

## PROJECT SAFE ROCKINGHAM COUNTY

## Indicators of Strategy Success

From submitted reports

Project SAFE Rockingham County, a partnership between the six law enforcement departments and the community, continues its work to reduce gun and gang-related violent crime. And, while there is still much work to be done, indications are that the strategy continues to make progress.

To achieve its mission, Project SAFE Rockingham County (PSRC) focuses on the most violent firearms offenders from around the county. Twice each year, a group of ten to twenty of these offenders is directed by Community Corrections to attend a meeting, known as a call-in, where they are given an ultimatum to put down their guns or face the wrath of the entire criminal justice system. In the same meeting, community resource volunteers are present to help offenders mainstream back into society.

One-on-one exchanges take place as the volunteers offer offenders assistance with obtaining their GED, drug treatment, literacy, jobs searches, and many other skills.

### Compliance with call-in warnings

With its most recent call-in last November, PSRC has conducted five such meetings, the first of which focused on gangs.

All total, 234 offenders have received the warning

to stop the violence and, to date, only four have re-offended with a firearms-related offense.

Mayodan Police Chief Charles Caruso, Chairman of the PSRC Executive Board, stated, "This is a valuable program where offenders are complying with our warnings, and that is clearly making our community a safer place in which to work and live. I would like to encourage citizens countywide to attend our next call-in to experience it firsthand. I am proud to be associated with PSRC."

### Savings on confinement

What savings do taxpayers experience when offenders comply?

For a quick answer, consider the sixteen gang offenders who attended the first call-in in November 2011. The local jail cost for housing these offenders was calculated for the one-year period prior to the meeting, and the same period after it.

The result? The cost of confinement in the year following the call-in for these offenders dropped by over \$10,000.00. Actual savings were probably much more when one considers the fact that the daily cost of confinement was calculated at \$40.00 per inmate — low by anyone's standard — and no costs were figured in for any additional services.

Then, too, this figure

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Mayodan Police Chief  
Chairman of the PSRC executive board

does not take into account time beyond the one year calculation. In other words, savings continue to accumulate with passing months as offenders stay out of trouble.

Sheriff Sam Page, Vice-Chairman of the PSRC Executive Board, stated, "Project SAFE Rockingham County shows a lot of hope and merit. I'm hoping for the same successes here as have been with the High Point [Police Department] model. Every time you can prevent someone from reoffending, you save the person, the community, and tax dollars."

### Volunteers: Giving offenders skills they need

The work of PSRC continues after the offenders attend the call-in, especially in the area of employment. Project Re-entry, an important community partner with PSRC, is providing job readiness classes for offenders at the Division of Work Force Solutions office in Wentworth. In this workshop, they learn vital skills in resume preparation, interviewing and a host of other related skills.

Along similar lines, PSRC has worked closely with Rockingham Community College in providing vocational training for several offenders from the last call-in. Several of them have received tuition scholarships and are now attending evening classes at the Goodwill Industries Community Resource Center in Reidsville to sharpen skills and earn certificates which, in turn, will make them more hireable. Still other offenders are assisted in a one-on-one capacity by PSRC, either with job searches or referrals, shelter or other primary needs.

Just this week, for example, one of the offenders, unemployed and about to be homeless, was directed by PSRC to a local housing facility and manufacturing plant. The offender is now a full-time employee, and his prospects for housing are promising.

### Gun screenings

In addition to call-ins, PSRC continues scrutiny over all felony firearms cases. Under the leadership of District Attorney Philip Berger, Jr., every case in the county is close-

ly reviewed for optimal punishment in state or federal court.

After 12 meetings, 24 of the most violent local offenders are scheduled for prosecution in federal court, with others being considered.

In summary, PSRC continues with the strategies that have made it successful over the last three years. Although the violent crime rate rose last year, the rate for the last two years still shows an overall decline. Regardless, chronic offenders are getting the message and putting down their guns, as only about two per cent of them, once warned, have re-committed firearms offenses. And keeping violent offenders out of jail is saving taxpayers thousands of dollars in Rockingham County, not to mention the steps that PSRC and its community helpers are taking to help make the offenders taxpayers again. All these achievements are indicators that the ongoing efforts of PSRC are working and improving the quality of life of all residents of Rockingham County.

For more information about Project SAFE Rockingham County, check out either of these two sites: [www.redirections.org](http://www.redirections.org) or [www.co.rockingham.nc.us](http://www.co.rockingham.nc.us). Guilio Dattero is Program Manager for Project SAFE Rockingham County. He is retired from the Reidsville Police Department.