



MEMORANDUM

TO: Mayor and Council Members

FROM: Nuria Rivera-Vandermyde, Deputy City Manager

NPR —

DATE: July 22, 2020

SUBJECT: Gun Violence Task Force Report

City Council approved Resolution No. [20190822-069](#), which established the Gun Violence Task Force to advise the City Council on potential actions the City can take to reduce gun violence at the local level and to make recommendations for enhancing existing resources and campaigns. The purpose of this memo is to provide, on behalf of the Gun Violence Task Force, the City Council with their final report.

This report is being shared with the City's Equity Office, Office of Police Oversight, and the Austin Police Department for their review. It will also be shared with the City-Community Reimagining Task Force.

Additionally, the resolution directed the City Manager's Office to provide Council and the Public Safety Commission a quarterly report on incidents of gun violence that occur within the City. On July 1, 2020, APD provided a [memo](#) to Mayor and Council, which highlighted the department's comprehensive report on gun crime in the city from 2014–2018. In addition, APD provided this report to the Public Safety Commission.

xc: CMO Executive Team

Amber Goodwin, Gun Violence Task Force

Shelli Egger, Gun Violence Task Force

Brion Oaks, Chief Equity Officer

Farah Muscadin, Police Monitor

Chief Brian Manley, Chief of Police

Anne Morgan, City Attorney

Attachment – Gun Violence Task Force Final Report



July 16, 2020

GUN VIOLENCE TASK FORCE

REPORT TO THE AUSTIN CITY COUNCIL

Introduction to the GVTF

On August 22, 2019, the Austin City Council created the Gun Violence Task Force (GVTF) with the adoption of Resolution No. 20190822-069. Our mandate was to:

- Advise the Council on potential actions the City can take to reduce gun violence at the local level and to make recommendations for enhancing existing resources and campaigns; and
- Recommend actions the City can take to partner Page 2 Of 4 with other levels or units of government and private organizations to make our communities safe and resilient from gun violence.

The GVTF consists of eleven members, approved by the Council, with backgrounds in a variety of fields, including public safety, gun violence prevention, domestic violence, criminal justice, community organizing, and public health. There was also representation of both people of color and non-POC leaders from around Texas on the GVTF.

To better understand the nature of gun violence in Austin, we shared our own experiences, both as individuals and as advocates for the people and communities we serve that are directly impacted by gun violence. We examined data, academic and policy research, and best practice models from around the country to identify solutions with proven success.

Written by: Shelli Egger and Amber Goodwin

Endorsed by GVTF members: David Johnson, Noel Landuyt, Hilary Whitfield, and Selena Xie

A Letter from the Authors

It is important to note that this final report very much reflects the moment of this summer 2020. When the GVTF first convened in October, none of us could have imagined all the ways life would change between then and now. The GVTF met virtually the week after George Floyd's murder. With leadership from Black members of the task force, Amber Goodwin and David Johnson, we discussed some of the ways traditional gun violence strategies contribute to the viscous cycle that allows police violence to happen. For some of the members, the reality of the painful racist history of violence in Austin was all too familiar. For some members, that conversation was a moment of reckoning. A moment to decide how to move forward in our gun violence prevention work - with our eyes open or closed.

The current criminal justice lens has skewed perceptions of the gun violence epidemic for too long. Law enforcement controls the data to support their narrative that punishment - rather than liberation from violence - is the goal. We join with activists, advocates, community leaders, healthcare professionals, and gun violence prevention experts from Austin and around the country in calling for a whole new vision of public safety.

We begin by shifting to a public health framework focused on advancing racial justice. The public health approach recognizes that (1) violence is often predictable and preventable, and (2) the trauma and harm caused by gun violence cannot be healed by arrest. From this perspective, Austin can prevent and treat gun violence the same way as any other disease - by getting down to the roots.

This will not be a quick fix or blanket solution. It will require white people in Austin to be honest with themselves about their values, their responsibilities, and the reality of what life is like for people of color in this city.

