



SAFE AND THRIVING YOUTH

Central Iowa's
Youth Violence
Reduction Plan

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Executive Summary

Empowering Greater Des Moines: Building a Safer Community Together

Despite the complex challenges confronting the central Iowa community, its people possess the power to spark positive change when they unite. This plan presents a comprehensive strategy to address community violence, uplift our youth, and cultivate a safer, more supportive environment for everyone.

The central Iowa community has come together with a shared vision of fostering a safer, more peaceful home. United Way of Central Iowa convened more than 100 dedicated community members through in-person and virtual sessions over 12 months to learn, provide insights and guidance, offer feedback, and reflect on opportunities. Participants have united to forge a path forward, engaging in monthly community conversations, a book study, a leadership day-retreat, and an intensive 6-week training program. These efforts, facilitated by Tony Wilson and Rachel Rockwell of Cultivating Culture

Developing Communities (CCDC), have all aimed to craft a comprehensive plan to address violence and support at-risk youth in central Iowa. A brighter, safer future for all is being built together.

Developing and implementing a comprehensive youth violence prevention strategy that departs from past practices, engages partners at all levels, and embodies the aspirations of central Iowa residents is of great importance and urgency. A critical mass of community members and leaders have united for this endeavor. By establishing robust systems, structures, and relationships, the coalition aims to significantly reduce violence within the next 5 years. Achieving sustainable long-term change requires intentional early and intermediate efforts. Community engagement, cross-sector collaboration, and coordination are seen as the cornerstones of a successful strategy to create a safer and more peaceful future.

Des Moines Police report they took 780 guns off the streets in 2022, the highest ever recorded in the city. What's especially worrisome about that number is that many of those firearms belonged to children.

Introduction

The Central Iowa Youth Violence Reduction Plan aims to prevent gun violence among youth, reduce shootings, and improve access to services for community members impacted by violence. It seeks to enhance residents' perception of safety and social cohesion, and break cycles of violence. Adopting a public health approach, this Community Violence Intervention (CVI) focuses on individuals at high risk of gun violence victimization and offenses. By leveraging evidence-based strategies and fostering collaboration among community stakeholders, it emphasizes prevention, intervention, and addressing the root causes of violence to achieve long-term, sustainable change, ultimately creating a safer and more supportive community environment. Key components of the plan include:

Enhance community, law enforcement, and social service engagement.

Addressing past issues and promoting reconciliation to build trust and collaboration among community leaders, law enforcement, government, and social service agencies. This will improve services and support for victims, families, and community members.

Provide wrap-around services and supports.

Prioritizing high-risk individuals and integrating cognitive behavioral therapy, restorative practices, therapeutic arts, and trauma-informed care.

Promote of hope, belonging, and peace.

Grassroots engagement and outreach led by credible messengers and community leaders to foster a sense of community solidarity and resilience.

Plan goals could include a reduction in the number of:

- Shots fired.
- Individuals victimized by gun violence.
- Individuals arrested/incarcerated for gun charges.
- Gun homicides.

Introduction

Community violence intervention plans are not one-size-fits-all. Each community has unique needs, historical context, existing partnerships, and emerging leadership. To create an effective plan, members of the central Iowa community have engaged with facilitators to understand evidence-based practice, elevated diverse voices, and maintained active participation. The following priorities have been pulled from evidence-based best practices and first-hand experiences as the framework for the development of the plan:

- Engage trusted messengers and practitioners.

- Honor insights from individuals who are respected and credible within the community.
- Trusted messengers can effectively deliver key intervention elements, such as conflict resolution techniques or violence prevention education.

- Involve community representatives as full partners.

- Community members directly impacted by violence should be active participants.
- Partner input and guidance shape the intervention's approach, ensuring relevance and cultural sensitivity.

- Focus on high-risk individuals.

- Prioritize those at the highest risk of experiencing or perpetrating violence.
- Targeted interventions can prevent incidents and address root causes.

- Use data responsibly.

- Gather data from multiple sources, and critically evaluate it for biases (racial, ethnic, economic, etc.).
- Informed decisions require accurate, unbiased information.

- Address trauma and community well-being.

- Recognize the impact of trauma on individuals and the broader population.
- Tailor interventions to promote healing and resilience.

- Build authentic relationships.

- Engage public, private, and community stakeholders.
- Strengthen community resilience by fostering trust and collaboration.

- Prioritize equity.

- Understand social, demographic, economic, and institutional factors perpetuating violence.
- Direct supportive responses to neighborhoods and individuals with the greatest need.

Background

National Trends

Cities around the country experienced increases in homicides and aggravated assaults starting in 2020 when the firearm homicide rate increased 35% from 4.6 to 6.1 per 100,000 persons, and then increased 8% more in 2021 to 6.6 per 100,000, resulting in the highest rate since 1993. ¹

According to the Pew Research Center, which also analyzed the CDC death data, the number of children and teens under 18 who died from guns spiked by 50% between 2019 and 2021. ²

In 2021 firearms became the leading cause of death for children and adolescents aged 1 to 19 in the United States.


