



Violence Reduction Initiative

Change takes all of us

Kansas City's Violence Impact Review

September 2023

Kansas City is entering into a season of unprecedented collaboration in the violence reduction space. Across the city, diverse partnerships have started to collectively address violence prevention, intervention, enforcement, reentry support and expanded social services. A holistic approach affirms the complexity of the issue at hand and recognizes that there is no single entity or solution to the problem of violence. This report expands on the collective work undertaken in Kansas City over the past year and summarizes the current efforts.

Expand Community Leadership

From a neighborhood level, weekly community-led meetings bring together stakeholders from across the violence reduction spectrum. All participants are asked the same question, "What can we do to keep our young people safe?" From an initial group of 25 people, the weekly convenings have grown to more than 60 strategic partners ranging from neighborhood stakeholders to nonprofit staff, justice system professionals to city leadership. Key actions to reduce violence have included:

- Training residents in evidence-based practices such as conflict resolution and de-escalation skills
- Launching a youth employment program that is growing to serve over 1,000 young people annually
- Improving physical environments within communities most impacted by violence: neighborhood clean ups; repairing signage and property damaged by bullets; expanded lighting
- Establishing a regular cadence of door-to-door canvassing with under-engaged community members
- Accelerating early prevention with employment, education and mental health support specifically for disconnected/absentee youth and young adults

Recast Drivers of Violence

A novel program launched in Kansas City that works with individuals who are driving much of the violence, supporting an established network of those likely to shoot or be shot who are seeking a different lifestyle. These critical individuals are offered education support and stipends for living expenses, thereby expanding their access to livable wage employment and new opportunities. Elevating young people is the solution to end the cycle of violence.

Street outreach programs are working across peer organizations to better protect and treat young people. Over the past six months, there has been a 20 percent increase in invitations to visit shooting scenes and connect with those directly affected sent to faith leaders, chaplains and community members who have proximate, lived experiences.

While for many years, Kansas City had institutional, formal programs working with individuals directly impacted by violence, these programs lacked sustained impact due to short-term, unstable funding. Public funding in this space has grown 1,100 percent to \$6MM dollars annually. A 30 percent expansion in staffing and funding streams has amassed small teams of professionals specially trained to intervene and de-escalate violent situations.

Increase Victim, Family, & Neighborhood Resources

From an institutional level, more government agencies are aligned to support violence reduction. Over the last two years, previously siloed teams of staff who case manage the recovery process of nonfatal shooting victims have been brought together under a single office. At the same time, the city maintains a modest staff team that responds to gun violence-related situations within area hospitals. Services are thereby streamlined to individuals and families, leading to more significant learnings into what works.

Coinciding with strengthened relational bonds, expanded funds are being deployed to families and individuals who are directly proximate to violence. One-third of Kansas City families who have experienced the homicide of a loved one now receive assistance with funeral expenses. A quarter million dollars was recently allocated to relocate individuals and families who witness violence and fear for their safety. Expanded funding has been mobilized for repairing property damage caused by violent actions. These funding efforts

have enabled the referral of social and emotional support to 147 individuals most likely to shoot or be shot.

Communities most impacted by violence are receiving investments in public funding and resources. Physical improvements to neighborhoods include enhanced lighting, street signage and design. A recently passed city council ordinance created new processes to streamline fixes and improvements within these communities.

Invest in Research & Innovation

This spring brought about a renewed focus on data and evaluation in violence reduction. Evidence-based practices incorporating the expertise of communities most impacted by violence are taking center stage.¹ Research partners from Kansas City academic institutions are assisting in the evaluation and improvement of violence reduction practice and praxis.

City and county government staff have proactively engaged regional and federal partners to learn from and adopt institutional practices that more effectively reduce violence. Of note, local law enforcement are involved in community-led violence reduction meetings, with the vision of evidence-based practices and community leadership informing future enforcement strategies. Enforcement strategies have included increasing law enforcement interventions and social service resources to individuals at considerable risk of violence, as well as reprioritizing the missing persons unit and illegal firearms squad.

Over the past year, law enforcement streamlined the weekly sharing of information related to shootings with non-law enforcement agencies who then follow up with impacted individuals. All of this is possible due to a renewed emphasis on rebuilding trust between the community and the justice system.

A referral system recently rolled out at the county level, thereby increasing cross-agency communication and tracking. This platform unifies the referral

¹ These include: the Hindelang Criminal Justice Research Center (University at Albany); Center for Violence Prevention and Community Safety (Arizona State University); Center for Criminal Justice Research (University of Cincinnati); Criminal Justice Research Center (Ohio State University); Consortium for Crime and Justice Research (University of Nebraska-Omaha); Center for Public Safety Initiatives (Rochester Institute of Technology); Center for Criminal Justice Research (Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis); and the Justice Center for Research (Penn State University).

process, placing multiple agencies and organizations that work with populations affected by violence under a single technology platform.

The mutual trust currently being fostered has increased the utilization of justice system data to better support those impacted by violence. Partner organizations visit prisons and prepare past trigger-pullers for a more peaceful and prosperous reentry. Upon release, hundreds of Kansas City residents are receiving re-entry support and connections to meaningful employment.

Conclusion

Significant growth and opportunity exist considering newly invigorated collaborations. By deepening the relationship across public and private, formal and informal, institutional and community partners, new elements of violence prevention are regularly being deployed. While much has been achieved in the burgeoning start of the Kansas City collective to reduce violence, increased work remains to be done.

Prepared by

