected to *selective coding*, which led to the identification of fourteen major themes.

⁸ Glaser, B. & Strauss, A. (1967). *The Discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategies for Qualitative Research*. Chicago: Aldine Publishing.

These fourteen themes were then subjected to meta-analysis and divided into four major groupings. Research findings will be discussed later in this report.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The city of Newark has long struggled with violent crime and gang activity. However, the root causes of community violence can be traced back more than fifty years and must be contextualized in terms of the ongoing poverty and lack of resources that has plagued this strong and vibrant city. Newark originally rose to economic wealth and prominence in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, with a manufacturing base that provided jobs and opportunity to its citizenry until the years that followed World War Two. In the 1950s and 1960s, Newark faced civic corruption, the withdrawal of industry, and white flight to the suburbs.⁹ Tom Hayden’s seminal work, *Rebellion in Newark*, set the tone of the challenges Newark faced.¹⁰ In this account published in 1967, Hayden wrote that Newark was saddled with “rats, roaches and ridiculous rents” and went on to describe the struggle for civil rights and political empowerment, organizing under the leadership of Junius Williams¹¹ to empower community leadership and control of anti-poverty agencies and

⁹ Tuttle, Brad (2009). *How Newark Became Newark: the Rise, Fall and Rebirth of an American City*. New York: Rutgers University Press.

¹⁰ Hayden, Tom (1967). *Rebellion in Newark: Official Violence and the Ghetto Response*. New York: Vintage Books.

¹¹ This is just a small part of Junius Williams’ extraordinary biography which culminated in Tom Hayden’s observation, “If he had come along forty years later, he might have been Barack Obama. But instead he became one of those gifted young black leaders who invested their lives in creating the conditions for Obama’s future.” See: riseupnewark.com/junius-williams.

law enforcement. But civil rights organizers like Williams and Hayden were not the only ones to point out that need for community-based solutions to the problems posed by poverty. In the Lilley Commission Report on Newark, commissioned by New Jersey Governor Richard Hughes in the aftermath of the Newark riots posited that the violent uprising that occurred could be traced directly to failures in the public school system, housing and law enforcement.¹² But history has shown that the problems that began with the 1967 uprising still remain over fifty years later.

In the 21st century, these problems centered on crime and violence as well as law enforcement abuses that persisted over time. The gravest threats to public health and community well-being could be found in the lack of safety in the streets. Since the 1980s many gangs emerged in Newark, a handful with ties to the west coast Bloods and Crips, but most indigenous to Newark itself. As gang activity raised the level of community violence, public safety decreased with severe consequences. Residents did not feel safe outside of their homes, they did not feel able to gather in outside spaces and they feared for their families, especially their sons and daughters. There were also concerns about the quality and availability of programs available for children and youth. To add to the perfect storm of urban challenges, excessive force and racial profiling on the part of law enforcement further fueled the atmosphere of mistrust, fear and residents who no longer felt safe walking city streets. In 2012, CNN reported that Newark was ranked the 6th most

¹² <https://governors.rutgers.edu/governor-richard-hughes-and-the-newark-report/>

dangerous city in the United States, reporting 10 murders in 10 days and ending the year with 111 homicides, comprising close to 30% of all murders recorded in the state of New Jersey. Two years later, the U.S. Attorney released a July 2014 report that found “a pattern and practice of unconstitutional policing by the Newark Police Department” which resulted in the U.S. Department of Justice and city of Newark negotiating and filing a federal consent decree.¹³

Newark faced this collection of grave challenges when Ras Baraka was elected its 40th mayor in 2014. Baraka came to this position with a deep understanding of what was

In describing the priorities of his incoming administration, Baraka was determined to defuse and ultimately end the violence plaguing Newark’s communities. As part of this, he was committed to redrafting the public safety infrastructure to include a community-based component as an equal partner.

needed in this lively but violence-ravaged city; he had been an activist as well as serving as the principal of the city’s Central High School. In describing the priorities of his incoming administration, Baraka was determined to defuse and ultimately end the violence plaguing Newark’s communities. As part of this, he was committed to redrafting the public safety

infrastructure to include a community-based component as an equal partner. This was not a plan that was easily accepted and Baraka faced an uphill battling in getting others in city government to understand the process. His work and his dedication to community well-

¹³ <https://www.justice.gov/usao-nj/information-about-department-justice-s-consent-decree-newark-police-department>

being led to an innovative approach to public health and safety. This approach was nested in work that was being conducted throughout the United States, offering a new approach to violence prevention and gang intervention. To understand the significance of what Mayor Baraka undertook, it is critical to track the development of community street intervention and outreach.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Newark was not unique in experiencing the plague of community-based violence. During the last two decades of the 20th century, cities across the United States found themselves confronting the rise of neighborhood violence and escalating rates of crimes. In particular, gangs plagued major urban centers on the east coast and the Midwest with law enforcement at a loss regarding how to resolve the issues that were being played out with deadly consequences in the streets.

This epidemic crisis gave rise to multiple approaches to community violence reduction, with most programmatic efforts based on a model created at the University of Chicago by social work scholar Irving Spergel. What is now referred to as the Comprehensive or “Spergel” model of gang reduction was embraced and funded in different settings by the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention.¹⁴ This model grew out of social

¹⁴<https://www.nationalgangcenter.gov/Comprehensive-Gang-Model/About>

disorganization theory which stated that an individual's location and environment were integral to their development; as a result, altering the environment is key to creating individual, sustainable change in a community – in this case, reducing gang violence.

Spergel's model influenced the evolution of a handful of related models and gave rise to the development of multiple new approaches, including Slutkin's Cure Violence¹⁵ which drew specifically on a public health model, the One Vision One Life program in Pittsburgh, the Safe Streets program in Baltimore, the TRUCE project in Phoenix (Fox, Katz, Choate, & Hedberg, 2015), the Seattle Youth Violence Prevention Initiative (Shader & Jones, 2015), and Operation Ceasefire in Boston.¹⁶

Across these programs, a common, necessary component is the reliance on street-level workers or interventionists, who recruit youth for special programming, engage community members, assist those at-risk, and provide street intelligence on gangs and possible incidents of violence.¹⁷ These individuals are referred to by numerous names, including street workers, community intervention workers, interventionists and outreach workers; however, they generally fulfill the same essential role – maintaining an essential connection to the community and preventing and/or intervening in potential violence based on this. The level of credibility these individuals possess because so many are from

¹⁵ Formerly Chicago CeaseFire

¹⁶ For further information see Butts, Roman & Porter, 2015; Wilson & Chermak, 2011; Fox, Katz, Choate & Hedberg, 2015; Shader & Jones; Kennedy, 2012.

¹⁷ For more information see National Network for Safe Communities-<https://nnscommunities.org>

the communities in which they now work, often have been incarcerated and/or had past connections to the gangs in the area. All of these experiences provided them a better understanding of the environment, the community, and other points of access.

Their efforts have also attracted the attention of researchers and policymakers interested in their effectiveness in reducing gang-related violence and crime. However, evaluations across these gang prevention and intervention programs have not always been positive and over time, several reported critical views of street workers outcomes. Wilson and Chermak's analysis of the One Vision One Life program argued two possible reasons violence in the Pittsburgh area may have increased instead of decreased: (1) that street work helped gang identities become stronger and more cohesive, allowing more organized gangs to participate in more acts of violence, and (2) that creating a structure of streetworkers which works independently of law enforcement may undercut police legitimacy in communities.¹⁸

David Kennedy, a nationally recognized expert in street intervention and one of the leading voices in community-based strategies in responding to gang-related violence and crime carefully reviewed this

According to Kennedy, the most effectiveness strategies foster partnerships between street interventionists or outreach workers and residents, stakeholders and other peace keepers.

¹⁸ Wilson, J. & Chermak, S. (2011). "Community Driven Violence Reduction Programs: Examining Pittsburgh's One Vision One Life." *Criminology and Public Policy*. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1745-9133.2011.00763.x>

argument and cited it as an example of the criticisms made regarding the usefulness and effectiveness of street workers.¹⁹ In his thoughtful analysis, Kennedy explained that these issues do not stem from streetworkers themselves, but from how any violence reduction program design integrates the street workers and their operation with other stakeholders as well as residents. According to Kennedy, the most effectiveness strategies foster partnerships between street interventionists or outreach workers and residents, stakeholders and other peace keepers. Additional research examining effective street work reported similar findings on the need to improve the relationship between street workers and law enforcement.²⁰

In all of these discussions of gang prevention and gang intervention, Los Angeles remained a world unto itself. Long considered “ground zero” for gang activity and violence, this multi-ethnic west coast urban center had long been locked in the grip of gangs. From the mid-1980s to the 1990s, during what is now referred to as “the decade of death,” on average three individuals a day were killed and countless others were victims of violent attacks – the vast majority of this related to lethal gang warfare that accompanied the dual rise of crack cocaine and possessive territoriality that existed in communities throughout east and south Los Angeles. David Kennedy actually realized the depth of the national gang problem while visiting Nickerson Gardens in Watts, a gang ridden public housing

¹⁹ Kennedy, David. (2012). *Don't Shoot: One Man, A Street Fellowship and the End of Violence in Inner City America*. New York: Bloomsbury USA.

²⁰ National Council on Crime and Delinquency, now renamed Evident Change:
<https://www.evidentchange.org>

development in a Los Angeles neighborhood and his observations were validated in other accounts.²¹ While Father Greg Boyle worked to bring peace to the gangs of Boyle Heights in East Los Angeles,²² in South Los Angeles, a different process was taking shape. Led by Aqeela Sherrills, the idea of mediation tables and peace treaties was raised among the warring gangs.

Because of his work in Los Angeles and his subsequent efforts in communities across the United States, Ras Baraka already had a connection to Aqeela Sherrills. Now, as Mayor of Newark, Baraka was very clear that he wanted to turn to community interventions instead of the police to reduce and prevent violence. In Aqeela Sherrills, who he often publicly refers to as a “godsend,” he found the individual who could lead this effort.²³ There were many reasons an outsider like Sherrills represented an ideal choice.

Professionally and personally, he was no stranger to community violence. He grew up in the Jordan Downs Housing Development in Watts and in what was an inescapable fate, became involved with gang activity. But he also suffered as the result of community violence. His son Terrell was murdered in 2004 in what was believed to be a case of mistaken identity when several young gang members burst into a party he was attending.

²¹ Leap, Jorja (2012). *Jumped In: What Gangs Taught me about Violence, Drugs, Love and Redemption*. Boston: Beacon Press.

²² Boyle, Greg (2012). *Tattoos on the Heart: The Power of Boundless Compassion*. New York: The Free Press.

²³ <https://www.wsj.com/articles/an-l-a-peacemaker-tackles-east-coast-crime-and-trauma-1519932550?mod=searchresults&page=1&pos=2>

Beyond that unimaginable loss, in adulthood, Sherrills also spoke openly about being a survivor of childhood sexual abuse. Beyond that, he lost friends and extended family in the gang wars that endured in Los Angeles before he helped broker the peace treaty between the gang rival Bloods and Crips. However, his peace activism did not end there. Alongside football star Jim Brown, Sherrills co-founded the Amer-I-Can education initiative as well as The Reverence Movement, based in Watts. He was a recognized voice and expert in violence prevention and community healing and health who understand the challenges Newark faced.

