

***Being Resilient. Learning from Community Responses to  
Gangs in Cape Town: Reflections from a Manenberg  
activist***

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## **Being Resilient. Learning from Community Responses to Gangs in Cape Town: Reflections from a Manenberg activist**

*'On 6 March 2019, the day before I was to testify against a notorious Manenberg gang, I got a call from my son. Gunmen had opened fire on our home in Manenberg. My five-year-old grandson hid in a corner, covering his ears with his head between his knees and screamed. Fortunately, no one was injured but the screams and cries of my grandchildren in the background haunt me to this day.'*

—Activist Roegchanda Pascoe, chairperson of the Manenberg Safety Forum, reflects on the consequences of being a state witness and living in Manenberg.

South Africa, which has long experienced an exceptionally high rate of violent crime, has seen a worrying increase in the murder rate in recent years. Cape Town, which has the highest murder rate of all the country's major cities, has experienced the sharpest increase, with a murder rate of 69 per 100 000 (October 2018 figures).<sup>1</sup> Manenberg, one apartheid-era Cape Town suburb of many crippled by gang control and violence, has a staggeringly high murder rate comparable to some of the most violent cities anywhere in the world.

The extremely high murder rate is largely attributable to gang-related violence. More than 10 large gangs and about 40 smaller ones are thought to operate in Manenberg, an urban area of only 3.35 square kilometres. The neighbourhood is also home to some of Cape Town's most notorious and violent gangs, including the Hard Livings, who introduced drugs – and the violence that ensues from the drug trade – on a level that the community of Manenberg had never experienced.

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<sup>1</sup> Anine Kriegler, Why Cape Town's murder rate is rising, *The Economist*, 4 October 2018, <https://www.economist.com/middle-east-and-africa/2018/10/06/why-cape-towns-murder-rate-is-rising>.

This case study on Manenberg, which focuses in particular on the experiences of one activist organization that works in the community there, forms part of the Global Initiative's Resilience Fund project, a programme that aims to create a global network of resilient communities to counter and help diminish the effects of criminal networks.<sup>2</sup> The case study focuses on Manenberg, not only because the area has long been notorious for its gang violence, but also because it is a community that stands out as a sterling example of activism and community resilience in the face of the huge levels of violence it lives with and negotiates on a daily basis. The document, however, not only looks at Manenberg as a case of extreme violence, and at one NGO's reflections on its efforts to build up resilience to it – it is also intended as a practical toolkit for those who wish to replicate the resilience model in the face of violent organized crime elsewhere. People living in communities ravaged by violent crime face complex challenges and building community resilience is increasingly being shown to be an important part of the overall response mechanism.

In particular, this toolkit incorporates lessons learnt from the Manenberg Safety Forum. As such, it offers practical, transferrable advice tips that can provide guidance to any organization looking to replicate the Manenberg Safety Forum's resilience initiatives and develop a set of guidelines to help establish and sustain resilience in other contexts threatened by high levels of criminality.

### **Manenberg: Why the violence?**

Throughout the struggle against South Africa's apartheid government, residents of Manenberg demonstrated their resilience through political and social activism. Later, in the democratic era of the 'new South Africa', the community of Manenberg has continued to show remarkable levels of resilience. But, today, their struggle is of a different kind: the resilience has morphed into a stance against the violent organized crime that cripples the

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<sup>2</sup> The aim of the #Gresilience Project is to create a global network of resilient communities to counter and help diminish the effects of criminal networks. This involves highlighting the courageous and inspiring work done under the most challenging circumstances, and incubating and developing resilience-based initiatives that can protect, enable and empower citizens who have taken, and continue to take, a stand against organized crime. By tapping into their communities' own sources of resilience, we can build sustainable responses to organised crime and develop their capacity to thrive.

community. In recent times, gangs, guns and drug wars have replaced the threat of the apartheid state to the community. The reservoirs of resilience in Manenberg today are community response mechanisms that have to be brought to bear not against a racist, discriminatory government, but to provide support for those who are threatened by the bullets of gang warfare.

