

Safe Surrender

Kent State prevents violence through understanding

By Melissa Edler, M.A. '07

As I pulled into Akron's House of the Lord parking lot in mid-July, I took a deep breath to calm my nerves. I was about to do something I never imagined — interview fugitives for a magazine story. They would be gathered here as part of an event called Fugitive Safe Surrender (FSS), a unique initiative that encourages persons wanted for nonviolent felony or misdemeanor crimes to voluntarily surrender to the law in a faith-based, neutral setting.

Several police officers met me at the door and asked me to walk through a metal detector. My nervousness continued as they escorted me past law enforcement officials from the U.S. Marshals Service and Summit County Sheriff's Office, representatives from Oriana House (a nationally renowned chemical dependency treatment and community corrections agency) and the Bureau of Motor Vehicles, as well as public defenders, prosecutors, judges and probation officers, all set up in various rooms of the church. Eventually, we found the person I had come to see — Dr. **Daniel Flannery**, professor of justice studies and director of the Institute for the Study and Prevention of Violence (ISPV) at Kent State University.

As a collaborator in the Fugitive Safe Surrender program, the ISPV gathers demographic information about the



Twenty-year-old fugitive Casey Hennacy, five months pregnant here, waits to be processed through the court system after turning herself in at Akron's Fugitive Safe Surrender program

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participants through consent forms, surveys and warrant sheets. Afterward, the researchers track participants to determine whether those who were given future court dates actually attend the proceedings.



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"The appearance rate for the justice system is typically low," says Flannery. But in Akron, individuals scheduled for a later court date have an appearance rate of 91 percent. "FSS is a very efficient and cost-effective program," he explains.



[ISPV](#)

Institute for the Study and Prevention of Violence

The Institute for the Study and Prevention of Violence conducts research for projects such as the Fugitive Safe Surrender, and also provides evaluation, training, data analysis and consultation related to violence interventions. The services engage a multitude of community partners, including schools and law enforcement agencies, treatment providers, community organizations, and youth and family services systems.

"We're in the community doing applied research," says Flannery, "which sets us apart from many university research-based partners." In fact, much of the institute's research has been used to evaluate or change policies in law enforcement and behavioral and mental health systems, among others.

Learning from tragedy

The concept of Fugitive Safe Surrender was originally developed by Peter J. Elliott, United States Marshal for the northern district of Ohio, after a Cleveland police officer was killed by a fugitive who was on the run for seven months. According to Elliott, half of the law enforcement officers who have died in the line of duty in the northern district of Ohio were killed by fugitives.

Today, 1.2 million warrants exist in the United States — 50,000 in Ohio's northern district alone. "Desperate people commit desperate acts with tragic consequences," says Elliott. "What we're trying to do with Fugitive Safe Surrender is take the desperation out of the equation."

To date, nearly 6,000 fugitives have voluntarily turned themselves in during FSS events in Cleveland, Phoenix, Indianapolis, Akron, Nashville and Memphis. The key to the program's success may be the location: Each one has taken place in a church.

"People just don't turn themselves in voluntarily at the courthouse," adds Flannery. At the Akron FSS, 80 percent of the fugitives surveyed said it was important that it was held at a church; they would not have turned themselves in otherwise.

"This program is about trust and honesty," says Elliott. "A church brings instant trust and credibility because it is present through every stage of a person's life."

Casey Hennacy, a 20-year-old fugitive from Springfield, Ohio, agrees. "When I go to church," she says, "I feel safe and know that God is here with me so I don't have anything to worry about." I met her at the House of the Lord when she came to turn herself in to law enforcement officials.

"I want to get everything taken care of before I have my baby," Hennacy tells me. She was almost five months pregnant, and had outstanding warrants for both a felony and a misdemeanor charge.

A couple of years ago, Hennacy and two of her friends overdosed one night on a drug called Fentanyl, a narcotic that has effects similar to heroin. "We kept telling each other not to go to sleep," she says. "But when my friend decided to go into the other room, I checked on her and she had fallen asleep, so we called 911." Her best friend



Photo by Jeff Glidden

At the Akron FSS, a majority of the fugitives surveyed said they turned themselves in because the event was held at a church.

nightmare that I will have to live with the rest of my life."

Hennacy and her other friend were arrested for felony charges of aggravated possession, obstruction of official police business and theft of drugs. She attended six months of drug counseling and has been sober since. In addition, she was given 18 months of probation. She attended all but her last probation hearing.

"When I was at court [for the last hearing], I started feeling sick and shaky, so I left before my hearing," says Hennacy. A few months earlier, she had been charged with misdemeanor assault when her ex-boyfriend assaulted someone in her presence. Hennacy feared she would be arrested and taken from her family when she appeared for that final hearing for the previous charge. She didn't show, and a warrant was issued for her arrest.

died of an overdose that evening.

"We were young and we were dumb," says Hennacy, who was 18 years old at the time of the incident. (She had been using drugs since junior high school.) "It was a horrible

She became a fugitive.

"You always are fearful and looking over your shoulder, afraid you're going to be arrested," says Hennacy. "Every time I saw a cop drive by, my heart would drop, and I'd run the other way." In addition, because she had outstanding warrants for her arrest and no driver's license, she couldn't find a job.

When Hennacy saw reports on the local news about Fugitive Safe Surrender, she says she "felt like God had answered her prayers." She arrived at the Akron church escorted by her mother, boyfriend, one-year-old niece and her father — who also had an outstanding felony warrant for his arrest. He had also decided, with his daughter's encouragement, to turn himself in during the safe surrender program.

Making a fresh start

"It was a big relief walking through that church door," says Hennacy. "At least in the end, I know it will all be done."

Though she feared she would be arrested that day, Hennacy was not taken into custody. Instead, she was booked, fingerprinted and given a public defender. She made an appearance that same day before a common pleas court judge and was released on a \$20,000 personal recognizance bond, with a court date set for the following week in Cuyahoga Falls to address the misdemeanor assault charge that was out of the current court's jurisdiction.

"This program gives people a fresh start," says Chris Snyder, a private attorney who served as a public defender for the Akron Fugitive Safe Surrender program.

While FSS provides a unique opportunity for fugitives, it benefits law enforcement officials as well. Says Elliott: "Because these people come in peacefully and voluntarily, it is one less dangerous confrontation for law enforcement officials and residents to face on the streets."

"It also helps get rid of many outstanding warrants," says Steve Finical, assistant sheriff for Summit County. "The faster we process people, the less crowding we have in the jails, which has been an issue in Summit County for years."

Fugitive Safe Surrender is a win-win situation for all involved — and no one would agree more than Hennacy. "It feels like the whole world has come off my shoulders," Hennacy says as she leaves the church. "I know that my child will have a life because I'm not going to be taken away from him."

Postscript: Four months later, I followed up with Hennacy. Since turning herself in at the Akron FSS, she attended a second court hearing in Cuyahoga Falls and received probation until next August for her felony charge. Her misdemeanor charge for assault has been completely cleared. In addition, she now knows she is expecting a baby boy, whom she plans to name Skylor Mikal. After her baby is born, Hennacy plans to begin working again and attend school to become a medical assistant.