

cities united  
*resource series*

# A Strategic Resource for Mayors on Disrupting Community Violence and Preventing Homicides

August 2018

cities  
united

*Working Together to  
Build Safe, Healthy and  
Hopeful Communities*



*Working Together* to Build Safe, Healthy and *Hopeful* Communities







cities  
united



# table of *contents*

Introduction.....	5
Core Principles.....	8
About the Series.....	9
About this Resource.....	10
Methodology.....	11
The Nature of Our Challenge.....	12
Letter from a Youth Mentor.....	17
Program and Policy Interventions.....	19
Letter from a Family & Community Leader.....	43
City Planning Process.....	45
About Cities United.....	53
Messaging and Communications Strategy.....	57
Potential Challenges.....	63
Further Reading.....	65
Acknowledgments.....	69
Partners.....	71



# Introduction

# UNTIL VIOLENCE IS No Longer an Option

We all want to live in healthy and vibrant cities where our families and neighbors can thrive. For our cities to prosper, we must improve life outcomes and expand opportunities for all our young people and residents. This includes creating opportunities and establishing safe neighborhoods for our young Black men and boys who currently face greater barriers to surviving and thriving.

Every day, young Black men and boys are working hard to put themselves on a path to success and well-being. They are attending and graduating from school, aspiring toward good jobs and careers and taking care of their families and communities. Unfortunately, all too often, they have to run a gauntlet of violence that cuts short their dreams and hopes.

The numbers are stark. Homicides are the leading cause of death for young Black men and boys aged 15-24.<sup>1</sup> Our research shows their experience with violence—whether as victim, survivor or witness—sets them apart from nearly every other demographic group, including Black men older than 24, white men and Black women and girls. In addition to the devastating impact on young Black men themselves, violence inflicts trauma on entire families, neighborhoods and communities. The economic costs are also staggering. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) estimates that homicides cost the U.S. economy \$26.4 billion every year in medical and work loss costs.<sup>2</sup>

That is why we created Cities United with one, central mission—to come together as mayors and city leaders from around the United States to reduce violence and violence-related deaths against young Black men and boys. We know change is hard and that we will not establish truly safe, healthy and hopeful communities if we don't unite across our neighborhoods and backgrounds to build better cities where everyone can thrive and fulfill their potential.

Today, as our network has grown to over 130 mayors, our mission remains as urgent as ever. Rates of violence against young Black men and boys remain unacceptably high. We are committed to partnering with mayors throughout the country to cut the homicide rates of young African American men and boys in half by 2025, a goal that has guided our cities since we launched in 2011.

It is time for us as a country to treat the loss of young Black men and boys for what it is, a public health crisis that impacts all of us. Our communities and our country need a new blueprint for 21st century public safety, one that is grounded in social justice, equity, collaboration, innovation and youth voice. One that lights a path to real hope and opportunity for young Black men and boys. Since violence does not occur in a vacuum, we cannot only rely on a law and order approach to solve our public safety problems. Violence is intimately connected to other factors in a neighborhood—poverty, limited opportunity, lack of social or economic investments. In order to truly address violence, we must put sustained and coordinated attention on all of these factors across each neighborhood and city.

And while Black men and boys are disproportionately impacted by violence, increasingly, research tells us that race is not a risk factor in violence—structural racism is. That is why we must also focus on dismantling policies and practices that contribute to violence, such as

1. <https://www.cdc.gov/healthequity/lcod/men/2011/LCODOBlackmales2011.pdf>  
2. [https://www.cdc.gov/injury/wisqars/overview/cost\\_of\\_injury.html](https://www.cdc.gov/injury/wisqars/overview/cost_of_injury.html)

discrimination in employment, lending, housing, policing and unjust disciplinary practices in schools. We must also change the narrative and end the perpetuation of negative perceptions of our young men and boys.<sup>3</sup>

Mayors and city leaders are uniquely positioned to develop and lead a comprehensive, public health approach to addressing violence that invests resources into quality education, builds an inclusive economy and engages youth and families as part of the solution. When we do that, we increase the tools we have to reduce violence and we increase the probability of success for our people and our cities. As a result, lives are saved, communities are safer and the full potential and greatness of our cities is clearly visible to residents and visitors.

The *Working Together to Build Safe, Healthy and Hopeful Communities* resource is one tool offered by Cities United to move our cities, regions and our country toward becoming environments that are safer, more enriching and more supportive of Black men and boys. In this resource, we lay out what that vision looks like and outline a comprehensive, public health approach to reducing community violence that mayors can use to address this crisis in each and every city across America. We know that a public health approach to reducing violence has been proven to work when we engage multiple sectors in addressing the underlying reasons that increase or decrease the likelihood of violence. This approach is geared toward rooting out systemic, racial inequities that have led to diminished outcomes for our young Black men and boys for generations by focusing on improving outcomes across the sectors that determine quality of life for our young people.

We have seven more years until our 2025 goal to make real, substantive progress—we don't have time to waste. This urgency is communicated throughout the steps we detail in this resource that were gathered from partner cities and communities around the nation.

Developing a comprehensive city public safety plan requires strong leadership, planning and systems change and will not happen overnight. Cities United has developed a *Roadmap to Safe, Healthy and Hopeful Communities*<sup>4</sup> that helps cities focus their process and provides steps that will help cities engage stakeholders from all walks of life, focusing on those most impacted by community violence.

Working together, we must act now and for the long term to transform neighborhoods that have historically seen structural disinvestments, into pockets of opportunity, healing and hope—where young people are encouraged and supported so they can live up to their full potential. This vision for our young people is intertwined with our core values of social justice, equity, youth voice, collaboration and innovation. Mayors and city leaders can catalyze all corners of our communities to come together and improve our cities, block by block and neighborhood by neighborhood—until violence is no longer an option.

**Anthony Smith**  
Cities United

**Mayor Stephen K. Benjamin**  
Columbia, SC

3. University of Louisville, Youth Violence Research Center

4. <http://citiesunited.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/CU-RoadMap-11x25.5brochure-Final-03092017-2-1-1.pdf>

## core *principles*

More than 600 people were killed in Chicago—my hometown—last year, and the majority of victims were African American. I sometimes find myself discouraged by these numbers. But there are mayors across the country addressing urgent issues that our cities face, diving into the spaces that many dare not go: **the root cause.**

This is an all-hands-on-deck movement and we are the change we have been waiting to see. It won't be easy. Working to impact the lives of Black men and boys can be draining and difficult. As a mentor to youth in Chicago and Seattle, I know this firsthand. But I have seen a great change in some of my most challenging youth and I'm confident that this change can expand to include the lives of many more. We must do this work—our young men can't afford to wait.

— RICHARD L. TAYLOR, JR.,  
YOUTH MENTOR, CHICAGO, IL & SEATTLE, WA

The following six core principles guide our efforts.

**Awareness:** Build national and local awareness of the epidemic of violence amongst and against African American men and boys, and empower mayors to lead in this effort.

**Assessment:** Identify and share tools for mayors and other city leaders to assess the problems in their communities, the resources available and the capacity to tackle the problem.

**Alignment:** Help mayors better align local, county, state and national initiatives to produce maximum local impact.

**Action:** Strengthen the capacity and sustainability of cities to develop and implement plans by providing access to experts, tools, and best and promising policies and practices.

**Advocacy:** Support and elevate advocacy efforts associated with the issue, based on a policy framework that includes engaging young Black men and boys as well as youth-serving organizations toward a commitment from every level of government and sector of society.

**Accountability:** Highlight and use data and other means of measuring the effectiveness of local initiatives as well as the ability to share experiences and results between mayors.



# about *the series*

The “Working Together to Build Safe, Healthy and Hopeful Communities” series is a resource provided by Cities United. Mayors, city leaders and police chiefs are tackling a number of difficult issues related to violence and poor life outcomes affecting young African American men and boys in their cities. Cities United heard from city leaders about the need for a series of resources on the most pressing of these issues. The series focuses on:

- police-involved shootings and in-custody deaths (published in March 2017)
- community violence and preventing homicides
- suicides, and
- family violence (domestic violence as well as child abuse and neglect)

The series is designed as one of many important resources that, taken together, may equip mayors and city leaders with the steps, information and tools they need to address and prevent the different forms of violence affecting young African American men and boys in their respective cities. The resources can equip mayors with the necessary information and action steps to address not just the incidents themselves, but also the underlying, complex and systemic issues that contribute to violence.

The best practices and suggested recommendations included in this resource are meant to contribute to community transformation, in line with Cities United’s vision of ending violence against African American men and boys, reducing the number of violence-related deaths and creating safe, healthy and hopeful communities for all.

We believe in the power of sharing. If your city would like to get involved in developing this series of resources, or if your city has suggestions of best practices to include in this series, please tell Cities United your ideas and experience at [info@citiesunited.org](mailto:info@citiesunited.org).

## about *this resource*

Mayors, city leaders and police chiefs are tackling a number of difficult issues related to violence and poor life outcomes affecting African American men and boys in their cities. Cities United heard from city leaders that a series of how-to resources for mayors focused on the most pressing of these issues—police-involved shootings and deaths in custody, community violence, suicides and family violence—will help equip them to take action.

This second resource is focused on community violence, including shootings and homicides, which are unfortunately continuously in the news and disproportionately impact our African American men and boys. While overall violent crime in the United States has been in a decades-long decline since the early 1990s, recent increases in homicides in the nation's 30 largest cities, such as Chicago and Dallas, have disproportionately harmed young Black men and boys.

To make our cities safer for our young African American men and boys—and for all of us—we believe we need to work toward the following:

- Reduce homicides by 50 percent by the year 2025.<sup>5</sup>
- Build pathways to justice, employment, education and increased opportunities in our cities for African American men and boys and their families.
- Help mayors and their law enforcement leaders assess their current situations through a racial equity framework, increasing their opportunities for awareness, assessment, alignment, action, advocacy and accountability.
- Elevate advocacy efforts associated with reducing and stopping violence through a racial equity and policy framework.
- Restore hope to our communities.
- Prioritize the voices and experiences of young leaders.

We have heard from city leaders that additional systems and procedures are required to develop and implement a comprehensive, public health approach to this problem. We have also heard that best practices are emerging, and our resource aims to showcase these best practices and outline the steps that city leaders can take to prevent and reduce violence in their communities. In particular, the resource builds off of our theory of change that mobilizing all corners of the community including prioritizing youth voice and investment is critical for the comprehensive, public health approach to look at the root causes of community violence and reduce the homicide rate of young African American men and boys by half by 2025. We include a section toward the end on messaging and communications because we recognize the importance of making the case for city-level investments and the urgency of action.

The best practices we showcase in this resource are meant to contribute to community transformation, in line with Cities United's vision of reducing the rate of violence-related deaths of young African American men and boys and creating safe, healthy and hopeful communities in all our cities.

5. 2011 is our baseline year.

# methodology

This resource is the result of extensive research with mayors, city leaders, public safety and government agency officers who play a role in the work to reduce community violence in their cities. We conducted stakeholder interviews with mayors, city leaders and government officials across the country affiliated with Cities United, and we also spoke with community leaders and advocates, as well as young men and family members who have lost loved ones to community violence and homicides. While we kept the interviews confidential to encourage candid inputs, our recommendations are rooted in the findings from these interviews.

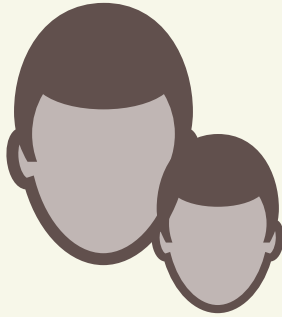
We reviewed a series of recent reports that spotlight best practices, including reports from the Department of Justice, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Institute, the U.S. Conference of Mayors, Law Center to Prevent Gun Violence and other national advocacy organizations committed to ending community violence. The full list of publications is included in the Further Reading section.

We also reviewed media coverage of community violence and homicides in several major cities affiliated with Cities United and conducted a social media and media audit in those cities to understand how community leaders, affected families and young people respond to violence and uncover the concerns and demands raised. Finally, we reviewed The Guardian's extensive gun violence data and coverage.



# the nature of *our challenge*

## VISION



**Creating safe, healthy and hopeful communities** for African American young men and boys and their families.

### **Homicides are the leading cause of death for young Black men and boys aged 15-24.**

African American boys' and men's disparate experience with violence sets them apart from nearly every demographic group, including black men older than 24, white men and black women.

## PROBLEM

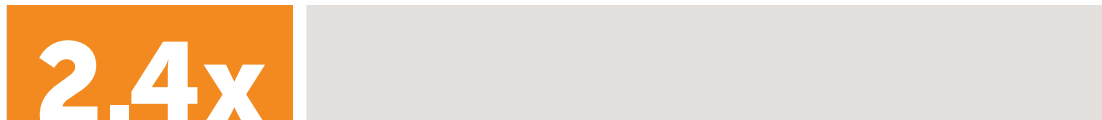
#### **Black males between the ages of 18-24**



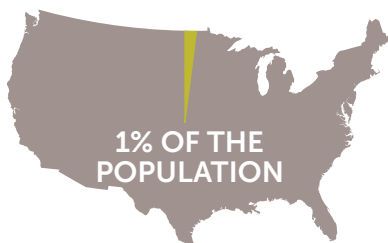
7.8 times as likely as white males of the same age group to be homicide victims



8 times as likely as black females to be homicide victims



2.4 times as likely to be homicide victims as black males older than 25



#### **Young black males ages**

**14 to 24** constitute roughly 1% of the U.S. population, yet they account for 16% of homicide victims



Young people between the ages of 12-17 are most likely to be victims of serious violence compared to overall population.

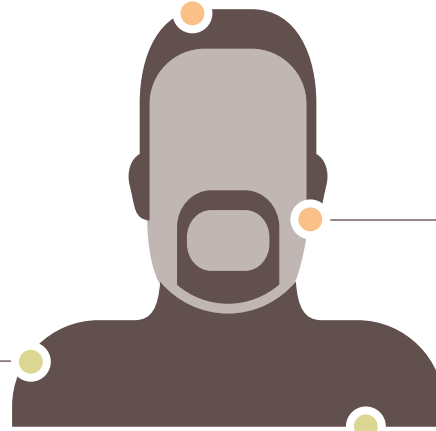
#### BLACK YOUTH

#### WHITE/HISPANIC YOUTH

Within that segment, Black youth were **more than twice as likely** as white or Hispanic youth to be victims of serious violent crime in 2010

In 2009, the hospitalization rates for **gun related injuries** to adolescent Black males ages 15-19 were **13.1 times higher than that of the rates of white males** and 3 times that of rates for Latino males

Violence is also the leading cause of death for Native American youth aged 12-20, including intentional injuries, homicides and suicides, **which together account for 75% of deaths<sup>6</sup>**



Black adolescents were 1.7 times and Latino youth were 1.5 times as likely to **witness serious violence, such as shootings, stabbings and robberies**, as white youth

African American youth still experience the highest rates of homicides compared to other youth of color: among 10- to 24-year-olds, **homicide is the leading cause of death for Black youth**, the second leading cause of death for Latino youth and the third leading cause of death for Native youth

PROBLEM

6. <https://assets.aspeninstitute.org/content/uploads/files/content/images/Fast%20Facts.pdf>

7. <https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/pdf/yv-datasheet.pdf>

# the nature of *our challenge*

## THE COSTS AND CONSEQUENCES OF VIOLENCE



Apart from the devastating impact on the well-being of young Black males, **violence inflicts trauma on entire families and communities** – and has enormous economic costs.

