



COMMUNITY BASED VIOLENCE PREVENTION

SUMMER 2024 POLICY MEETING
AUGUST 8-10 • KNOXVILLE, TN

Across the country, data-informed and community-based violence prevention programs are stemming the tide of rising violence. This session will highlight approaches to violence prevention that are laying the groundwork for sustainable change, producing demonstrated results in reducing violent crime and recidivism, creating lasting community partnerships, and increasing community empowerment.



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A New Anti-Violence Center Offers Scientific Solutions to Gun Violence

In recent years, homicides and violent crime have increased. Now a University of Maryland center is combining research and real-world know-how to point policymakers toward strategies that work to curb the problem.



Police investigate the scene where as many as 14 people were reported to have been shot on October 31, 2022 in Chicago, Illinois. Three juveniles were among those reported to have been wounded in the drive-by shooting, according to published reports. (Scott Olson/Getty Images)

By:

Michael Friedrich

ArnoldVentures.org contributor

TOPICS	Violence Reduction
	Community Safety
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Cities across the U.S. are struggling with tragic increases in community violence. Homicides [jumped by 30% in 2020 and 4% in 2021](#), disproportionately affecting communities of color. But for local leaders, the solution is often unclear — and there’s little rigorous, publicly available information to guide them.

Consider Richmond, Virginia. Homicides there [rose](#) to 90 in 2021 from 66 in 2020, a 36% spike, and in 2022 the city continued to see an alarming [spate of shootings](#). What can be done? Could a [tough-on-crime task force](#) stop the killing? How about [mentorship and job programs](#) for youth? Maybe a [gun buyback program](#)? State and local policymakers are trying all of these approaches, despite [a wide body of evidence](#) demonstrating the ineffectiveness of such strategies.

Left to their own devices, it’s easy for cities to fund programs that sound good on paper but work only temporarily, or don’t work at all. Meanwhile, they often miss out on investing in interventions that are proven to reduce violence.

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We’re here to save lives by stopping violence.

Thomas Abt
professor of criminology and researcher on community violence at the University of Maryland

That problem is what led [Thomas Abt](#), a professor of criminology and researcher on community violence at the University of Maryland, to launch the new [Center for the Study and Practice of Violence Reduction](#), also known as the Violence Reduction Center (VRC).

“We’re here to save lives by stopping violence,” Abt said. “The way we do that is by getting the best science on violence reduction and making it available, free of charge, to policymakers and practitioners.”

The mission of the VRC is twofold: to gather and share the most rigorous evidence on effective community violence interventions, and to help city leaders choose and apply the right combination of strategies to reduce violence locally. Abt and his colleagues work collaboratively with both government officials and community representatives to improve community safety for the long term.

Expanding ‘Access to Research About What Works’

The spike in violence has spurred unprecedented new funding for anti-violence programs at every level of government. The 2022 bipartisan Safer Communities Act made [\\$250 million](#) of federal funding available for

local community violence intervention initiatives, and 15 states have pledged a total of \$700 million for community safety and wellbeing programming.

\$250M	Amount of federal funding available for local community violence intervention initiatives
50	Number of sates pledging funds toward anti-violence solutions
\$700M	Amount earmarked for community safety and wellbeing programming

Spending those funds well is key to saving lives. “So many cities are struggling to understand how to effectively reduce violence,” said [Walter Katz](#), vice president of criminal justice at Arnold Ventures. “But they don’t necessarily have access to research about what works.”

Arnold Ventures devotes significant investments to reducing community violence. The philanthropy places a strong focus on addressing perpetration and victimization among young Black and brown men in high-risk places, increasing community involvement in preventing crime, and improving police effectiveness and fairness. To advance that vision, Arnold Ventures supports rigorous research on strategies to guide local policymakers, community members, and law enforcement officials in their efforts to plan, launch, and sustain evidence-based strategies that lead to large-scale violence reductions.

“With its unique combination of research and practice, the VRC is central to realizing this goal,” Katz said.

A Commitment to Research and Practice

On the research side, the center is working on two major projects. One is a systematic meta-review of all anti-violence strategies, building on [Abt’s previous research](#). The other is a systematic review of street outreach work, an intervention that employs community workers to intervene in conflicts and connect high-risk people with services. Both studies are “well underway and should be published next year,” Abt said.

Some strategies have already been shown to reduce violence effectively. Focused deterrence — which brings law enforcement together with community members and social service providers to offer both a legal warning and community resources to high-risk people — has been [linked](#) to a 43% decline in homicides in Oakland and [major violence reductions](#) elsewhere. Street outreach programs like [Cure Violence](#) have helped reduce community violence, as have [hospital-based violence intervention programs](#) and approaches that [incorporate cognitive-behavioral therapy](#).

43%

Decline in homicides in Oakland linked to focused deterrence strategies

“The common denominator,” Abt explained, “is that these approaches focus on the highest-risk people and places, balance punishment with rewards, and forge connections with local communities so that they are perceived as fair and legitimate.”

Building legitimacy is especially important to reducing violence, according to University of Maryland criminology professor [Rod Brunson](#), who is advising Abt on the VRC. Strategies that use aggressive law enforcement tactics in neighborhoods of color often damage police legitimacy in the eyes of the community, making residents less likely to cooperate on solving violent crimes.

“Anti-violence strategies need to be implemented as part of broader public safety initiatives rooted in fairness, equity, and procedural justice,” Brunson said. “Police will be better equipped to help prevent and solve crime if the community sees them as having the moral authority to do so.”

On the practice side, the VRC is ramping up to work with a small number of cities using a training format that the organization calls the “practicum.” Over the course of a few days, VRC staff collaborate intensively with senior city leadership, including the mayor, police executives, social workers, and community representatives, helping them put together a plan and then assisting as the city puts it into action.

“We know that cities need to implement more than one strategy simultaneously, and they need to figure out how to align them,” Abt said. He noted that effective anti-violence work includes both enforcement and non-enforcement strategies.

In December 2022, VRC staff held its first practicum with leaders in Knoxville, Tennessee, which saw its highest [homicide numbers on record](#) in 2020 and 2021. There they worked with local leaders to determine the nature of the city’s violence problem, understand what obstacles stood in the way of past interventions, and outline what strategies the city would use in the future.

“The subject matter experts they exposed our community to really gave insight about how to do violence reduction well, what things have worked, where some stumbling blocks are, what tools or resources we will need, and how we need to think about not only implementing the work, but also assessing the work in real-time,” said LaKenya Middlebrook, the city’s community safety director. “The experience was invaluable for our community.”

Brunson explained that the practicum was exemplary of how the VRC works with cities: “We didn’t come with all the answers. We came to listen, and to help them shape a collaborative effort that will not only have positive

impacts on violence but also be sustainable well beyond our involvement.”

Who's Involved

Abt brings a long record of anti-violence action to the VRC. He is currently a senior fellow at the [Council on Criminal Justice](#), a think tank where he chairs a committee focused on addressing recent violence spikes. His 2019 book, [“Bleeding Out: The Devastating Consequences of Urban Violence — and a Bold New Plan for Peace in the Streets.”](#) outlined an influential vision for reducing violence in major American cities by combining the most effective strategies. Abt also served for several years as a public safety official in the New York Governor’s Office, leading the state’s Gun-Involved Violence Elimination Initiative, and prior to that he was chief of staff for the Justice Department’s Office of Justice Programs, where he helped to found the National Forum on Youth Violence Prevention. Abt has advised hundreds of public officials on anti-violence strategies in the U.S. and internationally.

Brunson has spent his career conducting research that informs criminal justice policy, particularly in the areas of youth violence, concentrated neighborhood disadvantage, and police-community relations. In landmark studies like [“Oh Hell No, We Don’t Talk to Police”: Insights on the Lack of Cooperation in Police Investigations of Urban Gun Violence.”](#) from 2019, Brunson interviewed people in disinvested Black communities to understand what policy solutions can help improve police-community interactions and counteract “anti-snitching” norms. A fellow of the American Society of Criminology, his scholarship has appeared in *Criminology & Public Policy* and *Preventive Medicine*, among other academic journals.



We believe that this approach, through the University of Maryland, is an important piece in advancing what works.

Walter Katz
vice president of criminal justice at Arnold Ventures

The VRC will also benefit from the participation of Bianca Bersani, a professor in the University of Maryland’s Department of Criminology and Criminal Justice, and Joseph Richardson, the university’s Joel and Kim Feller Professor of African American Studies and Anthropology. Both have made important contributions to violence reduction research and policy throughout their careers.

The new center brings Katz hope that a greater number of cities will connect with more effective anti-violence strategies, he said. “We believe that this approach, through the University of Maryland, is an important piece in advancing what works.”