White people in Austin can no longer pretend that the layer upon layer of disadvantage that plague Black and Brown communities are some unfortunate coincidence. White people in Austin must admit that the forces of racism, sexism, homophobia, white privilege, and oppression are alive and well in our city because they were built right into the foundation. White people in Austin must realize that we cannot afford more attempts to repair and reform the roots of slavery and Jim Crow that still infect our criminal justice system today. White people in Austin must understand that being an "ally" means more than showing up for the protests, press conferences, and proclamations.

City leaders must understand that acknowledgement without action does not make them progressive. It makes them participants.

The time has come for all of Austin to understand that none of us are safe from gun violence until all of us are safe in our homes, our neighborhoods, and our city.



We envision a justice-focused and racially equitable Austin, where:

A child's race, class, or zip code would no longer predict a poor health outcome, lack of success at school, or future earning capacity.

A woman's race class or zip code would no longer predict whether she will be victimized at home, and if she is, whether she feels safe enough to ask for help.

A young man's race, class, or zip code would no longer predict whether he will be stopped, searched, arrested, assaulted, or killed by the very people meant to protect him.

“

We have to break down the concept of what safety actually means and make sure safety is something that is entitled to not only white Americans but it should be something everybody has access to.

Chas Moore, Executive Director
Austin Justice Coalition

We ask the Council to commit to realizing this vision with a minimum initial investment of \$5 million dollars to fund an Office of Violence Prevention and contract with an outside technical assistance provider develop a triage and long-term strategic plan. This best practice combination will institutionalize Austin's trauma-informed public health approach to prevent gun violence and increase access to healing supports for survivors. We then ask the Council to commit a minimum of \$5 million dollars each year (\$25 million total) for community-led solutions that prioritize the needs of individuals and neighborhoods disproportionately impacted by persistent and concentrated levels of structural, community, and police violence. These communities are the critical starting point for healing justice and equitable safety. We conclude by outlining selected evidence-based strategies that focus on prevention and healing. Quite simply, as long as the focus and the funding of Public Safety flow toward the criminal justice system, an Austin that is "safe and resilient from gun violence," will always be out of reach.

Signed,

Shelli Egger and Amber Goodwin

The Public Health Approach

Treating gun violence like a disease is not a novel idea. The U.S. Surgeon General declared violence a national public health crisis of the highest priority in 1979. For decades researchers at Centers for Disease Control (CDC) have studied the overlapping causes and consequences of different forms of violence. The central premise of this research is that most violence is not random - it is the result of an interplay between individuals and their environment.

The public health approach asks the foundational questions:

- Where does the problem begin?
- How could we prevent it from occurring in the first place?

”

Gun violence has permeated our national conscience. It is a disease that is spreading and needs to be stopped. I believe it's imperative that we attempt to understand people on both sides of the pistol. They both need our help, because hurt people hurt people.

Erica Ford, Founder
LIFE Camp

Key Risk Factors

- Victims of one form of violence are 2-3 times more likely to experience other forms of violence.
- Those who have been violent in one context are likely to be violent in another context. Adults who are violent toward their partners are also more likely to abuse their children.

No one factor alone can be attributed to causing or preventing violence. It is the accumulation of overlapping risk factors, without an equal balance of protective factors that puts individuals, families, and communities at risk for violence. Successful gun violence prevention plans require a multi-disciplinary approach to strengthening protective factors and reducing risk factors across multiple levels of the model at the same time.

The second step of the public health approach is to “zoom out” so we can see the intersections where risk factors overlap and where we can intervene to prevent multiple forms of violence at once to maximize the benefits of the limited resources that are available and achieve greater impact

Family factors, such as a high level of conflict or poor parent-child relationships, are also particularly important as a focus for prevention. These factors are strongly linked to child abuse and neglect, youth violence, intimate partner violence, sexual violence, elder abuse, and suicidal behavior. Research on protective factors underscores the importance of enhancing social connections, including close supportive relationships with one's family, school, and community, to reduce social isolation and risk for multiple forms of violence. It is particularly important to support those who have been exposed to violence. These individuals and their families are likely to require more intensive intervention to reduce their risk for subsequent victimization or perpetration.

