

Ceasefire initiative relies on community strategies



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An innovative model from America, CeaseFire, was presented by the Institute of Security Studies (ISS), at a seminar in Woodstock, on Thursday September 16.

The programme challenges existing perceptions on the formation of violence and the approach to reducing it.

Its founder, Dr Gary Slutkin, has been working with Chicago leaders, the clergy, the community, and law enforcement agencies since 1995 to develop and implement a new strategy for violence combating.

He applies an innovative public health approach to combating gang violence.

The Chicago project has been given the highest national level award of the US Department of Justice.

Ceasefire relies on prevention, intervention and community mobilisation strategies to reduce shootings and killings in communities.

It pays its volunteers an hourly rate of \$15 (about R150) when they go out on duty.

Director at ISS, Hennie van Vuuren, said it was clear that both countries were facing similar challenges in terms of dealing with urban violence, but this had to be approached with caution.

“It is important to note that no model can be replicated from other countries on a full scale, but it is equally important to engage with the experiences of other countries.

“We also recognise that many efforts are being made to promote peace in Africa.

“However, the most important work still needs to be done at community level.

“And finally, combating violence should not only be a top-down approach, but one that involves communities in finding solutions to the issue of urban violence that plagues many parts of Cape Town,” said Mr Van Vuuren.

Director at the Woodstock-based



■ University of Cape Town psychologist, Dr Cathy Ward; CeaseFire members Jalon Arthur and founder Dr Gary Slutkin, listen to the Institute for Security Studies' (ISS) director, Hennie van Vuuren, as he opened the Violence Reduction seminar.

Gun Free South Africa (GFSA), Natalie Jaynes, said: “Their model is interesting as it pays more attention on getting people to take a stand against violence so we need to test it and see.”

Michael Jacobs, the chairperson of the Mitchell's Plain Community Police Forum (CPF) said: “Each country has its own dynamics and socio-economic problems, so you cannot just replicate what is happening in Chicago and apply it here.

“With the current crisis where funders are withdraw-

ing their support to non-governmental organisations (NGOs), there needs to be a lot of resources in order to sustain such a project.

“Over the years we have had quite a lot of volunteers who have been working in this country purely out of passion, and it doesn't seem as if our government has the kind of money that's required to sustain such a project, and also pay the volunteers at the same time,” said Mr Jacobs.

Among the handful of police officers who attended the presentation of the CeaseFire project, was Claremont SAPS member Warrant

Officer Ernest Wilkins.

Speaking shortly before the event, Warrant Officer Wilkins said he was looking forward to the presentation to see if he could learn a thing or two from it.

“This talk is especially important for me since I work with prison gang members who sleep in the streets of Claremont. Though my precinct is not gang-infested, I think it is worthwhile to come and listen to the Americans' way of doing things and see how we can take something from it, or even identify our shortcomings,” he said.