Generally, it is important to look at community responses when challenged by violent crime, as members of low-resourced, overburdened communities experience the harsh realities of their environment on a daily basis. They also understand how organized crime has impacted local culture, such as familial networks and values. Through the process of struggle, communities build up tremendous power in the networks and relationships that they form. To help create resilient communities, it is therefore important to understand the value of strengthening and supporting these community networks in a way that is sustainable and replicable.

It is also important to distinguish between these resilience-building efforts and vigilantism. Vigilante groups, unlike community-resilience forums, are characterized by their violent response to crime by taking the law into their own hands. Core to community resilience, on the other hand, is a non-violent, yet robust approach to the stance taken against organized crime. Manenberg has a strong network of resilient activists and is therefore an ideal context from which to learn more about how resilient communities function. These lessons and experiences from the Manenberg context can be transferred to the broader aims and needs of communities impacted by organized crime globally.

## **What is resilience and why is it important for Manenberg?**

Resilience can be defined as:

- The strength to respond to difficulties ...
- by standing up to the bad influencers, and ...
- trying to limit the effect of their negative control as much as possible.
- It is also the ability to constantly bounce back in hard times.

Resilience to organized crime at the community level is essentially characterized by its non-violent, grassroots approach; a resilient community understands how violent crime has gained power over the community. Resilience can be expressed in a number of ways:

- By creating an alternative vision of what society can be
- By building relationships, so that individuals and groups can stand strong together
- By resisting the temptation and lifestyle offered by organized crime
- By constantly standing up to injustices
- By supporting others as they fight their addiction
- By engaging with gang members and believing in their ability to change
- By standing together, so that people's voices can be heard as a collective
- By creating safe spaces, so that children can play outside
- By supporting victims of violence and abuse

In Manenberg, a community that has been harmed by gang control and violence, it is primarily through the community resilience of its residents that there can be hope for a better future. Already embedded and respected in their communities, grassroots activists and organizations, like the Manenberg Safety Forum, have the potential to work with residents to build an even stronger and more resilient community to change Manenberg from the bottom up.

### **Resilience in context: Manenberg's history, demographics and gang control**

There have been various community responses to violent crime globally, and South Africa is no exception. However, there has been limited reflection on the lessons learnt from starting and maintaining resilient organizations. In an attempt to address this gap, this case study reflects on the establishment and evolution of one organization, the Manenberg Safety Forum, and how it has developed a community response in one particular context. Manenberg has a rich history of political and social activism. This case looks at the impact of gangs in Manenberg and what motivates activists to come together. It then looks at the work of

the Manenberg Safety Forum and reflects on the lessons learnt in order to help and offer advice to other organizations and activists developing similar resilience responses.

Entering Manenberg, a high-density urban area south-east of Cape Town's city centre on the Cape Flats, the first thing one notices is the overwhelming number of youths standing around on the street corners. In many respects, they don't want to be inside: housing conditions are cramped here, with so many living under one roof that, in some cases, people need to sleep in shifts. As a result, the only place they can find a sense of independence and escape from the squalid conditions is the streets. The overcrowding in Manenberg is just one of the neighbourhood's many social challenges. Like in other marginalized urban areas in South Africa created by the apartheid government, residents have limited access to social services and employment opportunities. Manenberg was intentionally designed this way. It was established by the apartheid government in 1966 as part of the forced removals and relocation programme, a policy under the Group Areas Act in which people from different racial groups were forced to live in far-removed, designated areas. Residents of Manenberg were relocated from all over Cape Town, including District Six, Constantia, Wynberg and Sea point. These residents were bundled together in an unfamiliar place, forced to live together in poor housing conditions, without hope or opportunity. And that's the message these young men lingering on the street corners and the triple-storey overcrowded tenement blocks looming behind them convey: hopelessness, and an opportunity denied them.