AUSTIN'S NEW ROAD TO PUBLIC SAFETY MUST BE PAVED WITH HEALING JUSTICE



Photo credit: Austin American Statesman

“At the very root of healing justice is an analysis of trauma and resilience, of our need as Black people to care for each other and organize for freedom. We understand that Black people across the globe continue to endure trauma at all levels, from the State and institutions to our very communities and homes. We may not always realize that we are navigating our own trauma at almost every step of our lives. Our perspectives, the way we build relationships, and our responses to conflict are informed in large part by the ways in which we have been traumatized, and what opportunities, if any, we have had to heal from that trauma.”

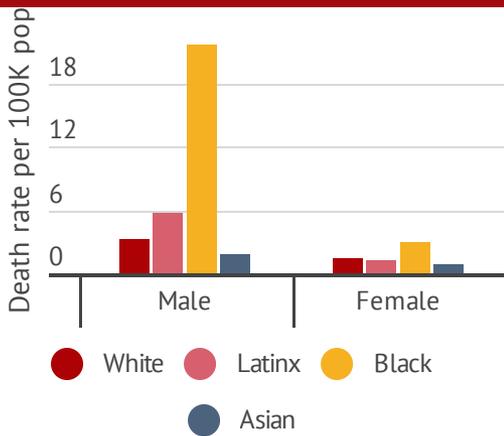
Black Lives Matter, [Healing in Action](#)

What We Know About Gun Violence

Every day, more than 100 Americans are killed with guns, and another 100,000 Americans are shot and injured annually. According to CDC, In an average year, 3,288 people die by guns in Texas.



Gun Homicides in Texas 2013-2018



The Financial Costs

One researcher has estimated that the cost of the Las Vegas mass shooting would be at least \$600 million after tallying costs such as medical and mental health care, police work, work loss and employer expenses, and quality of life.

At the neighborhood level, studies have shown that gun violence has a substantial long-term effect on local economies by reducing job growth and business investment in the neighborhoods where violence is most prevalent. The burden on these areas is further compounded by residential property values that decrease as violent crime and homicide rates increase.

Researchers at the Center for American Progress (CAP) conducted a thorough analysis of housing and crime data from five cities over eleven years, and found that on average a single homicide resulted in a 1.52 percent decrease in property values in the same ZIP code the following year.

While our recommendations will require the City to invest financial resources that are already strained, these costs are negligible compared to the toll we already pay for gun violence each and every day.

Mass Shootings

No aspect of the gun policy debate draws more attention - or inspires more action - than mass shootings in mostly white areas of the country. The City of Houston's Commission Against Gun Violence was created in response to the 2018 school shooting that killed 10 people in Santa Fe, Texas. The Austin City Council created this GVTF after mass shootings killed 31 people over the course of a weekend last August. Studies have found that a majority of school-age children experience anxiety about the threat of a shooting at school.

But the truth is that mass shootings account for less than one percent of American gun deaths each year. After most mass shootings, there is speculation about the shooters mental health. It's easy to assume that someone who could inflict such devastation must have "snapped." But extensive research tells a different story. A majority of mass shooters first practiced acts of extreme violence at home.

The last public mass shooting in Austin occurred on August 1, 1966, when Charles Whitman - a 25-year-old former Marine - murdered his mother and his wife before climbing the stairs of the University of Texas tower where he shot and killed 14 people and wounded another 31 people.

A recent analysis found that about 60% of the 749 mass shootings over the past six years were either domestic violence attacks or committed by men with histories of domestic violence.

This connection is important, because it tells us that strategies designed to protect victims of domestic violence from gun violence also have the potential to reduce the risk of mass gun violence.

Suicide

The majority of gun deaths in America are self-inflicted. More than 62% of gun deaths in Texas are suicides. Over the past 10 years, the firearm suicide rate for children and teens has increased by 65%.

White people in Texas are 3x as likely to die by gun suicide as Black people.

Access to a gun triples the risk of suicide death. Therefore the best protective strategies, in addition to support for mental healthcare services, involve reducing access to firearms for individuals at risk of self harm.