A staggering 4,733 young lives were extinguished by bullets, surpassing even car crashes and other diseases. ³

Most homicide victims are young males who are killed by other young males and who die as the result of firearm injuries. In 2022, 92% of youth homicide victims (10-24 years old) and 87% of young adult homicide victims (25- 34 years old) were killed with a firearm. ⁴

In addition to the direct impacts of gun violence, youth experience indirect impacts of that violence. Research suggests that youth may experience symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder and anxiety in response to gun violence. Specifically, young survivors of firearm-related injuries may be at increased risk of mental health conditions and substance use disorders. Furthermore, gun violence disproportionately affects many children of color, particularly Black children, and children living in areas with a high concentration of poverty. ⁵

Background

Polk County Data

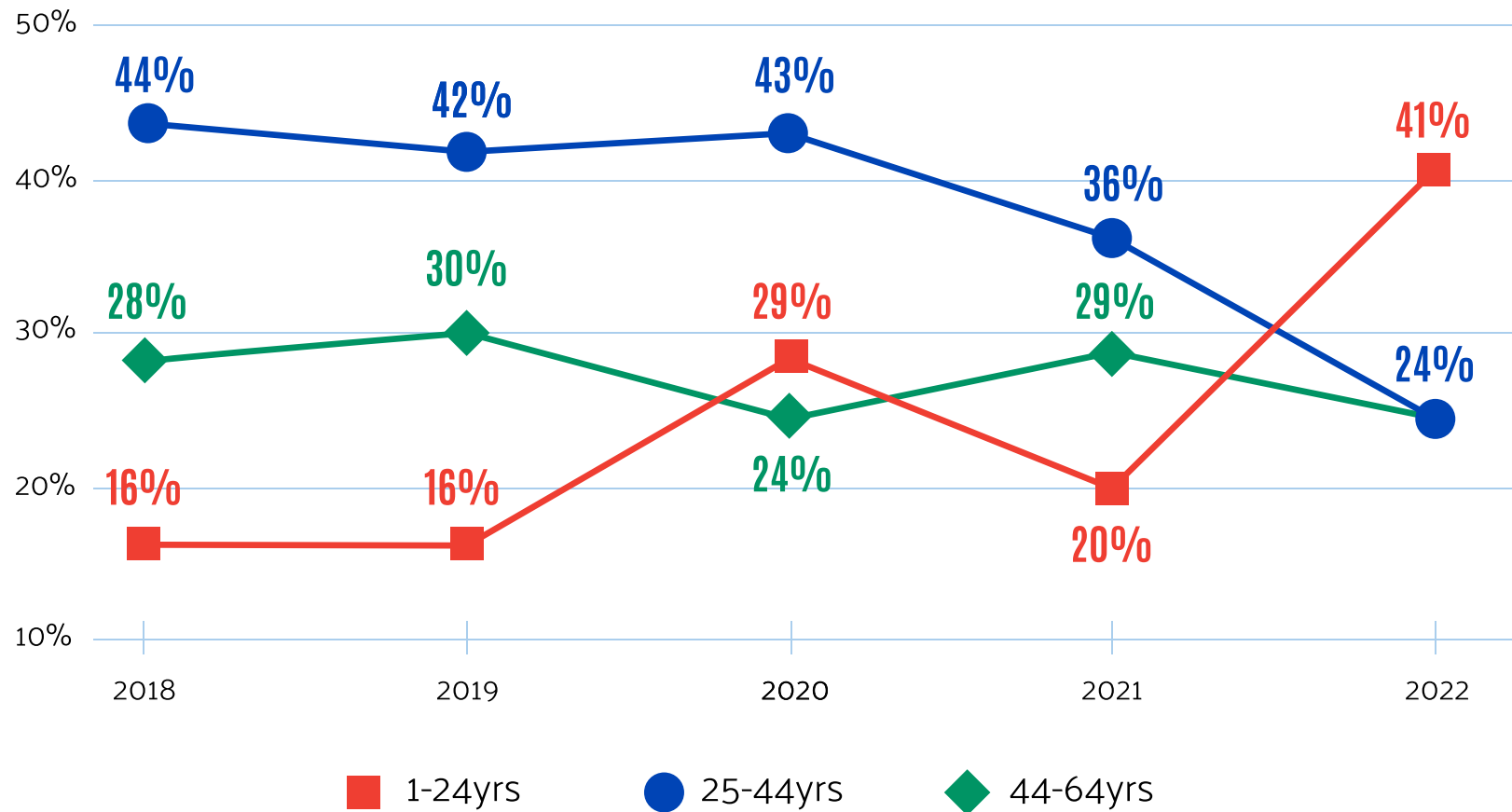


In an average year, **12 children and young adults** die as a result of gun-related injuries.