Saving Lives: Ten Essential Actions Cities Can Take to Reduce Violence Now

January 2022

As 2022 begins, America's cities confront an ongoing surge in violent crime, particularly homicide. The [Council on Criminal Justice \(CCJ\)](#) documented a [30% rise](#) in murders nationwide in 2020, while [police data](#) from large cities reveal another 7% increase in 2021.¹ Indianapolis, Philadelphia, Portland, and at least ten other municipalities experienced the most homicides in their cities' history last year. This spike has been driven primarily by community gun violence, or violence involving firearms in community settings. It is claiming lives, tearing families and communities apart, filling prisons, and eroding support for policing and other criminal justice reforms. Policymakers and practitioners need to put polarized, "us versus them" politics aside and focus on solutions that strengthen both community and enforcement-based approaches.

In response to the crisis, CCJ launched a Violent Crime Working Group in July 2021. Composed of a diverse range of leaders, the Group dedicated itself to saving lives by producing anti-violence guidance that is timely, relevant, and reliable. Since then, the Group has met 11 times, consulted with the field's leading experts, produced three reports on national crime trends, held two live public web events, and issued seven bulletins highlighting its key findings and featuring concrete recommendations to improve policy and practice in this critical area.

[Four principles](#) guide the work of the Group. First, the Group is *solution-focused*, with an emphasis on providing concrete assistance to leaders in the field. Second, it is *evidence-informed*, recognizing that reliable research and data are critical to understanding the complex challenge posed by violent crime. Third, it is *community-engaged*, noting the importance of involving those who are most frequently and directly exposed to crime and violence. Fourth and finally, it is *humanity-centered*, reaffirming the humanity of all those impacted by promoting healing and minimizing harm.

In this final report, the Group identifies [Ten Essential Actions](#) that cities can take now to reduce community gun violence. This list is not comprehensive; instead, it highlights the actions members believe are most likely to make the greatest immediate impact on violence. Listed in roughly sequential order, the actions are short-term measures that can be carried out within a year. They are not a substitute for longer-term strategies and investments that can address poverty, inequality, racism, and other underlying systemic causes of crime and violence.

1. Set a clear goal: commit to saving lives by stopping violence.

Homicide and other violent crimes devastate cities in human and economic terms. In Chicago in 2021, homicide collectively cost the city almost \$8 billion in criminal justice and medical costs, lost wages and earnings, diminished property values, and reduced quality of life.² And that is just the price of murder. The human and economic costs of all violent crime run far higher.

Preserving life by preventing lethal or near-lethal violence is the primary goal of any true anti-violence effort, and progress should be measured in concrete terms: fewer homicides and non-fatal shootings. City leaders should commit to tangible reductions in these measures. Annual 10% reductions in homicides and non-fatal shootings are realistic goals.

2. Identify the key people and places driving the violence.

In every city, violence concentrates among small sets of individuals, groups, and locations. To effectively reduce violent crime, cities should begin with a rigorous problem analysis like the one completed in [Oakland](#).³ These analyses draw on incident reviews, shooting data, law enforcement intelligence, and social network mapping to identify the people and groups most likely to become involved in a violent incident. Also critical: mapping the occurrence of such incidents to reveal the micro-locations, or “hot spots,” where most violence happens. These analyses should then be reviewed by trained street outreach workers and other non-police individuals with relevant experience. This foundational work is critical to creating a shared understanding of a city’s violence and guiding [collaborative efforts](#).⁴

3. Create a citywide plan for engaging key people and places.

Addressing violence demands a multi-disciplinary response and a strategic plan to effectively organize these efforts, such as the paired plans from the [Dallas Mayor’s Office](#) and [Police Department](#).⁵ Most critically, leaders must coordinate stakeholder activities focused on the highest risk people and places. Plans should be practical and actionable, detailing concrete commitments: for key people and in key places, who will do what, by when? These commitments should use SMART (specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound) criteria. Plans should also identify which activities will not be undertaken in order to maintain focus, as trying to do too much often results in failure. Finally, plans must emphasize partnership, particularly between members of law enforcement and impacted communities, where relationships are often severely strained.

4. Engage key people with empathy and accountability.

Those individuals and groups at the highest risk of violence must be placed on notice that they are in great danger of being injured, killed, arrested, and/or incarcerated. This message must be delivered with a combination of empathy and accountability. Supports and services must be offered so people have something better to say “yes” to, but it must be made clear that further violence will not be tolerated.

Outreach workers in neighborhoods and hospitals where shooting victims are recovering can defuse conflicts, connect people to services, and serve as crucial go-betweens for a city and some of its most disconnected citizens, as they do in [New York City](#).⁶

“ VIOLENT CRIME IS A DEADLY SERIOUS CHALLENGE, BUT ALSO A SOLVABLE ONE.

Cognitive behavioral interventions like those used by [READI Chicago](#) can help even the most traumatized individuals begin to heal and make better life decisions.⁷ [Proactive policing](#), like the “precision policing” effort also in [New York City](#), can put high-risk people and groups on notice that they are being watched and that further violence will be met with swift and certain consequences.⁸ Focused deterrence strategies, such as [Oakland Ceasefire](#), are a successful framework for all such engagement, blending customized supports for high-risk individuals with targeted sanctions, as needed.⁹ Finally, efforts like those in [Boston](#) to improve homicide and shooting clearance rates can deter future violence and disrupt cycles of retaliation.¹⁰

5. Address key locations using place-based policing and investment.

A combination of place-based policing and investment can calm violent spaces. Police are necessary to disrupt existing cycles of violence and stop others from starting. But such short-term actions must be supplemented and quickly replaced by place-based interventions and investments to change the nature of violent micro-locations and the communities in which they are located.

Problem-oriented policing, conducted in collaboration with residents as demonstrated by the Community Safety Partnership in **Los Angeles**, can begin the process.¹¹ Environmental crime prevention approaches such as cleaning-and-greening initiatives in **Philadelphia** as well as **changing traffic patterns** and **repairing, upgrading, and adding streetlights** can also influence the trajectory of these areas.¹² Finally, targeted investments and deployment of resources must be made to improve education, employment, healthcare, housing, transportation, and other socioeconomic factors that can give rise to crime and violence in the first place.¹³

6. Place responsibility for violence reduction efforts at the top.

Every city suffering from high rates of violent crime should have a permanent unit dedicated to violence reduction operating inside the mayor's office, with senior leadership reporting directly to the mayor. These units, such as the Office of Gang Reduction and Youth Development (GRYD) in **Los Angeles**, can provide direct services as well as administer funding and should act as a hub for city anti-violence efforts.¹⁴ Housing the unit outside the mayor's office or placing intermediaries between the mayor and the unit's leadership will significantly diminish performance and long-term viability across administrations. These units must be sustainably staffed and substantially funded in order to be successful long-term.¹⁵

“CITIES, AS WELL AS STATES AND THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT, ARE NOT HELPLESS IN THE FACE OF RISING RATES OF SHOOTINGS AND KILLINGS.”

Within law enforcement agencies, chiefs and other top leaders must demand a consistent focus on preventing violence, not just making arrests, and on working with citizens and community partners. Effective management also includes rewarding officers for outcomes like reduced victimization, rather than outputs like the number of pedestrian or car stops they make. Similarly, non-law enforcement leaders such as those running community-based anti-violence organizations should maintain a focus on anti-violence outcomes, not outputs such as services delivered.

7. Emphasize healing with trauma-informed approaches.

Gun violence disproportionately affects the poor and powerless in our society. In certain communities, **Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder** is more common among residents than among veterans of the wars in Afghanistan, Iraq, or Vietnam.¹⁶ Victims of violent crime are more likely to be victimized again, and many victims are subject to multiple forms of violence, known as **polyvictimization**.¹⁷ Finally, those exposed to chronic violence are more likely to **perpetrate violence** themselves.¹⁸

Agencies working with victims and survivors of violent crime should use a trauma-informed approach, such as the model used by the **Trauma Recovery Center** in San Francisco.¹⁹ This means acknowledging and recognizing the impacts and symptoms of trauma and ensuring that supports and services are delivered in a way that does not retraumatize victims. Law enforcement officers also **experience trauma** and benefit from such approaches as well.²⁰

8. Invest in anti-violence workforce development.

Too many in the violence reduction field have worked too long without proper support or recognition. Many street outreach workers, for instance, work for little pay, no benefits, and with minimal opportunity for advancement. Most do not receive sufficient support for addressing the trauma – direct and vicarious – that comes with anti-violence work. Investing in a professional and sustainable anti-violence workforce means providing adequate salaries, benefits, and prospects for upward mobility through effective training and education. Law enforcement agencies, meanwhile, are suffering from serious morale, retention, and recruitment challenges. That workforce also needs **additional support** to perform at its best.²¹

9. Set aside funding for new stakeholders and strategies.

There is a large base of rigorous evidence about what works, and what doesn't, when it comes to violence reduction. That said, there is still room for learning and improvement. While most funding should be reserved for strategies with demonstrated track records of success, some portion of anti-violence dollars should be set aside to promote innovation. Development funds should be created to nurture new leaders and organizations with small grants, training, and technical assistance. Innovation set-asides can

support new anti-violence strategies intended to establish proof of concept and pave the way for additional funding. Intermediary, pass-through, and fiscal sponsorship agreements can ensure that less-established organizations can still participate in city efforts.

