GRYD RESEARCH UPDATE: FURTHER EVIDENCE OF THE IMPACT OF COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT ON VIOLENT CRIME

GRYD's Summer Night Lights (SNL) program continued to deliver reductions in violent crime calls-for-service and crime events in 2022 despite the two-year hiatus for the global COVID-19 pandemic.

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In 2008, the City of Los Angeles Mayor's Office of Gang Reduction and Youth Development (GRYD) established the Summer Night Lights (SNL) program as a means of engaging community residents of all ages in places impacted by violent crime.[1] Starting with eight locations the first year, by 2019 SNL was operating in 32 parks and recreational centers across the city on most summer nights from late June through the end of August.

SNL is focused on transforming neighborhoods by creating safe and inclusive spaces, building a sense of community among residents, providing access to city and community resources and information, and creating opportunities for youth employment and professional development.

To achieve these goals, SNL provides free programming including meals and activities for community residents, youth employment in SNL roles, community-led proactive peacemaking in and around SNL locations, and partnering with the Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD) to foster positive community relationships.

In a prior research brief, the impact of SNL was examined by comparing areas where SNL was active with nearby areas without SNL.[2] It was found that SNL led to a 3.8% decline in violent crime calls-for-service and 3.6% decline in violent crimes in SNL sites between 2010 and 2019.

THE IMPORTANCE OF COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

The current research looks at how SNL rebounded from the widespread disruptions of the global COVID-19 pandemic. In 2020 and 2021, SNL adjusted to pandemic conditions by moving to online events and grab-and-go food distribution.[3] However, violent crime in Los Angeles continued with little apparent disruption.[4-6] SNL returned to in-person events and activities in 2022 and expanded their coverage to 43 locations across the city.[7] Re-analysis of the data from 2010-2019 with the addition of 2022 outcomes indicates that SNL continued to reduce violent crime calls-for-service by 3.2% (Figure 1) and violent crime events by 2.0% (Figure 2).

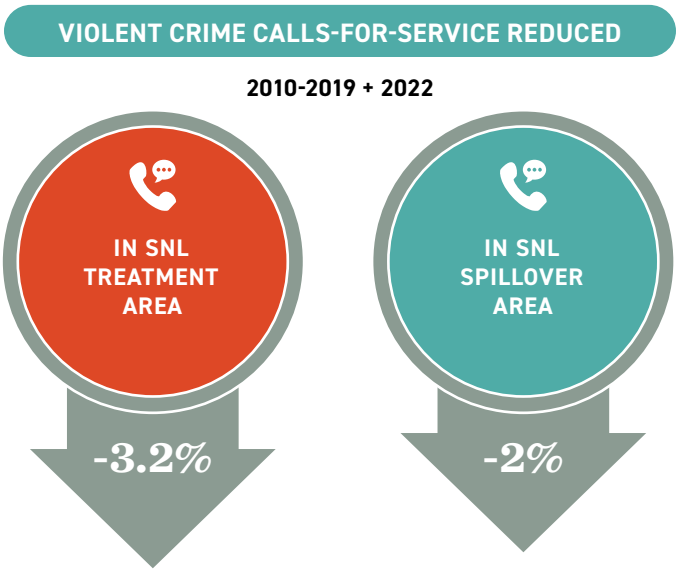

Figure 1. Impact of SNL on violent crime calls-for-service in SNL RDs and spillover area RDs. The results combine 2010-2019 and 2022 outcomes. SNL in 2022 continued the trend of reduction in violent crime calls-for-service in spite of the two-year hiatus for the global COVID-19 pandemic.

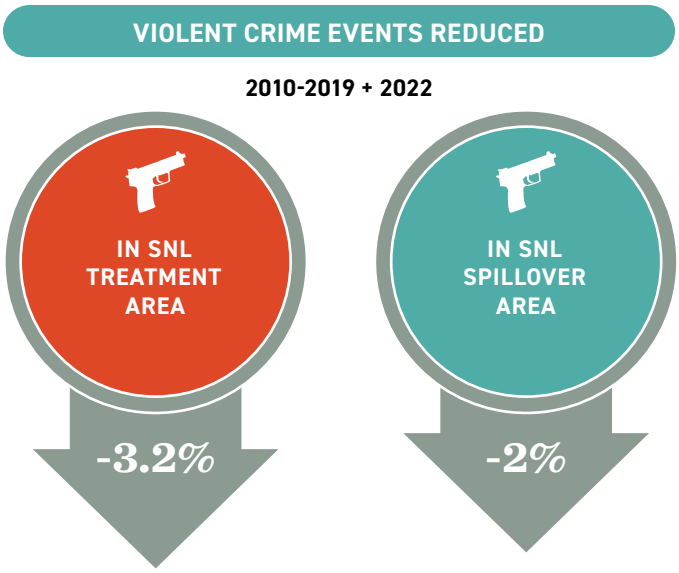

Figure 2. Impact of SNL on violent crime events in SNL RDs and spillover area RDs. The results combine 2010-2019 and 2022 outcomes. SNL in 2022 continued the trend of reduction in violent crime calls-for-service in spite of the two-year hiatus for the global COVID-19 pandemic.

The small, but stable impact of SNL on violent crime calls-for-service and events is remarkable. The only interventions that consistently record crime reductions of greater than 15% focus on either known offenders for enforcement or hotspots for crime suppression.[8-9] The reductions associated with SNL are arguably a by-product of community-building. GRYD's SNL program shows that real gains in community safety can arise from intentional community engagement, not just crime suppression.

SUGGESTED CITATION

Brantingham, P.J., Herz, D.C., & Kraus, M. (2022). *Further evidence of the impact of community engagement on violent crime* (GRYD Research Update No. 8.1). Los Angeles, CA: California State University, Los Angeles.

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