INNOVATIVE PROSECUTION SOLUTIONS

CHATHAM COUNTY, GEORGIA:
Savannah's Innovative Prosecution Solutions

The Problem:
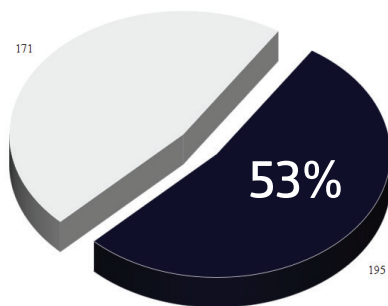Violent crime in Savannah has risen over the past several years

171

53%

195

Chart 1: 2014: Aggravated Assaults
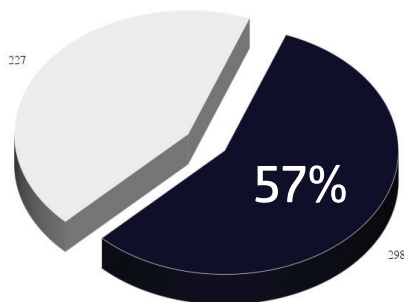366 Aggravated Assaults, **195 involving firearms.** *(approximately 53%)*

227

57%

298

Chart 2: 2015: Aggravated Assaults
525 Aggravated Assaults, **298 involving firearms.** *(approximately 57%)*
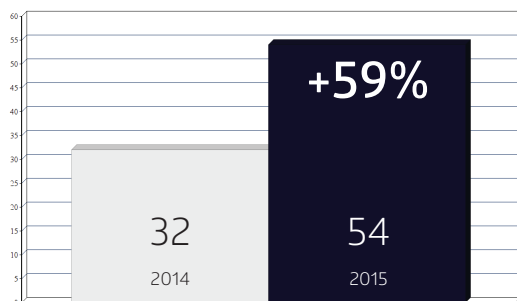

+59%

32
2014

54
2015

Chart 3: 2014 - 2015: Homicide Rate
32 Homicides in 2014, **54 Homicides in 2015.** *(approximately 59% increase)*

The Response:
Violent Crime Reduction Initiative

The District Attorney's Office (DAO), researchers at Georgia Southern University (GS), and Savannah Chatham Metropolitan Police Department's (SCMPD) Savannah Area Regional Intelligence Center (SARIC) mapped the most violent crimes (i.e. homicides, armed robberies, and shootings, both fatal and non-fatal) to identify five different hotspots. The team identified the hotspots by noting several factors: large or obvious clusters of crimes, geographic isolation, and active neighborhood associations while omitting areas that included large numbers of crimes of opportunity. The team selected one downtown hotspot area, targeting the most violent crime drivers, while also focusing on gaining the community's trust and support.

The Approach:

One prosecutor reviews all cases in the hotspot area. Two prosecutors handle cases in the hotspot from indictment until disposition; one prosecutor handles non-fatal shootings, the other handles homicides. Prosecutors work closely with a SCMPD Sergeant to develop crime reduction strategies and enforcement action responses to gang and gun crime. DAO prosecutors collaborate with U.S. Attorney's Office and other federal agencies on violent crime. Team members meet regularly with the community and its leaders to develop positive, proactive relationships so that more community members will report crimes and feel confident to assist during investigations and during trial.

Analysis:

To identify violent offenders, GS researchers use Social Network Analysis (SNA) and risk terrain modeling to understand why violence occurs in the hotspot. Researchers then couple SARIC data, as well as input from DAO and the community for suitable triangulation.

For a qualitative, comparison analysis, the site uses one intervention area and two qualitatively-similar comparison areas. Researchers also disseminate community surveys to gauge community attitudes and perception of violence in their neighborhoods.

"SNA is really important because it lets you understand social dynamics through associations and activities." (GS Researcher, Dr. Chad Posick) SNA allows the researchers to visualize crime though hot spot maps, as shown below.

Through collaboration between law enforcement at the research partner, GS, the site has identified five regions in the city where .5% of the overall population (young adult males) commits most of the reported violent crime.

"SNA is really important because it lets you understand social dynamics through associations and activities." (GS Researcher, Dr. Chad Posick) SNA allows the researchers to visualize crime though hot spot maps, as shown on the right.

In violent jurisdictions such as Savannah, GS researcher Dr. Posick explains that only 50% of all crimes are reported to law enforcement

Initial Analysis

- Identify target area using crime mapping
- Identify comparison areas
- Identify violent offenders in target area
- Conduct social network analysis in target area

Engagement

- Assign cases to dedicated prosecutor
- Divert non-essential cases
- Meet regularly with community groups in target and comparison areas
- Develop media outreach strategy

Analysis

- Community leader survey
- Process evaluation using Michigan State University (MSU) Strategic Action Plan template tool
- Impact evaluation using before-and-after and quasi-experimental designs

Key Features:

- Using a modified vertical prosecution approach (indictment to disposition) two prosecutors handle gun violence cases from the hotspot area

- Engaging with community groups and attending Neighborhood Association meetings to address local needs and concerns

- The site relies on its pre-existing in-house programs to assist with this initiative: The End Gun Violence Initiative and The Youth Intercept Program

- The team plans to continue work with the Violence Intervention Program (VIP) and Youth Intercept program for case diversions and with End Gun Violence for intervention with serious violent offenders

" There is more to crime prevention than arrests and convictions. It takes a coordinated effort between law enforcement and community leaders to effect a change in perception. Our hope is that change starts with our efforts here. "

-Matt Breedon, *Assistant District Attorney*

Challenge: Buy-in

According to Project Lead Kristin Fulford, a challenge was initially obtaining buy-in from law enforcement, "as warm as law enforcement has been, it did take some time for them to warm up to our initiative." The team benefited from a strong connection to one sergeant who championed the cause and helped bridge the gap with other members of law enforcement. Dr. Posick adds, "anytime you try to shake something up, having an advocate is important."

Next Steps:

The team plans to work with local judges and community organizations to create ownership and build sustainability.

Expected Outcomes:

- Crime reduction in the target area

- Reduction in time from arrest to indictment

- Increase in community participation in violence prevention measures

- Enhanced relationship between community and local law enforcement

---

" The last community meeting was a great example of walking in to a group and feeling at home. We received a lot of hugs and a lot of 'we're glad you're here' sentiments that have never occurred before. "

-Kristin Fulford, *Site Lead*

(Discussing the team's attendance at a recent community meeting in the hot spot area)

" Folks can be afraid of law enforcement and don't want to talk because they are afraid of retaliation and the fear of putting people in their community in prison, but they need to see that their perception is not the full picture. We don't want to just put people in prison, we want to make their communities safer. We don't want them to be afraid to live in their own neighborhood. We are here to help. "

-Kristin Fulford, *Site Lead*

" There is a vibrancy in this community for crime prevention. The community understands we don't want to simply arrest people and put them in prison. We want to make communities safer and healthier before crime happens.... "

-Dr. Chad Posick, *GS Researcher*