10. Commit to continuous improvement based on data, evidence, and peer-to-peer learning.

Strategies must be tested to see if they actually stop violence and save lives. Plans must be reviewed and, if necessary, revised. Leaders should embrace a learning culture that is able to recognize when strategies are not working and shift course – without starting over from scratch. Data must be gathered and research partners should be engaged early to assess performance,

working in close consultation with police and community partners.

Reducing violence requires a diverse range of stakeholders, and the best way to focus and maximize their efforts is through information-sharing networks. In today's interconnected world, networks can promote peer-to-peer learning across bureaucratic and jurisdictional boundaries. Efforts like the [National Network for Safe Communities](#) and the newly-established [National Offices of Violence Prevention Network](#) can also promote fidelity to evidence-informed practices, encourage collaboration, spur innovation, and build capacity for action.²² Finally, networks can serve as vehicles for broader institutional and systemic change.

STATE AND FEDERAL SUPPORT

Most anti-violence efforts happen at the local level, but state and federal support are key to help cities succeed in their front-line anti-violence campaigns. States and the federal government can support the essential actions outlined above through messaging and convening, grantmaking and fiscal incentives, regulation and legislation, and through the direct actions of certain agencies.²³

Help cities set the right goals.

Prioritizing violence reduction can be politically difficult for local leaders seeking to portray their cities as safe and healthy places to live, work, and raise families. State and federal leaders can encourage their local counterparts with clear messaging as well as fiscal incentives for doing what is necessary, not politically expedient. This means emphasizing clear anti-violence goals, evidence-informed strategies, and partnership between law enforcement and community groups.

Support evidence-backed strategies, workforce development, and technical assistance while also investing in innovation.

Most state and federal dollars invested in local violence reduction efforts should fund proven strategies and the capacity building and training needed to sustain and expand those strategies. At the same time, resources must be made available for localities to pursue or enhance promising or emerging approaches to reducing violence. Also key is support for improving the quality and quantity of relevant data and research as well as peer-to-peer learning through convenings and information-sharing networks.

Align state and federal actions with local anti-violence priorities.

For state and federal agencies that work directly on anti-violence issues, aligning activities with local efforts is essential. State probation and parole agencies can create specialized caseloads to better supervise and support high-risk individuals, the FBI and U.S. Attorneys can coordinate with local law enforcement to incapacitate persistently violent individuals and groups, and health, labor, education, and other non-enforcement agencies can similarly focus their resources. A coherent, whole-of-government approach that identifies and engages the key people and places driving local violence is the goal.

BEGIN TODAY

Violent crime is a deadly serious challenge, but it is also a solvable one. Cities, as well as states and the federal government, are not helpless in the face of rising rates of shootings and killings. By taking the ten essential steps above, government and community leaders can avoid paralyzing and polarizing debates and promote peace and safety in their communities. These actions can begin immediately, without the need for massive budgets or new legislation. The main ingredients are courage and commitment. As the famous Chinese proverb says, “The best time to plant a tree was 20 years ago. The second-best time is now.”

ENDNOTES

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12 “Transforming Vacant Land.” *Philadelphia Horticultural Society*, accessed 14 Dec. 2021, <https://phsonline.org/programs/transforming-vacant-land>; Lasley, James. “Designing Out Gang Homicides and Street Assaults.” *U.S. Department of Justice: National Institute of Justice*, Nov. 1998; Chaflin, Aaron, Hansen, Benjamin, Lerner, Jason, and Lucie Parker. “Reducing Crime Through Environmental Design: Evidence from a Randomized Experiment of Street Lighting in New York City.” *University of Chicago Crime Lab*, 24 Apr. 2019.

City of Knoxville Community-Based Violence Reduction Plan



CITY OF KNOXVILLE
INDYA KINCANNON, MAYOR

PREPARED BY THE OFFICE OF COMMUNITY SAFETY
MAY 2023

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STATEMENT FROM THE MAYOR

Over the past few years, too many Knoxvilleians have experienced loss of family, friends, and neighbors, as a result of violence. While violence impacts our entire community, we acknowledge that the weight of violence disproportionately impacts already underserved and underrepresented communities.

As a city—as a community—we all have a role to play in creating safe, healthy, thriving communities.



As Mayor, I am committed to using proven strategies to reduce community-based violence. I am thankful for the partnership of so many in our community to address this critical issue. No single individual or entity can effectively solve this crisis. I am eager to work with stakeholders from a range of disciplines and experiences, including those most directly impacted by violence, to implement solutions that will save lives.

The plan detailed in this report represents a commitment to engaging the people, places, and behaviors most likely to be impacted by community-based violence, using strategies that prioritize strengthening and supporting individuals and neighbors, building community trust, and focusing resources towards the highest risks. I am confident that using coordinated, evidence-based, community-informed approaches, adopted and implemented across disciplines, we will save lives.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, which appears to read "Indya K." followed by a stylized flourish.

Indya Kincannon,
Knoxville Mayor

The Challenge



In 2020 and 2021, the city experienced 37 and 41 homicides respectively.

The City of Knoxville is a mid-sized city in East Tennessee, located at the foot of the Great Smoky Mountains. It is the third largest city in the State of Tennessee, the largest city in the state's eastern division, and the county seat of Knox County. According to most recent census data, Knox County has a population of approximately 478,971, with approximately 190,740 people living in the City of Knoxville. Like many other cities in the United States, Knoxville experienced dramatic increases in violent crime in 2020 and 2021. Between 2010 and 2014, Knoxville averaged 17.2 homicides per year; between 2015 and 2019, the city averaged 23.2 homicides per year. In 2020 and 2021, the city experienced 37 and 41 homicides respectively.

In 2020, while the nation experienced 7.8 homicides per 100,000 people, Knoxville experienced 19.7 per 100,000 people. In 2021, that number rose to 21.4 per 100,000 residents. In 2021, 93% of homicides in Knoxville involved a firearm. In 2022, 35 lives were lost to violence.

Homicides in Knoxville disproportionately impact Black Knoxvillians. Black residents represent about 17% of Knoxville's population, but represent about 75% of persons involved in shooting incidents between 2019 and 2021. Violence in Knoxville is disproportionately concentrated in areas with high concentrations of black or poor residents. Black Knoxvillians not only bear an outsized share of the burden of community-based violence,

they are also overrepresented in the number of Knoxvillians living in poverty. Black residents represent about 9% of the population of Knox County; however, almost 30% of black Knox County residents live below the poverty line, compared to 12.2% of white residents. As of 2019, the poverty rate among black residents in the City of Knoxville is approximately 34%. Black residents experience the highest poverty rate of any racial demographic in Knox County.



The Process

On December 6th, 2022, a diverse collection of leaders met in Knoxville for four days to discuss, deliberate, and decide on new ways to address Knoxville's elevated rates of gun violence. These leaders included Mayor Indya Kincannon, Councilwoman Gwen McKenzie, District Attorney Charme Allen, Police Chief Paul Noel, Denzel Grant from Turn Up Knox, Reverend Dr. Jacquelyn Bragg from Justice Knox, Chris Martin from the Knoxville Leadership Foundation, Candace Allen from the McNabb Center, Randy Nichols from Knox County Sheriff's Office, and many others.

Supported by the University of Maryland's Center for the Study and Practice of Violence Reduction (also known as the Violence Reduction Center or VRC), these leaders participated in a series of briefings by leading anti-violence researchers and practitioners on the most effective local anti-violence strategies currently available.

Following the briefings, participants produced a draft "plan to plan" to help guide Knoxville's future anti-violence efforts. This "plan to plan" included key definitions and values to frame the understanding of the issue and how Knoxville will approach identifying and implementing strategies, identified a framework for implementation, and proposed key strategies to be further developed and finalized after consulting with and receiving feedback from additional Knoxville stakeholders.

On March 1, 2023, Mayor Kincannon convened a team of more than twenty-five leaders representing city government, law enforcement, criminal law systems participants, medical systems representatives, service providers, faith leaders, and violence impacted persons to review and provide feedback on the proposed plan. Following feedback from the team, the following plan was developed.