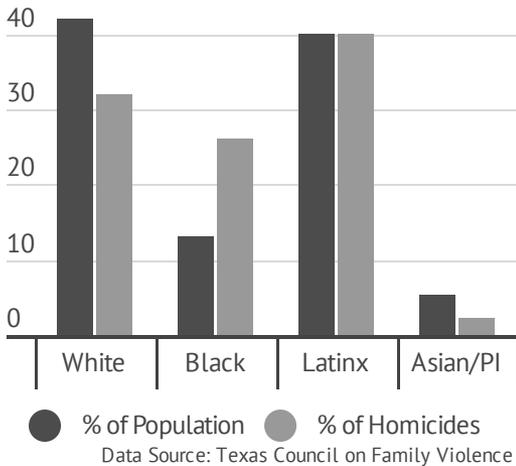
Domestic Violence

About 4.5 million women in the U.S. have had an intimate or domestic partner threaten them with a gun, and nearly 1 million have been shot, or shot at, by an intimate partner.

Nationally, Black women are twice as likely as white women to be fatally shot by an intimate partner.



Texas Women Killed by an Intimate Partner in 2018



Guns amplify the inherent power and control dynamics characteristic of abusive relationships, whether as lethal weapons to injure and kill, or as a tool to inflict emotional abuse without ever firing a bullet.

A 2017 study found that the fear of a firearm threat — just the fear of the threat, not even the actual threat — is significantly associated with PTSD in survivors of domestic violence. It's stronger even than the link between physical or sexual abuse and PTSD.

Abusers intent on killing an intimate partner are also more likely to take out other people. 85% of homicide victims under age 13 are killed in a home, and nearly a third of those deaths are connected to intimate partner or domestic violence.

Community Violence

The majority of American gun violence, and in particular homicides, are largely concentrated in communities of color. Extensive research shows that even in the neighborhoods with the most gun violence in America, an incredibly small and readily identifiable segment of the community is responsible for the vast majority of gun violence.

Residential segregation - the hallmark of structural racism - is shown to be a primary driver behind racial disparities in firearm homicide rates. It is no coincidence that in Austin - one of the most racially segregated cities in the U.S., the neighborhoods that have always paid the biggest price for gun violence follow the same I-35 dividing line that defines so much about life in our City.

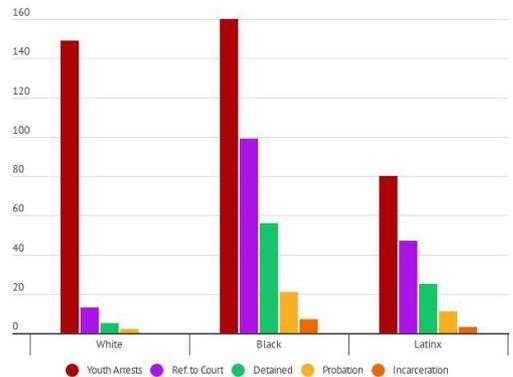
Black Americans are more likely to die gun homicide than their white counterparts.

10x



For decades, the Austin Police Department has traumatized Black and Brown residents and the neighborhoods where they live through a destructive cycle of over-policing and under-protection. Violent crime goes unsolved and undeterred, while Black and Latinx drivers in Austin are more likely to be stopped, questioned, searched, and arrested by law enforcement for non-violent crime.

2013 Travis County Youth Justice Decisions



Comparison of arrest to population is rate per 1,000 youth. All other annual decision points are rate per 100 youth at the prior decision-making point.

Data source: The W. Haywood Burns Institute. available at <https://data.burnsinstitute.org/#comparison=2&placement=1&race=2.3.4.5.6.6&offense=5.2.6.1.9.11.10&year=2015&view=map>

This dynamic undermines public safety for entire communities. Women of color routinely report greater hesitation to contact law enforcement, and more negative interactions with law enforcement when they do report domestic violence. In turn, chronic exposure to violence puts survivors, children, youth, and communities at increased risk of all forms of violence.

For so many of Austin's people and communities of color, law enforcement opens the door to the civil and criminal justice machine traumatizes families for generations. From there, the risk factors multiply and spread like an aggressive virus.