**\$26.4**  
BILLION

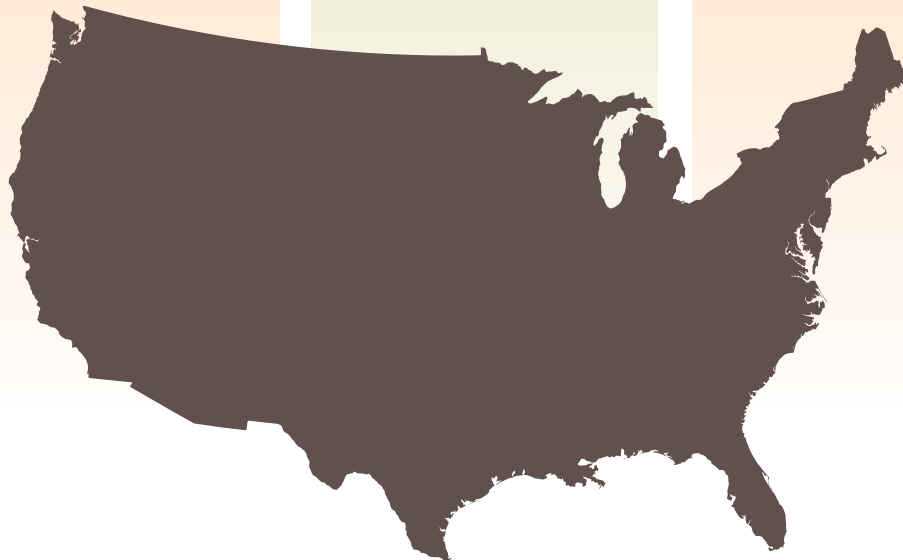
The CDC estimates that homicides cost the U.S. economy \$26.4 billion every year in medical and work loss costs<sup>8</sup>

**\$35**  
BILLION

The CDC estimates that reducing violence by 50 percent saves over \$35 billion in annual medical and lost productivity costs alone

**\$8.6**  
BILLION

Homicides and gun violence cost the U.S. \$8.6 billion a year in direct costs, e.g. emergency respondents, healthcare for gunshot victims, prison costs for people convicted of homicides or shootings, etc.<sup>9</sup>



8. [https://www.cdc.gov/injury/wisqars/overview/cost\\_of\\_injury.html](https://www.cdc.gov/injury/wisqars/overview/cost_of_injury.html)

9. <https://www.motherjones.com/politics/2015/04/true-cost-of-gun-violence-in-america/>





**Employ** a Comprehensive, Public Health Approach to Disrupting Violence



**Engage** Youth, Family and Community



**Bolster** Family Support



**Boost** Education



**Expand** Trauma-Informed Practice



**Build** an Inclusive Economy



**Interrupt** the Cycle of Community Violence



**Reshape** Criminal and Juvenile Justice Systems

**SOLUTIONS**

10. <http://citiesunited.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/Violence-Trends-Patterns-and-Consequences-for-Black-Males-in-America-A-Call-to-Action.pdf>



letter from a *youth mentor*



## The Health of Our Communities Depends on Our Young People

We know the undeniable truth—that young black men’s experience with violence, whether as victim, survivor or witness, sets us apart from nearly every other demographic group.

But we cannot think of ourselves as statistics. We must instead focus on solutions—and the good news is, we do know what works. All across the country, we see communities coming together to lift up our young people and invest in their success.

I started my organization, D3 Community Outreach, Inc., in 2006, with a mission to empower and encourage disconnected young people through academics, service, entrepreneurship and athletics to become leaders and good stewards of the community. Our vision is to develop healthy communities by developing a healthier child. Our summer basketball league offers educational, leadership and advancement opportunities to low-income youth and males 14-18 who have been associated with gangs. Through our other yearlong programs, we promote leadership skills, character development, life skills and educational opportunities to young people, including those who have dropped out of high school. Through this work, I see first-hand how we cannot give up on our young people; their potential for transformation and growth is unlimited when given the support, encouragement and opportunities they need to thrive.

I also see that no one organization or leader alone can achieve the vision of safe and healthy communities for all. Instead, we need an all-hands-on-deck approach to transform the systems and policies needed to end violence. We must focus on both policy and practice so that our young people can access the fundamentals they need to get ahead in life—education, healthcare, jobs and safety.

In Durham, we are listening to young people, partnering with them to carry out our programs and implement new ones, and working with our local city leaders and law enforcement to remove the barriers to opportunity and safety that are currently holding our young people back. We also collaborate with national and local stakeholders like Cities United to bolster our efforts and lift up what it really takes to build safe, healthy and hopeful communities for everyone—especially our boys and young men of color.

We must expand and deepen our investments in young people most affected by violence so they have the tools and opportunities they require to transform their futures. Instead of seeing negative statistics, we can instead choose to see positive ones: a future doctor, scientist, engineer, teacher, parent, homeowner, community leader and more.

We cannot stand in the way of our young people—the health of all of our communities depends on it.

### **Malcom Reed**

Founder and President, D3 Community Outreach, Inc.

PUBLIC SAFETY IN THE 21ST CENTURY  
program and policy interventions

I want to help people look at violence from a human rights framework. We need to question not only the roles of individuals to protect each other, but also the roles of government to make sure that no person loses their life unnecessarily to the barrel of a gun. I want to change the conversation. By the time I was 15 years old, I had seen all 10 of my older brothers be incarcerated, as well as both of my parents who were repeat offenders. I'm constantly living in the intersection of guilt and happy—feeling guilty for making it out and being extremely proud of myself. **Success for me is getting to the place where I feel proud of the progress I've made, knowing that I've done everything I can for others, with the resources that I have.**

— JAMIRA BURLEY, HEAD OF YOUTH ENGAGEMENT,  
GLOBAL BUSINESS COALITION FOR EDUCATION DURHAM, NC

Mayors and other community leaders are working tirelessly every day to reduce violence in our communities. As we collectively take concerted action across our nation to reduce the homicide rates of young Black men and boys, this resource outlines a roadmap to reducing community violence that mobilizes all corners of the community, and addresses both the program and policy interventions needed to help us change outcomes, save lives and make sure all our communities are safe, healthy and hopeful.

## Employ a Comprehensive, Public Health Approach to Ending Violence

Here, we frame the set of recommended interventions as a comprehensive, public health approach to ending community violence. For each intervention, we include input we have heard and learned from the following key stakeholders and efforts: city-level initiatives, federal experts, national violence prevention initiatives, faith leaders, legal experts, young leaders, family and community members and the media.

### WHY A PUBLIC HEALTH APPROACH?

The communities where we live help determine whether we can be healthy and thrive. Growing up, young people require safe places to play and spend time with family and friends, quality schools and access to health care, good jobs and community programs and services that meet their needs.

A public health approach to building safe, healthy and hopeful communities acknowledges that law enforcement cannot be the only solution, because many factors contribute to

community violence, including housing, employment, education and mental health. A public health approach recognizes that health and well-being is rooted in multiple facets of a person's life, which means that efforts to reduce community violence must incorporate the many influences and institutions that contribute to or detract from a person's well-being.

The CDC has worked to spread a public health approach to community violence prevention to ensure solutions are multidisciplinary: "The field...emphasizes input from diverse sectors including health, education, social services, justice, policy and the private sector. Collective action on the part of these stakeholders can help in addressing complex problems like violence."<sup>11</sup>

Cities United has used this multidisciplinary approach as a blueprint for how mayors can come together with city leaders and community residents to reduce the community violence that robs the lives of young African American men and boys. We are addressing an urgent issue for the prosperity of cities and our nation. We aim to tackle the root causes of community violence against young African American men and boys and help build pathways to justice, employment, education and increased opportunity.

With a public health approach, cities will have more tools with which to save the lives of residents and improve the well-being and standing of the entire community.

## Elements of a Public Health Approach

Our extensive research along with lessons from cities across the country has surfaced the following core elements of a comprehensive, public health approach to reducing community violence. In this section we provide detailed recommendations under each area of intervention.

1. Engage youth, family and community
2. Bolster family support
3. Boost education
4. Expand trauma-informed practice
5. Build an inclusive economy
6. Interrupt the cycle of community violence
7. Reshape criminal and juvenile justice systems



### 1. ENGAGE YOUTH, FAMILY AND COMMUNITY

Increasingly, mayors and city leaders understand that residents and leaders in the communities most impacted by community violence also hold the most effective solutions. Cities across the country are investing in community, family and young leaders to identify and implement effective, locally driven solutions to reducing violence.

#### The Challenge

If policies and programs to end violence are going to be successful and sustainable, the community must have input and buy-in. Families and communities are often left out of designing the programs, initiatives and systems change efforts that are most likely to reduce

11. <https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/overview/publichealthapproach.html>

community violence in their neighborhoods. A lack of trust between communities, law enforcement and city leaders due to the prevalence of shootings and homicides, as well as lack of political participation and engagement overall, may mean that community members choose to stay away from town halls, city council meetings or other public forums where their participation is requested. They may not see such requests for participation as genuine or leading to real changes in their neighborhoods.

### The Solution

Designing and implementing community-driven solutions to the violence that affects young Black men and boys will help ensure that programs, policy and practice to effectively reduce violence can take hold in the community and make a sustained impact. Incorporating youth, family and community requires taking their needs into consideration at all levels of planning. For example, meetings with youth should avoid school hours, and meetings with family and community members may be most effective in the evenings or weekends to accommodate schedules. Inviting the engagement of multiple young people or family members is important for incorporating a range of perspectives, while sparking community building among participants and minimizing isolation or tokenization of their perspectives.

Youth, family and community grant programs put forth by city leaders can direct resources toward neighborhood-led solutions that assess and respond to the community's needs. Community members can also be engaged in data collection to confirm blocks or neighborhoods where there are high rates of crime and violence. Youth, families and community must also be engaged in measuring and evaluating the success of programs intended to promote violence reduction and community transformation.

Incorporating youth, family and community leaders into the leadership and advisory boards of local planning tables focused on violence prevention, community building and distribution of resources is also critical to ensure their buy-in, leadership and participation.

Cities and states can both boost civic engagement and civic participation among young Black males and expand opportunities to authentically integrate their voices into policy making, by establishing youth advisory councils, involving young people in planning and implementation of violence prevention efforts and establishing youth-run grants. Leaders can also organize youth summits in order to get input from impacted youth on policy and planning decisions. In Knoxville, TN, Mayor Madeline Rogero invited young Black men to be part of the dialogue through their Sons Summit. That step resulted in the Change Center, a new \$2.9 million state-of-the-art facility that will provide a safe recreational space along with mentorship and leadership development for young people ages 14 to 24.

By expanding, reallocating or braiding funding, cities and states can establish more youth and community centers including transforming schools into 21st Century Community Learning Centers, which provide academic support along with supplemental services, including youth development programs, after school activities, health and wellness education and counseling and family support.

### Spotlight: Minneapolis, MN

Former Minneapolis Mayor Betsy Hodges launched the Collaborative Public Safety Strategies program in August 2016 to direct \$500,000 to two communities in the city that have been most harmed by violence, Little Earth and the West Broadway corridor in north Minneapolis.



The new spending allocation was approved by the City Council in recognition of the need to invest additional resources in community-driven public safety.<sup>12</sup>

Little Earth is home to many in the Minneapolis Native American community and the West Broadway area is a majority African American community. The city solicited ideas from youth and community for how to create safe, healthy and hopeful neighborhoods and the community, using criteria they generated, selected proposals to fund based on a joint review with community leaders and content area experts.

Eleven strategies were selected for implementation beginning in summer 2017 including a mentorship program for young women in Little Earth, run in partnership with the Minneapolis Police Activities League, Minneapolis American Indian Center and the Minnesota Indian Women's Resources Center. In the West Broadway corridor, One Family One Community and Urban Youth Conservation program will carry out a community-driven safety patrol to have a positive, visible presence in the neighborhood.<sup>13</sup>

#### **Spotlight: Chicago, IL**

Young people of color are often missing from public conversations with decision-makers that determine the policies and practices that impact their daily lives. The Chicago-based Mikva Challenge partners with schools in Chicago, Washington, D.C., and Los Angeles to encourage young people to get civically engaged through education, awareness and advocacy. They establish student-run councils focused on issues that most impact young people including safety, violence and juvenile justice.

In Chicago, the Juvenile Justice Council has helped transform how young people interact with the justice system by creating opportunities for young people to meet system officials, judges and law enforcement and exchange information and perspectives while conducting research with youth across Cook County to inform their recommendations for improving policies and practices. The Council weighs in on timely issues including holding a youth forum with city leaders after the video of Laquan Macdonald being shot by police was released in December 2015.

Based on extensive youth survey research, the Council developed recommendations to improve outcomes for court-involved youth, collaborated with local officials to redesign a youth detention center and streamlined efforts to help youth expunge their criminal records to ensure better access to future opportunities. Sustained, multiyear engagement between the Council and justice system officials has helped ensure the Council's recommendations go from idea to implementation.

#### **Spotlight: Baltimore, MD**

The city of Baltimore established the Baltimore City Youth Commission in 2005 to ensure intentional and compensated youth leadership that brings a youth perspective to citywide policies and programs. Since its inception, the Youth Commission has engaged in shaping policy and informing programs that affect youth in the areas of health, youth violence prevention, education, recreation and mentoring.

The Youth Commission is composed of 17 voting members and 14 non-voting members. Young people representing 14 City Council districts are appointed by the Mayor while three at-large positions are recommended by the Council President. Commissioners serve terms

12. <https://www.minnpost.com/politics-policy/2016/12/minneapolis-council-takes-new-approach-passing-citys-2017-budget-getting-alo>

13. <http://mayorhodges.com/2017/06/a-collaborative-approach-to-public-safety/>

parallel to the Mayor's term in office. To ensure Youth Commissioners meaningfully engage with key city officials, the Commission is also composed of 14 non-voting members from community and city agencies including Baltimore City Schools, Department of Recreation and Parks, Health Department, Police Department and Department of Social Services.

The Youth Commission has advised on the creation of a Youth Health and Wellness plan, organized Stop the Violence flag football and softball tournaments, partnered with police on anti-youth violence projects, participated in community mediations and brought youth leaders together to show solidarity in light of youth homicides.

In the aftermath of the April 2015 youth and community uprising following Freddie Gray's death while in police custody, the Youth Commission engaged with the city's B'More for Youth! Collaborative<sup>14</sup> to identify opportunities for building safe and equitable communities for young people, particularly youth of color, to create job and economic opportunities, prevent violence and keep youth out of the criminal justice system.