This marginalization has impacted Manenberg in numerous ways. Many high-school students don't see potential for their future, resulting in a dropout rate of 78 per cent.<sup>3</sup> Unemployment in Manenberg is disproportionately high, with only 64 per cent of the labour force employed.<sup>4</sup> An uneducated and unemployed youth population, with too much time on their hands and too little hope,

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<sup>3</sup> Derica Lambrechts, *The impact of organised crime on social control by the state: A study of Manenberg in Cape Town, South Africa*, PhD thesis, Stellenbosch University, 2012.

<sup>4</sup> According to the 2011 Census by Stats SA, [http://www.statssa.gov.za/?page\\_id=3839](http://www.statssa.gov.za/?page_id=3839).

can provide a ready and willing pool of recruits for the local gangs.<sup>5</sup> For many marginalized young men, gangs are an opportunity and a source of employment, but, more than that, they also represent a sense of belonging, of identity – something these youths desperately need. It is estimated that 30 per cent of males in Manenberg between the age of 10 and 30 are members of a gang.<sup>6</sup> The fact that gang membership is so common has meant that the communities have become conditioned to accept gang culture as a daily reality. And, for many – and these deprived young men in particular – gang membership is seen as a satisfactory career path.

In this challenging environment, gangs and gang-related violence became rife. According to older residents of Manenberg, the gang members used to largely keep to themselves, fighting with sticks and knives – only the bosses used guns.<sup>7</sup> When the Hard Livings came into Manenberg in the 1970s, gangs weren't as violent and the violence would happen mostly at night when people were in their homes. A key turning point came during the 1990s when the gangs started infiltrating all parts of society. Wealthy gang members, keen to gain credibility and to be seen as local Robin Hood-type figures, would pay bills and secure housing for the poor and vulnerable. Some even reportedly threw fistfuls of money to the locals from their car windows as they drove around the neighbourhood.<sup>8</sup> Essentially, these kinds of displays were intended to exploit the poverty of the community in order to expand their power and hold over the residents. The 'generosity' of the gangs unfortunately came at a price as residents became co-opted by the gang bosses, hiding drugs for them and working as lookouts to alert them if law enforcement appeared. Many could not find a way out. As the gangs crept into all aspects of society, their violence simultaneously flowed into the streets.

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<sup>5</sup> Derica Lambrechts, *The impact of organised crime on social control by the state: A study of Manenberg in Cape Town, South Africa*, PhD thesis, Stellenbosch University, 2012

<sup>6</sup> T Legget, *Terugskeit (returning fire): Growing up on the street corners of Manenberg, South Africa*, in Dowdney, L (ed.), *Neither war nor peace: International comparisons of children and youth in organized armed violence*. Rio de Janeiro: Viva Rio/ISER/IANSA, 296-315.

<sup>7</sup> Roegchanda Pascoe in conversation with elderly residents of Manenberg.

<sup>8</sup> Derica Lambrechts, *The impact of organised crime on social control by the state: A study of Manenberg in Cape Town, South Africa*, PhD thesis, Stellenbosch University, 2012, 162; T Legget, *Terugskeit (returning fire): Growing up on the street corners of Manenberg, South Africa*, in Dowdney, L (ed.), *Neither war nor peace: International comparisons of children and youth in organised armed violence*. Rio de Janeiro: Viva Rio/ISER/ IANSA, 14.

Gang violence has escalated over the last five or six years in the Cape Flats. One key cause for a recent uptick in violence was the influx of firearms as a result of corrupt policemen who sold thousands of police-issued guns to gangsters from the police armoury.<sup>9</sup> Now, almost all gangs are heavily armed, and children as young as 12 can be seen walking around with guns. The increase in availability of firearms means it is no longer just experienced hitmen who have access to firepower, but also untrained youths who want to prove their strength. This need to show off, combined with a lack of skill in handling firearms, results in more violence and more bystanders getting caught in gang crossfire.

Another cause for the escalation in violence has been the increased flow of illicit drugs into Cape Town. This has fuelled a long-standing fight over drug turf. There are now numerous active gangs in Manenberg, and youths are fighting not only to find a space at home but are also battling it out for their territory on the street. With limited turf available, and a growing number of active gangs and product to be sold, drug battles are a common cause for gang violence.