The Plan

Key Definitions and Values

What is Community Gun Violence? Community gun violence is the lethal or potentially lethal violence that happens in community settings and is perpetrated with firearms, the vast majority of which are illegally possessed and carried. It is also known as urban or street violence. From 2019-2021, approximately 87% of all shootings in Knoxville where the cause of the incident was known were associated with community gun violence (Knoxville Gun Violence Problem Analysis, 2022).



The Problem: Knoxville is losing too many lives to community gun violence. In 2020, 37 Knoxvillians were murdered. In 2021, 41 more were killed and in 2022, an additional 35 people died violently. Knoxville's homicide rates are rising over time and are significantly higher than state and national averages (Knoxville Gun Violence Problem Analysis, 2022). Too many of our residents are dying – we must act now.

The Solution: Knoxville will save lives by reducing community gun violence, cutting the numbers of fatal and non-fatal shootings by 10% each year starting in 2023. At the same time, we will improve trust between government agencies and our most impacted communities, as measured by new tools such as surveys as well as individual and

group consultation.

Key Values: Knoxville will save lives and improve trust by staying true to its values, using strategies that are partnership-based, solution-focused, evidence-informed, community-engaged, and humanity-centered.

- Being **solution-focused** means staying focused on providing Knoxvillians with concrete relief from community gun violence as measured by reductions in fatal and non-fatal shootings.
- Being **partnership-based** means understanding that building trust requires working together, communicating and coordinating across stakeholders that may not have worked together before.
- Being **evidence-informed** means that all decisions concerning community gun violence are informed by sound evidence and reliable data, including community generated evidence.
- Being **community-engaged** means recognizing the importance of engaging with impacted communities generally, but particularly with those who are most frequently and directly exposed to crime and violence.
- Being **humanity-centered** means reaffirming the humanity of those impacted by crime and violence, as maintaining peace requires acknowledging difficult truths, building trust, and promoting reconciliation.

“Knoxville will save lives by reducing community gun violence, cutting the numbers of fatal and non-fatal shootings by 10% each year starting in 2023.”

Implementation

Translating a city's anti-violence vision into action requires clear and consistent leadership. In order to achieve a 10% reduction in fatal and non-fatal shootings, as well as build community trust in government, a clear accountability structure must be put into place to drive strategy implementation. Resources are also required, including, but not limited to, staff, funding, training, and equipment.

Knoxville leaders agreed on five accountability measures to keep the city's anti-violence work on track and moving forward.

1. **Increase the capacity of the Knoxville Office of Community Safety.**

OCS staff are responsible for day-to-day implementation of this plan, but current capacity is not sufficient to handle the workload associated with this effort. The OCS should hire additional staff, including at least one with project management experience and expertise, and make funds immediately available to engage outside experts to help the OCS guide implementation.

In the 2023-24 fiscal year, Mayor Kincannon proposed additional staff for the Office of Community Safety to support the management and implementation of additional programs, services and partnerships related to reducing violence. Additionally, Mayor Kincannon consolidated the Office of Community Safety and the Office of Community Empowerment to better align City efforts able to impact the people, places and behaviors at highest risk for being affected by violence.

2. **Establish a leadership committee.** The city needs a leadership committee to set the direction of the city's anti-violence effort and monitor progress towards its goals. This committee should be chaired by the city Mayor. Other committee members would include law enforcement leaders such as the Knoxville Chief of Police, District Attorney General, Knox County Sheriff, and the U.S. Attorney; non-enforcement leaders, such as nonprofit, business, and public health executives; and importantly leaders from impacted communities - especially leaders of faith-based organizations.

In March 2023, Mayor Kincannon convened a team of more than twenty-five leaders representing city government, law enforcement, criminal law systems participants, medical systems representatives, service providers, faith leaders, and violence impacted persons. The Leadership Team meets monthly, engaging in shared learning and discussing how to effectively implement violence reduction strategies in Knoxville.

3. **Establish a management team.** In addition to convening high-level leaders, regular meetings among managers with day-to-day responsibility for implementation is necessary. This team should be chaired by the Mayor's Director of Community Safety and include representatives from the same stakeholder groups identified above. That said, membership should be limited to those directly responsible for implementing one or more of the strategies below.

Implementation (continued)

In March 2023, the Management Team began meeting to work toward implementation of the identified key strategies. The Management Team has developed a regular, weekly meeting schedule, continues to develop partnerships, identify opportunities for collaboration, and prepare recommendations to present to the Leadership Team.

4. **Establish a place-based violence prevention team.** Participants agreed that a separate team was necessary in order to manage the development of the place-based police/community partnerships strategy. Chaired by the Mayor's Director of Community Safety, this group should include representatives from relevant city and county departments, neighborhood associations, business owners, KPD representatives, and community and faith-based leaders.
5. **Establish a service development and delivery team.** Participants recognized that perhaps the greatest gap in current capacity was for the services necessary to support individuals at the highest risk for community gun violence. In order to rapidly bring those services online, participants agreed a separate team was necessary. Chaired by the Mayor's Director of Community Safety, membership in this group should include representatives from relevant city and county departments, representatives from nongovernmental agencies who can deliver needed services, and community and faith-based leaders.



The Plan

Five Key Strategies

Based on Knoxville's recent [Gun Violence Problem Analysis](#) and consistent with [national best practices](#) on evidence-informed anti-violence strategies, the following five strategies should be implemented simultaneously and as soon as reasonably possible.

1. **Engage high-risk people by implementing the Group Violence Initiative.**

[Rigorous research](#) indicates that the Group Violence Initiative (GVI), also known as the Group Violence Reduction Strategy, Ceasefire, or focused deterrence, has a reasonably strong track record of success in reduced gun and group-oriented violence. In addition, Knoxville's problem analysis suggests that the majority of gun violence in the city involves group-affiliated individuals.

The GVI reduces gun violence by identifying high-risk people and social networks, communicating directly to them the commitment of the police and community members to stop such violence, providing special supports and services, and deploying targeted law enforcement sanctions as a last resort.

The supports and services necessary to engage high-risk individuals and groups may not be currently available in the city, thus developing that capacity must be a top priority for city and community leaders. In particular, the capacity to provide high-quality cognitive behavioral interventions (CBI), a leading crime prevention intervention backed by [rigorous research](#), must be put into place quickly.

Project deadlines: By September 2023, the city will launch a pilot version of the GVI. By September 2024, ensure that GVI is fully operational along with all necessary supports and services, including CBI.

Project lead: Knoxville Office of Community Safety.

The City of Knoxville Office of Community Safety, in partnership with the Violence Reduction Center, continues to engage national experts in Group Violence Intervention to provide technical assistance, training and thought partnership in developing evidence-based strategies in Knoxville.



2. Address high-risk places with localized police/community partnerships.

[Rigorous research](#) indicates that problem-solving law enforcement strategies that increase police presence in locations where crime concentrates can be successful, provided that they positively engage with impacted community members and avoid indiscriminate stops, searches, and arrests.

But policing is not enough. Research also indicates that investments in crime-prone locations, particularly efforts to remake the physical makeup of such spaces, can yield crime reductions.

To leverage both place-based policing and investment, the city will form a series of police/community partnerships in and around the places where crime and violence concentrates. Along with law enforcement, these partnerships should include local residents, nonprofits, businesses, and especially faith-based leaders. Together these partnership councils can work to remake public spaces in crime-prone locations so that a significant police presence is no longer needed over time.

Project deadlines: By September 2023, KPD will identify Knoxville’s most violent “hot spots” and the city will pilot partnership councils in several of them. Each of these locations will benefit from increased police presence but also from additional investment. By September 2024, every “hot spot” in Knoxville will have an active partnership council.

Project leads: Knoxville Office of Community Safety and the Knoxville Police Department.



3. **Scale up community outreach to support Knoxville's people- and place-based efforts.**

The evidence concerning community outreach is [promising but mixed](#). When done well, community outreach is a powerful anti-violence tool. Also described as violence intervention or interruption, these programs recruit frontline workers with credible ties to impacted communities in order to mediate disputes and help those most at risk manage provocations and conflicts without resorting to violence. Importantly, outreach workers also connect individuals to social support and services.

Knoxville needs broader community outreach efforts, both independently and to support its other anti-violence strategies. Careful attention must be paid, however, to properly implementing these efforts and ensuring strong management and oversight.

Project deadlines: By September 2023, the city will identify opportunities to scale up current community outreach efforts in order to properly engage and support the strategies described in this plan. By September 2024, outreach efforts will be expanded further to fully engage the the city's highest-risk people and places.

Project lead: Knoxville Office of Community Safety.

The City of Knoxville Office of Community Safety continues to provide funding and programming support for violence interruption street outreach. Funding to continue support of street outreach is included in the FY2023-2024 City budget proposal. The Office of Community Safety, in partnership with the Violence Reduction Center, will continue to engage national experts and local partners to support training and network development for effective engagement with high risk individuals.