MAYOR RAS BARAKA AND NCST: BEGININGS

Community based intervention, led by workers whose own backgrounds might be linked to gangs, most often offered the most effective response to the epidemic of violence plaguing communities across the country. But this intervention or violence interruption alone was not enough; it needed to be integrated with case management and service provision focused on promoting community healing and future violence prevention.

At Mayor Baraka's bequest, Sherrills came to Newark in 2014 to start the pilot project that quick grew into the Newark Community Street Team. Because of his "on the ground" experience, Sherrills intuitively understood what research was showing, that community based intervention, led by workers whose own backgrounds might be linked to gangs, most

often offered the most effective response to the epidemic of violence plaguing communities across the country. But this intervention or violence interruption alone was

not enough; it needed to be integrated with case management and service provision focused on promoting community healing and future violence prevention.

Before Sherrill's arrival in Newark, in fact even prior to Mayor Baraka's effort to reimagine public safety, there had been individual, voluntary street workers trying to keep the peace in the South and West Ward. These individuals were working entirely on their own – there was no methodology and no funding support. They were just volunteers, worried about the community, out in the streets, trying to keep things safe. One resident recalled, "These were just guys from the neighborhood. Sometimes they were the only ones these gang members listened to. And they were trying to keep us safe. We need something big to help us and in the meantime, these were the guys who tried to keep things safe.

The Newark Community Street Team began life as a pilot program in October of 2014 with seed funding from the Mayor's Office. Its activities focused on the South Ward of Newark where the highest rate of violent crime was centered. What made violence and gang-related crime so intractable in the South Ward was the nature of gang activity itself. As one resident explained, "The gang beefs are all internal, they're inside of each gang. And you can't even keep track of them – they change from day to day." It was in the South Ward that NCST began the work of building community trust and reducing violent crime. Newark had experienced a gang Cease Fire from 2007 to 2010 but this was never accompanied by any systematic violence prevention or interruption effort. It was clear that there needed to be a structure to help the men and women who had been in the

streets, trying to keep the peace. There also needed to be programming to sustain the peace once established. One individual who had worked in the streets summarized, “We were trying to stop the violence but we didn’t have an organization. We needed that – we needed the other part to finish the job.”

During the implementation of the pilot program, three researchers from the Rutgers University School of Criminal Justice, Brian Wade, Shadd Maruna and Rod Brunson began work on a process evaluation.²⁴ For six months, the research team “attempted to directly observe” the implementation process, conducting ethnographic observation of worker applicant interviews, trainings, team meetings and field work. Additionally, 11 of the 15 original “streetworkers” were interviewed²⁵ From this study, the Rutgers team reported the following preliminary conclusions:

- Historically in other urban settings, streetworker programs have been part of a larger, multi-agency collaborative effort with few implemented as a “stand alone” initiative;
- “With some notable exceptions, over the six month pilot NCST “largely struggled” to create collaborative relationships occurring in other successful streetworker interventions;
- There was evidence of what was termed “trickle down crime reduction” which consisted of:

²⁴ All evaluation material in this section is derived from a Rutgers Power Point. No report was submitted to Mayor Ras Baraka or the Newark Community Street Team.

²⁵ Terminology used by Rutgers in their power point presentation.

- Changing behavioral norms
- Mentoring youth who might be criminally involved
- Connecting at-risk youth with city services and jobs
- “Enhancing collective efficacy” through patrols of hot spots

The researchers were clear that their focus “was not on evaluating the effectiveness, or lack thereof, of the initiative as a crime reduction strategy.” However, even in its early stages, this evaluation opened the door to an effective evaluation that would be holistic and participatory. It is also critical to note that beyond the evaluation, there was an immediate and positive reaction to NCST, some of it even emerging from law enforcement.

From the onset, from the response of leadership in the Newark Police Department (NPD) as well as anecdotal accounts, it was clear that the pilot program’s efforts were proving effective. Now officially established as the Newark Community Street Team in May 2015, the pilot program was rapidly growing into a systematic community-based violence reduction initiative led by Mayor Ras Baraka.

Six months later, in November 2015, NCST partnered with the City of Newark Department of Health and Community Wellness and created the West Ward Victims Outreach Services and Crime Reduction Initiative (WWVO). This effort represented an expansion into a second community – adding the West Ward to the South Ward as the focus of NCST efforts. The WWVO was developed as an innovative crime victim services

and violence prevention strategy, adding on to the overall crisis intervention strategy originally implemented in by Mayor Ras Baraka 2014. As a result of braided funding from local philanthropic foundations²⁶ and a grant from the U.S. Department of Justice, the NCST both expanded its service sector and hired a full-time MSW. The funding enabled them to begin offering crisis/short-term counseling as well as the capacity to connect crime victims and their families to services and community resources. Because of this, the role and identity of NCST outreach workers and high risk interventionists grew and became more complex.

Program Expansion

These were all welcome developments for the inaugural team of NCST interventionists and outreach workers, composed of 16 individuals, who were selected out of 40 original applicants. After these individuals were vetted, interviewed and subjected to background checks by the Newark Police Department, they were hired as NCST staff. These were dedicated men and women, but they faced multiple challenges as well. By November 2017, NCST was growing but needed structure. While it functioned in the basement of the NAN Newark Tech World Community Center, it was rapidly outgrowing its quarters. Trainings and meetings were held in the basement where staff members also had their desks. Its nontraditional employees were struggling with protocol and time management. There were ongoing concerns with the fact that outreach workers and high risk

²⁶ These philanthropic foundation included the Prudential Foundation, the Victoria Foundation and Paul Profeta of the Profeta Urban Investment Foundation.

interventionists (particularly the latter group) needed to develop a stronger sense of professionalism and fidelity to the model and protocols of violence prevention as well as case management. The organization also faced ongoing concerns surrounding recordkeeping and data collection. NCST had hired a part time data expert who was knowledgeable but was pulled in different directions, having multiple commitments outside of NCST. Early observation quickly reinforced participant reports that the organization was struggling on two major fronts: (1) ensuring the professionalism of street workers and (2) implementing systems of data collection. These issues were not unusual for an organization committed to meeting the needs of a demanding environment at a time when funding support was limited. Nationally and at the federal government level, there was a major shift away from the social justice orientation of the Obama administration. Instead, the new President indicated that there would be deep cuts in programming and an emphasis on “law and order.” This was not an easy environment for NCST to stabilize its structure and put more workers on the street to address the concerns of youth, families and community residents.

However, at the same time, there were positive developments. The Newark Public Safety Roundtable was up and running and engaged in major community impact. It began meeting every other Tuesday in the basement of the Community Center. The meeting was facilitated by two members of the NCST staff and as one explained, “This is a community driven public safety forum. There needs to be honest feedback. It’s set up to let law enforcement know how they’re doing in the community and what we need from them.”

By late 2018, the number of partners involved with NCST was growing. Along with law enforcement, NCST was collaborating with the City of Newark, the South Ward Children's Alliance, hospitals, and local community-based organizations. The pursuit of data was extremely important and Ms. Deysi Maury was hired as the new data administrator. Ms. Maury's work will be discussed in detail below but it is critical to note that she introduced the Apricot Data Management System, that became institutionalized within NCST as the most effective source for data collection and information technology. Alongside these internal developments, by 2018, three separate areas were being covered by NCST as Georgia King Village (GKV) joined the South Ward as a focus of both case management and violence interruption.

All of this activity kept pace with developments inside of City Hall. At the start of his second term in 2018, Mayor Baraka was clear that he wanted to reallocate money spent on policing towards victims and families affected by violence and poverty. In an interview conducted during the course of the evaluation research, Mayor Baraka spoke at length about strengthening families and communities.

We are trying to fix the system. But to do this, we need to keep people alive and then we can teach them. We want to keep people out of jail while we create opportunities where they can grow. We need trauma-informed care and community round tables, but all of this takes time. Violence is a public health issue and we need to deal with it the way we dealt with polio – we have to change

how we intervene, otherwise people are more than likely to catch this disease of violence and suffer even more.

Baraka was very much aware of the latest public health strategies and how they informed the work of the NCST. During the interview he talked extensively about the importance of collaboration because, “people are talking to each other but they’re not really working together.” The Mayor was also deeply concerned with the future of NCST and figuring out how the organization could be sustained. He discussed how, even as the NPD used law enforcement tools such as CompStat,²⁷ “there is going to be disruption in all of these families – the more people you arrest, the more disruption occurs.” What Baraka was most interested in was the idea of “shared safety.” He expressed his belief that:

The police need to see NCST as a supplement. When the crime stats showed that aggravated assault went up, then NCST sent out more resources. They had an impact. We need to get everyone involved in this, including the state legislature. If we can buy garbage trucks under state contracts, why can’t we do this?

With Mayor Baraka’s ongoing support, the structure of NCST continued to grow. In 2019 the organization moved out of the community center basement and into new offices that included a conference room and a larger meeting room. Framed photographs of each NCST staff member and Outreach Worker were centered on one of freshly painted walls.

²⁷ CompStat is short for Compare Statistics and is a law enforcement approach to crime reduction which is based on identifying spikes in crime through comparative statistics and then addressing those spikes by targeted enforcement. It emerged in the wake of broken windows theory and has been popularized in police and sheriff’s departments across the country. It has been criticized as only marginally effective and far too easy to manipulate.

There was space specifically dedicated to offices with this new site testifying to the stability of the organization. However, the changes were not limited to the location alone. As NCST continued to expand both its mission and vision, new Leadership Team members were added. Daamin Ali is now Field Director; he has been with NCST from its early days and is the critical possessor of all institutional memory. Toby Sanders, a theologian was appointed Director of Education to help design and develop curriculum. Consistent with NCST's emphasis on hiring individuals whose experience is grounded in the reality of violence prevention and criminal justice, Dr. Sanders was previously incarcerated and during his detention, started a program for Rutgers University to help individuals move from prison to college. This program grew to 700 students and represented the depth of the need for education throughout incarceration. At NCST, Dr. Sanders works to build the capacity of staff, helping them to navigate trauma. Edith Muhammad was appointed Program Manager and her background attests to the effectiveness of NCST's innovative hiring modeling. Miss Muhammad was formerly an NPD police officer who has cared for a 15 year old son with disabilities throughout her career. Deysi Maury was promoted to Chief of Organizational Operations (COO) and manages all administrative operations. At the same time, a succession planning process was instituted. As Aqeela Sherrills worked to expand the Shared Safety approach into a multi-state initiative, the NCST Leadership Team continued to ensure that there was a seamless delivery of services and ongoing structure for all community-based efforts. Additionally, NCST has expanded its partnerships further to include:

Baraka Center

Newark Department of Health and Community Wellness

Essex County Prosecutor's Office

Newark Anti-Violence Coalition

Newark Community Solutions

University Hospital/Rutgers New Jersey Medical School

In reviewing its brief history, it is apparent that from 2015 to 2020, the NCST has evolved and further developed a complex and responsive mixture of approaches and services. The Newark Public Safety Director Anthony Ambrose openly stated his support for the efforts of the NCST high risk interventionists and outreach workers explaining, "When there is a problem we call them." Ambrose continued to explain, "Their work fills a void that cannot be filled by the police department." It is significant to note that this organization has not stayed rigidly fixed on its initial strategies but instead has responded to community needs with the intentional development of new approaches and services. The current structure of approaches and services is outlined in the next section.