Manenberg's dire social and criminal state is a driving cause behind its vibrant resilient community. Manenberg's deep-rooted history of social activism goes back to the 1970s, when residents rallied together to advocate for improved living conditions. Between the 1970s and 1990s, numerous community organizations were formed.<sup>10</sup> In the 1980s, Manenberg was home to key apartheid resistance-movement leaders. The late 90s and early years of the new millennium also saw the rise and fall of vigilante group People Against Gangsterism and Drugs (Pagad). Pagad emerged to stand up to the armed and violent organized gangs on the Cape Flats, but it soon evolved into a violent, extremist vigilante group respon-

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<sup>9</sup> Caryn Dolley, Ex-cop in guns-to-gangs case should be charged with murder – lawyer, News24, 8 June 2018, <https://www.news24.com/SouthAfrica/News/ex-cop-in-guns-to-gangs-case-should-be-charged-with-murder-lawyer-20180608>.

<sup>10</sup> Julian A Jacobs, *Then and now: Activism in Manenberg, 1980 to 2010*, MA thesis, University of the Western Cape, 2010.



sible for bombings, ‘necklacings’<sup>11</sup> and murder.<sup>12</sup> Since the arrest and imprisonment of the majority of its leaders in the early 2000s, Pagad has had a significantly smaller presence and, today, most gangs and community members consider its role insignificant.

## **The Manenberg Safety Forum**

The 21st century has seen a number of remarkable organizations and people who have stood united in their opposition to gang violence and in their advocacy for the community of Manenberg. Although there have been numerous community responses to crime and the social injustices of Manenberg, this manual focuses in particular on those of the Manenberg Safety Forum and the lessons in resilience this organization has learnt over the past few years.

### **‘Taking back our streets’**

The Manenberg Safety Forum was established in 2013 by a group of 20 people in the wake of yet another gang shooting, resulting in a 6-year-old boy being shot while playing outside his home. The person who had shot him reportedly laughed and said, ‘I want to see who is going to put me in jail’. This complete disregard for the law and human life galvanized into action those who would become the founders of the Manenberg Safety Forum. They took to the street in a non-violent protest against gang violence.

Says Roegchanda Pascoe: ‘We said, we don’t want any fights in our marches, we don’t want any more violence in our community because there is already too much violence. Our marches are open to everyone in the community, no matter the organization or politics, because we all have a right to feel safe. That is how our slogan “taking back our streets” started out.’

Roegchanda explains that people looked up to the Manenberg Safety Forum because they were ‘very tired of the violence and the fear’. After that first peaceful march, ‘we went into partnerships with religious leaders and we even started engaging with gang

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<sup>11</sup> Necklacing is the practice of killing someone by putting a burning tyre around his or her neck or chest.

<sup>12</sup> For more on Pagad, see B Dixon and L Johns, *Gangs, Pagad and the state: Vigilantism and revenge violence in the Western Cape*, Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation, May 2001, <http://www.csvr.org.za/docs/gangs/gangspagadstate.pdf>.

leaders,' she continues. 'After engaging with a variety of different people and organizations in our community, we built our vision and focus around the needs of our residents.'

### **Resilience: Vision and focus**

The vision of the Manenberg Safety Forum is to see Manenberg become a sustainable, healthy, peaceful and prosperous suburb of Cape Town. The organization aims to achieve this by focussing on five key areas:

1. Mobilizing community response by means of protests and community meetings.
2. Responding to crime scenes by contacting emergency services, providing trauma support and ensuring bystanders do not interfere with the crime scene or damage evidence.
3. Lobbying and advocacy by drawing attention to the challenges of Manenberg's residents and engaging with various levels of government.
4. General community support by assisting with access to social services and counselling.
5. Gang mediation by meeting with gang leaders or gang members and helping to settle disputes so they do not escalate into violence.