4. Continue to identify the key people and places that drive community gun violence by enhancing Knoxville’s capacity for problem analysis. In the Summer of 2022, a problem analysis was conducted to identify the precise drivers of firearm violence in Knoxville. That analysis, publicly released on November 2, 2022, found that a large share of gun violence in the city was perpetrated by relatively small numbers of individuals and groups, in a relatively small number of micro-locations or “hot spots.” Further analysis is needed to identify these high-risk people and places on an ongoing basis. In addition, since this analysis is based on police data, enhancing the analysis with input from select representatives of impacted communities from outside law enforcement will strengthen the analysis further.



Project deadline: By September 2023, KPD will put ongoing problem analysis into place, along with a new component that provides for input from key community members and organizations.

Project lead: Knoxville Police Department.

The Knoxville Police Department is participating in training and expanding data collection and management capacity to increase its ability to access and provide continuously relevant analysis necessary for effective implementation of group violence reduction strategies.

5. Create new tools for measuring community trust in government. We measure what matters. If improving trust in government agencies among Knoxville residents most impacted by community gun violence is important, concrete measurements must be taken to ensure progress is made. In order to see whether these strategies are increasing community confidence, baseline measurements should be taken before implementation begins. There are a variety of ways in which to measure community trust, including the use of surveys and other tools.

Project deadlines: By September 2023, the city will take baseline measurements of trust in government agencies among residents impacted most by community gun violence. By September 2024, it will repeat the process annually in order to measure progress.

Project lead: Knoxville Office of Community Safety.

The City of Knoxville’s leaders and citizens are committed to a collective future where every member of our collective community can thrive, free from the threat of deadly violence. This plan memorializes that commitment and will guide our action.

Together, we can and will save lives.

HEALTH

As research grows into how to stop gun violence, one city looks to science for help



The city of Knoxville turns to gun violence prevention research and street outreach program to combat gun-related homicide and suicide rates not seen since the early 1990s. (Aug. 24) (AP video: Erik Verduzco)

**Photos**

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In recent years, research reviews have begun to conclude there's enough evidence to say which public health interventions prevent shootings, which do not, and which need more study. Knoxville is one of a growing number of cities teaming with researchers to develop an evidence-based plan to stop the bleeding.

Knoxville's program was in reaction to a dramatic rise in shooting deaths and includes policing changes and other efforts. However, it does not count on new gun restrictions. That was important, since Tennessee has repeatedly moved to loosen gun laws.

"I wanted to have answers," said Knoxville Mayor Indya Kincannon. "I wanted to be able to fix it."

Nearly non-existent not long ago, gun violence prevention research has experienced a small boom in the wake of mounting shooting deaths, expanded funding and burgeoning advocacy.

Two decades ago, only about 20 U.S. researchers were focused on gun violence prevention. Last fall, more than 600 gathered in Washington, D.C., for what's been described as the largest-ever national conference on the issue. An even bigger turnout is expected at a conference this fall.

Funding continues to be just a fraction of what is spent on other leading causes of death. Still, research has "just exploded" in the last few years, said Rebecca Cunningham, a gun violence researcher at the University of Michigan.

The work addresses the worst firearm violence in decades.

Researchers [estimate](#) there were more than 48,000 firearm deaths last year, with gun-related homicide and suicide rates not seen since the early 1990s. Gunshots are now [the leading cause](#) of death of U.S. children and teenagers.

Though some big questions remain, there is a growing consensus about what programs and policies make a difference — and which don't.

According to an [assessment](#) by the Rand Corp., measures that work include laws that permit charging adults who let children have unsupervised access to guns,

well-enforced background checks and policies that ban guns from people subject to domestic violence restraining orders.

Measures that don't: stand-your-ground and concealed carry laws, which studies consistently show increase gun homicides, and gun buyback programs, which have been shown to have little, if any, effect on crime.



Tay Tay Washington rides a scooter in the Five Points neighborhood Friday, Aug. 4, 2023 in Knoxville, Tenn. (AP Photo/George Walker IV)

About 16% of Knoxville's population is Black, and about 40% live in poverty, many in East Knoxville, where firearm violence has surged.

As in other U.S. cities, violence escalated during the COVID-19 pandemic, when adults were out of work, kids were not in school and people were anxious.

"It was a very unsettled time," Mayor Kincannon said.

Before the pandemic, homicides hovered around 20 per year. That shot up to 38 in 2020 and rose again to 41 in 2021, giving Knoxville a gun homicide rate that rivaled Chicago's.



Mayor Indya Kincannon visits with members of the Lonsdale neighborhood during a homecoming celebration Saturday, Aug. 5, 2023 in Knoxville, Tenn. (AP Photo/George Walker IV)

As shootings accelerated, Kincannon turned to Thomas Abt, whose book, “Bleeding Out,” offers a plan for cities that includes having police and community organizations work together.

Crucially, Abt’s program doesn’t count on policymakers to take action to restrict gun access. That was appealing, because Tennessee’s state government has been moving in the opposite direction.

In 2021, the state started letting people carry handguns — visibly, or concealed — without a permit. This year, the minimum age for carrying handguns dropped to 18.

Even after [a mass shooting](#) that killed three children and three staff at an elementary school in Nashville this year, the state Legislature’s Republican

majority fought calls for tougher gun laws. Two Black representatives who protested the inaction were [expelled](#).

Gov. Bill Lee, a Republican, opened [a special legislative](#) session this week to address public safety. But many Republican lawmakers have spurned his centerpiece measure that would take guns away from people deemed an extreme risk to themselves or others.

Kincannon supports expanded background checks and other gun control measures, but said Knoxville's efforts are designed to make a difference "no matter what happens legislatively."

Several cities have began looking to team up with gun violence prevention experts, including Muskegon, Michigan, which partnered with the University of Michigan.

Knoxville became the first city to sign up with Abt's program at the Center for the Study and Practice of Violence Reduction at the University of Maryland, which teamed with an outside researcher to analyze its violent crime.

The analysis contained a few surprises, said Knoxville Deputy Police Chief Tony Willis.

The average age of shooting suspects was 28, and for victims, 29, — an unexpectedly large proportion who were "much older than I expected," he said.

Only 12% of homicides were solely gang-related, much lower than anticipated, Willis said. That suggests gun violence is often a personal dispute that could be mediated or averted before shots are fired.

The research also supported police data showing most gun violence happened in a few "hot spots," mostly in East Knoxville, leading to a plan initially focusing police and community outreach to a nine-block area there.

The effort involves church leaders and a range of community organizations. There were also changes at the police department, including a new police chief, a detective unit focused only on homicides and shootings, and officers dedicated to patrolling in areas with many shootings.



Knoxville Deputy Police Chief Tony Willis uses a map to show the concentration of gun violence crimes during a meeting of the Violence Reduction Leadership Committee on Thursday, Aug. 3, 2023, in Knoxville, Tenn. The city saw a spike in gun deaths in 2020 and 2021, with a gun homicide rate that at one point in 2021 rivaled Chicago's. (AP Photo/George Walker IV)

A goal is to increase public trust in law enforcement, which had been low and sometimes abysmal. A particular low point occurred in 2021, when a police officer [killed a student](#) in a high school bathroom in East Knoxville.

“The community did, absolutely, raise concerns about policing. ... A lot of conversations are still happening, frankly,” said LaKenya Middlebrook, the mayor’s point person on the effort.

Kincannon said she knew police “couldn’t do it alone.”

“We would have someone get killed in broad daylight, with a lot of witnesses, but no one wanted to talk,” she said. “That means we need more partnership in the community, to build trust.”

Even before the researchers’ analysis was completed, the city funded Turn Up Knox, a nonprofit led by 32-year-old community activist Denzel Grant.



Knoxville Deputy Police Chief Tony Willis, left, talks with Turn Up Knox executive director Denzel Grant after a meeting of the Violence Reduction Leadership Committee on Thursday, Aug. 3, 2023 in Knoxville, Tenn. The city saw a spike in gun deaths in 2020 and 2021, with a gun homicide rate that at one point in 2021 rivaled Chicago's. (AP Photo/George Walker IV)

It uses ex-offenders, violence survivors and other community members to identify those most likely to be shot or to become shooters in the future. They mentor teenagers, operate a lawn service that gives jobs to kids and are teaching families how to mediate conflicts and deal with the trauma that follows shootings.

Sometimes, when someone is in danger of becoming the victim of a revenge shooting they give them a bus ticket to get out of town for a few days.

Such outreach can be pivotal if it's integrated with a trusted police force, responsive mental health services and other community efforts, Abt says.

It's too early to say if the steps so far are making a difference in Knoxville.

There were 36 homicides last year, down from the 41 the year before. But firearm homicides fell nationally last year, and experts aren't sure why. In the first six months of this year, Knoxville had 15 homicides, down from 18 in the same period last year.