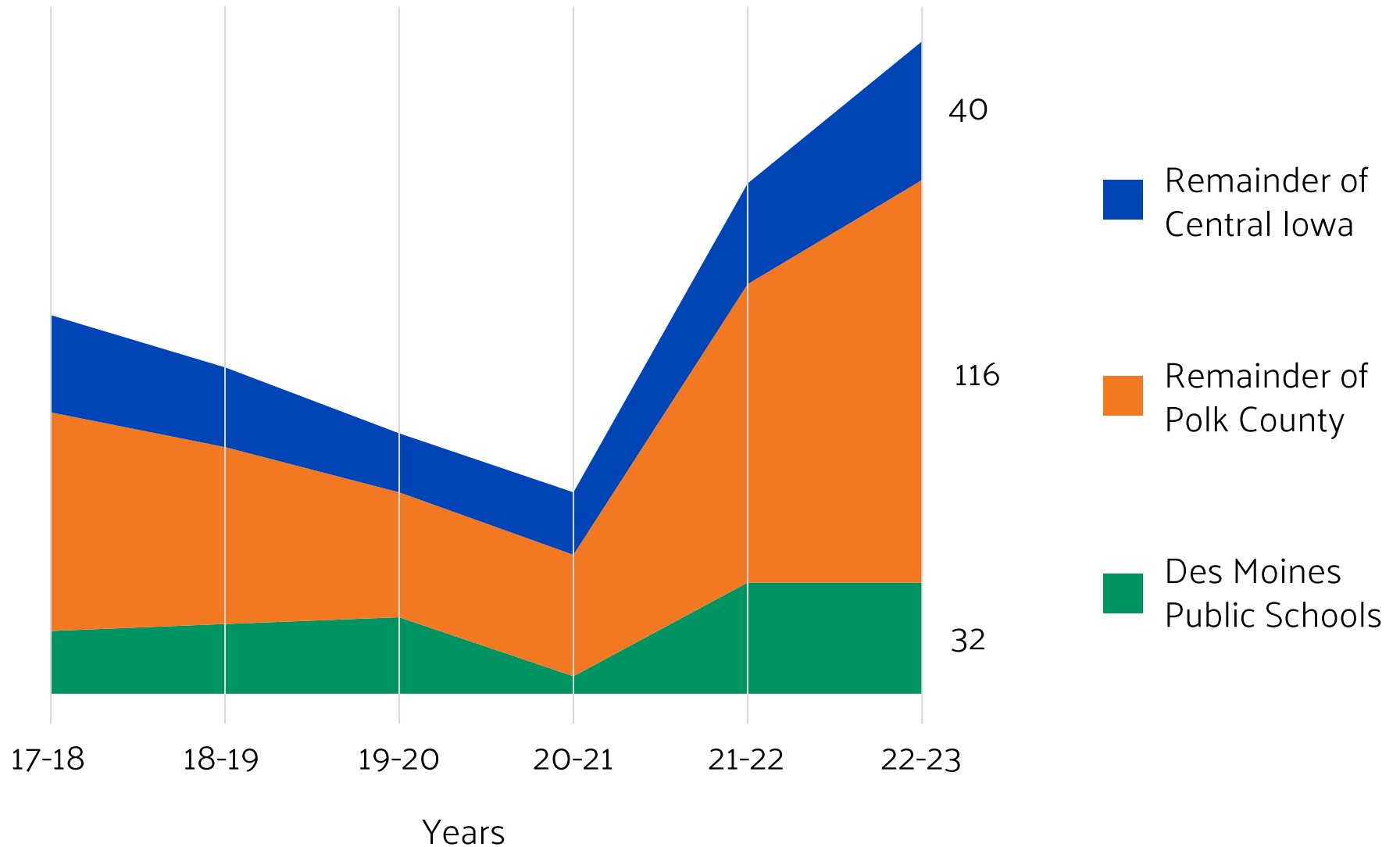
Children and young adults represent **25% of all gun-related deaths**.