THE NCST MODEL

The development of the Newark Community Street Team Model continues to progress. Evaluation research revealed the key elements of the model. In addition, the following preliminary “Theory of Change” was developed by the evaluation team to guide future efforts:

MISSION STATEMENT

NCST draws upon an evidence-based, trauma informed approach to violence reduction that has been implemented in several cities across the country. NCST believes that relying on crime rate data as the only indicator of public safety is inadequate. Safety is not just the absence of violence but the presence of well-being and systems that support the most vulnerable amongst us. NCST envisions a public safety system that puts victims at the center of our public safety strategy and invests in healing services for community and our law enforcement partners.

PROGRAM COMPONENTS

High Risk Intervention
Safe Passage
Case Management and Mentoring
Community Walks
Hospital-based Violence Intervention Program (HVIP)
Victim Support and Advocacy
Public Safety Roundtable

NCST Mission and Vision

The Newark Community Street Team is grounded in the public health model of violence prevention and community wellness. In this model, public safety is not viewed simply as the absence of violence and crime; instead it is viewed as the ongoing existence of a community sense of wellness, health and well-being. While there is an understanding of the role of law enforcement in this approach, because of its holistic view of public safety, the public health model maintains that it is critical not to expect the police to handle all problems. Aligned with its emphasis on the public health model, the NCST interweaves attention to trauma through all of its programs and strategies, maintaining that there must be alternative and meaningful ways to address trauma that also trace their roots to the public health approach. “We cannot stop any violence or help to heal these communities with addressing the underlying trauma that almost everyone in them has experienced,” Aqeela Sherrills declared at the beginning of a team meeting. This is an understanding that guides all the work conducted by high risk interventionists, outreach workers and related staff.

While there is an understanding of the role of law enforcement in this approach, because of its holistic view of public safety, the public health model maintains that it is critical not to expect the police to handle all problems.

Mission Statement

The NCST mission statement is clear and details its function and philosophy:

“NCST draws upon an evidence-based, trauma informed approach to violence reduction that has been implemented in several cities across the country. NCST believes that relying on crime rate data as the only indicator of public safety is inadequate. Safety is not just the absence of violence but the presence of well-being and systems that support the most vulnerable amongst us. NCST envisions a public safety system that puts victims at the center of our public safety strategy and invests in healing services for community and our law enforcement partners.”

Components of the Model

From the onset, the Newark Community Street Team relied on five delineated strategies designed to reduce violence and maintain peaceful stability in the South and West Wards of Newark, New Jersey. These strategies consisted of the following:

- (1) Identify, recruit, train and deploy community-based, non-traditional leaders to serve as interventionists and outreach workers;
- (2) Offer case management to high-risk, high-promise youth;
- (3) Drawing upon varied methods and approaches, including High Risk Intervention and Safe Passages, intervene in and mediate conflicts between individual and rival gang-involved youth in the South and West Ward;

(4) Increase awareness of and access to healing and recovery services for victims/survivors of violence by providing direct services, advocacy and public education;

(5) Collaborate with citywide and regional public safety initiatives, as described below.

The Newark Community Street Team consisted of the following key components:

Leadership Team

While Aqeela Sherrills represented the innovative force behind the Newark Community Street Team, from the onset, he was determined that leadership team be developed and extended to include a group of individuals who could guide the Initiative through every challenge that it faced and into the years ahead, ensuring the sustainability of community wellness. With its membership described previously, the leadership team includes an executive director, a deputy director, a field director, chief operations officer, a fiscal administrator and a project manager.

High Risk Intervention

This service demonstrates the significance of the partnership between the Newark Police Department (NPD) and NCST. The NPD routinely sends email notifications of homicides and shootings as soon as they occur, in real time. The High Risk Intervention (HRI) team

is required to respond to at least 3 events every 24 hours. There is, however, no cap on the number of HRI responses that may occur in a 24 hours period.

Each high risk interventionist responds to active street disputes, helps de-escalate personal disputes, and collects intelligence at crime scenes without crossing the yellow line. They draw upon trust and leverage relationships with all those associated with the perpetrator as well as victim(s) to further de-escalate rumors and prevent retaliation. Additionally, interventionists may follow shooting victims to the hospital for what is termed “a warm hand” off to the Hospital Violence Intervention (HVIP) Team based in the trauma unit. As of 2020, the team had received and responded to 2-3 calls from the Newark Police Department per day with each of these calls originating from the South and/or West Ward. High risk interventionists receives intelligence from the police but they never share their own intelligence with law enforcement.

Safe Passage

Because violence is occurring in and around school settings more than anywhere else, this service deploys a group of outreach workers at four schools: Kipp School, Shabazz High School, Weequahic High School and West Side High School. These workers provide “safe passage” for youth before and after school, to protect students from any kind of attack or intimidation. This effort grew out of the Community Assessment completed by the Newark Department of Health and Wellness, which identified “safety around schools” as a priority. The outreach workers position themselves at key entry and exit points at

each school as well as at bus stops, intersections, and stores near to the school where youth “hang out” and develop relationships with youth, building trust and ongoing communication. These strategies allow workers to intervene in and de-escalate potential conflicts and problems while they ensure students both arrive and make it home from school safely on a daily basis. There is particular attention paid to what is occurring on school campuses during Fridays because this often is a lead-in to the weekend. The opposite is true on Mondays as violence that has occurred over the weekend may spill over into the start of a new school week.

As described in the vignette that opened this report, the outreach workers are on site from the early morning, beginning at 7:30 AM and then continuing at 9:00 AM, 2:30 and 4:00 PM, depending on the specific school schedule. NCST Safe Passages workers have developed partnerships with school security teams and Newark Police Department Officers assigned to school settings. This allows them to help prevent violence both on campus in certain instances and in the area surrounding schools. While the Safe Passage team may be called upon to break up fights, they also keep these conflicts from escalating into shootings and homicides.

Case Management and Mentoring

Outreach workers, whose overall activities, including mentoring, are described in detail in the next section, offer case management to youth and young adults between 18-30 years of age. They focus on the young men and women who are at risk of becoming victims

and/or perpetrators of violence. These individuals are carefully recruited and identified even as outreach workers engage in other community based activities. Once each youth is screened and enrolled in case management, they receive both access to services and mentoring provided by their case manager.

Community Walks

Every Thursday NCST case managers conduct a community walk in a neighborhood that has been noted as possibly having had “hot spots” during the previous week. These walks produce intelligence about the potential for retaliations, the presence of at-risk individuals and other community concerns that require NCST intervention. These concerns may include (but are not limited to) gang activity, drug trafficking, child endangerment, or illegal gun sales. This intelligence is never shared with law enforcement but is used by NCST in planning the future deployment of NCST interventionists to address retaliatory events. It also provides information to aid in strategizing around future deployments.

Hospital-based Violence Intervention Program (HVIP)

In this innovative program – the first of its kind in the state of New Jersey – three outreach workers are embedded full time in University Hospital and act as community healthcare providers. In turn, the work of the High Risk Intervention program is directly related to these HVIP outreach workers. When an individual is harmed, whether it is by a physical attack, rape, shooting or stabbing, they enter the hospital to be served. Sometimes there is warm hand-off from another NCST high risk interventionist and on other occasions people

enter the hospital on their own. In yet another protocol for referral, trauma center physicians treating victims of violent crime explain the services that NCST provides once their patients are stabilized. If the patient is receptive to NCST intervention, the physician contacts NCST and a worker makes an arrangement to meet with the individual.

It is critical to note that NCST workers do not station themselves at hospital emergency rooms waiting for individuals to be admitted, nor do they approach friends or relatives who may be arriving at the hospital following a violent event that involves a friend or loved ones. NCST consistently observes protocols surrounding privacy and deep respect for the agency of victims of violence. If they are called to help, the HVIP workers help each individual develop a safety plan so that after they receive medical services, they do not face the same conflict or danger that brought them to the hospital to begin with. All of this is designed with future violence prevention in mind.

Victim Support and Advocacy

As part of this service, any children, youth, parents, families and residents who have been the object or victims of violence receive immediate intervention for trauma. Beyond this, there is referral to long-term psychological services, given that the vast majority of individuals suffer with Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). Additionally, individuals are connected to all available victims services which can range from assistance with memorials as well as pro-bono legal services provided by Rutgers University as well as information regarding awards and funding for those who have suffered violence in their

lives. Specifically, NCST has received financial support through the New Jersey Victims of Crime Act, enabling them to fund a full-time advocate on staff who helps all violence survivors complete applications so they can receive the dollars allocated for them. That term, “survivors,” is integral to the NCST model, empowering individuals to act on their own behalf to receive services they are entitled to and require. Before this effort, 90% of community residents were being denied victims services and compensation because they were labelled guilty of “contributing behavior.” Working with the Public Safety Round Table, NCST lobbied for a change in law enforcement policy so that individuals were not labelled “victim suspect” on police reports.

Public Safety Roundtable

Along with these major services, NCST facilitates the Public Safety Roundtable, the community policy forum that meets twice a month in the NCST offices. This effort is modeled after the highly successful Watts Gang Task Force in Los Angeles, an effort which Aqeela Sherrills helped establish and successfully maintain. The Roundtable or PSR takes place in the South Ward and consists of residents, elected officials, law enforcement, community-based organizations, faith-based groups and other community stakeholders. All service providers, most notably law enforcement, are held accountable by residents who are quick to point out when individuals or entities are not providing the programs and/or services for which they receive funding. There are also updates from the Newark Police Department, including CompStat reports so that residents can be informed about where violence is occurring in their neighborhoods. In turn, NCST reports on conflicts

they are trying to de-escalate and mediate. PSR offers a public forum for vibrant exchanges on health and public safety as challenges arise in the South Ward.

Public Safety Initiatives

In addition to hosting the Public Safety Round Table, representatives from NCST consistently attend and actively participate in several local councils and task forces including the Safer Newark Council, the Law Enforcement Partnership Meeting, and the Newark Victims Services Task Force. NCST plays a significant role in the Safer Newark Council, which actually consists of two groups: (1) a smaller advisory group comprised of the Mayor's Office, the Newark Police Department and NCST and (2) the larger Safer Newark Council.

Participation in each of these efforts is strongly aligned with all NCST service delivery. Simply stated, NCST does not exist in a silo but instead is engaged in ongoing collaboration with multiple city and regional efforts. The Law Enforcement Partnership meeting which is held twice a month at Rutgers University includes the Newark Police Department, the Office of the County Prosecutor, the state Attorney General, County offices of Probation and Parole, along with other law enforcement agencies who all meet together and discuss their responses to gang activities and crime. While NCST represents an alternative approach to public safety, their participation is essential to this group's work. Similarly, NCST is a member of the monthly Newark Victim Services Task Force, representing its Hospital-based Violence Intervention Program.

Education, Training and Jobs

The NCST is committed to wellness sustainability, both for individual residents as well as at-risk neighborhoods. Because of this, staff facilitate 12-week Amer-I-Can Life Skills training classes offered at the Georgia King Village and NAN Tech Center. This innovative learning program, originally founded by former NFL football star Jim Brown, is designed to foster each participant's personal development by helping individuals cultivate both academic and life management skills, leading to increased pro-social behaviors and meaningful contributions to society.²⁸ Additionally, NCST has built relationships with local employers, both public and private, and hosts a weekly jobs clinic, enabling residents to learn about available employment as they meet face to face with various public and private agencies, businesses and organizations.