Quintest Vinson, right, of Turn Up Knox hands out candy to children during the Lonsdale Neighborhood Homecoming celebration Saturday, Aug. 5, 2023 in Knoxville, Tenn. (AP Photo/George Walker IV)

Some experts have mixed feelings about the Knoxville approach.

Abt is “very respected” and focuses on immediate steps to reduce gun violence, but he doesn’t emphasize longer-term programs to alleviate poverty and racial disparities, said Jim Mercy of the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

The program also doesn’t directly address gun suicides, which outnumber gun homicides.

Some East Knoxville residents note the area has few stores, and few safe places for kids to have fun, and limited opportunities for summer jobs.

“Kids should have something to do,” said Chloe Isom, 41, who lost two sons to gun violence last year. JaBari, 16, was killed in September and 20-year-old Stephen two weeks later.



Chloe Isom, left, with Rashaad Woods and Denzel Grant, right, of Turn Up Knox along Martin Luther King Jr. Ave. on Thursday, Aug. 3, 2023, in Knoxville, Tenn. (AP Photo/George Walker IV)

City officials have increased summer youth programs, serving hundreds of kids. But they acknowledge much still needs to be done and that Turn Up Knox needs more resources and training. Also, Kincannon faces a primary election on Tuesday.

“If she doesn’t get re-elected, that’s a scary situation,” said Terry Walker-Smith, 58, who works with Turn Up Knox and lost two sons to gun violence, in 2007 and 2009.

Charlene Roberts’ 25-year-old daughter, Jessie, was killed by a stray bullet in 2019 while sitting in a car at a North Knoxville fast-food drive-thru. Her son Kevin, 33, was killed in 2021 when gunfire erupted at a birthday party.

She is now raising Jessie’s son, Princeton.

Princeton is a quiet, basketball-loving kid who just started sixth grade and looks a lot like his mother. On his bedroom wall is a framed certificate, “Brightest Smile Award,” presented to him by a teacher a year before his mother was killed.

Besides losing his mother and uncle to violence, his father is in prison. Princeton has been bullied in school, his grandmother said. Princeton recalled a scary day when he saw people with guns just down the street.

“I wish they didn’t allow people to have guns,” he said. “I just don’t want to get hurt one day.”



Charlene Roberts and her grandson Princeton Roberts, 11, pose with portraits of her son Kevin and daughter Jessie on Friday, Aug. 4, 2023, in Knoxville, Tenn. Roberts' son, Kevin, was killed in 2021 and her daughter, Jessie, in 2019. Knoxville saw a surge in fatal shootings during the beginning of the pandemic, and community leaders are working on a new effort to reduce gun violence. (AP Photo/George Walker IV)

His grandmother says he is resilient and “amazing,” but he’s also changed.

“He always had the biggest smile, just like his mother,” she said. “It breaks my heart. He fakes a smile now. He don’t have that smile anymore.”

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OVP23



CITY OF ST. LOUIS
OFFICE OF VIOLENCE PREVENTION
DIVISION OF THE DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC SAFETY

2023 YEAR IN REVIEW



Tishaura O. Jones
Mayor, City of St. Louis

As the Mayor of St. Louis, I have made it the explicit goal of my administration to transform public safety. I am committed to breaking cycles of crime through prevention, intervention, and enforcement. In June 2022, I established the Office of Violence Prevention (OVP) to serve as a center coordinating hub for agencies, people, and personnel tasked with realizing the promise of a safer St. Louis.

Transforming public safety requires us to face the hard truths of our city. Despite having one of the largest police departments per capita in 2020, St. Louis still carried the reputation of “the most dangerous.” In the year before I took office, St. Louis suffered 263 homicides and our homicide clearance rate was 38 percent. It was clear that the old, antiquated approaches to public safety are a hindrance to our city’s ability to thrive.

Since I took office in 2021, we have seen a significant decrease in homicides: a 24 percent drop from 2020 to 2021, and another 21 percent from 2022 to 2023. At 158 homicides in 2023, with a homicide clearance rate of 75 percent, we experienced our lowest violent crime rate in a decade and one of the largest year-over-year declines in homicides in 90 years. As a mother, I am proud of our work to decrease youth shooting incidents by nearly 50 percent.

These numbers are a result of a coordinated effort of many different agencies within our city to address the root causes of crime while holding those who do commit crime accountable. OVP’s community-centered approach to violence prevention is essential in our crime reduction efforts - crime is prevented years before it happens.

The work of OVP is varied and powerful. From funding legal services to victims of domestic violence, to supporting community organizations like the Bullet Related Injury Clinic, to empowering community members to analyze crime data and partner with the government to address practical solutions, OVP is committed to close relationships with neighborhoods and communities. This work creates measurable changes both in the lives of individual people who have been able to leave a life of violence and to communities who can breathe easier as violence decreases. There is a long road to travel but this type of engagement centers on one primary goal, saving lives.

The Office Of Violence of Prevention does not shy away from individuals who are committing violence or victims of violence. Intervention at this level is the most effective way we have to decrease crime. Beyond individual community organizations, OVP works directly with our city’s 911 system to get the right responder to the right call, for example connecting clinicians directly with those experiencing a mental health crisis.

In February, St. Louis Metropolitan Police Dept. Chief Robert Tracy and I joined the Office of Violence Prevention and the Show Me Peace Initiative for a Peace Walk in the Dutchtown neighborhood. We marched side by side with dozens of community members to stand strong against violence and to honor the lives lost to it.

The work that Director Wil Pinkney and the staff at OVP do every day is an essential part of my administration’s efforts to increase public safety in St. Louis. I’m proud to say that their work is helping to make us safer today and even safer tomorrow.

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KEY HIGHLIGHTS OF THE YEAR

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2023 was a milestone year, witnessing a commendable 21 percent decrease in homicides compared to the previous year. This marked the lowest crime rate in a decade and a historic decline in homicides over the last 90 years.

Property Crime

1. Felony Theft -39%
2. Auto Theft -19%
3. Burglary -12%

2023 Violent Crime Stats

1. Homicide -21%
2. Robbery -11%
3. Aggravated Assaults -6%
4. Shooting Incidents -24%
5. Shooting Victims -23%

Violent Crime Involving Youth

1. Youth Shooting Incidents -47%
2. Youth Shooting Victims -50%





CVI

2 0 2 3

OVP hosts bi-weekly meetings with CVI cohort partners to share information and work collaboratively to address emerging issues.

COMMUNITY VIOLENCE INTERVENTION FOCUSED APPROACH

Community Violence Intervention (CVI) programs focus on reducing homicides and shootings by establishing relationships with people at the center of gun violence in our communities. These programs support people at the highest risk of being victims or perpetrators - or both - of violence. OVP strategically funded and directed various CVI initiatives across the city, emphasizing relationship-building with those at the core of gun violence. The goal is to create a CVI ecosystem that brings together local stakeholders to build a comprehensive violence reduction infrastructure that promotes equity and complements the work of law enforcement. The office meticulously selected priority neighborhoods based on data-driven insights:

- DUTCHTOWN
- WELLS/GOODFELLOW
- HAMILTON HEIGHTS
- WALNUT PARK
- COLUMBUS SQUARE
- CARR SQUARE
- PEABODY LASALLE
- O'FALLON
- PENROSE
- FOUNTAIN PARK
- COLLEGE HILL
- BADEN

Grounded in a commitment to empirical effectiveness, OVP meticulously integrates a data-driven methodology, leveraging insights from leading best practices and partnerships with esteemed research entities. We leverage relationships with local stakeholders on the ground and foster national connections to bring the best intervention work possible to St. Louis. For example, a MasterCard assessment of St. Louis' call diversion and co-responder models in 2021 indicated that these strategies saved first responders more than 2,000 work hours combined in their first year. OVP used this information and other data from similar programs across the country to inform its decision making on future investments in this area.

FOUNDATIONAL STEPS TOWARDS GROWTH

Prioritizing team development, OVP expanded its workforce to 12 employees, filling five key positions to ensure the continuity and effectiveness of violence prevention efforts in 2023. With serving the community as a priority, OVP moved to the Urban League of Metropolitan St. Louis - Peter Bunce Campus in the College Hill community. Staff also focused on building their own knowledge and capacity, attending professional development trainings and representing OVP at over 15 conferences and convenings across the country including those hosted by the National Offices of Violence Prevention Network, the National League of Cities, Cities United, the Health Alliance for Violence Intervention (HAVI), Missouri Foundation for Health, the St. Louis Alliance for Reentry, the National Assessment Center for Association, Salesforce, and the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation's Safety and Justice Challenge.