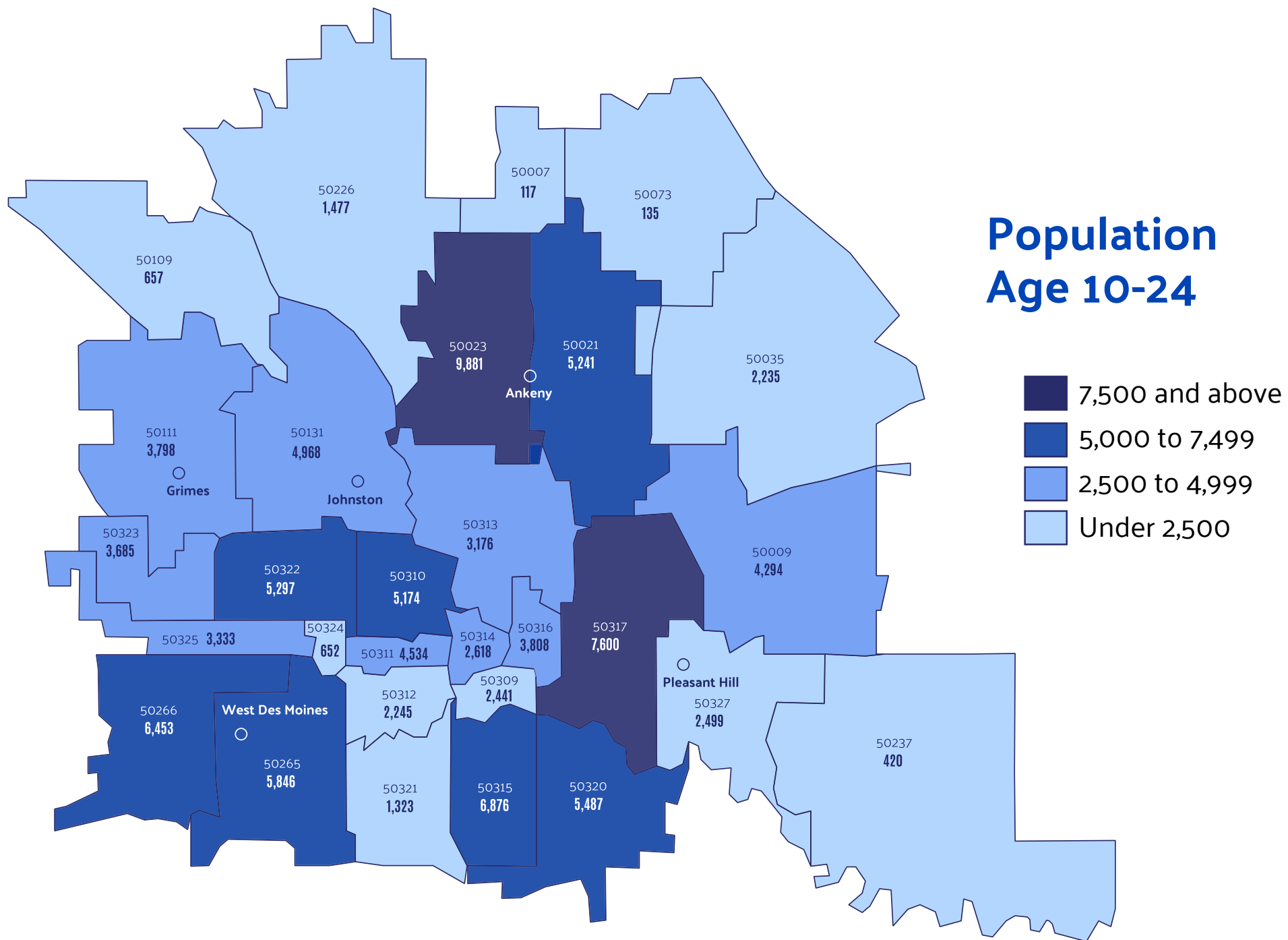
In 2022, **youth (ages 1 to 24 years)** accounted for **41% of all gun-related deaths**.

Percentage of Total Gun-Related Deaths by Age Group (1-64 Years) in Polk County, 2018-2022