Outreach Workers: Roles and Responsibilities

The role of the NCST outreach worker is multi-faceted and vital to the NCST. Simply stated, outreach workers are the engine powering the main NCST activities. Each worker functions as a case manager and at times focuses on preventing violence. In many other gang intervention and violence reduction efforts, workers' duties are bifurcated – they are either case managers *or* violence interrupters. Within the NCST, the function of the outreach worker is much more holistic – they work both as case managers *and* violence interrupters. Prior to describing their specific roles and requirements, it is critical to note

²⁸ <http://www.amer-i-can.org/about/about.html>

that from its founding, NCST has never discriminated on the basis of gender and has included both female as well as male outreach workers as part of its professional work force and leadership team.

It is critical to understand each outreach worker and their responsibilities as case managers. Once an individual enrolls in the NCST program, their outreach worker assists them in completing a 6-month life plan. They then enroll in Life Skills training and are connected with specific services they need to transform their lives. This is not an easy process, nor as straightforward as this description. NCST outreach workers are deeply involved in the daily and even hourly struggles of their clients, creating a safe and intentional space for individuals to communicate and share with them. By conducting home visits, accompanying clients to interviews and appointments and even spending “down time” with them, outreach workers build trust and a strong relationship with each one of their clients. They are not simply case managers but also mentor each client who is their responsibility.

As described, outreach workers’ efforts as case managers are complemented by their engagement in violence interruption; in a sense these responsibilities are two sides of the same coin of public safety. As an embodiment of the public health model, workers are committed to initiating and maintaining trust and relationships with neighborhood residents and their extended families, gang members and associates as well as community elders. Because they have lived in the communities they are now serving, outreach

workers leverage these relationships to further serve violence interruption. They will sometimes work in concert with high risk interventionists. The trust these individuals build enable both high risk interventionists and outreach workers to obtain critical information and intelligence that is *never shared*. This knowledge then allows them to then short-circuit, de-escalate and prevent violent events at danger of occurring in the South and West Ward communities. By mediating violence and ensuring peace, the efforts of both outreach workers and high risk interventionists drive the crime rate down and decrease the number of violence incidents that occur in neighborhood settings.

TRAINING

From the onset, it was clear that outreach workers and high risk interventionists would require professional training before they could begin to fulfill their roles in the community and neighborhoods they would be serving. Initial training during the pilot phase of NCST was provided by Teny Gross who was the Executive Director of the Institute for the Study and Practice of Nonviolence in Rhode Island. Mr. Gross' training was well organized and enthusiastically received by both interventionists and outreach workers who were hungry for knowledge. However, his approach was much more philosophical, revolving around the mindset necessary to both cultivate and model non-violence in the community. There was a need for more specific training that involved specific protocols of how to proceed

with case management and how to respond to threat as well as full blown crises in the community. To fulfill this training need, NCST turned in a different direction.

In the next phase of development, outreach workers and interventionists were required to complete 40 hours of professional training provided by the Professional Community Intervention Training Institute (PCITI), led by Dr. Aquil Basheer,²⁹ a nationally recognized expert on violence intervention and public safety.³⁰ Aquil possessed a long history of training community interventionists and outreach workers globally and represented the optimal choice to work with the NCST workers moving forward. He maintains an ongoing partnership with NCST and his efforts were part of this qualitative evaluation.

Since 2015, the training that PCITI and Aquil offered to NCST trainees focused on community-based intervention strategies tailored to the specific Newark neighborhoods. The training emphasizes violence deterrence, crisis-abatement, de-escalation, pro-active scenario-based resolutions, critical incident response reporting, scene management and supervision, and retaliation protocols. Additionally, throughout the training, there continues to be a concentration on the planning and implementation of holistic responses to individuals, groups, neighborhoods, business districts, government jurisdictions and public agencies.

²⁹ Dr. Basheer prefers to be called Aquil. While this is not consistent with report conventions, we will agree to his request, which is based on modesty, not scholarly ability.

³⁰ The UCLA Evaluation team has conducted two separate evaluations of the PCITI, one completed in 2010 and the second currently underway.

At this time, in order to contextualize the findings of the SJRP narrative evaluation, the following time line of crime reduction is presented. It parallels the time of the Baraka administration and the introduction of NCST and is meant to be suggestive, not conclusive.

CRIME TRENDS

To begin to assess the impact of the Newark Community Street Team, it is necessary to consider crime statistics and trends as collected and reported by the Newark Police Department. It is clear that there was a marked decrease in crime after Mayor Ras Baraka first took office in July 2014 and introduced his transformative community based public safety model. This was immediately followed by the introduction of a pilot project which led to the full-time work of the Newark Community Street Team. It is equally apparent that the work of NCST had an impact on public safety and community well-being. In 2018, Mayor Baraka credited NCST with helping to reduce crime and aid economic development. However, it will be imperative for future evaluation research, based on this effort, to measure the type and degree of impact that can be linked specifically to NCST, if possible.

It is important to further contextualize the findings from the narrative evaluation research process by reporting available rates of crime.

Year	Crime Trends
2014	Ras Baraka takes office and launches new public safety initiative
2015	100+ homicides in Newark Mayor Baraka involves Aqeela Sherrills in starting NCST
2016	11% reduction in homicides and overall violence, first double digit reduction in 50 years
2017	12% reduction in homicides In 2017 the Newark Police Department reported a 12% reduction in homicide. Through multiple interviews with individuals from the NPD, leadership staff from NCST, community residents and two outside criminologists there was consensus that this was due to a collective effort to reduce violence in the city.
2018	15% decreased in overall crime from 2017
2019	30 year low in homicides 50 year low in overall crime ³¹
2020	The Newark Public Safety Collaborative reported that, “Crime data from January 1st, 2020, to November 8th, 2020, compared to the same period for 2019, suggest a citywide decline in homicide, robbery, burglary, and theft incidents. Notably, robbery and burglary incidents have decreased by 36% and 27%, respectively. Our most recent analyses indicate a 5% increase in both, auto theft and aggravated assault counts citywide.” ³²

³¹ <https://www.nj.com/essex/2019/08/despite-5-murders-in-one-week-officials-calm-anxious-residents-with-reminder-that-newark-crime-is-at-50-year-low.html>

³² <https://newarkcollaborative.org/crime-data>

In a 2020 meeting, the Newark Police Department reported a six decade all time low in terms of homicide. During four consecutive years in a row, from 2016 to 2020, there have been record low homicides. This reduction in homicides has occurred during the same time period NCST has been in existence.

ETHNOGRAPHIC OBSERVATION: UNDERSTANDING THE WORK OF NCST

Over three years, UCLA researchers observed and analyzed the work of the NCST. We were granted unrestricted access to all organizational efforts from the very beginning. The NCST leadership team welcomed us and allowed us to see the internal workings and challenges of the organization and what went on “behind the curtain.” This expanded to after hour discussions, dinners, car rides and follow-up telephone conversations. Ethnographic observations added greatly to the depth of data to be understood, coded and analyzed. There were two major areas where there was sustained ethnographic observation: (1) training sessions and (2) the Public Safety Roundtable and Community meetings. While the entirety of the over 100 hours of ethnographic observation cannot be replicated here, the following represent vignettes from both settings and offer a sample of what transpired as a context for the interview material that follows.

Training Sessions

Aquil Basheer commanded the attention of trainees throughout each of the three training sessions observed. Each session began with a didactic presentation for the new students. He then had each individual introduce themselves and describe their background; after that he empowered the more experienced students – saying, “I expect you to explain the concepts.” At each session he asks two participants to stand up and explain the concepts that guide street work. During one session two men struggle with how to define key concepts. It is very awkward but Aquil is not afraid to let them struggle; the participants start share their anxiety but Aquil tells them to wait, the men will respond. Instead of describing the key concepts, the men start explaining their methodologies and Aquil pulls them back, explaining, “You are getting into the methodology, instead of the key concepts...you are making a visual perception of your selves and you are forming a visual perception of me and my training. But we need to change those perceptions.”

After engaging the participants at each session, he then presents their first assignment: the participants are told to interview each other. In every session they enjoy this exercise. They get to know each other and after they discussed what they have learned, Aquil arrives at his key point . Every time he tells the group, “You may not know it right now, but this is the essence of what you are doing, you are building trust. That is the center of the NCST work.” His training is based on participants experiencing the lesson, rather than being told what they need to know. It is active rather than passive.

The three day introductory training is extremely practical and mission driven. During one training session there is a young woman who Aquil asks to talk about the nature of intervention. She describes the work of relationship building and the group applauds. After this, Aquil sets up the scenario about what will happen when an NCST worker observes a young man being pressured to join a gang. It's an effective teaching method: the participants have no idea what they should do. They all acknowledge how this is a difficult situation to handle and they listen to Aquil's suggestions intensely. "You need to create normality and get those individuals to function in the moment," he tells the group.

Once you get the person stabilized, you find out what they want and need.

That is the essence of your work: normalize, stabilize and get the resources for them. What we want is constructive, conducive, effective communication.

Following this explanation, Aquil then set each trainee group on an interviewing assignment – they are required to interview each other and find out what is meaningful to the person they are interviewing. It is an excellent opportunity to break things up. Each time he introduced this exercise, Aquil told the group, "This interview is so important – especially when there are new people – it tells their thinking process." After twenty minutes, the trainees reported back, describing how much they had learned about the interviewing process as well as what they were finding out about one another. After one of these sessions Aquil observed, "I like them to hear themselves talk, I like them to see how they present...what I've got to get them to do better is expand, ask more questions, learn to follow up."

Observation of training revealed that Aquil kept all sessions highly participatory. This process was repeated with each new cadre of workers. The groups were raw, inexperienced and dedicated. During individual interviews, each participant talked about gang associations, criminal ties and deep self-hatred that had existed in the past. Attesting to this one man wore a sweat shirt reading:

Nigger

Nigga

Neither

Aquil was constantly working to improve the training content. There were clear additions made between the first and third training sessions that added information surrounding what was happening with gang activity and violent crime in the South and West Ward. Aquil acknowledged the need for additions to the curriculum after the first training sessions, which were attended by 20 people who had no formal knowledge of intervention. When the three day session ended Aquil reflected on how difficult it had been:

Before this, there was no actual structure to the work here in Newark. Our first goal was to clean that up – then we had to give them tools. We gave them the template for how to work together. We also had to show them how they were a nexus with the public safety system. Even now, our first team needs some serious reinforcement. I’m going to have to remember that and incorporate it into the training for the next set of trainees.”

“You are interviewing someone who has gone through trauma. The interviewing process is the assessment process. You keep your mouth closed and your ears open.”

In training with a second group of workers Aquil once again used the exercise that requires the participants to interview one another. After they presented what they have learned,

Aquil brings up how even if they started out uncertain, it was easy it is to fulfill the interview process. He then tells the training participants that they need to “flip this back to the street,” adding a critical point: “You are interviewing someone who has gone through trauma. The interviewing process is the assessment process. You keep your mouth closed and your ears open.”

Over the three separate training engagements, Aquil dove deeply into the issue of trauma, telling the group before him he knows that they have suffered personal trauma. “Because of this you need to be a team. You have to know your people, you have to know their pro’s and con’s.” Always ask the question, “What are your needs?” The training shows each group of participants how they must be there for one another and for the community they are serving. This is followed by videotapes that detail trauma that other street workers and interventionists working in different settings have encountered. Every single time I see the video and this part of the training, the group watches raptly; several individuals are in tears. Aquil is very effective at engaging people and then driving the lesson home. There is a constant reiteration of the idea of teamwork and how together

NCST helps individuals and communities that have suffered pain and trauma, including the workers themselves.