Youth Commissioners testify at hearings and submit recommendations across issues affecting young people, including submitting testimony in 2017 to the statewide Kirwan Commission that assessed Maryland public schools, in which the Youth Commission urged state officials to boost funding for pre-K, summer school, afterschool programs and community schools.



## 2. BOLSTER FAMILY SUPPORT

Family members affected by community violence require targeted support particularly in the aftermath of losing a loved one. Beyond the immediacy of healing from violence, family members also require support to protect their loved ones and raise healthy and successful young people. They require connection to services, engagement by city leaders, educators, healthcare providers and other institutions who serve young people and tools and resources to be able to advocate for themselves.

### The Challenge

Family members often find themselves powerless after losing a loved one to community violence—first impacted by the act of senseless violence and then harmed by a justice system that often treats affected families as criminals rather than protecting their rights or interests.

Family members who lose a loved one to community violence often may be unaware of services available to crime survivors or else unable to obtain those services because of their perceived involvement in the crime. The daily procedural realities of the justice system may make it difficult for young Black men and boys affected by community violence to access services; law enforcement and the courts may treat them as offenders rather than recognizing they are most at risk of being victims of crime,<sup>15</sup> including being at risk of retaliation if they are perceived to have been involved in the violent incidents that harm them.

Denial of services include a lack of access to financial support or medical treatment as well as lack of access to trauma-informed care that can address the mental health impact of being a victim of crime. Affected families face serious financial and employment consequences from

14. [https://youth.gov/sites/default/files/National-Forum\\_Baltimore-Plan508.pdf](https://youth.gov/sites/default/files/National-Forum_Baltimore-Plan508.pdf)

15. Young Men of Color and the Other Side of Harm, Vera Institute for Justice, <https://www.vera.org/publications/young-men-of-color-and-the-other-side-of-harm-addressing-disparities-in-our-responses-to-violence>

being a crime survivor as bills stack up and family members lose work days in an attempt to obtain healthcare.

Families require support to raise healthy and successful young people beyond the immediate aftermath of violence, including programming targeted to providing tools and resources for parents. Provision of these services is sometimes complicated by a mistrust family members may hold toward city officials and programs that may have previously failed to support them.

### The Solution

Victims services programs need to take into account the needs of African American families impacted by violence. The Department of Justice's (DOJ) *Vision 21: Transforming Victim Services* report<sup>16</sup> acknowledged the barriers that boys and young men of color, including young African American men and boys, face in their efforts to access victims' services. The report prioritized bolstering victims' services across the country to support all victims and their families including those who have been traditionally marginalized.

Victims and families require financial support as well as compensation for healthcare and other costs they may incur while seeking mental health or related services stemming from being a survivor of community violence. These support services are needed to respond to the immediate physical and mental health consequences of being a survivor as well as helping family members including young people to navigate long-term health, mental health and emotional impacts.

As noted in previous sections, trauma-informed approaches and restorative justice practices are important for healing communities and preventing future crime and violence. Features of trauma-informed and restorative justice approaches include group-based strategies such as trauma recovery groups and healing circles. Funding for victims' services must include a comprehensive approach to services that includes these evidence-based practices.<sup>17</sup> Victims' service programs need to assist families and loved ones to navigate the justice system rather than allowing the system to hamper family members' ability to access services, by treating them as survivors rather than as criminals. As part of its Vision 21 efforts, the DOJ funded the establishment of a National Resource Center on Reaching Underserved Victims to direct training and technical assistance toward victim-serving organizations that provide trauma, healing and related services to traditionally underserved victims of crime including young Black men and boys and their families.<sup>18</sup>

Cities can help find spaces to hold group sessions, and be a connector for organizations that serve families who have experienced trauma so they can coordinate services better. Beyond the immediate aftermath of violence, cities can expand, reallocate or braid funding for programs to ensure that families are supported in raising healthy, whole children, including home visits, group based parenting and responsible fatherhood programs and dual generation strategies across all age levels, from infancy to early adulthood.<sup>19</sup> School districts can also create and implement policies that better engage parents in schools.

Cities can also take action to expand access to quality childcare and early education opportunities for children and families. In **New York City**, Mayor Bill de Blasio pushed to

16. [https://ovc.ncjrs.gov/vision21/pdfs/Vision21\\_Report.pdf](https://ovc.ncjrs.gov/vision21/pdfs/Vision21_Report.pdf)

17. Victims of Crime Act and the Need for Advocacy, Californians for Safety and Justice, <http://www.safeandjust.org/system/storage/211/14/a/760/CSJ-VO-CA-toolkit-Mar2017-R2.pdf>

18. <https://ojp.gov/ovc/grants/pdf/txt/2016-National-Resource-Centers-Underserved-Victims-508.pdf>

19. <http://www.urban.org/sites/default/files/publication/39556/2000094-Promoting-Healthy-Families-and-Communities-for-Boys-and-Young-Men-of-Color.pdf>

expand free pre-kindergarten for all 4-year-olds, resulting in more than 50,000 children enrolling in pre-K classes across the city. In **Seattle**, voters overwhelmingly approved a ballot initiative to fund a citywide preschool pilot for 3- and 4-year-olds through a property-tax levy of \$58 million. The effort was based on model programs in **Boston** and **Tulsa**.<sup>20</sup>

Cities and states can strengthen noncustodial parents' ability to meet their child support obligations, including by helping them find work, increasing the involvement of fathers in their children's lives and improving the relationship between parents. At the same time, states can stop the accrual of arrears in child support while a parent is incarcerated.<sup>21</sup> In Baltimore, a "Day of Reconciliation" initiative offered formerly incarcerated people and others who had fallen behind on child support payments "a chance to resolve their bench warrants for nonsupport and put themselves on a path toward meeting their child support obligations without risking the possibility of arrest."<sup>22</sup>

#### Spotlight: Lexington, KY

SWAG, or Sisters and Supporters Working Against Gun Violence<sup>23</sup>, is a community-based organization in Lexington, KY, founded by mothers who have lost loved ones to gun violence. The organization collaborates with local law enforcement and the city of Lexington's Division of Youth Services on violence prevention. In addition to their overall mission to reduce the violence that predominantly affects young Black men and boys in their community, SWAG advocates for increased services for survivors, who require both immediate and sustained support to heal. They have built a database of services so that affected families know where to go for help and SWAG executive director Tonya Lindsey joined a state-level Survivors Council to push the state of Kentucky to review how victims' services are distributed to survivors, to ensure the communities most harmed by violence receive the support they need.

#### Spotlight: Durham, NC

Parents and families require support to raise young people who believe in their full potential and can access opportunities to learn and grow in a future free of violence. Educator William P. Jackson founded Village of Wisdom in Durham, NC<sup>24</sup> to organize and mobilize African American families to nurture the full potential of our youth by promoting Black genius<sup>25</sup> and hosting events that provide a support system for families to bolster their young people's education and career opportunities. They support parent leadership, organize community events, identify opportunities to nurture youth interests and passions and create family learning villages to create strong networks within the community to promote the inherent value of all Black youth including young Black men and boys.



### 3. BOOST EDUCATION

A core solution to reducing violence is improving educational outcomes for young people. Education is the cornerstone of ensuring health, success and well-being as young people grow into adulthood. Targeted programs and policies that uplift young Black men and boys are necessary to put them on a safe and thriving path so they can overcome the unique barriers they face. A comprehensive public health approach to violence prevention must acknowledge and disrupt the pathways to the juvenile and criminal justice system that many young men may find themselves on due to family, community and institutional factors.

20. <http://www.citylab.com/politics/2015/05/how-cities-and-counties-are-taking-the-lead-on-child-care/393569/>

21. <http://www.urban.org/sites/default/files/publication/39556/2000094-Promoting-Healthy-Families-and-Communities-for-Boys-and-Young-Men-of-Color.pdf>

22. <http://www.baltimoresun.com/news/opinion/editorial/bs-ed-child-support-20160822-story.html>

23. <https://www.ket.org/episode/KCWRS%20000944/>

24. <http://www.echoinggreen.org/fellows/william-jackson>

25. [https://www.huffingtonpost.com/echoing-green/the-blueprint-for-protect\\_b\\_8812350.html](https://www.huffingtonpost.com/echoing-green/the-blueprint-for-protect_b_8812350.html)

### The Challenge

Education must be a core part of any intervention to reduce community violence. Data shows a clear relationship between low educational outcomes and youth involvement with the juvenile justice system. Four of five incarcerated juvenile offenders read two or more years below grade level. A majority are functionally illiterate. Seventy percent of the prison population reads below grade level.<sup>26</sup>

Young African American men and boys face multiple barriers to being able to attain quality educational outcomes. Black men and boys experience lower graduation rates (52%) than their white and Latino counterparts. Black male high school dropouts are 38 times more likely to be incarcerated than their peers with a four-year degree.

Many young Black men and boys live in neighborhoods with under-resourced schools and experience harsh school discipline, which makes it difficult for them to stay in school. Minor misbehavior may lead to suspensions or expulsions, with African American boys facing severe disciplinary actions beginning as young as kindergarten, hampering their ability to learn, thrive and graduate.

### The Solution

Educational interventions must be rooted in the belief that young Black men and boys—similar to other young people of color who face unique barriers to success—already have the capacity and potential to succeed in life, and what they require is systems change, support and resources to make their dreams and goals a reality. Classes and programming must support young people on a path toward high school graduation that extends to ensuring their capacity to fully participate in college, career and community, depending on the direction they choose.

Education programs or initiatives must work to keep young people in school and out of the juvenile justice system and recognize that young people have needs within the classroom as well as outside of school. A community school model recognizes the multiple factors that contribute to a young person's learning in addition to curriculum and textbooks.

Schools must ensure that young Black men and boys have access to classes and programs that enable them to see themselves and their culture, explore meaningful employment, career or higher education options, including exposure to colleges and vocations. Access to mentors and counselors who may share the same background and experience is also critical as well as acknowledging the day-to-day challenges young people may face. Young Black men and boys' families also require support and encouragement so they can be better engaged in their child's educational success.

Successful programs and policies recognize the factors that push young people out of schools and into the streets. Cities and school districts can put in place early warning systems and interventions at key moments—third grade, middle school and ninth grade. According to the U.S. Department of Education, early warning systems are defined as systems “based on student data to identify students who exhibit behavior or academic performance that puts them at risk of dropping out of school. Early warning systems help districts and schools pinpoint student achievement patterns and school climate issues that may contribute to students dropping out of school.”<sup>27</sup> Schools can also be part of changing norms around community violence that harm youth, honoring young people lost to violence and providing support to family and community members affected by violence.

26. <http://www.begintoread.com/research/literacystatistics.html>

27. <https://www2.ed.gov/rschstat/eval/high-school/early-warning-systems-brief.pdf>



Shifting toward common sense school discipline that holds young people in community while holding them accountable can increase school attendance. Cities can work to end the school-to-prison pipeline and end disparities in school discipline in their respective school districts by putting in place sensible discipline policies that reduce suspensions, expulsions, school-based arrests and juvenile court referrals. In addition, cities can examine the impact of the use of police on school environments and student engagement, and elect to increase resources that provide support for students, such as counselors, youth development specialists, mental health professionals and more. For example, the **Oakland Unified School District** eliminated willful defiance as a reason to suspend any student and is investing at least \$2.3 million to expand restorative justice practices in its schools. Restorative justice practices are gaining traction in schools across the country to ensure young people receive the counseling they need, conflicts get resolved and teachers are able to be more effective in their classrooms.

Mayors can also work closely with school district officials and superintendents, as well as community leaders, families and others, to collectively tackle disparities in educational outcomes and achievement.

In **Seattle**, the Mayor's Education Summit Advisory Group brought together 30 representatives from Seattle Public Schools, the city of Seattle, community leaders, parents, business and philanthropy leaders—all dedicated to closing Seattle's achievement and opportunity gaps between white students and students of color.<sup>28</sup> The Advisory Group helped launch the African American Male Advisory Committee (AAMAC)<sup>29</sup> focused on improving education, employment and well-being outcomes. In 2017, after 15+ months of meetings and collaboration that involved parents, students, teachers and community members, the AAMAC issued recommendations currently being adopted by the school district. These include improving the educational environment for African American males to help increase attendance, improving their access to college and career readiness classes and programs, attracting and retaining African American male teachers, supporting families to become more actively engaged and operationalizing principles and practices to improve racial equity throughout the district.

Being pushed out of school and into the justice system for being late to class is another educational barrier facing young people of color, including young African American men and boys, who are more likely to experience challenges with neighborhood safety or transportation that may make it more difficult for them to get to school. City leaders and school districts throughout the country are revising their truancy policies to address these barriers and keep young people in school.

**Los Angeles Unified** established a truancy-diversion program that directs students to YouthSource Centers (described in a spotlight under Section 5, Build an Inclusive Economy) and other non-court referrals to ensure they are held accountable while being supported to improve their attendance. Truancies dropped 78 percent by 2013<sup>30</sup> in the initial years of the policy shift and have continued to drop since.<sup>31</sup> **Minneapolis** initiated a similar change in how young people, particularly young African American men and boys, are treated if they are truant or violate a daytime curfew for not being in school. A Juvenile Supervision Center<sup>32</sup> was established to assess and address the underlying factors that lead young people to miss school, keeping them out of the juvenile justice system while holding them accountable and

28. <https://www.seattleschools.org/cms/One.aspx?portalId=627&pageId=16222058>

29. <https://www.seattleschools.org/cms/one.aspx?pageId=12557972>

30. <https://home.lausd.net/apps/news/article/337268>

31. <http://www.latimes.com/local/crime/la-me-school-police-20151130-story.html>

32. <http://www.nlc.org/minneapolis-juvenile-supervision>

supporting them to go back to school. Data show this policy shift helped improve attendance and encourage young people to re-enroll in school.<sup>33</sup>

Many young Black men and boys are considered to be “disconnected” because they have dropped out of school and do not hold jobs in the formal workforce. Cities and states can push for policies that increase and support access to postsecondary education and completion for African American students. For example, with strong advocacy and support from mayors and city leaders, policymakers can expand state and federal financial aid for low-income students and increase investments in college prep programs.<sup>34</sup> Cities and states are also eliminating cost as one barrier. In 2017, **Tennessee** expanded a program making tuition and fees free for recent high school graduates enrolled in a community college or technical school to adults who don’t already have an associate’s or bachelor’s degree.<sup>35</sup> Statewide efforts follow local programs that long have been offering students access to some form of either free or dramatically reduced tuition to college, including **New Haven, Oakland** and **Boston**.<sup>36</sup>

As we note throughout this resource, mayors and city leaders can benefit from engaging national initiatives targeting the improvement of life outcomes for vulnerable young people including young Black men and boys. The Coalition of Schools Educating Boys of Color applied its national standards and promising practices around school-based mentoring to the Sankofa Passages Program in partnership with the Philadelphia school district, contributing to improved educational outcomes for male high school students of color including a 94% promotion rate, 89% fewer violent incidents and adverse behaviors and 98% graduation rate for 2013–14 seniors.<sup>37</sup>

#### Spotlight: Oakland, CA

The African American Male Achievement initiative (AAMA) in the Oakland Unified School District has engaged in advocacy to restore common sense school discipline that holds young people accountable while keeping them in school. The initiative runs a Manhood Development Program that provides mentorship and counseling support to young Black men and boys. AAMA measures its progress against district data while partnering directly with youth to listen to their experiences, lift up their stories and ensure they are at the center of shaping and benefiting from programs. Young people who are part of AAMA have seen better grades, increased graduation rates and rising admissions to California state colleges and universities.<sup>38</sup>

#### Spotlight: Nashville, TN

Nashville city, school and community leaders came together as part of the PASSAGE (Positive and Safe Schools Advancing Greater Equity) initiative in 2014 to address school discipline and its disproportionate harmful impact on students of color. Nashville is one of four cities nationwide participating in the PASSAGE initiative; the others are **New York, Los Angeles** and **Chicago**.