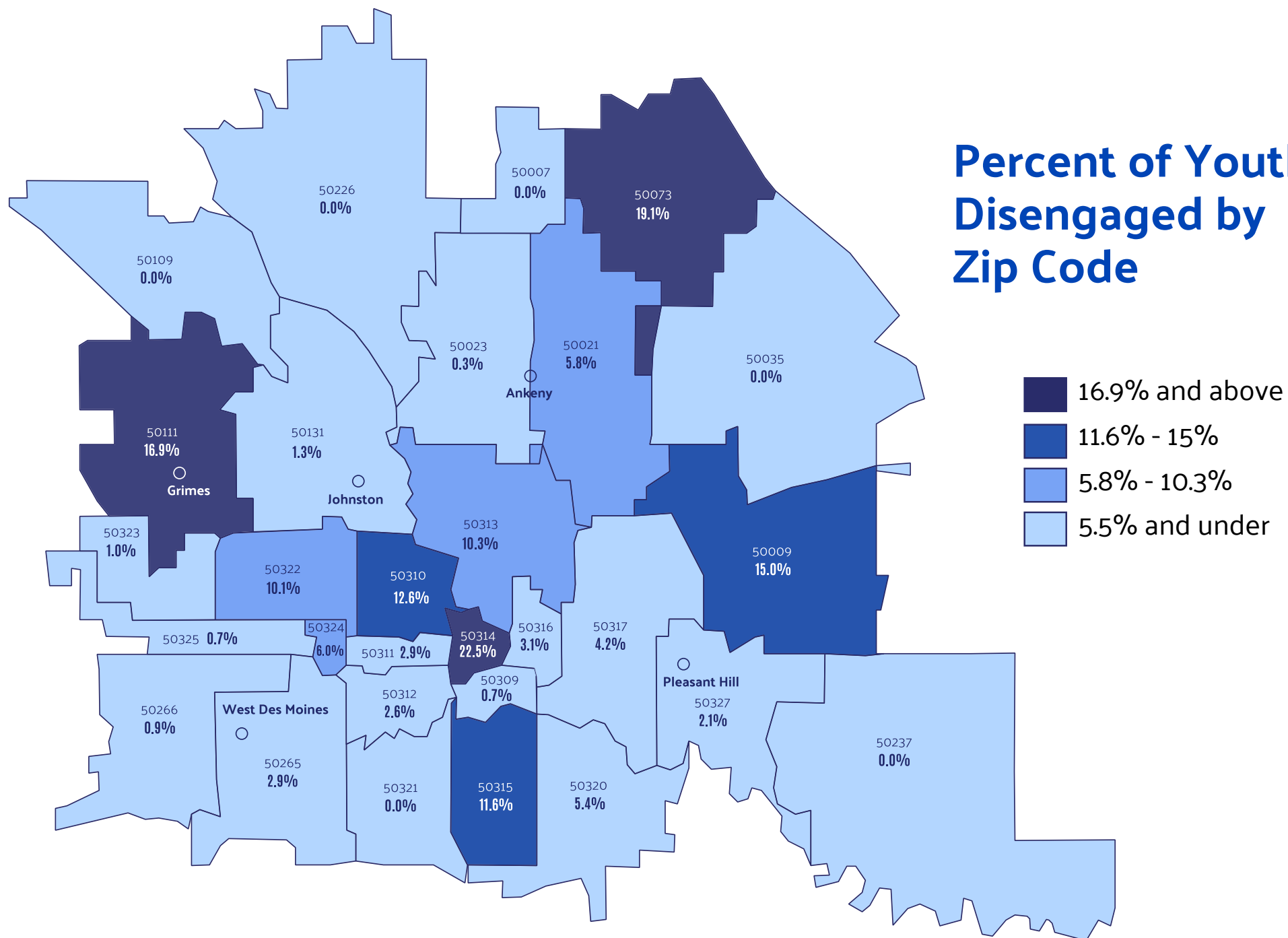


Central Iowa Weapons Related Suspensions and Expulsions

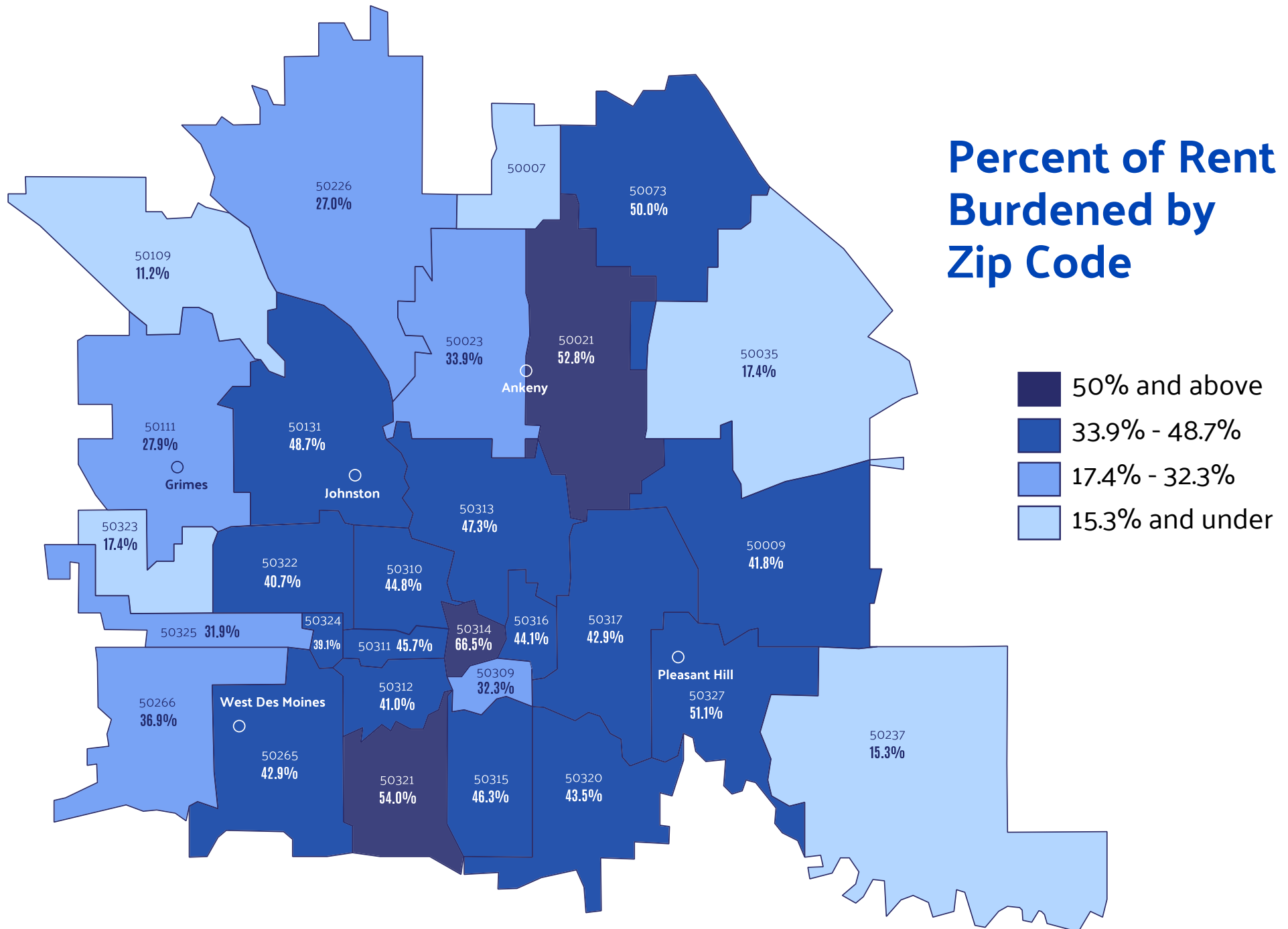




Percent of Youth Disengaged by Zip Code



Percent of Rent Burdened by Zip Code



Background

Local Impact Stories

Cities around the country have experienced increases in homicides. In central Iowa, where neighborhoods intersect and lives intertwine, firearm violence presents a pressing challenge. The statistics paint a sobering picture—a surge in homicides and a rising tide of tragedy. Among the lives lost to gun violence nationally, Des Moines has its own stories to tell.

November 14, 2021: A stray bullet found its mark—a 2-year-old struck in the leg during an apparent drive-by shooting in the Magnolia Park neighborhood in Des Moines. Simultaneously, 18-year-old Dean Titus Deng breathed his last breath, a gunshot wound claiming his future in Capitol Park. And just days earlier 15-year-old Isaiah Fernandez-Smith fell victim near Evelyn K. Davis Park.

March 7, 2022: A shooting occurred near East High School in Des Moines, Iowa. At least 35 gunshots were fired from three vehicles. Tragically, 15-year-old Jose David Lopez was killed, and two female students were critically wounded. Within hours, six teenage males were arrested: four in adult court and two in juvenile court, all charged with first-degree murder and attempted murder. Additionally, four more teens were later charged in connection to the incident.

January 12, 2023: Two students, Gionni Dameron, 18, and Rashad Carr, 16, were killed at Starts Right Here, an alternative education program for at-risk youth. Will Keeps, the founder and CEO of Starts Right Here, was wounded in the shooting.

A cycle of violence is apparent,
and youth are caught up in it.

In the aftermath of so many senseless tragedies, the central Iowa community has rallied together. United Way of Central Iowa and local leaders formed the Safe and Thriving Youth steering committee, and after a March 2023 convening, decided to engage the community in a yearlong process to build capacity for and develop a plan.

Community Engagement

The central Iowa community refuses to be defined by tragedy. A coalition of community leaders, activists, experts, and concerned citizens have come together, envisioning a future woven with safety, resilience, and opportunity. In this future, schools will transform into vibrant centers of learning and be equipped with essential mental health resources. Youth-led initiatives will tackle bullying and violence head-on. Neighborhoods will become safe havens through community policing and restorative justice, infused with hope and love.