“Remember you are stepping into the situation as experts – they [the community] is looking for instructions. And if you are as dysfunctional as they are, people won’t know what to do,” Aquil sounded a cautionary note, but also

There is a reinforcement of the idea that even though the NCST professional has knowledge, they should not expect things to operate perfectly

offered a solution. “You must know your own pain and get help. Support one another with this too.” There is also a reinforcement of the idea that even though the NCST professional has knowledge, they should not expect things to operate perfectly.

It is apparent from observing the content of the training sessions over time and the participant reaction to both Aquil and the material, that this training is exactly what the incoming NCST staff require. It sets the tone for worker professionalism and also equips them with protocols each can follow in difficult and dangerous situations. One trainee summarizes what he has learned succinctly, “I know what to do when a crisis comes. I know how to de-escalate. But the really important part is that everyone on the team will handle a situation in the same way. We’re all on the same page. We need that.”

Public Safety Roundtable and Community Interactions

From 2017 to 2020, meetings of the NCST Public Safety Roundtable were observed by a SJRP researcher. At each meeting, the Roundtable was comprised of members of the Newark Police Department, including a Captain, as well as high risk interventionists, outreach workers and community residents and stakeholders. The Captain played an active role during several meetings, warm and serious, he was consistently focused on community engagement and the introduction of community services officers. There was ongoing discussion of accountability and the need for cameras to be installed in crime-impacted sectors of Newark. During one meeting, the NPD Captain reassured the group, “When people know cameras are involved, they act differently.” But questions about how this information is retrieved and stored were raised repeatedly. Community residents and stakeholders were deeply involved in the ongoing discussion. Initially, during the 2017 meetings, there was a small and committed group of residents involved, but their numbers grew over time. Their trust, however, took much longer to build.

At a later meeting in mid-2018, the Roundtable is much more organized. Mr. Simpson is now the facilitator of these meetings and with his guidance, the meetings cover all the topics on the agenda; time limits and rules of engagement are observed: everyone speaks one at a time and listens quietly to one another’s opinions. One 2018 meeting begins with a discussion of recent crimes that have occurred in the South Ward. The NPD Captain has developed strong rapport with the growing number of residents attending. Although he is Anglo and very much a law enforcement professional, he is understanding

and non-judgmental, telling the residents that “drug dealers are doing their business but honestly, that’s not what I’m worried about. Shootings are what I’m worried about.” He talks about the different streets where most of the shootings are occurring. One resident tells me, “He knows what he’s talking about – it’s like he’s carrying a map around in his head.” Another resident overhears us talking and mutters, “I still don’t trust him.”

Despite the residue of mistrust, by 2019 it is apparent that the Public Safety Roundtable has solidified. The group covers a broad range of topics – most notably the needs of families, whether they are the families of victims of violent crime or the families of the accused. Over the weeks, there is also discussion of sex trafficking, substance abuse, more outreach into school settings and the significance of Outreach Worker efforts. Repeatedly, residents and stakeholders alike express their gratitude for both case management and violence interruption. One resident stands up and announces:

I got one complaint about the workers and I speak for the community [in the South Ward] on this. We need more of them and we need them around for more hours. We can use their help with our children and we can use their help around the clock for the violence. Right now, the work is good, but we need more. And I want to apologize to everyone from the PD right now because I mean no disrespect, but the workers are doing a better job than law enforcement. They’re the reason we feel safe.

The man sits down and everyone in the room starts laughing and clapping, including members of the NPD. Something has shifted in the atmosphere – the group feels they are in this fight together.

Something has shifted in the atmosphere – the group feels they are in this fight together.

At a meeting in late 2019, Aqeela indicates that he wants to speak. “We need to talk about the issue of trauma,” he tells the group, adding, “Part of this trauma means that people have a fear of the police and government. They think – with good reason – they’re going to bring on more trauma.” Several people nod and then begin rise up one by one to speak about how to save children from experiencing trauma. One soft-spoken black man stands up to talk about what he is trying to do to save the youth of the community. “There was a man in the community who helped me – he was a mentor. He talked me into going to school. Now we need to do that for the next generation.”

There are also women’s voices in these meetings; they are lifted up in concern for the community. They talk about the history of drugs – “now we’re in 2019 and we’re supposed to be woke...but how do we get woke when we don’t even recognize our history?” One woman is talking about “our history of trauma” and one Outreach Worker keeps saying “yes Ma’am, yes Ma’am.” She is talking about living in the West Ward and says, “I can call them [the street workers] at any time.” But, she is urging the group to take responsibility for itself.

At a PSR in 2020, there is extensive discussion about the lead in pipes that is affecting the water in housing developments. The group begins to ask questions. How is this affecting children in the community? Has anyone checked the pipes in the schools? There is concern about violence but what is also apparent is that there is a building of collective efficacy, community residents are coming together to solve multiple problems. It is clear that the PSR has now solidified as a community forum and serves as a setting for outreach workers, high risk interventionists, residents, law enforcement – literally all involved – to come together.

Taken together, these observations of both Training Sessions and Public Safety Roundtable, provide a context for what occurred during depth interviews with NCST leadership, outreach workers, high risk interventionists, residents and community stakeholders. Their thoughts and ideas offered a rich and moving portrayal of a community taking control of its own fate and building agency in relation to public safety, healing and community wellness. What follows is a discussion of the interview content and the themes that emerged.

INTERVIEWS AND ANALYSIS

Based upon the data collected and analyzed, fourteen major themes emerged. The final determination of these themes depended on the coding procedure described earlier in this report. After coding, the data analysis and theme development was subjected to critical review by selected members of the evaluation research team. The fourteen themes were then subjected to a meta-analysis by two evaluation team members. Independent coding of the themes resulted in the development of four overarching themes that described the predominant concepts that emerged from the narrative evaluation. The overarching theme is listed first, with subsequent description of the related major themes. Both the overarching themes and the major themes were then used to guide the development of recommendations. This following table (designated Table 1) represents the themes in detail, followed by each theme being explained in detail.

Table 1. Qualitative Themes from NCST Roundtables and Interviews

NCST QUALITATIVE THEMES		
	Theme	Support for Theme
NCST Professional Identity, Roles and Effectiveness	<p>Outreach Workers and High Risk Interventionists were strongly identified with their work and the idea of bringing peace and preventing violence in their neighborhoods as well as in the city of Newark.</p>	<p>The workers identification with their work stemmed from the fact that every single individual interviewed had spent part of their life in either the South Ward or the West Ward, coming of age in the Newark area. But their identification was not simply a matter of having lived in Newark. They were also strongly focused on the future. Individuals were deeply invested in making the neighborhoods they grew up in safe and free from violence.</p>
	<p>All staff attributed much of their effectiveness to professional training and their engagement in learning was apparent from the onset of their involvement with NCST.</p>	<p>Observations of NCST training revealed that individuals responded strongly when Aquil Basheer explained to them: “You are here because you understand the people of the people. And because you understand the pain of the people, you are going to be driven by that passion and that commitment. And you know this is not a game.” During the training session, participants listened with their full attention. Afterwards, the men and women gathered in the room clustered around Basheer, saying, “You put into words how I feel,” and “I need this training, it’s going to help me to do my job.” Several interviewees described the effectiveness of the training, discussing how “I put what I learned into action,” and “whenever I got into a tight place I remembered what Aquil taught me.”</p>
	<p>Most NCST staff reported that they were formerly incarcerated and felt that their work represented a</p>	<p>Throughout interviews and during informal discussions, individuals openly discussed their personal histories, their involvement with the criminal justice system and their</p>

	<p>chance to help “heal” and “bring peace” to their communities.</p>	<p>past incarceration. Many felt that this allowed them to understand the youth and adults they were dealing with in a “real” and personal way. But there was more than their credibility that shaped the thoughts of the workers and the NCST staff. The majority of individuals indicated their need to make up for negative acts and behaviors in the past. Repeatedly they discussed their wish for redemption and the desire to “never see what happened in the past be repeated in the future.”</p>
	<p>NCST provided its outreach workers and high risk interventionists with a professional identity and legitimized their role in the community. This translated to plans for expansion in both knowledge and job responsibilities.</p>	<p>Along with their external peace-keeping, the majority of NCST staff talked about the internal growth they experienced, building new identities. Repeatedly, interviewees, both high risk interventionists and outreach workers described finding out “who I really was” or “I knew I didn’t have to be on the streets – well, I could be on the streets making peace, doing good.” All of this internal “work” helped individuals to envision how their lives might go forward.</p>
	<p>The use of women as high risk interventionists and even as outreach workers remains a source of conflict and ambivalence. However, interviews and observation indicate there is no difference in effectiveness as workers or understanding of roles and responsibilities.</p>	<p>During introductory interviews with men who were training to be on the NCST staff there were mixed feelings about their female counterparts. Some expressed concern and even dismay about the mobilization of women as workers in the streets. While there was some dissent, overall, women were viewed as playing an important role in both violence interruption and case management. There were several individuals who believed women excelled more than men at certain aspects of these roles.</p>
<p>Community Building and Collective Efficacy</p>	<p>NCST helps to build community capacity. While focusing on community wellness and de-escalating violence, NCST also builds a sense of collective efficacy.</p>	<p>Both NCST workers and residents alike described the importance of the efforts of NCST and how well these dovetailed with the work of the Public Safety Roundtable. Residents and stakeholders participated actively in the Roundtable and observations revealed that there was a steady and open exchange of information.</p>

		<p>Communication and relationships between NCST and partner organizations as well as law enforcement and city services have improved over time, largely due to the strengthening of the NCST model and its implementation. However, individuals emphasized that in relation to law enforcement there was still work to do.</p>	<p>The importance of relationships and communication was reinforced in the majority of interviews that occurred between 2017 and 2020. In particular, the theme of relationships with law enforcement recurred throughout interviews. Many NCST staff members discussed the need for stronger dialogue between the police and the community. Even prior to the events of 2020, there was ongoing discussion of the importance of – as one outreach worker explained – “closing the communications gap between the community and the police.”</p>
		<p>Despite initial uncertainty and mistrust, residents and community stakeholders have embraced NCST and now view it as a vital part of the Newark community; its presence is counted as a community strength.</p>	<p>When NCST was first established, there was skepticism about “how long it would last.” In its marginalized communities, Newark residents have seen programs come and go and were suspicious that NCST would be yet another passing attempt at violence prevention. As the presence and engagement of outreach workers and high risk interventionists continued over time, overlapping groups became increasingly convinced that NCST would stay and grow, alongside community needs and requirements. During interviews and informal discussions, residents repeatedly talked about how important NCST had become.</p>
	<p>Trusting Relationships as the Key to Success</p>	<p>Strong and stable relationships are critical to the success of NCST.</p>	<p>As the previous theme on the growth of collective efficacy revealed, high risk interventionists and outreach workers focus on relationships – building trust with all residents and helping at risk youth involve system involvement. They also assist individuals in leaving the criminal lifestyle, identifying with pro-social behaviors. Repeatedly, residents and NCST workers agreed that the trust they experienced then reinforced their work with youth in the community.</p>