### **Lessons learnt by the Manenberg Safety Forum: Resilience through relationships**

Reflecting on her six years as the chairperson of the Manenberg Safety Forum and her decades of experience in activism, Roegchanda Pascoe distils the key lessons she has learnt: 'As I look back on my experience as an activist, the most important and valuable advice I can give is that people must come first and that relationships are key to this! I can't emphasize this enough.'

In essence, good relationships are core to the sustainability of a resilient community and to the work that it does. Establishing and managing a variety of relationships helps both individual activism and the growth and sustainability of an organization in distinctive ways.

The key points that follow explain in more detail the various ways in which resilient communities can nurture such relationships with key stakeholders and supportive networks, and thus help achieve sustainability in their response to the threat of violent organized crime. They represent practical, transferrable building blocks to help plan and implement effective, sustainable strategies for engendering resilience in various contexts.

### **1. Networking with other organizations, religious groups and state departments is essential**

Resilience is about empowering networks of relationships and trust among people who live in a particular community. The members of the Manenberg Safety Forum have numerous relationships and partnerships with other organizations and activists in Manenberg, greater Cape Town, and even other parts of South Africa. Some of these relationships happened by chance but most of them were the result of hard work. It is important to understand that you have to go out there and make the effort to meet people and maintain relationships.

The Manenberg Safety Forum have found the following are key stakeholders to build relationships with:

- Local police officers (e.g. the station captain and local patrol police) are important names to have in your contact list if you witness a crime or find out about a crime after the event. It is helpful to have a direct contact, to get a faster, more reliable response. It is crucial to build relationships with police officers whom you can trust. In areas wracked by gang control, some police officers are not immune to corruption and the influence of gangs. By reporting to honest policemen whom you can trust, the cases are more likely to get the attention they deserve.
- NGOs in your neighbourhood as well as similar organizations in other areas of Cape Town, or nationally, are great contacts. These relationships are important because you can support one another and learn from the work that you do. They are also helpful because you can't be an expert in every area and when a member of your community needs specific help, it is vital to be able to refer them to specific organizations or people that can help them.

- Local churches and religious organizations are key partners in communicating with the community and mobilizing people behind a cause. They can also assist in providing venues for events and community meetings.
- Schools are also key partners. By building relationships with principals and teachers, you will increase your opportunities to run youth programmes and include youth in the work that you do.

Resilience is about standing together with others who believe in the same cause as you and creating a network that works together. All these organizations, groups and state departments are strengthened through collaboration.

## **2. Get community support**

Resilience is unity and collective action. It is therefore necessary to include all members of society in the work that you do. It goes without saying that if you want to help a community, you need to get to know it. This is a slow and time-consuming process, but by building relationships with all members of the community, you gather respect and trust.

The more members of the community who know what you can do, the more people who will call on you in a time of need. For example, when a young girl was sexually assaulted by a gang member in Manenberg, her parents knew that they could phone Roegchanda for advice on how to report the crime and support their daughter. Many residents of marginalized and crime ridden communities often feel isolated and unheard. By being a listening ear and providing support, you will help them to believe in a better future for their neighbourhood.

Standing united as a resilient community means building relationships with everyone, so that each resident can be supported and each individual voice is given the opportunity to be part of the collective voice.

## **3. Pick your battles**

Resilience is being strategic in picking your battles. Many activists and organizations have lost support and legitimacy by picking too many fights with too many people. Just as points 1 and 2 above pointed out, building relationships is key.

As Roegchanda says, 'I may not be the most likable person, but I have always been the most neutral person; and this means anyone can come to me for help.' By constantly fighting with the police, you will not have a police officer in your contact list whom you can call on for a quick response in time of need. By competing and struggling with other organizations, you risk losing the power of unity in numbers and the potential support you can draw from each other. It is always important to remember that the cause is bigger than yourself and that by burning bridges you often do more harm than good.

Resilience is about standing strong and resisting negative influences. By picking fights with your allies, you lose collective strength and unity, and as a result your resilient capacity is weakened.