The initiative engages principals, parents, teachers, counselors, law enforcement and the courts, faith and community leaders, researchers and local government officials to reshape policies and programs that contribute to discipline disparities and a negative school climate for young people of color, moving the city and the district toward a restorative justice approach through trainings and policy change.

33. <http://www.minneapolis.gov/www/groups/public/@health/documents/webcontent/wcmsp-189736.pdf>

34. [https://offices.depaul.edu/enrollment-management-marketing/student-retention/Documents/Black\\_Men\\_of\\_Color\\_November\\_2012.pdf](https://offices.depaul.edu/enrollment-management-marketing/student-retention/Documents/Black_Men_of_Color_November_2012.pdf)

35. <http://money.cnn.com/2017/05/11/pf/college/tennessee-free-community-college/index.html>

36. <http://time.com/money/4830367/free-college-tuition-promise-programs/>

37. <https://www.coseboc.org/sankofa-passages>

38. <https://www.ousd.org/Page/12804>

The initiative has met with success in Nashville, resulting in a 15 percent decline in suspensions from the 2011-2012 school year to the 2013-2014 school year. In the first quarter of the 2015-2016 school year out-of-school suspensions were down 29 percent and in-school suspensions down 47 percent compared to the 2014-2015 school year.<sup>39</sup>

What if we changed the story of our community, recognizing young people as at-hope youth, rather than at-risk youth? When I was younger I faced a lot of barriers, like living in poverty. I was prejudged because of how I look and didn't get the education I needed in school. **Now I know more, and I want to share that with other young people.**

— ISAIAH HUDSON, YOUNG LEADER, MINNEAPOLIS, MN



#### 4. EXPAND TRAUMA-INFORMED PRACTICE

Addressing mental health is critical to building safe, healthy and hopeful communities. That is why more cities are adopting trauma-informed practices that extend beyond health departments to inform multiple city agencies. Trauma-informed practices guide city programs and initiatives by recognizing that trauma informs each individual's life and behavior. These practices are woven across city agencies, from health to education to law enforcement, so that a holistic perspective is used to more effectively approach programming.

##### The Challenge

Young Black men and boys experience trauma at higher levels than other groups of Americans. Studies show that trauma has health effects long into adulthood. Unaddressed trauma is both a cause and consequence of exposure to crime and violence.

Data from Healing Hurt People, a trauma-informed hospital-based violence intervention program based in **Philadelphia**, found that 75 percent of the people they serve had diagnosable post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and 50 percent reported more than four adverse childhood experiences, or ACEs, before age 18. Their clients range between ages 16 and 35 and the majority (91.4 percent) are Black or Latino males. Studies of young men of color in **Boston** found similar levels of PTSD among young men exposed to violence.<sup>40</sup>

In the past several years, researchers have found that exposure to trauma and adverse childhood experiences—including poverty, state and community violence, abuse or neglect—can lead to diminished health and life outcomes for young people as they grow into adulthood, including chronic diseases. These experiences can also cause toxic stress that may contribute to lifelong cognitive impairment.

39. <https://mnpschildrenfirst.com/tag/passage/>

40. "Moving Toward Healing: Trauma and Violence and Boys and Young Men of Color," John Rich, MD, MPH Center for Nonviolence and Social Justice Drexel University, School of Public Health, Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and Moriah Group, <http://forward-promise.org/research-resources/moving-toward-healing-trauma-and-violence-and-boys-and-young-men-of-color/>

Young people exposed to violence encounter more than just a one-off traumatic event that triggers PTSD or toxic stress. They may experience these negative conditions throughout their childhood and youth in neighborhoods with high levels of violence.<sup>41</sup>

### The Solution

A trauma-informed approach means taking the motivating factors behind an individual's behavior—including trauma—into account along with the behavior itself and asking deeper questions about the lives of community members. It means asking, "what happened to you?" instead of "what is wrong with you?" This approach recognizes the impact on community members stemming from living in neighborhoods with concentrated violence and other adverse experiences.

Expanding trauma-informed practice means incorporating a trauma-informed lens across city agencies and community transformation efforts. Multiple city stakeholders beyond the health department must address and acknowledge the reality of trauma as a root cause of violence and other related obstacles to a city's success and well-being. They must recognize that trauma operates at a family and community level, beyond just the individual level.

Mayors and other policymakers can ensure that the assessment and treatment of trauma among young people is integrated across systems citywide. The cross-section of stakeholders that need to incorporate trauma-informed practice include schools, law enforcement, the courts, first responders, educators, child welfare agencies and departments of human services and juvenile justice, in addition to health care providers and emergency room departments. For law enforcement, this may mean adopting Crisis Intervention Trainings for police officers. Child welfare agencies may need to train their teams on trauma and also integrate the role of mental health professionals. Educators should be assessing their students for ACEs. For example, Walla Walla, Washington, has garnered national attention for its work to become a trauma-informed community; through trauma-informed approaches, its high school dropped suspensions by 85 percent over one year in 2012.<sup>42</sup>

At the state level, policymakers and department leaders have conducted data and research on the impact of adverse childhood experiences and trauma and the effectiveness of prevention programs, trained agencies and communities to become more responsive to trauma and enacted policy in response. For example, **Vermont** passed the first bill in the nation calling for screening for adverse childhood experiences in health services and for integrating the science of trauma into medical education.<sup>43</sup> In **Washington**, the state legislature has established a public policy research institute that is examining, among other issues, the cost-effectiveness of prevention programs.<sup>44</sup> Mayors can play a leadership role in ensuring that local leadership on this issue can translate into statewide and regional change.

### Spotlight: Philadelphia, PA

Under the leadership of multiple city and community leaders including former city behavioral health commissioner Dr. Arthur Evans and Healing Hurt People's Dr. John Rich, the city of Philadelphia integrated trauma-informed practice throughout all its city agencies over the past 11 years. Under this strategy, the city improved access to trauma-informed healthcare, including through hospital-based violence interventions administered by Healing Hurt People, and trained community members and public safety officials to equip them to provide a

41. Read more about ACEs and toxic stress at <https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/acestudy/index.html>

42. <https://acestoohigh.com/2014/10/07/childrens-resilience-initiative-in-walla-walla-wa-draws-spotlight-to-trauma-sensitive-school/>

43. <http://www.acesconnection.com/blog/human-rights-and-policy-creating-a-trauma-informed-policy-agenda>

44. <http://www.acesconnection.com/blog/human-rights-and-policy-creating-a-trauma-informed-policy-agenda>

trauma-informed response in schools, places of worship, police precincts, fire stations and prisons. To date, the initiative has trained more than 10,000 professionals to incorporate a trauma-informed approach.<sup>45</sup>



## 5. BUILD AN INCLUSIVE ECONOMY

We must build an inclusive economy that incorporates job and career opportunities as well as supports for young African American men and boys to be able to explore their creativity, spark innovation and motivate entrepreneurship. Providing these opportunities is critical for young African American men and boys to reach their full potential and live healthy and successful lives. Involvement with community violence often stems from a lack of a ladder of opportunity, with young Black men unable to find employment that offers livable wages that allow them to provide for loved ones or improve their quality of life. Cities must make investments in job training and placement as well as opportunities for economic innovation that enable young people to move into quality jobs, careers and small business development.

### The Challenge

Many of the neighborhoods where young African American men and boys live have experienced decades of discrimination and lack of investment, shutting them out of opportunities. Businesses, banks and government agencies have often chosen not to invest in communities of color. Gun violence data shows a correlation between neighborhoods with concentrated poverty and concentrated community violence.<sup>46</sup>

In these neighborhoods, schools may not have the resources they need, or infrastructure, including housing and roads, may have fallen into disrepair. Businesses may have closed or been denied the funds required to keep up with community needs. Banks may not operate, forcing community members to rely on more expensive payday lenders or check cashing businesses.

Low graduation rates and high incarceration rates contribute to an unemployment rate for Black males (13.4 percent) that is more than double the white male unemployment rate. Generational unemployment that affects African American men may also mean that young people grow up without role models or social networks that can help them successfully access sustainable jobs or careers.

### The Solution

Cities must bolster access to entry-level jobs and post-secondary education or vocational training that leads to well-paying jobs in their city. It is critical to invest in programs and create policies that ensure all young men are prepared for post-high school education, vocational training or work experiences that will lead to quality, family-supporting jobs with adequate wages.

The foundation for effective job training and career readiness programs must begin in high school where young African American men and boys should access college and career coursework. Summer youth jobs, apprenticeships and internship programs also set young people up for success by offering them a great learning opportunity.

Building an inclusive economy requires community investment and programs to support employment and workforce readiness. Good schools, functioning infrastructure and thriving businesses are essential to generating opportunity in the communities where young people live. Establishing better schools, improved infrastructure and successful businesses in

45. DBHIDS Trauma Transformation Initiative One-Pager, <http://dbhids.org/trauma>

46. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/mar/20/mapping-gun-murders-micro-level-new-data-2015>



communities of color requires cities to spur investment through government programs or tax incentives. Banks must also be incentivized to provide access to the credit needed by community members to buy a home or start a small business.

Educational, job and career programming should prioritize real-world skills and experience so that young people are exposed to a range of options and opportunities. Researchers at the Center for Law and Social Policy (CLASP) note that youth need to be connected to internships, career and technical education, work-based learning and service learning along with unpaid volunteer or employment opportunities. They also require workforce preparation that includes development of oral and written communication skills, teamwork, leadership, critical thinking and a sense of civic and social responsibility. Together, these sets of skills and experience can prepare young African American men and boys for a competitive job market.<sup>47</sup>

On the policy front, cities can focus on policies that strengthen the financial well-being of families and communities. One example is raising the minimum wage at the federal and local levels. The Congressional Budget Office (CBO) “has found that hiking minimum wage to \$10.10 an hour would raise income levels for families living below the poverty line by 2.8 percent and reduce the number of people living in poverty by as much as 900,000.” Seven states and 18 cities enacted minimum wage increases in 2016.

Cities can also remove employment discrimination and barriers to employment for system-involved young Black men and boys and people with records by passing “ban the box” policies, which remove questions pertaining to conviction histories from applications for employment, as well as housing and loans. As of 2017, 24 states, **Washington, D.C.**, and more than 150 cities and counties have adopted ban the box policies. While most of the policies apply to public employment, others—most recently **California**—have included private employers and government subcontractors. In 2014, **San Francisco** passed one of the nation’s most comprehensive ban the box ordinances to date, barring all private employers, affordable housing providers and city contractors from asking about previous records until after a live interview or conditional employment offer. **Alameda County**, in California, has gone beyond ban the box to make 1,400 county jobs available for formerly incarcerated people with felonies on their records.

Increasing partnerships with local and private institutions to expand opportunities for summer and year-round employment is also key. For example, in 2014, **New Orleans** launched an ambitious initiative in partnership with business and civic leaders to connect African American men to jobs in the region’s anchor institutions, including universities, health systems and the airport. The city raised \$10 million to implement a plan that connected community members to these career-path jobs.

### Spotlight: Los Angeles, CA

YouthSource Centers operated by the city of Los Angeles work to prepare young people ages 16–24 for college and careers. Run by the Economic and Workforce Development Department, the 13 centers across the city are located in communities with high dropout rates. The city partners with the LA Unified School District and community organizations to help young people earn their high school diploma or the equivalent, receive job training and subsidized employment and support efforts to access post-secondary education and career pathways. The initiative has served more than 30,000 youth and supported 2,668 young people who previously dropped out to re-enroll back in school.<sup>48</sup>

47. Our Youth, Our Economy, Our Future: A Road Map for a Stronger Talent Pipeline, CLASP, <http://www.clasp.org/resources-and-publications/publication-1/Campaign-for-Youth-Road-Map-2016.pdf>

48. City of Los Angeles Partnership - YouthSource System, [http://achieve.lausd.net/cms/lib08/CA01000043/Centricity/Domain/214/YouthSource%20City%20Partnership/YS\\_Jul2016\\_Dec2016.pdf](http://achieve.lausd.net/cms/lib08/CA01000043/Centricity/Domain/214/YouthSource%20City%20Partnership/YS_Jul2016_Dec2016.pdf)

### Spotlight: Atlanta, GA

The city of Atlanta announced its Resilient Atlanta<sup>49</sup> strategy in November 2017, representing the culmination of a year's worth of gathering input from 7,000+ residents across 40 public events, 25 Neighborhood Planning Unit meetings and the participation of a 100-member advisory group consisting of business, faith, nonprofit, academic and civic leaders. Developed as part of The Rockefeller Foundation's global Resilient Cities initiative, which includes New York, Dallas and Chicago, Resilient Atlanta seeks to pursue equitable growth and reverse decades of racial inequity in economic opportunity.

Core equitable development strategies intended to "enable all metro Atlantans to prosper" include an Advancing Collective Prosperity through Entrepreneurship initiative that will focus on increasing the number of Black-owned enterprises and increasing Black employment as well as establishing a \$1 million fund to support small businesses to stay in communities along the Atlanta Beltline corridor. This is particularly important because Beltline development has contributed to rising property values and pricing small businesses out of these neighborhoods. The strategy also recommends the expansion of an Anti-Displacement Tax Fund to help homeowners in gentrifying neighborhoods cover their rising property taxes to ensure they are not forced to move.



## 6. INTERRUPT THE CYCLE OF COMMUNITY VIOLENCE

We must interrupt the cycle of community violence at the neighborhood level, partnering with youth, family and community leaders who are directly impacted. There are proven ways to stop and prevent shootings and homicides that affect young Black men and boys ages 14-24 years old, and we must expand our investments in these programs and initiatives. Data is an important guide to identify where community violence occurs in cities as well as evaluating the effectiveness of violence interruption programs once underway.

### The Problem

Young African American men and boys ages 14-24 are disproportionately affected by community violence and are four times more likely to experience a homicide than any other group of young men. Young Black men's experience with violence—whether as victim, survivor or witness—sets them apart from nearly every other demographic group, including Black men older than 24, white men and Black women and girls.

While young Black males ages 14 to 24 make up around 1 percent of the U.S. population, they constitute 16 percent of homicide victims and 27 percent of homicide offenders.<sup>50</sup> Homicides remain the leading cause of death for Black males.