		<p>It is as a case manager, identifying and managing a case load of five to seven youth and young adults (ages 18-30), that the Outreach Worker truly expands the purpose and impact of NCST.</p>	<p>With resident and stakeholder concern over the future of children and youth, case management was viewed as essential to long-term community change, public safety and hope. Residents in particular expressed their appreciation for how youth connected with outreach workers. One of the major reasons NCST workers so effectively identified youth and then built trust with them was due to their own lived experience.</p>
		<p>There is interest in support for trauma and other services that focus on mental health needs for the community.</p>	<p>The vast majority of NCST staff described the profound need for mental health services for victims and perpetrators and their families. However, an equally significant component of this theme involved the interviewees themselves. Over the three years of the study, with only two exceptions, all of the NCST staff, high risk interventionists, outreach workers, residents and stakeholders all described multiple traumas they had experienced.</p>
	<p>The Road Ahead</p>	<p>Outreach workers expressed concern about youth and young adults being able to sustain themselves once case management ended. They emphasized the critical need for resources in the community.</p>	<p>Literally every outreach worker and NCST staff member talked about how desperately additional resources are needed for the youth and families they serve. There was constant discussion about the need for more services and simply stated, money, to give to youth and their families.</p>
		<p>Outreach workers as well as high risk interventionists discussed their desire for financial stability and health benefits.</p>	<p>Over half of the individuals interviewed expressed the need for financial stability and the opportunity for upward mobility in their work. Several individuals brought up pay as an issue and also expressed their need to be reimbursed for “out of pocket” expenses.</p>
		<p>The significance and impact of the Newark Community Street Team was affirmed by all the different groups of individuals interviewed. As part of this discussion,</p>	<p>As discussed earlier in the evaluation, there was a diverse range of individuals interviewed throughout the course of study. What was striking was the shared belief that NCST was having a significant impact on the South and West Ward neighborhoods. Mayor Baraka was mentioned several times</p>

	<p>Mayor Baraka was praised for his leadership.</p>	<p>in the course of interviews, invariably in a positive light. He was viewed as having brought “a new way of doing things” and “a new approach” to communities that “had to deal with bad cops for too long.” The public health model and the emphasis on community strengths was appreciated deeply by residents and NCST staff and workers alike.</p>
--	--	--

Overarching Theme One: NCST Professional Identity, Roles and Effectiveness

Theme One: Outreach Workers and High Risk Interventionists were strongly identified with their work and the idea of bringing peace and preventing violence in their neighborhoods as well as in the city of Newark.

The workers identification with their work stemmed from the fact that every single individual interviewed had spent part of their life in either the South Ward or the West Ward, coming of age in the Newark area. But their identification was not simply a matter of having lived in Newark. They were also strongly focused on the future. Individuals were deeply invested in making the neighborhoods they grew up in safe and free from violence. One interventionist said simply, “We just want what everyone wants – a place our families can be safe, where our children can grow up healthy.” A woman, early in her work as an Outreach Worker echoed this when she stated, “I want to make things better for the children.” Throughout interviews and over time, individuals kept repeating the same idea, “We need to make a better world for our children,” and “When I look at my children, I want something better for them.

Theme Two: All staff attributed much of their effectiveness to professional training and their engagement in learning was apparent from the onset of their involvement with NCST.

Observations of NCST training revealed that individuals responded strongly when Aquil Basheer explained to them:

You are here because you understand the people of the people. And because you understand the pain of the people, you are going to be driven by that passion and that commitment. And you know this is not a game.

During the training session, participants listened with their full attention. No one looked at a cell phone or texted a message. Afterwards, the men and women gathered in the room clustered around Basheer, saying, “You put into words how I feel,” and “I need this training, it’s going to help me to do my job.” One female interviewee went into detail:

I know because I’m a woman I’m gonna have a hard time on the street – people might not trust me and they might even try to punk [fool and intimidate] me, especially because I’m a woman. But this training has given me the tools I need to survive and to do my job. I feel like I’ve got the knowledge I need to work in the neighborhood.

One year later these same individuals were eager to re-visit their responses to training. In interviews with ten out of the sixteen individuals who participated in the original training revealed overwhelmingly positive responses. Several interviewees described the effectiveness of the training, discussing how “I put what I learned into action,” and “whenever I got into a tight place I remembered what Aquil taught me.” Over and over

again individuals referred to the safety protocols that they had absorbed from the training session and nine participants added that they would welcome the opportunity to receive more training. One worker enthused, “I just want to learn – it helps me grown, it’s help me to help others, especially the youth.” Only two individuals expressed reservations that were based on how brief the training was saying, “I needed more” and expressed concern that perhaps the trainer should have been from Newark. “You know Aquil doesn’t know how the PD [police department] operates here. We could have used someone who understand that,” one interviewee noted. In contrast, five men and women discussed how Basheer and the trainings he led had helped them to understand how they were a nexus with the public safety system.

One Outreach Worker described how meaningful the training was for him:

I went through the training with Aquil...it was definitely necessary. You really need to have a protocol that is the same with all of your colleagues. You have to see eye-to-eye there on the streets, you can’t just go willy-nilly running around. I use what I learned in the training every single day – it never gets old.

Another staff member discussed how “there has to be a protocol and everyone has to know their lane and their position. That’s why the training is so important.” Another worker enthused about the value of the training:

It is one of the best trainings you’re gonna be part of. All of that training gives you insight into not just how to survive but also how to strengthen your community and your peers. It needs to have a much larger platform –

including cops and other organizations.

Theme Three: Most NCST staff reported that they were formerly incarcerated and felt that their work represented a chance to help “heal” and “bring peace” to their communities.

Throughout interviews and during informal discussions, individuals openly discussed their personal histories, their involvement with the criminal justice system and their past incarceration. Many felt that this allowed them to understand the youth and adults they were dealing with in a “real” and personal way. “They know when I talk to them, I’ve got the credibility,” one individual explained.

But there was more than their credibility that shaped the thoughts of the workers and the NCST staff. The majority of individuals indicated their need to make up for negative acts and behaviors in the past. Repeatedly they discussed their wish for redemption and the desire to “never see what happened in the past be repeated in the future.” One interviewee explained:

A lot of us come from here and remember what things were like. Some of us were even part of the problem. But now we want to make things better, we want to really heal the community from all the trauma. There’s a lot of good people here and I know I want to make everything all right for them. I never want it to go backwards, I only want Newark to go forwards.

In an extensive interview, one individual described how after being a gang member for 17 years, he now wanted to give back to his community. “After I had kids, I knew I wanted to leave gang life and help make my community a better place. It’s where I’m raising my kids and it’s where I’m doing this work.” Another worker talked about his closeness to the community and how it was part of his past and his future purpose:

I know most of the knuckleheads here. I got shot right here. I got all my charges right here. Now my whole thing is being able to shine the light brighter – make people feel safe – that’s my position to play. And there is no off switch with that. I’m part of the neighborhood. It matters to me because of this. I want to make things better.

One Outreach Worker who is now a part of the NCST Leadership Team described his background which offered a meaningful example of why the NCST approach is so successful. He described how while he was incarcerated for 20 years, he began a process of self-reflection that led to a search for a different identity. While he was in prison, he discovered his leadership abilities. This led him to seek work after release with the Offenders Aid and Restoration agency where he learned how difficult it was for individuals to find employment after incarceration. He eventually met Mayor Baraka and learned about the plans for a new and innovative program of community outreach and violence prevention. This led him to Aqeela and the work that “changed my life.” He now hires and supervises outreach workers and high risk interventionists.

Another long-term NCST staff member described his investment in detail, explaining:

I'm good at recruiting people – I have one guy who I can call at Georgia Wright – this program motivates me – even if I get someone a simple ID. I really want to continue with this work. I know these guys who don't have anything – no birth certificate, no ID, no nothing – it's like these guys are like zombies out there.

These guys are walking around, taking drugs, it's like they're dead. It's like you have the predator and the prey. You see guys that when I see them – my thoughts are “I want to help them.”

Because these individuals came of age in the South and West Wards, their history informs their actions. They routinely go far beyond their job descriptions and the proverbial “call of duty” – working after hours to help. Many described how their deep personal sense of responsibility has grown out of their formerly destructive behavior and ‘wanting to make things right.’

Theme Four: NCST provided its outreach workers and high risk interventionists with a professional identity and legitimized their role in the community. This translated to plans for expansion in both knowledge and job responsibilities.

Along with their external peace-keeping, the majority of NCST staff talked about the internal growth they experienced, building new identities. Repeatedly, interviewees, both high risk interventionists and outreach workers described finding out “who I really was” or “I knew I didn't have to be on the streets – well, I could be on the streets making peace,

doing good.” All of this internal “work” helped individuals to envision how their lives might go forward. One staff member explained:

I never thought of going forward, I never thought of moving up in the world until I got here. I went through the training and I learned. Then I went to work with the kids, with all the folk, and they treated me with respect. I was from NCST. They respected me and I knew I had to start respecting myself. I had to be an example. Then when Aqeela told me I should be part of the staff – I knew it. I was ready.

These remarks about their new identities were confirmed by residents in interviews.

While this was not the purpose for the resident interviews, which were focused on the NCST work, two long-time community members spontaneously remarked about how one outreach worker had changed from the wayward youth they had known:

I knew [name here] growing up. He was no good. He was always up to something in the neighborhood. Now I see what he’s become. He’s a man and he’s a good man. He can walk proud. And that’s because of the work he’s doing in the community. The youngsters listen to him, they want to be like him. And that’s a good thing.

Much of this change started with the NCST training; the findings about training effectiveness and personal growth were strongly linked. As stated previously, every individual who participated in the NCST training from 2017 to 2020 was interviewed during or immediately after the training session and

One individual explained how he received calls from men who are currently incarcerated. He found that, “The way they talk about it when they call me from the pen[itentiary], they think it’s the greatest thing since sliced bread. We’re all helping each other.”

then a year later. There were only three individuals with whom there was no follow-up. At the time they attended the training and expressed their desire to become either interventionists or outreach workers, both men and women indicated that they wanted to eventually move on and up, either inside the NCST organization or in other community-based agencies. The women were more aspirational than the men, describing their desire to go to college and even graduate programs. The men were not interested in college, instead they were interested in upward mobility and higher paying jobs. Their desires and dreams paid off and those who had been involved with NCST had a visible afterlife. The majority of high risk interventionists and outreach workers moved on to work in nonprofits and service organizations throughout Newark.

News of the impact of NCST on lives and identity traveled beyond the Newark community. One individual explained how he received calls from men who are currently incarcerated. He found that, “The way they talk about it when they call me from the pen[itentiary], they think it’s the greatest thing since sliced bread. We’re all helping each other.”

Theme Five: The use of women as high risk interventionists and even as outreach workers remains a source of conflict and ambivalence. However, interviews and observation indicate there is no difference in effectiveness as workers or understanding of roles and responsibilities.

During introductory interviews with men who were training to be on the NCST staff there were mixed feelings about their female counterparts. Some expressed concern and even dismay about the mobilization of women as workers in the streets. One of the toughest, an experienced staff member who supervised both men and women was opinionated about the subject, insisting:

We've got too many women in the cohort [there were six out of twenty]. These are broken women – they can't solve their trauma by being staff here, especially with intervention -- it isn't going to be good for them, it isn't going to be good for the people they say they want to help.

While he is saying this another man quickly disagrees:

But we're broken too. We're all broken, brother. You've got to understand that this is why we're going to be able to help – because we've been through it. And the women know this better than anyone. They've had their kids or loved ones die. And they understand what mothers are going through when they lose their babies.