#### **4. Build a strong relationship with the media**

Resilience means being heard. Building a strong relationship with the media is valuable because if you help journalists, they will also help you in amplifying in your cause by covering key issues which you bring to their attention.

One benefit of a good relationship with the media is that if key journalists trust you, they are less likely to exploit members of the community for a good story. If they know that you are willing to feed them with updates and contacts to write a story, then you become valuable to them and, in turn, they will show you respect by checking with you if it is insensitive to publish certain information or frame a story in a certain way. This is key in protecting your community from being exploited by sensationalist media. One way of doing this is to obtain the contact details of journalists that cover your area and offer to provide them with information, interviews and contacts. Keep in contact with them and provide them with tips when a big story happens.

Resilience is about sharing your story. The media can take the story of your community and share it with the world. By doing this, it strengthens your community's voice. It also connects you to a global group of resilient communities.

#### **5. Mobilize and mentor the youth**

Resilience is believing in a better tomorrow, and it is through the youth that this can be achieved.

Young people in marginalized communities are often at risk of joining a gang or participating in criminal activities. They often don't see the potential for hope and a better life in their neighbourhood. By educating and incorporating the youth into all your activities, you raise up future leaders and bring hope to the next generation. By taking the time to mentor the youth, you empower them to find their voice and provide them with a positive role model, which they might not have at home. A practical way of doing this is to identify one or two young people in your area whom you know or who have shown an interest in the work of your organization. Try to meet with them on a regular basis, encourage them and mentor them in their activism. Get them involved in organizing an event or doing some of the administration or social media for a project, for example.

Resilience is hope made real by the leaders of the future. By focusing on the youth of today we build resilient capacity for tomorrow.

## **6. Engage with gang members and gang leaders**

Resilience is believing in the potential for change. It is important to the Manenberg Safety Forum to reach out to gangs because they see the gang leaders and members as part of their community. At the same time, it is critical to manage relationships with gangs.

As Roegchanda explains, 'Whether we like it or not, we must live with them [gangs], so it is important for us to engage with them because we have to share the space with them. It was through this realization that our work in gang mediation started. But I do not recommend engaging with gangs unless you are very experienced and have built relationships over a long period of time. Gang leaders can be strategic and use you for their own cause.'

The Manenberg Safety Forum are always wary of being used by gang leaders to further their own agenda. It is also important to manage community perception. Gang leaders might want to meet with you only to make the community think that you are involved with them. As a result, the Manenberg Safety Forum are very careful and selective about meeting with gang bosses. But they regularly participate in minor mediations among gang members. This is important, as small fights between gang members can escalate into a full-blown gang war.

Resilience is trusting in the good of a community and its ability to help transform the bad. By engaging with gangs and believing that they too can change and participate in uplifting the community, you provide them with an alternative for their future. Resilience is also about limiting harm: by mediating small gang fights, you also reduce the potential violence that gangs can cause.

### **7. Don't underestimate the emotional difficulty of the job, and the psychological and social support that is necessary**

Resilience brings with it the need for emotional and social support. Being a community activist is a 24/7 job.

As you build more relationships and have more influence, the pressure and workload grow. More people become critical of you and at the same time more people expect you to be able to solve their problems. To deal with this pressure, it is important to have a strong support group of family and friends, and to ensure that you have down time to recuperate. Meeting with a counsellor on a regular basis to debrief is highly recommended.

Resilience is about mutual support and encouragement. By creating a support network, an activist or organization is continually encouraged and appreciated in the work that they do.

### **8. Get comfortable with the NGO 'f word' and its impact on relationships**

Resilience is being sustainable. Funding, though incredibly helpful to achieve project goals, may also be the pitfall of many organizations. Understand the consequences of the 'f' word.

'I believe that one of the reasons the MSF is sustainable is that we are a voluntary organization, and not dependent on funding to do our work. All members of the Manenberg Safety Forum volunteer their time to the improvement of their community. As a result, we don't fight over salaries or benefits. So far, all money that has come in to the MSF has been used for specific projects. Although I understand that bigger and growing organizations need to hire staff to achieve their objectives, I do not believe this is necessary for a small community-based safety forum,' Roegchanda explains.