In the journey to address violence, attendees discovered the power of collaboration and engaged the wisdom of our young people. Through open dialogue, participants built a foundation of mutual respect and clear expectations. Together they explored the critical role of public health agencies and realized the strength and potential of collective impact.

Eager to contribute, many have overcome division and doubt while discovering successful engagement strategies. From innovative brainstorming to youth empowerment, community

leaders experienced the joy of mutual support. As we move forward, we carry the lessons of the past year and the knowledge that encouragement fuels our journey. Together, the community that has formed is ready to implement a plan that will make central Iowa a model for peace and collaboration.

Avoiding the Worst-Case Scenario

Early in our planning process, partners identified a worst-case scenario: a lack of a comprehensive plan leading to increased violence, silos among organizations, and a sense of hopelessness among youth. This scenario is all too familiar, and participants are committed to avoiding it.

This plan focuses on systems over individual organizations, collaboration over competition, and community empowerment over isolation.

Striving for the Best-Case Scenario

The best-case scenario is a community transformed: a strong coalition and comprehensive plan creates increased youth safety, a sense of belonging, and a significant reduction in violence. This includes:

- Youth-driven violence reduction strategies.
- Sustainable youth-developed approaches.
- Committed stakeholders working collaboratively.
- Active engagement, research, and implementation.
- A culture of appreciation, understanding, and unity.

Commitment to Success

Participants committed to checking egos at the door, understanding roles, and making progress towards mental health and wellness goals. Individuals attested they will step up, engage actively, and show their commitment by contributing eagerly to learning and growth. This collective commitment will ensure a sustainable approach, far beyond the initial planning phase.