His thoughts represented the viewpoints of the majority of NCST staff and workers. While there was some dissent, overall, women were viewed as playing an important role in both violence interruption and case management. There were several individuals who believed women excelled more than men at certain aspects of these roles. One staff member detailed this idea, saying, "Women are natural peace-makers. They are nurturing and they folk to get along. They can defuse things in the street when men might still be wondering what's going on."

One female Outreach Worker related that she had not been incarcerated but that all of her brothers as well as her father had been incarcerated. “I might not have been locked up,” she reported, “but I know the effect it has on a family. And I know how it affects these families.” Another woman offered her assessment of the value women bring to this effort:

Sometimes it takes a woman’s point of view. I work with all the kids on my caseload to get them clothes and make sure they’re all groomed to look right. I even talk to the male workers about what they’ve got to do. Some of them need help with their own grooming!

There was one long-term Outreach Worker who insisted, “The work needs to be extended to include even more women. And now we are seeing women get shot and these women, these girls, they need another woman to relate to.”

Overarching Theme Two: Community Building and Collective Efficacy

Theme Six: NCST helps to build community capacity. While focusing on community wellness and de-escalating violence, NCST also builds a sense of collective efficacy.

Both NCST workers and residents alike described the importance of the efforts of NCST and how well these dovetailed with the work of the Public Safety Roundtable. Residents and stakeholders participated actively in the Roundtable and observations revealed that there was a steady and open exchange of information. One Newark Police Department Lieutenant explained:

I’ve learned a lot more here than I ever would have working on my own

in the community. It's not about a specific crime – but it's about how the community is feeling, how they don't trust us – they want to but they don't believe we're on their side. This is the chance for me to prove I'm on their side – at least I feel that way.

The Public Safety Roundtable serves as one of the main arenas for building collective efficacy. It has been an essential component of the public health model, reinforcing the work of NCST and also enhancing community engagement. A small group of NCST staff including both high risk interventionists and outreach workers expressed about uncertainty regarding the specific functions of the roundtable. But the majority of NCST staff enthusiastically described its efforts.

During a follow-up phone interview, held during the height of the pandemic, one outreach worker explained:

We do a lot to build up this community. At the roundtable people get to speak up. We see their faces, we hear their voices and we get to face the cops. We can tell them when they're doing things wrong. I think one of the reasons Newark stayed peaceful after George Floyd was because of the work we do in the streets and the roundtable. We got our problems with the PD out in the open. And they said they would change.

“We don't got to like the cops. But we do gotta co-exist. If we know we are strong, we can get along as equals. And that's the important word. Equals.”

His words were the culmination of NCST efforts to empower the community to address public safety through its own action. This sense of agency has enabled residents and stakeholders to both hold law enforcement accountable and to peacefully co-exist. As one resident explained, “We don’t got to like the cops. But we do gotta co-exist. If we know we are strong, we can get along as equals. And that’s the important word. Equals.” These words evoke the sense of collective efficacy that is thriving in the South and West wards.

Theme Seven: Communication and relationships between NCST and partner organizations as well as law enforcement and city services have improved over time, largely due to the strengthening of the NCST model and its implementation. However, individuals emphasized that in relation to law enforcement there was still work to do.

The importance of relationships and communication was reinforced in the majority of interviews that occurred between 2017 and 2020. In particular, the theme of relationships with law enforcement recurred throughout interviews. Many NCST staff members discussed the need for stronger dialogue between the police and the community. Even prior to the events of 2020, there was ongoing discussion of the importance of – as one outreach worker explained – “closing the communications gap between the community and the police.” Another interviewee echoed this idea:

I never thought we’d have this kind of communication with the police – but
That doesn’t mean it’s all better. There’s still some cops that don’t believe
in NCST. But that means we can’t give up – we need more events that involve

us and law enforcement to help break down barriers. I've heard there's basketball tournaments and things like that in LA. We could do more that way – we've got the start of good communication and we need to do more.

One worker described how she has developed her own set of contacts with potential employers, explaining that she approaches potential employers every few days to try and solicit jobs for her mentees. "I try to keep up to date with people I know who are looking to hire – especially youth. That's part of doing the job and we gotta remember that." Stakeholder interviews revealed that NCST enabled them to "connect the dots." One representative of a community-based nonprofit described the changes that had occurred since 2017:

Before the Mayor and NCST, there was no one holding all the pieces together, no one who brought us together. You might hear about work someone was doing on the West Ward but that's as far as you got. And we weren't talking to each other. NCST has brought us all together. Aqeela almost sets it up like a party – we're talking, we're laughing, but all the time we're getting to know each other and working together. That's the real strength here. And it's the force behind the change going on.

Theme Eight: Despite initial uncertainty and mistrust, residents and community stakeholders have embraced NCST and now view it as a vital part of the Newark community; its presence is counted as a community strength.

When NCST was first established, there was skepticism about “how long it would last.” In its marginalized communities, Newark residents have seen programs come and go and were suspicious that NCST would be yet another passing attempt at violence prevention. As the presence and engagement of outreach workers and high risk interventionists continued over time, overlapping groups became increasingly convinced that NCST would stay and grow, alongside community needs and requirements. During interviews and informal discussions, residents repeatedly talked about how important NCST had become. One long-time resident explained:

You need to understand how much this community has been through – people promising stuff all the time. I’ve lived here over 23 years and I’m telling you, I don’t trust what anyone tells me. But these workers – they’ve been here – in the streets, calming things down; in our houses talking to our kids and our grandkids. They’ve really made a difference.

Her observations were echoed in the words of another resident who recalled:

We’ve had lots of trouble with gangs here [in the South Ward]. It’s been bad for a long time. You hear this and that – this program’s coming and it’s gonna make things better. The thing is, things never got better. Now, it’s starting to feel safe. I only hope we can keep this thing – this Street Team going -- because it’s the first thing that’s really worked.

A member of the Leadership Team recalled how the community did not trust NCST when it first began its efforts. Many individuals, particularly those who were gang involved

believed that the outreach workers and interventionists were snitches, saying “They didn’t like anyone who looked like they were dealing with the police.” Winning the community trust was a major part of relationship building. “The youngsters and everyone realized we weren’t snitches, we weren’t gonna turn them in, that we were interested in peace,” one interviewee explained. Virtually everyone who was or had been an Outreach Worker talked about the need to build trust. “I think it’s important that we live and work in the same areas – people know we want things to be better on the street because we live there,” one individual added. What emerged from both resident and NCST staff interviews was the understanding that NCST work is not episodic but instead ongoing and expanding to meet community needs, particularly trauma. Residents and staff all agreed that NCST is not simply crisis-oriented but is authentically part of a greater movement directed towards building community strengths and collective efficacy.

Overarching Theme Three: Trusting Relationships as the Key to Success

Theme Nine: Strong and stable relationships are critical to the success of NCST. As the previous theme on the growth of collective efficacy revealed, high risk interventionists and

“They’re around – we see their jackets with the letters on them. We know they’re here and they talk to us, they care about us, they live next door to us. This is the first time someone was really in the street. That’s why we trust them..”

outreach workers focus on relationships – building trust with all residents and helping at risk youth involve system involvement. They also assist individuals in leaving the criminal lifestyle, identifying with pro-social behaviors. Repeatedly, residents and NCST workers agreed

that the trust they experienced then reinforced their work with youth in the community. “We need these folk helping our babies, keeping them out of trouble,” one mother observed while another older man who had lived in the South Ward over thirty years offered:

They’re around – we see their jackets with the letters on them. We know they’re here and they talk to us, they care about us, they live next door to us. This is the first time someone was really in the street. That’s why we trust them. They talk to us all the time. And they’re helping our youth – we gotta save them from getting locked up or worse, getting killed.

Once again, these phrases regarding saving children and youth were heard over and over again throughout interviews. Relationships with youth were cited as being one of the biggest reasons residents and stakeholders trusted the NCST.

When it came to starting and then building relationships, outreach workers were endlessly innovative and dedicated. One interviewee described how he goes to “local hot spots and looks for kids congregating – including kids he is mentoring, as he reported, “I always look for problems that may be developing. It’s all about the relationships.” Another worker described how he draws upon relationships to “talk people down and prevent acts of violence from occurring.” The majority of individuals interviewed discussed the importance of daily contacts in growing relationships. In this vein, one worker discussed his dedication to effective recruitment and also talked about the challenges he faced:

Sometimes I might think that someone could use case management but then it turns out my ideas were wrong – the evaluation is wrong – and the recruit doesn't qualify. Even then I keep going and ask them if they know someone else who might benefit. The whole trick to this is you never stop.

That final phrase was used in one form or another by over thirty of the individuals interviewed, with words such as, "You just can't stop," "You've gotta keep trying," and "when you're working with youth, you can never ever stop." The determination that NCST staff and workers demonstrated was consistent and also part of the program's success. The vast majority of outreach workers and high risk interventionists felt very strongly that once they committed to residents, youth as well as older adults, that bond could not waver. This was especially true for outreach workers who interacted with youth. Whether they personally recruited or were assigned someone to their caseload, they were dedicated to building and maintaining their relationships. As one worker explained:

It's hard – especially when a kid gets in trouble. I get so discouraged – like, why did you do that? Then I remember what I was like when I was a kid – I got in so much more trouble. I think about that and then I tell them I'm not gonna give up on them.

The cultivation of peace and pro-social behaviors was a constant for NCST staff who drew upon their own life experience to help youth and young adults avoid the same mistakes.

“I tell them don’t be like me. I mean it. Do. Not. Be. Like. Me. I was locked up for 17 years and you don’t wanna to waste your life that way.”

Theme Ten: It is as a case manager, identifying and managing a case load of five to seven youth and young adults (ages 18-30), that the Outreach Worker truly expands the purpose and impact of NCST.

Resident and stakeholders together viewed case management as essential to long-term community change, public safety and hope. Residents in particular pointed to how youth connected with outreach workers, largely because NCST workers so effectively identified youth and then built trust with them was due to their own lived experience. For example, an interventionist who was particularly successful with violence interruption and case management then moved on to serve as a supervisor for incoming workers explained what happened once he was released from prison after being locked up for 19 years:

I was formerly incarcerated, formerly a criminal, formerly gang involved. I pretty much knew the game and I was really interested in helping to end it. I got involved in mediation in a public housing project where I was trying to stop the violence, stop kids from getting involved in gangs. I still don’t trust the police but now I just watch what they’re doing in case anything goes wrong. I meet with the people I’m supervising every day – I want to make sure their passion for this program and for the kids is nurtured and sustained. They have to learn it’s all about the relationships – especially for the kids – write that in capital letters:
IT’S ALL FOR THE KIDS [honoring his request].

Another worker, devoted to his case load that had grown to sixteen individuals, talked at length about how each youth or young adults, “need support, love and encouragement. I have a big caseload because I just can’t let any of them go.” Similarly, a different interviewee described how:

“It takes time but believe it or not, this is where things are really gonna change – you show these youngsters, through a relationship, that it’s all gonna be different, that there’s a different life out there for them.”

It’s hard to overcome youth’s suspicions that this is gonna work. They are suspicious and really afraid to trust you. But you gotta keep at it. It takes time but believe it or not, this is where things are really gonna change – you show these youngsters, through a relationship, that it’s all gonna be different, that there’s a different life out there for them.