We recognize guns pose a particular threat to our communities, and while the violent crime rate in the U.S. has generally decreased over the past 15 years, the gun homicide rate has hardly changed—and there is some evidence that non-fatal shootings may have actually increased.<sup>51</sup>

Violence doesn't just harm young Black men and boys; it inflicts trauma on entire families, neighborhoods and communities. In addition to the moral injustice this community violence represents, the economic costs are also staggering. The CDC estimates that homicides cost the U.S. economy \$26.4 billion every year in medical and work loss costs.<sup>52</sup>

49. <https://www.resilientatlanta.com/resilient-atlanta-actions-to-build-an-equitable-future/>

50. Violence Trends, Patterns and Consequences for Black Males in America: A Call to Action by Arnold Chandler, Forward Change Consulting, <http://citiesunited.org/resources-for-cities/violence-trends-patterns-and-consequences-report/>

51. <https://everytownresearch.org/reports/strategies-for-reducing-gun-violence-in-american-cities/>

52. [https://www.cdc.gov/injury/wisqars/overview/cost\\_of\\_injury.html](https://www.cdc.gov/injury/wisqars/overview/cost_of_injury.html)

A significant predictor of violence in a community is previous exposure to violence, making it all the more important to interrupt the cycle. If violence is present in a young person's environment, their likelihood of engaging in violence increases.<sup>53</sup>

### The Solution

We can stop the cycle of community violence by employing proven methods that have been championed by mayors and are making a difference in communities across the country. These interventions can generally be placed into a few categories that are documented in 4 Proven Violence Reduction Strategies by Solutions, Inc.<sup>54</sup> These include Operation Ceasefire or group violence interventions, hospital-based violence interventions, city-led agencies focused on neighborhood safety and Cure Violence or violence interruption strategies.

**Operation Ceasefire** is a comprehensive, group violence intervention (GVI) strategy that uses a data-driven approach to determine which individuals and groups are most likely to be impacted by gun violence and actively engages those individuals and groups. Initiative participants are informed about the risks they face and offered support including dedicated services in education, employment and housing. Key initiative stakeholders involved in community outreach include law enforcement, community leaders, clergy and service providers. If individuals or groups engaged by the initiative remain engaged in crime or violence, there is follow-up supervision and enforcement by police, probation, parole and prosecutors.

Ceasefire is based off the work of criminologist David M. Kennedy, who directs the National Network for Safe Communities at John Jay College. They have partnered with cities across the country to adopt the Ceasefire and/or GVI model to reduce community violence and homicides. Systematic reviews and city-level studies of this approach show demonstrated reductions in violence from **Boston** to **Cincinnati** to **New Orleans**.<sup>55</sup>

**Hospital-based violence intervention programs** focus on the role that medical staff and their community-based partners can play to reduce violence by engaging with young people impacted by violence as soon as possible after a shooting-related hospitalization. The National Network of Hospital-based Violence Intervention Programs (NNHVIP)<sup>56</sup> views this time as the "golden moment of opportunity at the hospital bedside to engage with a victim of violence and to stop the cycle of violence." An intervention specialist—typically a public health professional from the community who is a credible messenger,<sup>57</sup> reflecting the background of the young people they serve—connects the young person to trauma-informed services, mentoring, home visits and follow-up intended to promote both mental and physical recovery.

Across the country these initiatives are working to reduce the incidents of retaliation and recurrence, i.e., reduce the chances that a gunshot victim will shoot the person who shot them or others related to the incident. Studies show that intervening at the hospital is more likely to have an impact because young people find themselves at a crossroads—they can choose to retaliate or, with support, transform their traumatic experience into a turning point to heal themselves and their community.<sup>58</sup>

53. [https://www.childtrends.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/118\\_Exposure\\_to\\_Violence-1.pdf](https://www.childtrends.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/118_Exposure_to_Violence-1.pdf)

54. <http://citiesunited.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/4-Proven-Ways.pdf>

55. <https://nnscommunities.org/impact/results>

56. Violence is Preventable: A Best Practices Guide for Launching & Sustaining a Hospital-based Program to Break the Cycle of Violence, NNHVIP, <http://youthalive1.wufoo.com/forms/z7x3k1/>

57. <https://dysr.dc.gov/page/credible-messenger-initiative>

58. Hospital-based violence intervention programs save lives and money, Journal of Trauma and Acute Care Surgery, <http://nnhvip.org/news/1212/>

**City-led agencies focused on neighborhood safety** are in a position to bring together stakeholders from across the community to stop and prevent violence. A successful example is the Office of Neighborhood Safety (ONS) in Richmond, CA, which is now being replicated as the Advance Peace model in cities across the country.

Launched in 2007 under the leadership of DeVone Boggan, ONS engages young people most likely to be involved in violence and those who are hardest to reach and offers them support and opportunity. Their Street Outreach Strategy and Operation Peacemaker Fellowship programming includes life coaching, mentoring and connection to services along with excursions to domestic and international destinations to expose young people to new cultures and experiences. Participants may also receive financial incentives for participation and positive behavior.

The city of Richmond has seen significant reductions in community violence and homicides since ONS launched. Immediately after its founding, the number of homicides went down from 47 in 2007 to 28 in 2008, with firearm assaults decreasing from 242 to 150. In the past decade, homicides have declined in the city by more than 60 percent. Several cities across the country are replicating what is now referred to as the Advance Peace model,<sup>59</sup> including **Oakland, Washington, D.C.,** and **Baltimore.**

In **Milwaukee**, the city's Office of Violence Prevention brought together more than 1,500 people including youth, residents and community leaders to develop a comprehensive violence prevention plan, "Blueprint for Peace."<sup>60</sup> Officially launched in November 2017, city and community leaders are working toward zero youth homicides in summer 2018, as they seek to reduce the overall rates of community violence in Milwaukee.

**Cure Violence** is a violence interruption strategy working to interrupt violence at the source and treats violence as a disease that spreads from person to person. Three core components of this strategy include interrupting the transmission of violence, reducing the risk of violent acts by those at the highest risk and changing community norms. The model relies on the efforts of community outreach workers who have deep and sustained relationships in the neighborhoods where they operate, enabling them to effectively engage with youth and community.

Cure Violence and related violence interruption strategies have been evaluated by numerous independent academics and published in scientific journals showing a reduction in violence from their first sites in **Chicago** to over 100 replication sites across the U.S. and internationally. Data shows reductions in shootings and killings from **New York** to **Baltimore** to **Chicago** related to the effectiveness of Cure Violence strategies.<sup>61</sup>

In addition to implementing proven interventions, mayors and city leaders can advocate for increased access to mental health support, grief counseling and more for children, youth and families who have experienced crime, especially in communities most impacted by violence. For example, in California, the Los Angeles Metropolitan Churches, one of the "few groups working directly with African American survivors of violence in South Los Angeles," was recently approved for funding from the federal Victims of Crime Act Crime Victims Fund, a federal fund that helps crime victims pay for medical care, mental health counseling and funeral costs. States, including California, Illinois and Ohio, are also investing in creating trauma recovery centers, which offer rapid, comprehensive health and recovery treatment to victims of violent crime—all in one location—right when they need it the most, immediately after the

59. <https://www.advancepeace.org/>

60. Blueprint for Peace, <http://city.milwaukee.gov/414Life>

61. Cure Violence Summary of Findings, <http://cureviolence.org/results/summary-of-findings/>

traumatizing event.<sup>62</sup> Mayors and city leaders can work with state leaders to ensure that each community has access to a trauma recovery center.

### Spotlight: Brooklyn, NY

The Crown Heights Mediation Center in Brooklyn, NY operates Save Our Streets (S.O.S.), a violence interruption program based off the Cure Violence model. S.O.S. has successfully reduced community violence and homicides in central Brooklyn since 2009, with a 20 percent reduction in shootings. These successful results led to an expansion of the Cure Violence model across New York City with increased investments by Mayor Bill de Blasio; in the South Bronx, Cure Violence contributed to a 63 percent drop in shootings.<sup>63,64</sup> The Mediation Center has since launched Make It Happen to add trauma-informed practices to its programming to better serve young people who require mentoring, social services and mental health support as they embrace alternatives to crime and violence.<sup>65</sup>

### Spotlight: Boston, MA

The National Forum on Youth Violence Prevention<sup>66</sup> was established by the federal government in 2010 to bring together cities from across the country along with federal agency officials and national advocates to tackle community violence that impacts youth. The Forum uplifts local, regional and national solutions to reducing and preventing violence, with a focus on participating cities including **Boston, Camden, Chicago, Detroit, Memphis, Minneapolis, New Orleans, Philadelphia, Salinas** and **San Jose**.

In Boston, the Forum helped boost support for initiatives like StreetSafe Boston<sup>67</sup>, a community outreach program that deploys outreach workers into neighborhoods most affected by community violence. Outreach workers help connect young people to services and programs that will meet their needs including education, jobs and housing. The initiative is intentionally data-driven, having been set up after Harvard data showed that most youth violence in Boston was occurring in a small geographic area where a few hundred young people were impacted as both victims and perpetrators of violence.

The National Forum collaborates with city and community leaders to create an ideas exchange, catalyzing cities to develop and implement local violence prevention plans and to propel initiatives forward at the local and national levels. The Forum has helped drive comprehensive, local violence prevention plans in participating cities, resulting in reductions in violence in targeted neighborhoods.<sup>68</sup>

### Spotlight: Mayors Against Illegal Guns

Everytown for Gun Safety supports the more than 1,000 current and former mayors who are part of Mayors Against Illegal Guns. The city leaders in this national coalition advance gun safety policies and practices in coordination with the violence interruption strategies detailed in this resource. The coalition focuses on the threat to public safety posed by illegal guns and works to target and hold accountable irresponsible gun dealers; extend background check requirements to all gun sales; oppose all federal efforts to restrict cities' access to gun tracing data; develop and use technologies that aid in tracing of illegal guns; and support local, state and federal legislation that targets illegal guns.<sup>69</sup>

62. [https://www.nytimes.com/2017/05/31/opinion/a-haven-from-traumas-cruel-grip.html?\\_r=0](https://www.nytimes.com/2017/05/31/opinion/a-haven-from-traumas-cruel-grip.html?_r=0)

63. Testing a Public Health Approach to Gun Violence, Center for Court Innovation, [http://www.courtinnovation.org/sites/default/files/documents/SOS\\_Evaluation.pdf](http://www.courtinnovation.org/sites/default/files/documents/SOS_Evaluation.pdf)

64. <https://johnjayrec.nyc/2017/10/02/cvinsobronxeastny/>

65. <http://crownheights.org/makeithappen/>

66. <https://youth.gov/collaboration-profiles/national-forum-youth-violence-prevention>

67. <http://www.tbf.org/streetsafe-boston>

68. [https://johnjayrec.nyc/2012/04/03/nfyvp\\_results2/](https://johnjayrec.nyc/2012/04/03/nfyvp_results2/)

69. <https://everytown.org/mayors/>



Mayors in the coalition are working to reduce the supply of illegal guns and restricting the operation of local underground markets; in Tucson, AZ, lawmakers passed a local ordinance requiring gun shows to require background checks for all sellers. City leaders are also addressing the reality that domestic violence can account for a significant percentage of homicides, tightening laws to prevent domestic abusers from accessing illegal guns; in Dallas County, TX, judges worked to ensure convicted domestic abusers are prohibited from possessing firearms by having them relinquish their guns in a courtroom process.<sup>70</sup>



## 7. RESHAPE CRIMINAL AND JUVENILE JUSTICE SYSTEMS

City leaders must promote and develop programs and initiatives that prioritize prevention for youth who are at risk of becoming or already are involved in the juvenile justice system, and push for reforms that focus on restorative justice practices and alternatives to incarceration to rebuild trust between communities and law enforcement, including school resource officers, who might be a young person's first encounter with law enforcement.

### The Problem

If current trends continue, one in three Black males born today can expect to spend time in prison during his lifetime.<sup>71</sup> In schools, Black males are three times more likely to face disciplinary measures than their white counterparts.

Nationwide, African Americans represent 26 percent of juvenile arrests, 44 percent of youth who are detained, 46 percent of the youth who are judicially waived to criminal court and 58 percent of the youth admitted to state prisons. Harsh school discipline policies have disproportionately impacted young Black men and boys and pushed them out of school—35 percent of Black children grades 7-12 have been suspended or expelled at some point in their school careers compared to 20 percent of Latinos and 15 percent of whites.<sup>72</sup>

School districts are disproportionately focused on discipline and policing rather than guaranteeing every student access to a quality education. Over 1.6 million students attend a school that has a police officer but no counselor.<sup>73</sup> When young people are deemed suspicious, they are more likely to be suspended, expelled or arrested at a young age, potentially placing them on a lifelong path into the justice system rather than toward education, jobs or careers.

Once involved with the justice system, young people find their opportunities severely limited. Education, jobs and careers are difficult to access after incarceration. The box on job applications that asks about arrest and conviction records is often an immediate barrier to entry for most employment.

As we note in an earlier section, young Black men and boys have a unique relationship with community violence and can be both victims and perpetrators, and yet they are most often seen only as criminals by law enforcement, schools and the public. This perception contributes to challenges for communities that require law enforcement help to stop and prevent community violence, including the need to solve homicides, yet homicide clearance rates are significantly low in neighborhoods that experience high rates of violence.<sup>74</sup>

70. <https://everytownresearch.org/reports/strategies-for-reducing-gun-violence-in-american-cities/>

71. [https://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/10/04/racial-disparities-criminal-justice\\_n\\_4045144.html](https://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/10/04/racial-disparities-criminal-justice_n_4045144.html)

72. <http://www.naacp.org/criminal-justice-fact-sheet/>

73. [http://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/rulesforengagement/2016/12/black\\_hispanic\\_students\\_more\\_likely\\_to\\_attend\\_schools\\_with\\_police\\_but\\_no\\_counselors.html](http://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/rulesforengagement/2016/12/black_hispanic_students_more_likely_to_attend_schools_with_police_but_no_counselors.html)

74. <https://www.vox.com/2016/8/26/12631962/ghettoside-jill-leovy-black-crime>

### The Solution

The criminal and juvenile justice systems need to be reshaped to work for our communities—moving away from a punitive approach toward a restorative one that includes finding ways to hold our young people accountable while still keeping them in school and community.

Transforming school discipline with the aim of keeping young people in school while holding them accountable is an important step toward supporting the health and success of young Black men and boys from an early age. Restorative justice practices, positive behavior intervention and supports, mentoring and counseling can all contribute to putting young people on a path toward graduation and out of the justice system.<sup>75</sup> A restorative justice approach intentionally draws on educators, parents and counselors to provide a community of support to young people, rather than over-relying on school resource officers or police whose interaction with youth may lead them into the justice system.