Resilience is about standing strong and firm, in order to do this, you need to be sustainable. By structuring yourself as a voluntary organization, you will be less reliant on funding and as a result more sustainable.

### **Safety tips**

Along the way, the Manenberg Safety Forum has also learnt some valuable personal-safety tips:

- Make sure you have safe, security-protected office space or a meeting room that is not at someone's home.
- Set up emergency exit plans and protocols where you work. These can apply for group meetings and for meetings with gang members.
- Be aware of the risk you place on your family by being in the spotlight as an anti-gang activist. This is a very real risk. Roegchanda explains how after a gangster had mistaken her oldest daughter for her, he shot her while she was walking in the street. 'Fortunately, it was not a fatal shot. To this day, that event is a constant reminder of why we do the work we do, but also of the safety precautions that we need to take.'
- Be careful what information you put in the public domain and how. When working on community resilience in gang-controlled environments, you might find out sensitive information. It is important to understand the risks of obtaining and sharing such information. Be discreet.

Remaining resilient and strongly opposed to the social and criminal injustices of a community torn apart by violent crime is tiring and emotionally draining work but it is the only option for activists if they want to see a better future for their children. Roegchanda's final advice would be 'to constantly educate yourself on the causes and impact of the crime and social struggles of your community and always reflect on the work you are doing, making sure that it is always helpful and relevant to the needs at the time.'



## **The harsh reality of resilience continues: Roegchanda Pascoe's personal sacrifice for being a state witness**

Not only has Pascoe embodied resilience in her work as an activist through the MSF, but she also made a monumental personal sacrifice when she offered herself as a state witness in a gang-related murder trial.

On 20 July 2016, Pascoe and her three-year old grandson witnessed the brutal killing of Angelo Davids, allegedly by rival gang members, just a few metres from her home. When no other witness was prepared to come forward to testify, Pascoe offered to become a state witness. 'I was well aware of the dangerous implications that came with being a state witness but our security departments claim to serve the people, so the expectation is that they will protect state witnesses,' she said.<sup>13</sup>

Unfortunately, that expectation proved too high. The National Prosecuting Authority (NPA) offered to place Pascoe and her family in a witness protection programme, but in reality that merely meant relocating them to another part of the country, and without any other assistance. Pascoe was unwilling to move because her younger daughter and grandchildren would have had to adjust to a new area and school, while her older children and son-in-law would be compelled to abandon their jobs. The NPA's offer to relocate them would have left her and her family to start out anew far from home, with little to no financial support.

In Manenberg, Pascoe received threats and was warned that there was a 'price on her head'. On the evening of 6 March 2019, the day before she was set to testify, gunmen opened fire on her house in Manenberg. Luckily, Pascoe had moved to a safe place earlier that day, so she was not present when the gunmen attacked. However, her son and grandchildren were in the house during the shooting. Her son called to inform her that they had managed to survive the hail of bullets relatively unscathed. Nevertheless, she is still traumatized by the incident.

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<sup>13</sup> Barbara Maregele, Cape Flats murder witness puts her life in danger 'for the blood of innocents shed on the streets', Times Live, 27 March 2019, <https://www.timeslive.co.za/news/south-africa/2019-03-27-cape-flats-murder-witness-puts-her-life-in-danger-for-the-blood-of-innocents-shed-on-the-streets/>

On 3 September 2019, one of the three gang members against whom Pascoe testified was found not guilty and was released. Pascoe and her family are now unable to return to Manenberg because they fear the acquitted gangster will attack them. 'Once you have testified,' she said, 'the police don't have any business with you any more, unless you are targeted, and something has actually happened to you.' The cost of Pascoe's alternative safe housing is currently being covered by the Global Initiative's Resilience Fund, but there are no long-term solutions forthcoming from the state. 'We are practically homeless. We are sitting with a state that doesn't care what happens to witnesses afterwards,' she said.<sup>14</sup>

Pascoe is aware that her experience may well deter other residents in Cape Town's ganglands from testifying against gangsters. Yet despite the challenges, she chooses to remain resilient and hopeful, encouraging others to stand up to gang violence and take back the streets of Manenberg.