A Future of Peace and Possibility

The central Iowa community has the potential to be a model for how cities can come together to address violence and build a safer, more supportive environment. Great potential exists for a future where young people thrive, where organizations collaborate seamlessly, and where all community members feel valued and heard. This plan outlines the path forward. Now, it is time to come together and make this vision a reality. To make this vision tangible participants engaged in an asset mapping exercise. They broke into small groups to brainstorm existing local assets to break cycles of violence, increase peace, and foster prosperity in the community by preventing gun violence and the loss of young lives. Participants were briefed on the structure needed for a successful plan. They were asked to nominate five community members for an Executive Stakeholders Group to oversee the plan implementation, including representatives from multiple sectors and community members.

The Research & Learning

The Center for Disease Control reports that community violence, including homicides involving firearms, is a significant public health concern. A public health approach addresses multiple factors that influence violence and engages multiple sectors, such as public health, government, and business.

The Plan includes a mix of strategies and approaches that address several risk and protective factors and how these factors affect people, communities, and society. These strategies are intended to change norms, environments, organizations, and behaviors in ways that prevent violence and buffer against the risk for violence. Stopping youth violence before it occurs and sustaining a proactive approach throughout childhood and adolescence can be done with available programs, practices, and policies.

Research shows that community violence is generally not random or widespread, but rather concentrated among a very small number of high-risk individuals and groups. By focusing interventions on this population, this tactic can be highly effective in reducing overall community violence.

CCDC Comprehensive Community Violence Plan

The
community
recognizes its
gun violence
problems.

Law enforcement
and other key
institutional
administrators
are enlisted as
key partners.

The collaborative
mobilizes
and sustains
gun violence
reduction activities.

The
collaborative
develops a
comprehensive
vision and plan.

The
collaborative
seeks
resources.

The
collaborative
develops a
leadership
structure.

The Research & Learning

In his book, *Bleeding Out*, Thomas Abt stresses that tackling urban violence is key to social and economic progress. He explains that violence keeps urban areas poor and disrupts vital services like education, healthcare, and business. Abt believes that ensuring security is the first step towards recovery and prosperity in violence-affected communities. "... focusing on violence will not only save lives, but it is, again, the necessary first step on the path to those larger goals. Urban violence acts as a linchpin for urban poverty, locking in the conditions of concentrated poverty into place and undermining efforts to achieve broader social and economic progress. Teachers cannot teach and schools cannot educate when surrounded by violence. Doctors and hospitals cannot treat whole neighborhoods suffering from trauma-induced anxiety and depression. Businesses will not stay or hire in areas where murder is commonplace. Some measure of security must be provided before the broader and deeper process of recovery can begin. Communities confronting high rates of violence must start where they are, with the violence that is right in front of them. The surest path to prosperity begins with peace." ⁶

Strong partnerships and trust between law enforcement (including U.S. Attorney, Polk County Attorney, city police, adult probation and parole, and juvenile court representatives), community organizations, and residents is crucial for effective violence prevention and increases the willingness of community members to cooperate in violence prevention efforts. Community-based organizations and grass-roots efforts play a vital role in providing services, support, and opportunities that address the root causes of violence and promote community well-being. A comprehensive, multi-sector approach can help address the systemic roots of violence and promote community-level change.

Together community members explored how a comprehensive approach takes into consideration racism, adverse childhood experiences, and poverty as contributing factors to be addressed. Racism, exposure to violence, and growing up in poverty can have severe, long-lasting impacts on a child's development and adult life outcomes. Addressing these underlying issues through prevention and intervention is critical for breaking the cycle of violence.

The Research & Learning

The Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) focuses on reducing violent crime and gun violence. They support trauma-informed and evidence-based approaches through the Community Violence Intervention (CVI) initiative. This effort prioritizes investments in violence prevention and response, particularly in communities disproportionately impacted by violence.

OJJDP Strategies for Youth Violence Prevention

Strategies to prevent or reduce youth violence include:

- **Promoting family environments.**
Create supportive family environments that foster healthy development.
- **Providing quality education.**
Provide access to quality education early in life.
- **Strengthening youth's skills.**
Empower young people with essential life skills.
- **Connecting youth to caring adults and activities.**
Build positive relationships and engagement.
- **Creating protective community environments.**
Enhance safety and well-being.
- **Intervening to lessen harm and prevent future risk.**
Provide early intervention to reduce harm and prevent recurrence.

“Addressing violence is crucial not only for saving lives but also as the first step toward larger goals. Urban violence perpetuates poverty, hindering education, healthcare, and business growth. Without security, recovery cannot begin. Communities facing high violence must prioritize addressing it, as peace is essential for prosperity.”

(Abt, 2019)

Visioning

This vision statement is a culmination of verbal and written responses collected by CCDC facilitators over the course of a year of convening community members in central Iowa around the development of a violence reduction plan.

It's 2030, and our community thrives as a beacon of safety, resilience, and opportunity for our youth. Imagine neighborhoods where the sound of children's laughter fills the air, echoing through green spaces and vibrant community centers. Picture streets lined with well-maintained homes, where families gather on front porches, sharing stories and building connections.