Police Violence

One of the glaring holes in the current system is that criminal justice data excludes police shootings. Although our mandate referenced the dangers that law enforcement officers face in the line of the duty, through this lens of health and safety, we must consider all forms of gun violence.

Statistically, being a young Black man in America is more dangerous than being in law enforcement. Black men and children ages 15 to 24 are more than 11 times more likely to be shot to death than officers are to be shot and killed in the line of duty.

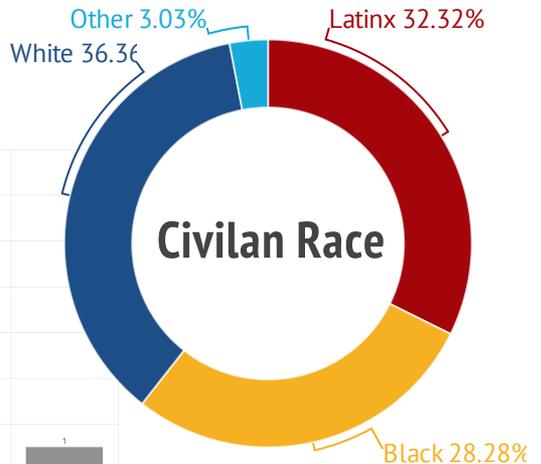
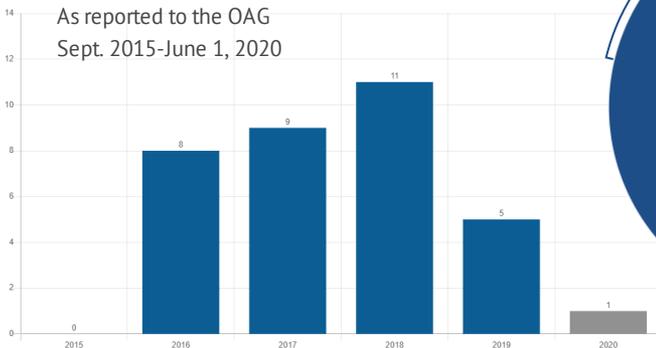
Unarmed black civilians are nearly 5x more likely than unarmed white civilians to be shot and killed by police.

The last Austin Police Department officer killed by gunfire in the line of duty was Senior Police Officer Jaime De Luna Padron in 2012.

From 2013-2019, APD officers killed 32 people. **That's an annual per capita rate of 5.8 - the highest of any city in Texas.**

The City's own data shows that, like other forms of gun violence, police shootings are not equally distributed across all of Austin. The Office of Police Oversight found a "disparate concentration of officer-involved shooting incidents affecting individuals who are ethnic minorities, as well as in areas of Austin that are historically minority-majority." These disparities are not random. They are a symptom of the racial profiling and unchecked police violence that drives gun violence in Austin.

APD Officer Involved Shootings



The "Jude Effect"



In 2016, a team of researchers from Harvard, Yale, and Oxford published a groundbreaking study of what happened to crime-related 911 calls in the wake of one of Milwaukee's most publicized cases of police violence against an unarmed black man, Frank Jude, in October 2004.

Researchers found a dramatic and durable decline in crime-reporting - especially among Black residents - that resulted in at least 22,000 fewer 911 calls. Homicides in Milwaukee jumped by one-third by summer 2005. The city would not experience more annual homicides for another decade, following reports that a Milwaukee police officer shot and killed an unarmed Black man during a mental health welfare check amid a disturbing spate of other highly publicized police brutality cases nationwide. Researchers concluded that police violence not only threatens the legitimacy and reputation of law enforcement; it ultimately make cities as a whole, and the black community in particular, less safe.

In a New York Times Op-Ed, the study's authors went on to say:

"No act of police violence is an isolated incident and it should not be treated as such. Each new tragedy contributes to and reawakens the collective trauma of Black communities, which have been subjected to state-sanctioned assaults — from slave whippings and lynching campaigns to Jim Crow enforcement and mass incarceration — for generations. **If acts of excessive police force result in community-level consequences, then cities should implement community-level interventions in the aftermath of such acts.**"

Action Items for the Council

We ask Council to commit a minimum of \$5 million dollars each year for community-led solutions each of the next five years (\$25 million total). This money should be divested from the Austin Police Department to:

1 Fund a permanent Office of Violence Prevention (OVP), with a full-time program director and staff, to coordinate city-wide gun violence prevention and intervention services.