## **Acknowledgements**

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<sup>14</sup> IOL, It's not worth testifying when gangsters walk free, says Roegshanda Pascoe's scared kids, 3 September 2019, <https://www.iol.co.za/capetimes/news/its-not-worth-testifying-when-gangsters-walk-free-says-roegshanda-pascoes-scared-kids-31761034>

## Content

|  |    |
|--|----|
| Introduction   | 7  |
| <br>   |    |
| <b>I. Lectures and Documents from the 13th Annual International Forum</b>  |    |
| <br>   |    |
| <i>Erich Marks</i><br>Prevention Policy in a Democratic State governed by the Rule of Law Must not be Left to Soapbox Rhetoric and Populism  | 13 |
| <i>German Prevention Congress and Congress Partners</i><br>The Berlin Declaration of the 24th German Prevention Congress   | 31 |
| <i>Petra Guder, Bernd-Rüdeger Sonnen</i><br>The Transatlantic Dialogue:<br>US Juvenile Justice Reform at First Hand  | 45 |
| <i>Guido A. DeAngelis</i><br>The Crossover Youth Practice Model: Delivering Successful Outcomes for the Juvenile Population  | 57 |
| <i>Anthony Capizzi</i><br>Helping Juvenile Treatment Court Improve Efficiency and Outcomes with IBM's Watson Health Solution   | 67 |
| <i>Anno Bunnik</i><br>Modernising Law Enforcement Intelligence for a Digital Society   | 75 |
| <i>Miriam K. Damrow</i><br>Incongruous demands – inside child protection and education   | 85 |
| <i>Triantafyllos Karatrantos, Despoina Limniotakis</i><br>Management of Violence in Divided Societies:<br>Prevention of Violent Extremism and Strengthening of Democratic Principles | 95 |

***Kim Thomas, Roegchanda Pascoe***

Being Resilient. Learning from Community Responses to  
Gangs in Cape Town: Reflections from a Manenberg activist 109

***Alexander Siedschlag***

A Culture of Preparedness: Fostering Prevention and Values 127

***Minakshi Sinha***

Transnational Organised Crime: Challenges to Criminal  
Justice Functionaries 135

***Irvin Waller***

Science and Secrets of Ending Violent Crime: What Actions  
will Reduce Violent Crime by 2030 to Achieve SDG 16.1 157

## **II. Lectures and Documents from the 14th Annual International Forum**

***Haci-Halil Uslucan***

School as a place of orientation and as a place of  
prevention of disorientation 171

***Gina Rosa Wollinger***

Looking for Orientation. On the relevance of crises as a  
social seismograph 197

***German Prevention Congress and its  
Congress partners***

The Cologne Declaration of the 26th  
German Prevention Congress 231

***Stijn Aerts***

Family-based crime: an EUPCN toolbox on effective  
prevention 235

***Kjell Elefalk***

Local Safety Measurement System in Sweden 1998-2021 253

***Noel Klima, Wim Hardyns, Lieven Pauwels,  
Lien Dorme, Birte Vandaele***

Evaluation and mentoring of the Multi-Agency approach  
to violent radicalisation in Belgium, the Netherlands,  
and Germany 269

***Rachel Locke***

From Research to Action: Activating Strategies for Violence  
Reduction amidst COVID-19 281

***Martí Navarro Regàs***

Nightlife and cities. Challenges and urban governance  
at night – The vision of the European Forum for  
Urban Security 293

***Alexander Siedschlag***

Pandemic Preparedness from the Security Research  
Perspective 307

***Erich Marks***

Perspectives on Prevention during and after COVID-19.  
More Fire Protection and not just Fire Extinguishers! 323

**III. Annex**

Programme of the 13<sup>th</sup> Annual International Forum 329

Programme of the 14<sup>th</sup> Annual International Forum 337