In parallel to these learning endeavors, OVP placed a strong emphasis on fortifying its operational framework. This led to the strategic engagement of specialized consultants tasked with tailoring the Salesforce software, ensuring it met the intricate demands of OVP's multifaceted operations. OVP also enlisted the help of consultants to build an internal grant infrastructure. These consultants were instrumental in preparing and testing processes and action materials for Salesforce, building grant strategy processes, and assisting with capacity building efforts.

This year also marked a period of invaluable collaboration and learning for OVP, as it garnered pivotal advice, guidance, and technical support from an array of distinguished national entities renowned for their expertise in the domain of violence prevention.

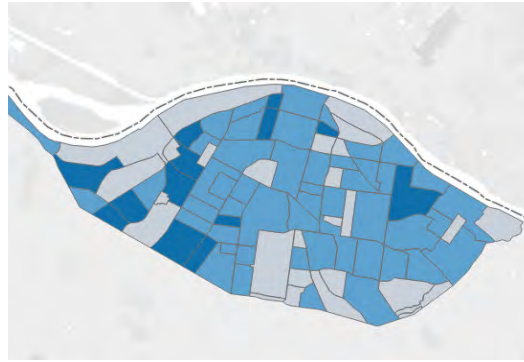


St. Louis is one of five cities receiving funding, technical assistance, and peer learning opportunities as part of the National League of Cities' (NLC) Municipalities Reimagining of Community Safety (MRCS) Initiative, a multi-year collaborative project made possible thanks to the support of the Wells Fargo Foundation. OVP also worked with the Center for Policing Equity (CPE) and other internal partners in working groups of key stakeholders, including one to develop a unified policy for non-police response models for behavioral health crises and another to explore the service needs for domestic violence, intimate partner violence, and family violence survivors in St. Louis. Also budding in 2023 were technical assistance relationships with the National Institute for Criminal Justice Reform (NICJR) and the Vera Institute of Justice.



IMPLEMENTING A COMMUNITY VIOLENCE INTERVENTION STRATEGY

OVP launched two Requests for Proposals in 2023, channeling funds towards violence prevention, youth programs, and community support initiatives. These programs have been pivotal in shaping a comprehensive CVI ecosystem within St. Louis communities:



The neighborhoods in the City of St. Louis most frequently served by CVI partners include Baden, Dutchtown, Central West End, Carondelet, and Wells Goodfellow. OVP's funded programs reached 62 of 79 neighborhoods.

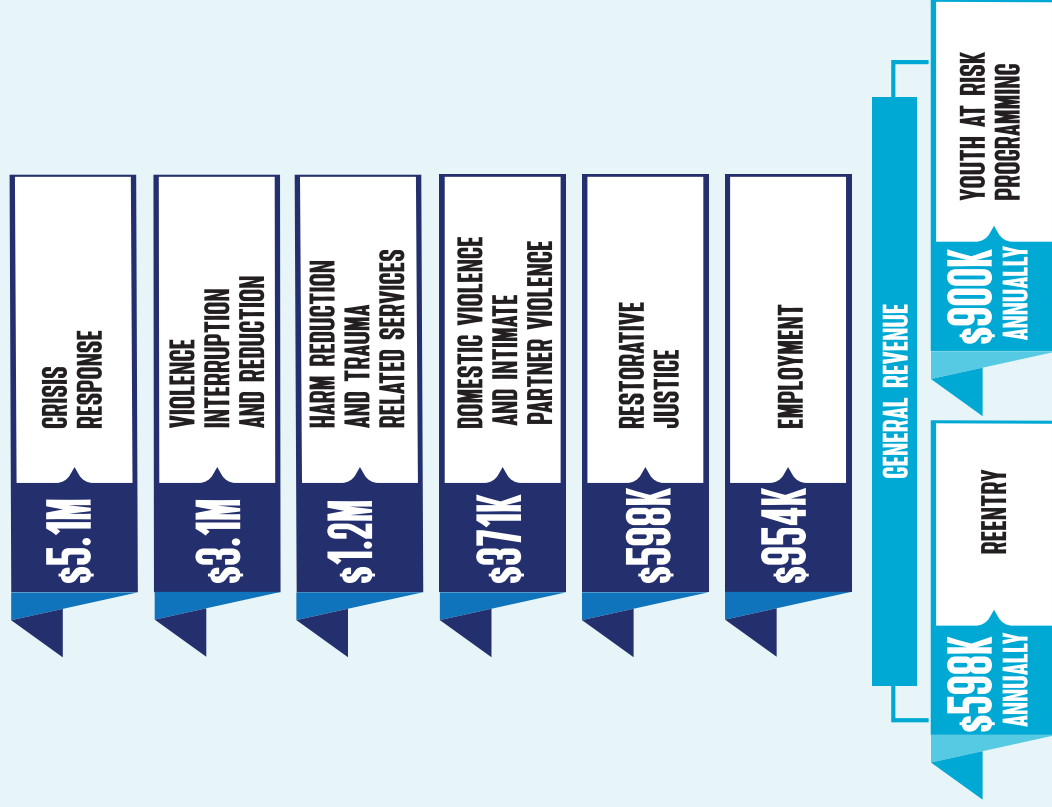
In March, a Community Violence Intervention and Prevention RFP was issued that includes \$10 million designated for programs in the areas of violence interruption and reduction services and training, domestic violence and intimate partner violence, violence prevention, and reentry. The RFP, which has remained open in early 2024, also includes \$6 million designated for youth diversion programs. OVP received over 20 proposals and entered into 10 CVI contracts in 2023 - 8 of which were amendments of contracts that were transferred from the Department of Health.

In October, another RFP was issued for \$3.6 million designated for youth programming strategies that create safe and healthy neighborhoods. OVP received 14 proposals in 2023 and plans to enter into contracts in 2024.

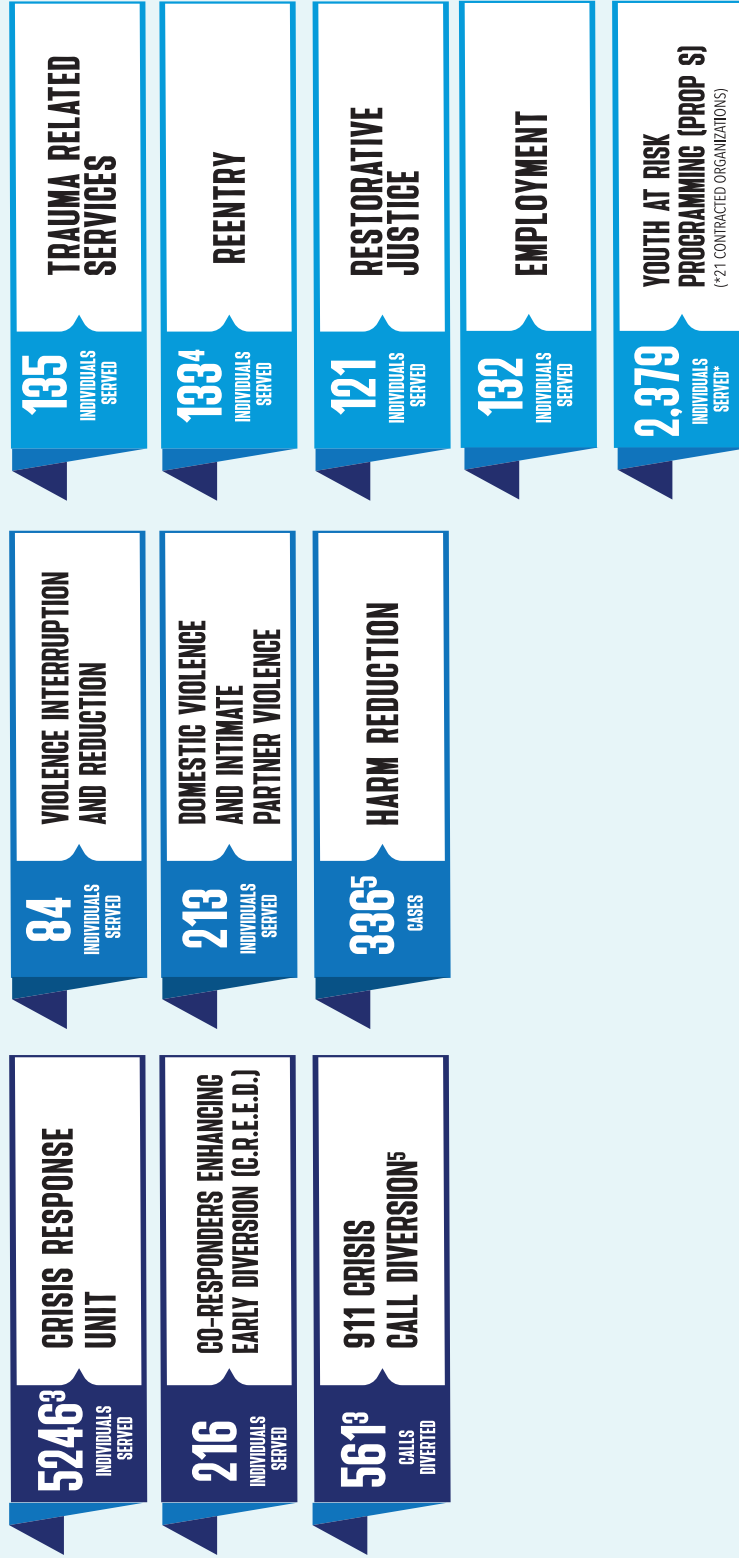
A partnership was established with Equal Justice USA (EJUSA) to facilitate support for a wide range of CVI providers to respond to these RFPs. Through this partnership, all consultations with EJUSA for project narrative writing and/or budget development are free to the entities submitting proposals. It is also important for OVP to solicit feedback from community members as it evaluates proposals. To that end, OVP sought scores and recommendations from community reviewers who were compensated for their time and effort.