Several outreach workers noted that they were able to most effectively recruit youth and young adults for involvement with NCST case management through community walks and Facebook posts. Social media was increasingly cited as being an important factor in maintaining relationships. “I communicate in between meetings by texting my mentees or on Facebook. We keep in touch that way and it’s easy,” one worker explained while another also talked about how he “face-times my youth all the time, just to check in and see if they’re okay. That way I keep in touch constantly. Another worker described how “sparking them sparks me. I text my mentees five to six days a week. I communicate with them a lot.”

Overarching Theme Four: The Road Ahead

Theme Eleven: There is interest in support for trauma and other services that focus on mental health needs for the community.

The vast majority of NCST staff described the profound need for mental health services for victims and perpetrators and their families. Repeatedly, interviewees talked about the need for counseling, as one interventionist reported, “I respond to the scenes of shootings and I always know, I’m gonna work with all the families involved to some help.” A staff member who had lost most of his family to gang violence implored, “It’s counseling, counseling, counseling. Everyone needs it. Everyone!”

However, an equally significant component of this theme involved the interviewees themselves. Over the three years of the study, with only two exceptions, all of the NCST staff, high risk interventionists, outreach workers, residents and stakeholders *all* described multiple traumas they had experienced.³³ Again, with two exceptions, every single individual had experienced personal trauma that included but was not limited to child abuse, intimate partner violence, being shot, seeing a loved one abused and/or shot, and losing a loved one to violence. “The staff here is traumatized,” one individual explained, “By what they’ve been through in their own lives and what they’re seeing on the streets.” Many described having been shot or having someone in their immediate family -- in most cases siblings and parents -- who had been shot.

³³ The two exceptions were associated with faith-based organizations as clergy or pastor’s associates.

One Outreach Worker went into detail:

One of the things that makes us good at this work is that we've all suffered. I watch my daddy beat my mama so bad he put her in the hospital. Then he turned on us kids and beat all of us. I saw my daddy shot and I saw my best friend shot right before my eyes. I've been hungry. I've been incarcerated. I've been involved in prison violence and violence on the streets. I've been through things no one should have been through. That's why I can do this work. But I also know that's why we need some support.

As he spoke, a member of the NCST leadership team sat nearby and kept nodding their head. Afterwards the woman approached me and confided, "You know I was sexually abused and I never even told anyone until Aqeela told me what he'd been through. We all help each other to heal."

Outreach Workers repeatedly described the stress of feeling responsible for the fates of so many youth and young adults. "Sometimes this is just too much work for one individual on a time schedule," one worker confided. "Sometimes when I am out there alone, I wish we had a team of guys just out there, focused on case management, focused on Safe Passage and people in the office, focusing on paperwork. It's so stressful." It is critical to note that 80% of the individuals interviewed – both NCST staff and workers agreed that there had to be an expanded focus on the trauma individuals experienced while they were engaged violence interruption and case management. One interviewee literally pleaded, "We need to consider the impact of secondary trauma on everyone who works at NCST."

Another individual observed, “Only the other people at NCST really understand what we’re going through. You can’t unless you see it.”

Peer group support proved important but the NCST staff as well as the Newark community need extensive strategies for healing. Such strategies must take into account that western, middle class models of psychotherapy, counseling and “talk” may not best serve every individual. “I don’t wanna talk,” one youth resident told me, ‘I wanna heal my body.” The use of alternative healing methods was discussed enthusiastically by many individuals who shared their personal traumas. Rather than therapy, this represented the most culturally resonant avenue for trauma-informed care. There has already been a partnership established with the Sanar Institute, which is a center for trauma informed healing.³⁴ NCST should enlarge this partnership along with building upon other resources to address the needs of both staff and Newark communities.

Theme Twelve: Outreach workers expressed concern about youth and young adults being able to sustain themselves once case management ended. They emphasized the critical need for resources in the community.

Literally every outreach worker and NCST staff member talked about how desperately additional resources are needed for the youth and families they serve. There was constant discussion about the need for more services and simply stated, money, to give to youth

³⁴ <https://sanar-institute.org>

and their families. “I don’t know if anyone needs to remind them that these people are POOR. We’re all poor,” one worker implored, “we need money.” Another interview participant described how there needed to be services and resources to keep youth and young adults motivated to stay in the program. The individuals interviewed were particularly eloquent when it came to delineating what mentees needed in addition to the case management services NCST provided. One woman explained:

I really worry that there aren’t enough resources to help these kids get where they can sustain themselves without our help. There’s a long, long list of what they need like bus passes, help with housing and maybe no one wants to say it but they need help with drug rehab.

Another interviewee stated that, “we just need more diversion programs for youth. Maybe it’s the first time they’re in trouble with the law – we don’t want to send them down that pathway for life.” His words were echoed by another staff member who said, “I got involved as a kid and it led to prison – I don’t want to see that happen to another kid. We need diversion. Badly.”

The individuals interviewed -- both NCST staff and workers -- had multiple ideas about how to further build relationships and provide resources for youth. “We need to develop more team building,” one interviewee suggested while another expressed the desire for additional funding so “we could take field trips to sports events and games – maybe we could even mix youth from different neighborhoods to overcome gang influences.”

Several workers suggested that mentees receive cell phones so they “could search for jobs

and communicate with us. Not everyone can afford a phone – and sometimes I’m a little suspicious about just who’s giving these kids these phones.” Throughout interviews, it was clear, the needs of youth were never far from the thoughts of NCST staff.

Theme Thirteen: Outreach workers as well as high risk interventionists discussed their desire for financial stability and health benefits.

Over half of the individuals interviewed expressed the need for financial stability and the opportunity for upward mobility in their work. Several wanted more hours, as typified in the remarks of one individual:

I know it sounds crazy but I love this work, I would do it for free if I could. But that’s the problem – I gotta make a living. I don’t get enough hours and I’m always worried they’re gonna cut my hours. I worry if we’re gonna keep getting grant funding. And at some points I need insurance or I need someone to pay for my insurance. I finally found something I really want to do – I gotta make sure it pays enough.

These words were echoed in the response of many other individuals who were interviewed over the three year study period. Several individuals brought up pay as an issue and also expressed their need to be reimbursed for “out of pocket” expenses. “It’s hard to live off of just one job, but I do it,” one interviewee explained. Other Outreach Workers described how they give their mentees money for transportation and food, adding that they worry about how many individuals they can support on their caseload. Seven individuals were critical that pay was not commensurate with their increased work load,

but these workers were in the minority. In the course of the three year study, these seven workers moved on to other jobs. When connected by phone for a follow-up interview, six of the seven indicated that they were happy to be making a steady salary but that they missed the work with NCST. As one former high risk interventionist explained, “What I’m doing now pays better but it’s not as rewarding as what I did with NCST.”

Theme Fourteen: The significance and impact of the Newark Community Street Team was affirmed by all the different groups of individuals interviewed. As part of this discussion, Mayor Baraka was praised for his leadership.

As discussed earlier in the evaluation, there was a diverse range of individuals interviewed throughout the course of study. What was striking was the shared belief that NCST was having a significant impact on the South and West Ward neighborhoods. The comments of one resident were evocative of what the sample subjects felt:

I didn’t vote for Ras Baraka the first time he ran. Then I heard he had this idea and I thought it was crazy. But he is the best thing that ever happened to Newark and the NCST is the best thing that ever happened that ever happened to the South Ward. It’s not just the crime. These guys are our people, they’re us! And they showed us you don’t need the cops to keep things safe – we can take care of our community. I finally feel some hope. I just hope – [laughter here] – they don’t take it away.

Mayor Baraka was mentioned several times in the course of interviews, invariably in a positive light. He was viewed as having brought “a new way of doing things” and “a new

approach” to communities that “had to deal with bad cops for too long.” The public health model and the emphasis on community strengths was appreciated deeply by residents and NCST staff and workers alike. One NCST staff member reported:

It’s been a hard road – we had to hire the right people then win the trust of folk who have had the rug pulled out from under them from too long. Then we had to get along with the cops and that was a whole other thing. But we had the Mayor and we had Aqeela and we weren’t gonna let anything stop us. And now, they show us on TV and they say Newark has something to teach the world. That’s something.

RECOMMENDATIONS AND NEXT STEPS

There are three key recommendations that emerged from the evaluation themes:

- 1.** The Newark Community Street Team should continue to be funded and developed as a national best practice.
- 2.** There must be a dedicated line item in the city and/or state budget to fund NCST in the years ahead. It should be a permanent part of city services.
- 3.** This narrative evaluation should serve as the foundation for the development of a formalized theory of change. It should also guide the development of outcome measures. In addition, there should be a formal data-sharing agreement with the Newark Police Department that will include crime statistics and other relevant information.

In addition to the three key recommendations, the narrative evaluation gave rise to the following suggestions regarding the next steps for NCST.

- There is a need for an ongoing training plan with “in-service” and community-based training to be created and evaluated in partnership with Aquil Basheer.

1. This should also include training for the Newark Police Department that can potentially follow the best practices that have been instituted in Boston and Los Angeles along with other urban settings. There is a particular need to educate street-level police officers on the value of high risk interventionists and outreach workers.
- 2.** All NCST personnel – interventionists and outreach workers -- should be facilitated and funded to pursue professional development and education. NCST can explore a partnership with local community colleges and/or state universities for certification and degree programs.
- 3.** There is an urgent need for intentional work addressing the trauma that high risk interventionists, outreach workers and NCST staff encounter. There has been some initial effort in this area but it should be extended to alternative strategies surrounding healing and support.
- 4.** It is critical to expand community capacity and responsibility for public safety. In this vein, NCST and its partners must pursue the use of an App that could be used to manage such efforts. One excellent example is the App currently being used by NCST through Aqeela Sherrills’ partnership with Citizen and Andrew Frame:
<https://www.forbes.com/sites/stevenbertoni/2019/07/15/murder-muggings-mayhem-how-an-ex-hacker-is-trying-to-use-raw-911-data-to-turn-citizen-into-the-next-billion-dollar-app/#53b232441f8a>
- 5.** NCST should continue with their highly effective leadership development and succession planning. This is integral to the continuation of this Initiative’s important work along with building the capacity of future community leaders.
- 6.** As outcomes are developed, it will be critical to integrate non-traditional, creative ways of measuring effectiveness. The NCST cannot rely exclusively on crime statistics but instead must work on incorporating them into community feedback and concerns

CONCLUSION

This narrative evaluation is the first step in demonstrating how the work of the Newark Community Street Team has decreased crime and increased community trust and capacity. There are still important steps ahead, focusing on connecting crime statistics to

All of the individuals observed and interviewed in depth represented a consensus view that the most important achievement of NCST was enabling individuals and families to experience a deep sense of safety in their neighborhoods.

additional measures. Still, it is important to stop and note that the NCST workers' greatest success has been in allowing residents to experience a greater sense of safety in their homes and out on their sidewalks and streets. All of the individuals observed and interviewed in depth represented a consensus view that the most

important achievement of NCST was enabling individuals and families to experience a deep sense of safety in their neighborhoods. One Outreach Worker offered his opinion that "the street team is all about safety for the community. We don't want people to be afraid when they're trying to go to sleep at night." Another interviewee said, "this program is all about public safety and opportunity. That's the meaning of our work." This narrative evaluation represents the first step in the transformative work that must go forward, building into a best practice and saving the lives of so many.