In the community, we recommend implementing or strengthening community policing efforts, and adding or expanding innovative programs and partnerships between neighborhood residents, particularly youth, and law enforcement and other city agencies. As leaders with hopeful visions for the health and safety of their respective cities, mayors and police chiefs are best positioned to build bridges and strengthen relationships between communities, law enforcement and other city government institutions. In Minneapolis, the city launched a Division of Community and Collaborative Advancement within the Police Department to build trust between officers and residents, tracking measures of positive contact with the community as a metric rather than relying only on measuring negative contacts like arrests. The division is establishing a committee of citizens and officers that meets monthly to review policies and discuss possible new programs.<sup>76</sup>

Community policing can also help police officers reconsider arrest and incarceration as the only tools with which to interact with young people and respond to misconduct or problematic behavior. Successful diversion programs around the country train local law enforcement to hold young people accountable without resorting to arrest or incarceration.<sup>77</sup>

If youth do become involved with the justice system, it is important to provide programming through juvenile justice detention centers and probation departments that can identify the challenges young people face and offer the support required for young people to return to their communities and access pathways to education, jobs and careers.

For communities wracked by violence, shifting justice system resources toward restorative school discipline, improved police-community relations, alternatives to incarceration and solving homicides will make a tremendous difference in the lives of young Black men and boys while making entire communities safer.

Policymakers at the city and state level can pursue a range of reforms to the juvenile and criminal justice systems in order to enhance public safety while ensuring that young Black men are not disparately impacted by over-policing and over-incarceration. In the juvenile system, policymakers can use alternatives to incarceration to keep young people closer to their communities and prevent reoffending. City and state leaders can use a Positive Youth Development approach to juvenile justice. Positive Youth Development is an “intentional, prosocial approach that engages youth within their communities, schools, organizations, peer

75. <http://laschoolreport.com/restorative-justice-program-dramatically-lowers-days-lost-to-suspensions-in-laUSD/>

76. <http://www.mndaily.com/article/2017/03/minneapolis-police-create-new-division-to-oversee-outreach>

77. <http://jlc.org/blog/diversion-programs-can-help-keep-youth-out-system-preventing-arrests>

groups and families in a manner that is productive and constructive; recognizes, utilizes and enhances young people's strengths; and promotes positive outcomes for young people by providing opportunities, fostering positive relationships and furnishing the support needed to build on their leadership strengths."<sup>78</sup>

At the adult level, states and cities can also pass measures to end practices that disproportionately target people of color—such as mandatory minimums and three strikes laws—and use other pathways, rather than incarceration, for lesser offenses, reinvesting resources into prevention and intervention programs. For example, in **California**, voters passed Proposition 47, which reclassifies several non-violent felonies into misdemeanors. The measure has reduced the state's prison and jail populations, and the resulting savings, \$103 million, is being granted to community and city programs that can help people stay out of prison.<sup>79</sup>

Dozens of public agencies across California—including cities, health and human services divisions and probation and law enforcement departments—submitted proposals to use the savings on counselors and case managers, therapy, housing, job opportunities and much more. For example, "in **Los Angeles**, public health leaders, prosecutors and community organizations will work to greatly expand drug treatment and mental health services, especially for people returning to their communities after being incarcerated.

In **San Diego**, community partners will work closely with county leaders to expand pre-trial diversion programs, so residents can stay in their communities and avoid a conviction by completing a treatment program following arrest. **Merced County** plans to partner with community groups to open a new youth center, creating a safe and productive space for teens and young adults."<sup>80</sup>

Formerly incarcerated people face a range of barriers, from education, to jobs and housing, that prevent them from reestablishing themselves and leading successful lives even after spending time in the justice system. Policy makers can remove those barriers through Fair Chance policies in employment, education, housing and more, by enabling expungement of records and pushing for reentry supports for people leaving jail and prison.

In addition to banning the box, as described in an earlier section, cities can support programs like PowerCorpsPHL,<sup>81</sup> a city of **Philadelphia** AmeriCorps initiative that successfully offers employment opportunities to young people who have been involved with the justice system. PowerCorpsPHL employs young people—mostly young Black men—in service positions that allow them to give back to the community through revitalizing public land and greening the city's infrastructure by building trails, planting trees and refurbishing park benches and playground equipment.

### Spotlight: Birmingham, AL

Birmingham, AL, was selected as one of six pilot sites for the National Initiative for Building Community Trust and Justice<sup>82</sup>, led by the Department of Justice and the National Network for Safe Communities at John Jay College. Mayor William A. Bell engaged the city in this initiative to improve police-community relationships, to transform how police officers interact

78. <https://youth.gov/youth-topics/positive-youth-development>

79. <http://www.latimes.com/politics/la-pol-sac-prop-47-grant-awards-20170329-htmlstory.html>

80. <http://www.calendow.org/proposition-47-delivers-preventionnotpunishment/>

81. [https://www.clasp.org/sites/default/files/publications/2017/08/BMOC\\_Employment.pdf](https://www.clasp.org/sites/default/files/publications/2017/08/BMOC_Employment.pdf)

82. <https://trustandjustice.org/pilot-sites/info/birmingham-alabama>

with youth and community at the beat cop level, including by addressing implicit bias and fostering reconciliation between law enforcement and neighborhoods of color in Birmingham. Already, the city's police force has been trained in procedural justice and implicit bias, with those trainings being made available to the community, so residents are aware of the changes underway within the Birmingham Police Department.

**Spotlight: Los Angeles, CA**

Years of community mobilization and advocacy efforts led by students and parents in Los Angeles County compelled the L.A. Unified School District to transform its discipline policies in 2013, increasing investments in restorative justice and moving away from an over-reliance on school police. Students, parents, teachers, principals and school police have all seen positive impacts from this change, which led to a significant drop in suspensions, expulsions and arrests—particularly for young people of color. The move also contributed to an improvement in school climate by recognizing conflict as an opportunity to establish accountability, trust and relationships among students, parents and teachers rather than turning automatically to discipline and policing. The data shows the move toward restorative justice has improved teachers' respect for students and, in turn, students' respect for teachers.<sup>83</sup>

83. <http://laschoolreport.com/restorative-justice-program-dramatically-lowers-days-lost-to-suspensions-in-lauid/>





letter from a  
*family and community leader*

## We Do This for Our Children and Families

My goal for starting Sisters and Supporters Working Against Gun Violence (SWAG) in Lexington, Kentucky, was simple: to not have one more member who lost a loved one to violence.

I started SWAG, a grassroots organization focused on education, awareness and prevention of gun violence, in honor of my son, Ezavion Lindsey. Ezavion was shot to death at 16, while he was a junior in high school. I raised Ezavion to live life to the fullest, and he did. He was a huge University of Kentucky basketball fan, played on the high school basketball team and dreamed of becoming a basketball star. In addition to school and basketball, he was active in church and worked part time. Anybody that knew him, knew him for his laugh and his smile. He was the life of any room he was in. When I lost Ezavion, I knew I had to dedicate my life to taking action in my son's name, so he can outlive me.

In the aftermath of his shooting, I was very disheartened by how the judicial system handled the matter. I not only had to grieve, I also had to fight for justice and accountability and didn't get access to victim services. Paying for mental health costs put me in a financial bind. No family suffering from loss should have to endure this additional burden. I started talking with other parents who had also been affected by gun violence and heard similar stories. That's how SWAG began.

I didn't start SWAG as a support group, but that's what it has become. At SWAG, the members support one another by attending each other's court hearings. We also work to raise community awareness about the risks and costs of gun violence. For example, we held a lock-in for youth and parents at a local church to show what it's like for families who have experienced a gun-related death.

Beyond working with survivors, we want to create systems change. Our aim is to collaborate with local and state law enforcement and the legislature to ensure that victims are heard and receive support, as well as to change gun laws in Kentucky. We are having impact. The Kentucky Attorney General recently started a survivors' council that includes survivors of community violence to begin identifying what needs to change.

If we truly want safe communities for all, we need more responsibility and accountability for gun ownership. We also need more services available for victims to support them during the court case and beyond. Violence occurs because of a lack of opportunities. We need more childcare, afterschool programs, support for single parents and year-round opportunities to keep young people engaged, productive and off the streets.

Through my work with SWAG, I've come to understand that for every life lost to gun violence, an additional 50 people—family members, friends, members of the community—are impacted. It's difficult to fully grasp the emotional impact of gun violence unless you've experienced it yourself. That's why, no matter what I may be going through, I know that if I call another SWAG mother or a mother who has gone through the same circumstance, she will understand.

### **Tonya Lindsey**

Sisters and Supporters Working Against Gun Violence (SWAG)  
Lexington, KY

city planning *process*

I'm a young Black male who had the world stacked against me and because I had a couple of revolutionary people in my life step in at the right moments at the right time, bullets didn't hit me. I want to be a force against the force of systemic violence. **No successful movement has ever happened without youth and young adults.**

I am proud to have been part of One Love Louisville where our local government recognizes and elevates youth voice in the improvement of social wellness and safer neighborhoods.

– BRANDYN BAILEY, ASSISTANT DIRECTOR, MUHAMMAD ALI INSTITUTE FOR PEACE AND JUSTICE, UNIVERSITY OF LOUISVILLE, KY

## Mobilize all corners of the community toward a common vision and plan

In this section, we share a recommended city planning process within the Cities United roadmap framework.<sup>84</sup> This process can help cities have a strong action plan that is rooted in social justice, equity, youth voice and collaboration, and is supported by goals and objectives that are specific, measurable, achievable, results-focused and time-bound. Cities United utilizes the Roadmap to Safe, Healthy and Hopeful Communities planning process to assist cities as they chart a course to establishing a city-level action plan that will guide a comprehensive, public health approach to reducing violence and incorporating all corners of the community.

### 1. Prepare to Plan

#### 1.1 BUILD POLITICAL WILL TO CHANGE

Developing sustainable solutions that will result in lasting change requires committed leadership from mayors, police chiefs, superintendents of public schools, faith leaders, local heads of health and human services organizations, neighborhood-level elected officials and community leaders.

#### 1.2 CREATE A CITYWIDE WORK GROUP OR LOCAL LEADERSHIP TEAM

Organize a cross-sector public safety and community building leadership team in every city to facilitate efforts within city government and between city government and the community. The working group can encompass multiple sectors, including community services, law enforcement, education, public health and social services as well as the business sector and the faith community. Tap committed individuals to join these efforts to improve community, youth and family outcomes. The working group can also assess existing efforts and needs, identify what's working and connect with leaders and community members addressing these issues.

84. See Roadmap to Safe, Healthy and Hopeful Communities for customizable guidance on creating a city action plan: <http://citiesunited.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/CU-RoadMap-11x25.5brochure-Final-03092017-2-1-1.pdf>

### **1.3 ENGAGE LEADERS IN AREAS MOST IMPACTED BY VIOLENCE**

Bring young people along with community leaders to the table and engage them in a dialogue to save lives. Prioritize youth participation and get comfortable with their presence—youth are critical to lasting change in communities. Youth have the capacity to become violence interrupters but only if we meet them where they are. Young Black men must have a seat at the table when devising solutions that affect their lives. As we note in an earlier section, effectively engaging young people and family members requires understanding their needs and planning meetings and events to accommodate school and work schedules.

### **1.4 BUILD PARTNERSHIPS AND RELATIONSHIPS**

Addressing community violence and developing a city-level action plan takes time. Build partnerships and relationships over the long haul to create an environment of trust while also enabling city agencies and community advocates to work across silos. Ensure the city's action plan and partnerships are designed to endure beyond the term of any individual mayoral administration, to guarantee that the work continues and benefits young people and communities for the foreseeable future.

### **1.5 RAISE AWARENESS**

Key audiences—city residents, decision-makers, business owners, etc.—may not be aware of how community violence affects them nor how a comprehensive, public health approach represents the solution. Use communications and media activities to raise awareness about the urgency of action as well as the emerging city action plan.

### **1.6 CONNECT CITY LEADERS TO A NATIONAL NETWORK**

Help city leaders find out what works in other cities and support them as they borrow and modify successful strategies.

## **2. Construct a Multiyear Plan of Action**

### **2.1 CREATE MULTIYEAR EVALUATION PLAN AND DATA PLAN**

Create a multiyear evaluation plan and data plan that guides the city's efforts and measures progress against key indicators of community development and violence reduction. Cities can create and drive a comprehensive action plan that measures specific outcomes for African American men and boys. Document, monitor and measure outcomes that build in flexibility to modify the plan when outcomes and circumstances warrant.

### **2.2 DEVELOP COMMUNICATIONS PLAN**

Develop a communications plan that will communicate the city's efforts and ensure key audiences understand why their participation is crucial and choose to get involved. Communications can also assist with fundraising and policy change.



### 2.3 ALIGN AND IDENTIFY EVIDENCE-BASED ACTIVITIES

Many violence prevention and violence interruption models exist across the country.<sup>85</sup> Identify models that will work in your city and prioritize evidence-based activities that have been shown to work in other cities.

### 2.4 DEVELOP MULTILAYERED SMART GOALS

Develop SMART (specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and time-bound) goals that will help guide the set of interventions you choose to employ in your city (e.g. public health, education, workforce, etc.) to ensure you make concrete progress against these goals.

### 2.5 DEVELOP BALANCED APPROACH BASED ON PIER (PREVENTION, INTERVENTION, ENFORCEMENT, RE-ENTRY) TACTICS

Addressing youth and community involvement with the justice system is a key aspect of reducing community violence. Draw from PIER tactics used across the country to apply a balanced approach that will work within the context of your city. Involve community, youth, health leaders and law enforcement stakeholders in this process.

### 2.6 DEVELOP AN INTEGRATED RESPONSE STRATEGY

It will take all of us, from city leaders to youth and community members to the business and philanthropic sectors, to tackle the public health crisis of losing our young Black men and boys to community violence. Develop an integrated response strategy across government agencies, public and private sectors, across age groups, civic and community organizations and faith institutions.

### 2.7 BE SYSTEMATIC ABOUT TARGETING RESOURCES WHERE THEY ARE MOST NEEDED

Create grids across the city to identify the targeted geography and understand neighborhoods experiencing violence. Not every neighborhood is equally impacted. Cities must isolate pockets of violence and concentrate efforts and resources to maximize effectiveness. Targeting resources has the wider impact of ensuring safer, healthier and more hopeful communities for every resident across the city.

## 3. Implement a Multiyear Plan of Action

### 3.1 IDENTIFY AND SECURE GOAL OWNERS AND ACTIVITY LEADS

Be clear about roles and responsibilities across city and community stakeholders to ensure that city agencies, community advocates, youth leaders, business owners, etc., all see and understand their measurable role in carrying out the action plan. Ensure there are ways to hold everyone accountable and that incentives are aligned with the goals.