American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA)

\$11.3M has been contracted for CVI programs through 2024, to-date.



Total People Served through CVI Partnerships²



² All data provided in this section is from July-December 2023 unless otherwise noted.

³ Data is from the full calendar year, January-December 2023.

⁴ Data is from April-December 2023.

⁵ This number does not reflect total individuals served.

COLLABORATIVE EFFORTS AND STRATEGIC ALLIANCES

In 2023, OVP spearheaded several pioneering strategic partnerships, each designed to address unique aspects of violence prevention and community support:

Community Centered Crisis Response Teams (C3RT)

Behavioral Health Response's clinician-only 911 call response, referred to as Community Centered Crisis Response Teams (C3RT), began its soft launch in November 2023. C3RT is a public health approach to violence prevention that utilizes a civilian-led crisis response to low priority calls for service. Teams are dispatched by clinicians embedded in the 911 communications call center and arrive on scene in their own vehicles to assist individuals experiencing a non-violent crisis. OVP worked with Behavioral Health Response to plan for the program's launch, soliciting input from national experts and other cities that have implemented similar strategies across the country - including Harris County, Texas.

Show Me Peace

Show Me Peace is a community-based violence interruption program that offers services and support for community members who have caused or are at risk of causing harm. This outreach program is staffed by credible messengers with lived experience who are from the target neighborhoods of Dutchtown, Walnut Park, Wells-Goodfellow, and The Ville. Their work aims to prevent and reduce gun violence through community education and connections to services, including cognitive behavioral therapy. Show Me Peace receives technical assistance from Live Free USA through a separate contract with OVP.



Community Centered Crisis Response Teams (C3RT)

Transitions Clinic

The Transitions Clinic was launched to provide focused medical and behavioral health services for people recently released from incarceration. Services are provided on site at community-based organizations and through a Mobile Health Van staffed by trained and experienced faculty and trainees from St. Louis University (SLU) School of Medicine. This work is currently funded as part of OVP's supportive reentry contract with St. Louis Integrated Health Network in partnership with SLU's School of Medicine and Mobile Health Van.

OVP's Supportive Reentry Program

With three dedicated staff members and multiple partner organizations, OVP provides an array of support to individuals returning to community from incarceration - increasing stabilization and decreasing the likelihood of recidivism. OVP sees supportive reentry not as a specific program, but rather an ongoing process that starts from the moment an individual is initially incarcerated and continues throughout that individual's transition from incarceration to reintegration into the community. OVP helps individuals identify their goals while incarcerated and continue making progress on their goals following their release.



Youth

INITIATIVES

In a concerted effort, OVP, alongside the Office of Children Youth and Families, orchestrated a comprehensive suite of youth initiatives throughout 2023. These initiatives, ranging from listening sessions to a diverse array of community events and enriching activities in the arts and sports, underscored a commitment to nurturing the well-being and potential of the younger generation.

Through the summer, City recreation centers remained open late, seeking to serve and engage the City's youth. One event at STL Artworks offered youth a nightclub-like experience based around the theme of Friendsgiving and welcomed 130 teens in attendance



Harambee Program Youth Participant

COMING YOUTH DIVERSION INITIATIVES:

Youth Assessment Center

In 2023, OVP completed a landscape scan of the Youth Assessment Center model that is implemented in various locations across the country, and began planning the development of a similar center in St. Louis with input from national experts and local service organizations. We envision an assessment center in St. Louis that would serve youth who come into contact with law enforcement either through an arrest, summons, or status offense. There are over 83 Assessment Centers throughout the United States that aim to prevent and divert youth from juvenile justice and child welfare systems by identifying needs and underlying issues contributing to concerning behavior. Centers may directly help youth and families connect to individualized services/resources or coordinate connection with pretrial and probation departments.



St. Louis Story-Stitchers Stitch Case Studio

Youth Advocate Program (YAP)

The Youth Advocate Program (YAP) provides young people, adults and their families with intensive support in their home, school and community through a model that blends best practices from research in wraparound, mentoring, and positive youth development. Wraparound is an intensive, individualized, holistic care planning and management approach to working with high and complex need youth and families from within their homes and communities. The cornerstone of the YAP Wrap model is the culturally competent Advocate. Recruited from the communities served, YAP Advocates are credible messengers, skilled at engaging youth and families in services. Advocates are highly trained staff who deliver services and connect youth and their families with other resources based on their Individualized Service Plan. The Saint Louis Mental Health Board supported the launch of this work locally and OVP plans to take on a contract for the program in 2024.



CULTIVATING AWARENESS & UNITY

In April 2023, OVP launched monthly family-friendly events called **Kickbacks**. Each OVP Kickback was hosted in a neighborhood most severely affected by community violence, usually in a local park. The events provide a safe space for residents, and help raise awareness of violence prevention and intervention resources. Over 900 people attended in 2023, including many who reported having been affected by gun violence, as well as over 30 community-based organizations, school officials, and elected officials. The events featured free food trucks, family-friendly crafts and games, tables that showcased local organizations and the wide range of services they provide; and access to a variety of free resources including gun locks, fresh produce, diapers, clothes, shoes, and assistance with utility bills. OVP staff were available to point attendees to local organizations that could provide assistance, and handed out business cards with information about how to access the website's robust list of violence prevention resources.

The launch of the OVP Kickbacks not only offered community engagement opportunities but also marked the beginning of a crucial partnership between the OVP, the Be SMART initiative by EveryTown for Gun Safety Support Fund, and the National Organization of Black Law Enforcement Executive (NOBLE). This collaboration is pivotal in addressing the complex issue of gun violence. The Everytown Support Fund aims to deepen our understanding of gun violence's underlying causes and diminish its impact through educational programs, research, and the promotion of policies backed by solid evidence.

Be SMART, a key component of this partnership, empowers parents and adults with the resources and knowledge needed to engage in meaningful discussions about gun safety. It emphasizes the importance of responsible actions to prevent tragic incidents involving children and firearms. The OVP's financial contributions are instrumental in strengthening the Everytown for Gun Safety Support Fund's efforts to build positive and impactful relationships in St. Louis' most affected neighborhoods. This initiative plays a crucial role in guiding individuals towards constructive alternatives, away from the path of violence, and effectively resolving conflicts within the community.

Concurrently, OVP embarked on a meaningful collaboration with the Saint Louis Story Stitchers Artist Collective, a renowned group dedicated to youth-driven creative development. This partnership is aimed at fostering a culture of gun safety, focusing on educating the community, especially the younger members, about the critical need for responsible gun handling and secure storage practices. One OVP Kickback included a performance from Story Stitchers artists who showcased their "3StepsBack" dance routine, part of their SAFE campaign, to demonstrate an easy strategy to maintain zero contact with firearms. SAFE aims to provide young people in St. Louis City with safety education to reduce unintentional shootings.



St. Louis Story Stitchers SAFE Team Members

LOOKING AHEAD »

OFFICE OF VIOLENCE PREVENTION

OVP is committed to using data to both assess the reach of programming and to evaluate the effectiveness of its strategies as a whole. We have partnered with the University of Missouri St. Louis Department of Criminology and Criminal Justice who has received a grant from the National Institute of Justice to better understand and refine the implementation of our CVI initiatives. The final project aim is to assess and evaluate CVI efficacy relative to its implementation characteristics in St. Louis.



St. Louis Public Safety Collaborative Meeting

As we step into 2024, the Office of Violence Prevention is poised to build on its successes, continuing to drive forward with data-informed strategies, community partnerships, and innovative programs aimed at fostering a safer, more resilient St. Louis. The dedication and collaborative spirit showcased in 2023 lays a solid foundation for continued progress in violence prevention and community empowerment.

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7122 Sewell Social Sciences Building | 1180 Observatory Dr | Madison, WI 53706

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