Moving Towards Organizational Best Practice

# Operations: Crisis Preparation

Street intervention workers are first responders and crisis managers. Shootings and homicides are the two most prevalent forms of crises that street intervention workers reflected on in their narratives. Other forms of crisis response involving street intervention workers include mediating disputes, preventing retaliation, responding to domestic violence incidents, responding to drug overdoses or substance-induced behavioral problems, and mental health crises such as suicide threats. Crisis response is an inevitable component of street intervention work, however study participant indicated that most organizations do not have protocol in place to support workers when they respond to crisis.

*That was kind of, I think, the trap for me in processing trauma work, is that there never really was time in the moment made for that. Like, maybe if you're really lucky at like the next staff meeting, there'll be some time to decompress or something, but like pretty much you were expected to be-- to keep going... I think part of it was the trap that those incidents never really stop. Like it's different from, like, having a specific, like very critical and unique situation and in an environment where you say this deserves to be responded to in a special way because it is unique.*

Organizations can develop policies and protocol to support staff when crises emerge. Focusing solely on homicide incidents, street intervention workers reflected the following organizational responses as helpful to their process:

* An individual check-in with their direct supervisor within 24 hours of the incident
* Having a team meeting oriented to process the event
* Creating a physical space within the organization to remember program participants and community members who lost their lives to violence
* Provision to take paid time-off for a few days after a homicide event if needed to provide for a period of physical and emotional recovery

*I got support… The support was that guy was like, "Hey man, what can we do for you bro? I understand you're going through some stuff. You know. Um, don't worry about it you're good. What can we do for you man?" And, uh, it was like-- it was like just hearing that and I felt so much better. I said, "Look man, just-just bear with me man. I'm coming around you know, I just need a little bit more time, man, but I'm coming around." I was traumatized being out and about during the day ... I didn't want to be caught walking through neighborhood during the day but at night, same time I got shot at night, both times in '91 and in 2007, I was out and about … I wanted to work-- I was doing work but I was doing it on my time and without responding to my supervisors or anything man, you know.*

In addition to sharing organizational practices that were helpful following a homicide incident, study participants gave examples where the lack of response caused additional harm.

*And, um, I don't think especially coming from my supervisor that it was a lack of empathy or a lack of concern for myself. It was just a lack of knowing the mental and emotional aspect of what we were experiencing and how to counteract it. You know what I mean?... I didn't go see a therapist or anything like. You know what I mean? The most I did talking to was my significant other laying on the bed, you know? Especially her saying that she wanted me to stop doing this. "Now look what happened." Things of that nature, you know.*

This suggests that organizations need to be proactive in preparing responses to crises when they emerge, and that all levels of staff from administrators to frontline workers are responsible for implementing protocols that are collaboratively developed. The following guided questions can aid in the development of organizational practices related to crisis response. Finally, it is recommended that these guided questions be answered through a collaborative dialogue process involving administrators and street intervention workers. This process will generate a deeper understanding of street intervention work that can lead to a more supportive administrative infrastructure.

# Food for Thought

* + What are the primary forms of crisis response that occur for street intervention workers?
  + What individual-level and team-level supports are helpful within the first 24 hours after a crisis occurs?
    - Support areas for consideration: paid time-off and mental health supports
  + Does the organization have any policies or protocols in place for when crisis occur?
    - Examples for consideration: when a client is killed, when a staff member is injured, when a threat is made at the workplace, when a firearm is found on a participant, etc.
  + Does the organization have sufficient internal resources to provide the support needed as articulated by staff? Or are external resources necessary?