85. See Interventions for Reducing Violence and its Consequences for Young Black Males in America, 2017: [https://gallery.mailchimp.com/a26fd55f7374a0e3b8a5a6f99/files/5b0af200-e9d1-45de-a315-6bfa354bcccd/Interventions\\_for\\_Reducing\\_Violence\\_and\\_its\\_Consequences\\_for\\_Young\\_Black\\_Males\\_in\\_America\\_August\\_2017reduced.pdf](https://gallery.mailchimp.com/a26fd55f7374a0e3b8a5a6f99/files/5b0af200-e9d1-45de-a315-6bfa354bcccd/Interventions_for_Reducing_Violence_and_its_Consequences_for_Young_Black_Males_in_America_August_2017reduced.pdf)

### **3.2 IDENTIFY AND MATCH SUSTAINABLE RESOURCES**

Determine the funding strategy for the city action plan to ensure resources will exist to fund the plan throughout its duration. Rely on a mix of government, foundation, individual donor and business contributions.

### **3.3 IMPLEMENT MULTIYEAR EVALUATION AND DATA PLAN**

Carry out the action plan you have developed across all corners of the city with broad participation and track the activities and outcomes. Include a focus on building and growing capacity to understand and implement multisector, public health-based approaches.

### **3.4 COMMUNICATE SUCCESS AND ACTIVITIES**

Deploy the communications plan and share successes and activities along with challenges to continue to motivate stakeholders to get involved and stay involved, while also mobilizing funders, changing norms and influencing decision-makers.

## **4. Create Sustainability Plan**

### **4.1 IDENTIFY AND MOVE POLICY AGENDA (ORGANIZATIONAL, LOCAL, STATE)**

Policy change will be an important part of ensuring the city action plan can succeed in the medium and long term to reshape community investment, budgeting and priorities that support a comprehensive, public health approach to violence prevention, violence reduction and, ultimately, community development. Recommended policy changes are detailed in the previous Program and Policy Interventions section of this document.

### **4.2 ENHANCE AND GROW ORGANIZATIONAL AND COMMUNITY CAPACITY**

Develop the necessary organizational and community capacity to adequately staff the plan. Be clear on roles and responsibilities as well as metrics to enable the multiple activities in the action plan to be carried out.

### **4.3 SECURE SUSTAINABLE PUBLIC AND PRIVATE FUNDING STREAMS**

Identifying sustainable funding streams across government, foundations, individual donors and business owners will ensure the length of investment required for a city action plan to succeed and make real change.

### **4.4 CONTINUOUSLY ENGAGE PHILANTHROPY**

The local, regional and national philanthropic community will be an important partner in ensuring the city action plan can be sustained for the medium to long term. This is critical as change will not happen overnight and will require sustained investment.

## 5. Develop Continuous Improvement and Evaluation

### 5.1 ANNUALLY REVIEW AND UPDATE MULTIYEAR PLAN OF ACTION

It will be important to regularly review and update the multiyear plan of action to ensure lessons and metrics are continuously being applied to the plan and activities.

### 5.2 IMPLEMENT COMMUNITY FEEDBACK MECHANISMS

Community feedback will form a critical aspect of capturing lessons learned to inform the continuous improvement and evaluation of the plan. Put into place mechanisms for capturing this feedback including community forums and surveys.

### 5.3 DEVELOP COMMUNITY WIDE INTEGRATED GOVERNANCE STRUCTURE

Develop a community wide integrated governance structure that ensures the buy-in of the range of stakeholders whose leadership and participation are required for the plan to succeed.

#### Spotlight: Newport News, VA

Newport News, VA, initiated its first violence prevention initiative, Building Better Futures,<sup>86</sup> centered on young people impacted by community violence in 2011, and in 2014 they hired their first program director, MaRhonda Echols. The city is currently in a strategic planning process to recommit to its efforts and ensure sustainability of their plan for the long haul.

Cities United is aiding the city in its strategic planning, sharing lessons learned from cities around the nation to ensure Newport News is able to build off the data, evaluation, lessons and successes of peer city leaders tackling similar challenges as well as federal initiatives that have captured national best practices.

Community outreach is a central feature of the city's violence intervention and officials have drawn heavily from the Comprehensive Gang Model developed by the DOJ's Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention.<sup>87</sup> The data-driven model has guided the city to focus its efforts in neighborhoods where youth are most impacted by violence.

#### Spotlight: Fort Wayne, IN

The city of Fort Wayne, IN, launched Fort Wayne United in summer 2016,<sup>88</sup> bringing the community together to create opportunities for neighborhoods across the city. The initiative prioritizes improving the life outcomes of young African American men and boys and integrates the city's involvement with Cities United and My Brother's Keeper. The initiative clearly calls out a vision of racial equity centered on Black men and boys: "Every black male in Fort Wayne is respected and valued and has the opportunity to achieve his full potential."<sup>89</sup>

Fort Wayne United seeks to create opportunity for young Black men by showing them career options, such as in the building trades, pairing them with mentors and caring adults. The initiative exposes young people to what happens behind the scenes in the police department and in courtrooms. The programming will enable young men to sit down with police officers to discuss each other's perceptions, perspectives and experiences.

86. <https://www.nnva.gov/1907/Youth-Gang-Violence-Prevention>

87. <https://www.nationalgangcenter.gov/Comprehensive-Gang-Model>

88. <https://www.cityoffortwayne.org/latest-news/3084-mayor-henry-announces-fort-wayne-united-program-to-advance-opportunities-for-african-american-men-and-boys.html>

89. <http://www.fwcommunitydevelopment.org/fwunited>

Cities United has partnered with Fort Wayne since the inception of Fort Wayne United to ensure the community plan brings together stakeholders across the city, with youth opportunity at the center, particularly for young Black men and boys. Faith leaders, schools and educators, local law enforcement, youth leaders, community-based organizations and multiple city departments have all been involved since the initiative's launch.

### Spotlight: Louisville, KY

The city of Louisville, KY, launched its comprehensive, public health approach to violence reduction and building safe, healthy and hopeful communities through the city's Office of Safe and Healthy Neighborhoods,<sup>90</sup> established in 2013. Since initiating phase 1 of the city's plan, a Blueprint for Safe and Healthy Neighborhoods, the city has seen an overall reduction in crime,<sup>91</sup> and a reduction in shootings and homicides of young men under 24. Mayor Greg Fischer recently announced a new 6-point plan<sup>92</sup> to further reduce homicides that includes enforcement, intervention, prevention, community mobilization, organizational change and re-entry.

The city's youth-focused initiatives have met with success including SummerWorks that put 5,200 young people into jobs<sup>93</sup> in summer 2017; Right Turn and REimage programs that have served 600 youth from neighborhoods with high levels of violence,<sup>94</sup> placing them into jobs, college, postsecondary training and workforce education; and One Love Louisville, which has activated young people across the city to drive community-led action plans.<sup>95</sup> The city's initial successes with youth investment and violence reduction sparked a recent multimillion-dollar investment from W.R. Kenan, Jr. Charitable Trust<sup>96</sup> to establish young leader fellowships to continue to provide opportunities for youth at risk of violence.

Cities United has been a partner to the city since 2013, working collaboratively to ensure data and evaluation drive the city's efforts to implement its citywide action plan and creating an exchange of lessons learned by local city leaders to inform other efforts across the country.

90. <https://louisvilleky.gov/government/safe-neighborhoods>

91. <https://louisvilleky.gov/news/crime-down-4-percent-louisville-first-half-2017>

92. <https://louisvilleky.gov/news/mayor-fischer-details-comprehensive-six-point-crime-plan-outlines-call-action>

93. <https://www.summerworks.org/news/2017-record-celebration>

94. <https://louisvilleky.gov/news/reimage-program-expands-give-more-louisville-youth-second-chance-help-prevent-violence>

95. [https://louisvilleky.gov/sites/default/files/safe\\_neighborhoods/youth\\_edition\\_action\\_plan-updated-printersmarks-07072016.pdf](https://louisvilleky.gov/sites/default/files/safe_neighborhoods/youth_edition_action_plan-updated-printersmarks-07072016.pdf)

96. <https://louisvilleky.gov/news/kenan-charitable-trust-invests-over-5-million-boost-life-outcomes-young-black-men-louisville>





about ***cities united***

Sometimes we think we're doing this work alone and to be able to connect with a leader from another city that is on the same mission as you, that's priceless. The difference is in consciousness and awareness around not just municipalities but youth leaders, the private sector and community coming together to say, if we don't solve this problem our cities are going to suffer. **If Cities United wins, we all win.**

– SHAWN DOVE, CEO, CAMPAIGN FOR BLACK MALE ACHIEVEMENT

Cities United was launched in 2011 by former Philadelphia Mayor Michael A. Nutter and Casey Family Programs President and CEO Dr. William C. Bell, who partnered with New Orleans Mayor Mitch Landrieu, Campaign for Black Male Achievement CEO Shawn Dove and the National League of Cities to forge a national network of communities focused on eliminating violence in American cities related to African American men and boys.

Today, this movement has grown to more than 130 cities committed to working with community leaders, families, youth, philanthropic organizations and other stakeholders to cut the homicide rate of our young Black men and boys in half by the year 2025. These cities are focused on restoring hope to their communities and building pathways to justice, employment, education and increased opportunities for residents.

Cities United acts as a strategic resource to mayors and city leaders to help assess their current situations and increase their opportunities for awareness, alignment, action, advocacy and accountability. The organization provides assistance with planning and implementing solutions by sharing best practices, instituting innovative approaches and understanding how and where to reconfigure resources. The members of Cities United hold each other accountable for achieving results, partnering with stakeholders across all corners of the community and at the local, state, regional and national levels.

From the outset, Cities United was based on the simple but fundamental premise that African American men and boys matter and are assets to our nation. Cities United was founded at a time when every 24 hours in America, 14 young people were being gunned down on the streets of our cities. While that number has declined in many major U.S. cities, challenges remain.

Cities United has grown to support a national network of mayors committed to working in partnership with community leaders, families, youth, philanthropic organizations, government officials and other stakeholders to reduce the epidemic of homicide-related deaths and shootings plaguing African American men and boys. We receive support in our mission from Casey Family Programs and the Campaign for Black Male Achievement. Additional support has come from the Ford Foundation, W.K. Kellogg Foundation, the Jacob and Valeria

Langeloth Foundation, William Penn Foundation, the Mayor's Fund of Philadelphia, Lenfest Foundation, John S. and James L. Knight Foundation, William R. Kenan, Jr. Charitable Trust and Walmart Foundation.

In addition to its national community of financial supporters, Cities United engages a broad network of partners, strategic allies and field experts. They include the Association of Black Foundation Executives, BMe, PolicyLink, National League of Cities, Opportunity Agenda, Forward Change Consulting, Opportunity Youth Network, African American Mayors Association and Louisiana Center for Children's Rights.

If your city would like to get involved in developing or implementing a comprehensive, public health-oriented plan to reducing violence, please contact [info@citiesunited.org](mailto:info@citiesunited.org).

A silhouette map of the United States is centered on the page. Overlaid on the map is the text "MORE THAN 130 cities" in a bold, sans-serif font. "MORE THAN" is in a dark blue color, and "130 cities" is in white. Below the map, the text "Reduce homicide rate of young Black men and boys" is written in a bold, dark blue font, followed by "ages 14-24 by 50% by 2025" in a smaller, dark blue font.

**MORE THAN**  
**130 cities**

**Reduce homicide rate of  
young Black men and boys**  
ages 14-24 by 50% by 2025



messaging and  
***communications strategy***



“ I’ve been part of the Little Rock OK program since 6th grade. I’ve learned you don’t have to follow everybody, you can be yourself, do you. Don’t be out here, trying to do all this, being hard for everybody. Just because everybody has a gun doesn’t mean you have to go get a gun.

– SAYVEON LAMBERT, YOUNG LEADER, LITTLE ROCK, AR

The nation has seen far too many African American men and boys lose their lives to community violence and homicides. The acknowledgment of both the loss of life and the dignity of that life, as well as the trauma experienced by families, communities and law enforcement, is critical when communicating with the public. No matter the outcome of a homicide investigation, acknowledging the tragic impact of the death(s) for the family and community is paramount. Being honest about the community’s collective hurt is as important as communicating transparently about law enforcement investigations intended to uncover what happened.

The suggested messaging strategy is meant to help city leaders respond meaningfully to community violence in a way that engenders trust and safety and achieves long-lasting positive change, with the goal of stopping and preventing community violence from occurring in the first place. We want to show our communities the concrete steps and reforms that mayors and city leaders are taking to bring about community transformation and healing.

We want to uplift the individual young people, families and community members impacted by this violence, beyond the aggregate numbers and statistics. Every opportunity to talk about violence is an opportunity to change the norms around violence and show that it is not simply a fact of life; it is preventable and is unacceptable, and all of us—mayors, city leaders, law enforcement, youth, family and community members—must be part of the solution to bring an end to it.

## Messaging Principles

Here we articulate seven core messaging principles critical to building trust, restoring community relationships and strengthening public safety, particularly in the immediate aftermath of an incident of community violence.

**Acknowledge loss of life and the dignity of life.** Acknowledge what has happened. Mourn the tragic loss of life and express condolences for the family. Acknowledge the dignity of the life of the victim and the pain of the family and community. Acknowledge that city leaders are invested in life, and are committed to doing what they can to prevent the loss of life. Do not get drawn into conversations about the moral or criminal character of the individual killed in the incident or the surviving loved ones or family members. Recognize that young Black men and boys are more likely to be victims of violence than perpetrators of violence, and treat them with respect and understanding.

**Highlight the need for collective healing.** Recognize that loss of life is devastating for directly affected family members, along with entire communities and the city as a whole. Let community members know that you recognize the need for healing, and communicate opportunities and spaces for healing.

**Be transparent.** Share as much information as possible on what steps the mayor and police chief are taking to address and to investigate the incident of violence. Community members need to know what is happening, when and why. They need to know you are listening to the community and taking immediate as well as sustained measures to reduce violence and keep all residents safe.

**Engage youth, family and community voices.** Create opportunities for the affected youth, family and community to speak with the mayor and city leaders immediately following an incident or string of incidents. Hold a series of private as well as public conversations—which may be difficult or painful for all involved—to listen, learn and work together on next steps and potential reforms to the city’s response.

**Lift up importance of trust and relationships.** For an authentic healing process, emphasize trust and relationship building with affected family members and the community at large. Reaffirm your commitment to working with everyone in the community to create a safe and vibrant city where all residents can thrive without fear of their neighbors or the police. Show what is being done to heal and strengthen relationships between mayors, city leaders, law enforcement and the communities you serve.

**Share lessons learned.** Show that mayors and city leaders are listening to and learning from the community to prevent any future loss of life. Show what steps or reforms are being taken based on these lessons learned. Remind the community that you are invested in life, and are committed to doing what you can to prevent the loss of life. Show that you are listening and learning to be able to put policies and practices in place to prevent violence.

**Shift the narrative.** Beyond responding to individual incidents, adopt a narrative change approach to messaging and communications around community violence. Elevate positive narratives about communities most impacted by violence, including by lifting up what’s working in these communities, highlighting youth, family and community members who are working for change, and combatting negative and inaccurate coverage of crime and safety in your city.

## Develop a Communications and Messaging Plan

It is important for cities to create a localized strategic communications plan that can help city leaders achieve the programmatic and policy objectives we detail above. Strategic communications can help generate broad-based support for a comprehensive, public health approach to building safe, healthy and hopeful communities. Here we provide six key steps involved in developing a communications and messaging plan.