2 Contract with an outside technical assistance provider to conduct a culturally relevant, community-wide risk assessment and develop a triage and long-term strategic plan for gun violence prevention and intervention. The plan must be centered on survivors of violence and focused on advancing racial justice.

3 Invest in evidence-based programs designed to promote healing; prevent further trauma; and lay the groundwork for economic growth in our communities of color.

Refocus, then Reform

This report does not include recommendations for working directly with law enforcement, and that is not an oversight. Extensive research tells us that lack of faith in law enforcement is an individual and community risk factor for violence. Austin Justice Coalition, Grassroots Leadership, MEASURE, and a host of other community-based organizations have outlined strategies for reform and reconciliation countless times. The only way to move forward with restoring community trust in law enforcement is to follow their lead, and the lead of survivors who have been disproportionately impacted by violence. We defer to their recommendations, and stand ready to provide policy recommendations and research on law enforcement best practices for gun violence prevention when the time comes. In the meantime, we ask the Council to refocus on the prevention and healing opportunities presented in this report.

Office of Violence Prevention (OVP)

The GVTF requests that Council immediately divert an initial \$5 million from APD's budget to establish a central Office of Violence Prevention, with a full-time program director and staff to coordinate violence prevention efforts throughout the City. We believe this Office should either sit in association with the Department of Health, or be a stand alone office within the City with its own operating budget and staff.

This best practice strategy has been recognized as a key element of coordinated violence prevention efforts in New York City, Milwaukee, and other cities throughout the country. In 2017, Philadelphia's mayor added an Office of Violence Prevention to support existing violence prevention efforts and coordinate the \$60 million dollars the City has invested in anti-violence programs across all departments.

City Spotlight

On June 24, 2020, Newark, NJ Mayor Ras Baraka celebrated the passage of a City Council ordinance creating a permanent Office of Violence Prevention. "The Office of Violence Prevention now, by law, is an integral part of the city of Newark," Baraka said. "It is officially part of the public service architecture, like any other social service we are duty-bound to offer." The office will initially be funded by 5 percent of the Public Safety budget, or about \$12 million.

The mission of the OVP is to institutionalize a trauma-informed cross-sector violence prevention and intervention framework.

To achieve this, the OVP will:

- Align programming priorities and develop shared standards of practice centered around the overarching mission of violence prevention and equitable safety;
- Empower residents and organizations to produce public safety in their communities;
- Ensure that trauma-informed practices are embedded into policies and operations across all departments;
- Conduct policy and procedural analysis and recommendations to better inform justice partners and practices;
- Coordinate shared metrics and data to ensure accountability and measure program effectiveness; and
- Educate the public about gun violence prevention and safety, anti-violence campaigns that promote healthy social norms, and OVP progress and results.

Austin's Violence Prevention Blueprint

Complex problems require comprehensive and integrated solutions. Efforts in other cities have shown that working with an effective technical assistance provider, to conduct a thorough problem assessment can mean the difference between success and failure in the implementation of a city's gun violence reduction strategy.

The GVTF believes that the first order of business for the Office of Violence Prevention should be partnering with Cities United and Chico Tillmon to develop an evidence-based multidisciplinary blueprint for violence prevention that integrates and empowers existing local assets and fills critical service gaps to reach the individuals and groups at highest risk of being involved in gun violence.

These proven leaders will ensure that the planning process is guided by the principles of equity, inclusivity, transparency, and participatory decision-making, utilizing cultural sensitivity and trauma-informed-care principles. They can help Austin build a coordinated and sustainable system of violence prevention and intervention strategies with buy-in from the residents and community organizations whose acceptance and efforts will be critical to implementation. This proven public health approach can also be utilized to address all forms of violence.