### STEP 1. Identify your goals as well as communications objectives.

**Goals:** It is critical to begin by identifying your goals, which may be necessary to prioritize as short-term, medium-term and long-term goals. A short-term goal may be to encourage city

council members to vote to adopt a mayor's budget whereas a long-term goal may be to shift all city agencies to apply a public health and trauma-informed approach to their efforts.

**Communications objectives:** Once you are clear on your goals, it is important to establish communications objectives that map to these goals. A short-term communications objective may be demonstrating the impact of city initiatives to show why further budgetary investments are required whereas a long-term communications objective may be defining what a public health and trauma-informed approach looks like and showing why it is effective.

## **STEP 2. Determine your audiences—who you need to reach—and profile them.**

**Audiences:** Determining your target audiences allows you to establish a communications plan that is truly strategic, because it can be tailored to reaching your audiences with your messages and moving them to action. You may have multiple audiences who are a different priority depending on your goal.

For a short-term goal of encouraging a city council to adopt a mayor's budget, the primary audience is the city council. You may even need to further refine this audience mapping to identify which city council members are less familiar with the community impact of the budgetary investments under discussion. For a longer-term goal of introducing a public health and trauma-informed approach across city agencies, a culture change will be required among many stakeholders including law enforcement, hospitals, health departments, educators, housing officials, business owners, etc.

**Profiles:** Profiling your audiences allows you to identify opportunities to meet these audiences where they are. For instance, taking out paid ads in social media may not be the best approach to reaching a city council member who you have determined responds best to one-on-one meetings.

To create an audience profile, answer the following questions in the mindset of that audience:

- Mindset: What do your audiences value? (e.g. *I see myself as a person who... I like it when...I wish more people would...*)
- Ask: What do you want your audiences to do? (e.g. *I should support your efforts because...I should engage with your efforts because...*)
- Barriers: What is keeping them from being supportive? (e.g. *I worry that... It frustrates me when...*)
- Entry: What do they care about? (e.g. *I care about...I really value...*)
- Messengers: Whom do they trust? (e.g. *I really like to hear from...When NAME has something to say, I stop and listen...*)

## **STEP 3. Identify the messages and stories that connect with your audiences, including what action, if any, you want people to take, and why it is needed now.**

**Messages:** Once you have identified your priority audiences and created profiles of them, you will be better equipped to develop messages that your audiences need to hear to be moved to support your efforts. Review what you learned by completing the audience profiles—what do your audiences care about? What values and emotions drive their work?

Build your messages with the following structure, integrating the messaging principles we outline above.

- **Start with the why:** Why should your audiences care about your efforts? How can you show the intersection between what you care about and what they care about? Show the value and vision of safe, healthy and hopeful communities for everyone.
- **Name the barriers:** What barriers are standing in the way of achieving safe, healthy and hopeful communities? Share one or two facts with impact that communicate the urgency of the problem, with a focus on how young African American men and boys are the most vulnerable.
- **Show the how:** How are you approaching your efforts? Are you bringing people together? Are you testing out innovative approaches and identifying best practices? Show your approach and why it matters through your messages.
- **Communicate the impact through data and stories:** What is the impact of your efforts? Can you point to data and stories that show what you have accomplished? When communicating about data, carefully choose one or two facts with impact rather than inundating your audiences with too many statistics. Make sure to identify one or two stories of individuals whose lives have been impacted by your efforts. Make clear the connection between your efforts and the individual's story and conclude the story by showing how your approach has the potential to create similar impact for many individuals, the wider community and the city as a whole.
- **Explain the what:** What programs or activities are you carrying out as part of your approach? Share the high-level details of your programs and activities.
- **Close with the vision and call to action:** What is your bigger vision for the city? Close by showing how your approach, impact and activities will get us to that bigger vision. Name the action(s) you need your audiences to urgently take so we can all be part of realizing the vision.

#### **STEP 4. Identify the strategies you need to achieve your goals and reach your audiences, including the tactics you will use to carry them out.**

**Strategies:** Determine what strategies are required to achieve your goals and reach your audiences. One strategy might be lifting up the voices of law enforcement and youth together, to show how the community policing aspect of your city's approach has been effective and influence audiences who listen to law enforcement and youth. Another strategy might be showcasing individual stories of impact from community members across the city to demonstrate how a broad cross-section of residents have benefited from the city's efforts.

**Tactics:** Tactics refer to the activities you will undertake to carry out the strategies, such as the joint op-ed from law enforcement and youth or the social media series depicting images of community residents accompanied by short microstories about their experiences.

#### **STEP 5. Find the right messengers to share messages and tell stories.**

**Messengers:** Use your audience profiles to select messengers who will move your audiences—the individuals and/or organizations who your audiences listen to. Much of the time, audiences listen best to people who reflect their own values and experiences, e.g. law enforcement talking to law enforcement, community leaders talking with other community members or

youth talking to youth. Other times, your audience may possess a background or experience that may be different from your own, but common values are still shared. The key is to ensure you understand your audience and know who they trust as credible messengers.

**STEP 6. Bring all of these elements together in a strategic communications plan that includes a timeline, roles and responsibilities and metrics for evaluating your success.**

**Strategic communications plan:** A strategic communications plan brings together your goals, communications objectives, target audiences, messages, strategies and tactics in one place to guide your efforts and move you toward your goals.

**Timeline:** The plan should include a timeline that is clear about what activities you will carry out, week by week.

**Roles and responsibilities:** The timeline should incorporate roles and responsibilities of staff, partners and allies.

**Evaluate your success:** The plan should incorporate metrics for evaluating your success. Track outputs (number of op-eds placed, number of social media posts created) as well as outcomes (passage of measures or budgets, number of people engaged in the campaign, number of people who changed behaviors or mindsets based on communications and outreach).

potential *challenges*



The recommendations included in this resource distill emerging best practices and outline suggested responses to stop and prevent community violence and homicides. These recommendations are rooted in prevention and community transformation, and we prioritize developing and implementing a comprehensive, public health approach to reducing violence that affects young African American men and boys.

However, we understand and acknowledge that each city is grappling with unique challenges that may stand in the way of implementing the recommendations outlined in this resource. Potential challenges include:

- Cities' geographic location
- Size of cities and complexity of roles and relationships
- Budgetary implications
- Long-standing systemic barriers to tackling challenges and conditions that Black men and boys face including racial and economic inequity
- Youth and community distrust of law enforcement, the courts or city leaders who may be perceived as being ineffective in measures to reduce violence
- Resistance to change inside and outside City Hall

We also understand and acknowledge that each city and county is located within a unique legal and political environment so that uniform program and policy changes are not possible across every jurisdiction. The recommendations outlined in this resource spotlight best practices that can and should be tailored to local legal and policy realities.

Cities United can serve as a resource to aid cities that are working to strengthen and improve their responses to community violence and homicides. Cities United can draw upon its network of mayors, city leaders, police chiefs and state and federal government agencies to facilitate conversations, channel resources and support reforms.

further *reading*

This section includes a partial list of the tools and publications we drew upon to create this resource with links where available. Footnotes throughout also cite our sources.

## Overall

### **A Companion to Multi-Sector Partnerships for Preventing Violence, a Collaboration Multiplier Guide, Prevention Institute**

[https://www.preventioninstitute.org/sites/default/files/publications/A%20Multi-Sector%20Approach%20to%20Preventing%20Violence\\_0.pdf](https://www.preventioninstitute.org/sites/default/files/publications/A%20Multi-Sector%20Approach%20to%20Preventing%20Violence_0.pdf)

### **Best Practices for the Prevention of Youth Homicide and Severe Youth Violence**

Johns Hopkins Urban Health Institute

[http://urbanhealth.jhu.edu/media/best\\_practices/violence\\_prevention.pdf](http://urbanhealth.jhu.edu/media/best_practices/violence_prevention.pdf)

### **Campaign for Black Male Achievement, High School Excellence Framework**

<https://blackmaleachievement.org/blog/high-school-excellence-a-critical-measure-of-success-for-black-male-students>

### **Multi-Sector Partnerships for Preventing Violence: A Guide for Using Collaboration Multiplier to Improve Safety Outcomes, Prevention Institute**

<https://www.preventioninstitute.org/tools/multi-sector-partnerships-preventing-violence-guide-using-collaboration-multiplier>

### **National Child Traumatic Stress Network on Community Violence**

<http://www.nctsn.org/trauma-types/community-violence>

### **Oakland Unified School District, Community Schools Research Brief**

<https://www.ousd.org/cms/lib/CA01001176/Centricity/Domain/97/CS%20teaching%20and%20learning%20brief.pdf>

### **The Guardian US gun violence database**

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/mar/20/mapping-gun-murders-micro-level-new-data-2015>

## Mayor and City Leader Resources and Commentary

### **Baltimore - A Call to Action - 2015**

<https://www.opnltr.com/letter/call-action%E2%80%94open-letter-mayor-stephanie-rawlings-blake>

### **Boston - Mayor's Dashboard**

Includes data on homicides by year

<http://www.cityofboston.gov/mayorsdashboard/>

### **Chicago - Mayors Commission for a Safer Chicago - Strategic Plan - 2015**

[http://www.cityofchicago.org/content/dam/city/depts/mayor/supp\\_info/Chi\\_SaferChicago\\_StrategicReport\\_final.pdf](http://www.cityofchicago.org/content/dam/city/depts/mayor/supp_info/Chi_SaferChicago_StrategicReport_final.pdf)

**Columbia, MO - Mayors Taskforce on Community Violence Recommendations - 2014**

<https://www.como.gov/downloadfile.php?id=579>

**Report of the Safer Newark Council, 2016: A Call to Action**

<http://www.safernewark.org/report-of-the-safer-newark-council-2016-a-call-to-action/>

**New Orleans - Comprehensive Murder Reduction Strategy - 2013**

[http://www.nola.gov/nola/media/Mayor-s-Office/Files/NOLA%20FOR%20LIFE/NOLA-FOR-LIFE-Sept2013-book-pdf\\_1.pdf](http://www.nola.gov/nola/media/Mayor-s-Office/Files/NOLA%20FOR%20LIFE/NOLA-FOR-LIFE-Sept2013-book-pdf_1.pdf)

**New Orleans - Mayors Strategic Command to Reduce Murders - 2014**

<http://www.nola.gov/getattachment/Criminal-Justice-Coordination/Reports/2012-2013-Executive-Summary-Murders-and-Non-Fatal-Shootings.pdf/>

**San Francisco - How our city can stem homicides - 2015**

<https://www.sfchronicle.com/opinion/openforum/article/S-F-Mayor-Ed-Lee-How-our-city-can-stem-homicides-6057528.php>

## Relevant Articles

**Big data reducing homicides in cities across the Americas**

Scientific American, 2015

<http://www.scientificamerican.com/article/big-data-are-reducing-homicides-in-cities-across-the-americas/>

**How America's Murder Capital Is Using Innovation Strategy To Reduce Violent Death**

Fast Company 2014

<http://www.fastcoexist.com/3034879/how-americas-murder-capital-is-using-innovation-strategy-to-reduce-violent-deaths>

**Mayors: Get a backbone and pass gun control**

Politico Survey - 2015

<http://www.politico.com/magazine/story/2015/10/mayors-survey-congress-pass-gun-control-reform-213296>

## Cities United Resources

**Violence Trends, Patterns and Consequences for Black Males in America: A Call to Action, 2016**

<http://citiesunited.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/Violence-Trends-Patterns-and-Consequences-for-Black-Males-in-America-A-Call-to-Action.pdf>

**Four Proven Ways: Violence Reduction Strategies, 2017**

<http://citiesunited.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/Four-Proven-Ways-NICJR-Cities-United-June-2017.pdf>

**Interventions for Reducing Violence and its Consequences for Young Black Males in America, 2017**

[https://gallery.mailchimp.com/a26fd55f7374a0e3b8a5a6f99/files/5b0af200-e9d1-45de-a315-6bfa354bcccd/Interventions\\_for\\_Reducing\\_Violence\\_and\\_its\\_Consequences\\_for\\_Young\\_Black\\_Males\\_in\\_America\\_August\\_2017reduced.pdf](https://gallery.mailchimp.com/a26fd55f7374a0e3b8a5a6f99/files/5b0af200-e9d1-45de-a315-6bfa354bcccd/Interventions_for_Reducing_Violence_and_its_Consequences_for_Young_Black_Males_in_America_August_2017reduced.pdf)

**A Strategic Resource for Mayors on Police Involved Shootings and In-Custody Deaths, 2017**

<http://citiesunited.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/A-Strategic-Resource-for-Mayors-on-Police-Involved-Shootings-and-In-Custody-Deaths-2017.pdf>

**Cities United Roadmap to Safe, Healthy and Hopeful Communities: A Guide to City Action Planning, 2017**

<http://citiesunited.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/CU-RoadMap-11x25.5brochure-Final-03092017-2-1-1.pdf>

## Other Resources

**PICO's Live Free report on gun violence jointly with the Law Center to Prevent Violence, released a new report in July 2016: "Healing Communities in Crisis," which offers concrete solutions for reducing urban gun violence.**

<http://lawcenter.giffords.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/Healing-Communities-in-Crisis-URL.pdf>

**Stand your ground laws contributing to homicides**

<http://nulwb.stage.iamempowered.com/sites/nulwb.iamempowered.com/files/SYG%20Report%20Press%20Release.pdf>

**Youth Violence: A Report of the Surgeon General, 2001**

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/20669522>

acknowledgments



We are grateful to the mayors, city leaders, public safety and government agency officers who took the time to speak with us as we developed this mayors' resource. We are indebted to the community leaders and advocates, as well as young men and family members who have lost loved ones to community violence and homicides, who took time out of their busy schedules to share their critical insights.

We thank the members of the Cities United advisory board, without whose leadership this resource and the broader work of Cities United would not be possible. We also thank the funders who make this work possible, including Casey Family Programs and the Campaign for Black Male Achievement. Additional support has come from the Ford Foundation, W.K. Kellogg Foundation, the Jacob and Valeria Langeloth Foundation, William Penn Foundation, the Mayor's Fund of Philadelphia, Lenfest Foundation, John S. and James L. Knight Foundation, William R. Kenan, Jr. Charitable Trust and Walmart Foundation.

We are grateful to the numerous colleagues who worked to develop and produce this document including: Casey Family Programs (strategic insight, research, editing, design), Forward Change Consulting (research, design), First Degree Consulting (strategic insight, research) and Wonder: Strategies for Good (strategic insight, research and writing).

partners

### Mayors



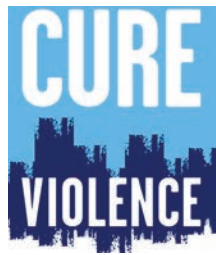
### Law enforcement



### Local partners



National partners







*Working Together* to Build Safe, Healthy and *Hopeful Communities*







# cities united





# cities united

2500 Montgomery Street | Suite 9

Louisville, KY 40212

502-614-6333 | [citiesunited.org](http://citiesunited.org)