”

Professionally we have silos, and we operate in these silos we've got to break down. Across the country, people working to prevent child abuse are right across the hall from people working on violence against women, and they don't work together. As we go into communities to bring everybody to the table, don't let people say, 'I work on child abuse, but this is about gang violence.' Don't let people say, 'I work on violence against women, and this is about child abuse.' This thing, all this violence, is connected.

Deborah Prothrow-Stith, MD, Adjunct Professor, Harvard School of Public Health

Evidence-Based Violence Prevention and Intervention Strategies

It is critical to the mission of the GVTF that the Council invest in community-led tools to detect, prevent, and treat the unsafe conditions that put individuals and communities at risk, such as exposure to chronic violence and early childhood trauma. The following public health-centered initiatives recognize that those most likely to be perpetrators of gun violence are also those most likely to be victims.

We have an obligation to change this paradigm and support efforts in Black and Brown communities to develop and build community-controlled institutions and interventions that have been proven to improve public safety and health more effectively than oppressive, terrifying, ineffectual, and deadly modern policing.

Urban Institute, Public Investment in Community-Driven Safety Initiatives

Violence Interruption

Violence Interrupters - trained, culturally-appropriate outreach workers with relevant life experience - are employed by the program to:

- Directly engage with people most likely to commit acts of serious violence to provide intensive, customized support, such as drug treatment, job training, etc.;
- Identify ongoing conflicts in the community, such as recent arrests or prison releases, and use mediation techniques to resolve them peacefully;
- Work in the community and at the hospital to cool down emotions and prevent retaliations after a shooting; and
- Collaborate with community partners to insert violence reduction programming into their existing curricula and training.

City Spotlight - Advance Peace Sacramento

- 50 young men at high-risk of being involved in gun violence selected for the 18-month Peacemaker Fellowship®.
- Neighborhood Change Agents (NCAs) are credible messengers who perform daily street outreach to Fellows and others within their influential circles.
- NCAs help each Fellow create a tailored Life Management Action Plan (LifeMAP) with goals, such as getting a GED, driver's license, and obtaining substance abuse or anger management support.



\$1,384,836
2 year total cost



NCAs intervened to stop 58 cyclical and retaliatory gun incidents



Researchers determined that for every \$1 the city spent on Advance Peace, they received between \$18-41 dollars in return

Cure Violence

One of the earliest models of violence interruption outreach is the Cure Violence program developed in 2000 in Chicago.

- Targeted districts have seen a 38% greater decrease in homicides, and a 15% greater decrease in shootings, than other districts.

On June 10, 2020, NYC Mayor Bill de Blasio committed an additional \$10 million to expand the Cure Violence program to some of the most violent precincts across the city.

Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT)

- Helps people become more aware of their thinking and their decision-making, and helps people practice how to make different choices and build different habits.
- Almost every effective anti-violence prevention program seems to contain, formally or informally, some element of CBT.
- In one review, CBT was associated with a 25% average decrease in criminal recidivism, and the best programs reduced recidivism by 50% or more.

Hospital-based Violence Intervention Programs (HVIPs)

Hospital-based violence intervention programs were developed by Oakland-based nonprofit YouthAlive! in 1994 under the name “Caught in the Crossfire,” built on the premise that the strongest risk factor for violent injury is a history of previous violent injury.

- The National Network of Hospital-based Violence Intervention Programs views the time when a young person is in the hospital for a gun shot wound as the “golden moment of opportunity at the hospital bedside to engage with a victim of violence and to stop the cycle of violence.”
- Case managers help clients access resources that promote their safety and recovery, including trauma counseling, mediation, GED tutoring, housing support, obtaining a driver’s license, vocational training, and even tattoo removal (to facilitate a break from group or gang identity).
- In the case of a homicide, the program will also assist families with planning and paying for a funeral or vigil if necessary.

Baltimore HVIP

- Injury recidivism rate of 5% for participating patients, compared to 36% for non-participants, which represented an estimated savings of \$598,000 in health care costs.
- Patients participating in the program were half as likely to be convicted of a crime and four times less likely to be convicted of a violent crime than those who did not participate, translating into approximately \$1.25 million in incarceration cost savings.
- Individuals who received the intervention also saw their employment increase from 39 percent to 82 percent, while employment fell for those not in the program.