Our schools are more than just educational institutions; they are hubs of growth and support. Trauma-informed practices are woven into the fabric of our curriculum, nurturing not only academic excellence but also emotional well-being. Mental health resources are readily available, ensuring that every student has the tools to navigate life's challenges.

Youth-led initiatives flourish across our neighborhoods. Imagine community gardens tended by young hands, providing fresh produce and fostering a sense of ownership. Art installations grace public spaces, telling stories of resilience and hope. Peer mentorship programs bridge generational gaps, empowering our youth to become leaders.

Our neighborhoods are safe havens, not just due to law enforcement presence but because of community outreach. Officers peacefully engaging with residents, building relationships, and addressing concerns collaboratively. Restorative justice programs replace punitive measures, emphasizing healing and reconciliation.

The approach is rooted in science, drawing from decades of research. We understand that violence prevention is multifaceted. It involves economic opportunities, education, mental health, and social cohesion. Our coalition tirelessly advocates for policies that address systemic inequities, ensuring that no one is left behind.

In 2030, our coalition stands as a testament to collective action. We've bridged gaps between law enforcement, schools, nonprofits, and families. Together, we've woven a safety net that catches every young person, ensuring their dreams take flight. Our legacy is one of resilience, compassion, and unwavering commitment to the well-being of our youth.

Recommended Strategies

Foster collaboration among organizations.

- Establish regular coalition and stakeholder meetings.
- Encourage networking, coordination, and multi-sector partnerships.
- Designate lead roles and responsibilities for effective convening.

Address the root causes of violence.

- Facilitate self-reflection and informed decision-making processes.
- Collaborate with organizations to build trust and achieve shared goals.
- Send representatives to relevant conferences for knowledge sharing and capacity building.

Provide support and resources.

- Offer resources addressing mental health, education, and basic needs.
- Foster a culture of love, acceptance, and understanding.
- Implement programs promoting a sense of belonging and safety.

Establish safe and supportive spaces.

- Create new or invest in existing opportunities and venues for creative expression and open dialogue.
- Implement alternatives to detention and suspension in schools.
- Facilitate restorative circles and therapeutic programs.

Engage and empower youth.

- Develop youth-led and informed initiatives.
- Offer programs promoting positive choices and healthy communication.
- Provide access to mentoring, skill-building, and leadership opportunities.

Educate youth and encourage positive decision-making.

- Provide workshops on decision-making, consequences, and goal-setting.
- Offer skill-building programs in areas like entrepreneurship and conflict resolution.
- Implement call-ins and custom notification systems for support and intervention.

Implement and sustain.

- Conduct regular analysis of progress, challenges, and opportunities.
- Develop contingency plans for unforeseen circumstances.
- Establish clear communication and reporting protocols.
- Secure necessary resources and commit to long-term sustainable implementation.

This plan is informed by and demonstrates knowledge of the CVI model of violence prevention, and it:

- Focuses services and supports on populations most vulnerable to the impacts of violence.
- Recognizes the trauma and victimization of individuals involved in violence, working to keep them safe, alive, and out of prison.
- Supports positive relations, communication, engagement, and partnership between police and the community.
- Increases the community's capacity to identify and solve problems, organize effectively, and advocate for change.
- Positions a cross-sector collaboration to secure significant public funding and investment for future violence prevention efforts.

Objectives

Action Items

Outcomes

Reduce Community Violence

- Implement evidence-based violence prevention and intervention strategies.
- Focus on high-risk groups and individuals.
- Leverage data to drive initiatives and influence policy.

Incidents of youth violence decrease (i.e., hospitalization, homicide, and suspension data).

Improve Community Collaboration

- Convene regular meetings of the Executive Stakeholders and subcommittees.
- Identify and address service gaps and barriers.
- Align goals, strategies, and resources across sectors.

The community forms and maintains a multisector collaborative, driven by a common vision for safety.

Increase Capacity of Nonprofit Partners

- Provide training and technical assistance on evidence-based practices.
- Offer funding opportunities to support capacity building.
- Foster a learning community for sharing promising practices.

Nonprofits have expertise and resources to implement evidence-based violence prevention strategies.

Enhance Community Trust and Confidence

- Foster genuine partnerships between law enforcement, social services, and the community.
- Ensure collective accountability and a moral message against violence.
- Provide opportunities for positive engagement between law enforcement and the community.

Trust in law enforcement increases (i.e., decrease in officer use of force and other assessment data).

Empower Youth and Community

- Provide opportunities for youth development and leadership.
- Engage community members in planning and decision-making.
- Support community-led initiatives and solutions.

Community leaders are identified, engaged, and empowered, with a focus on youth leadership.

Improve Health and Well-being

- Implement trauma-informed care and restorative justice practices.
- Provide access to cognitive behavioral therapy and other supportive services.
- Foster partnerships with health and social service providers.

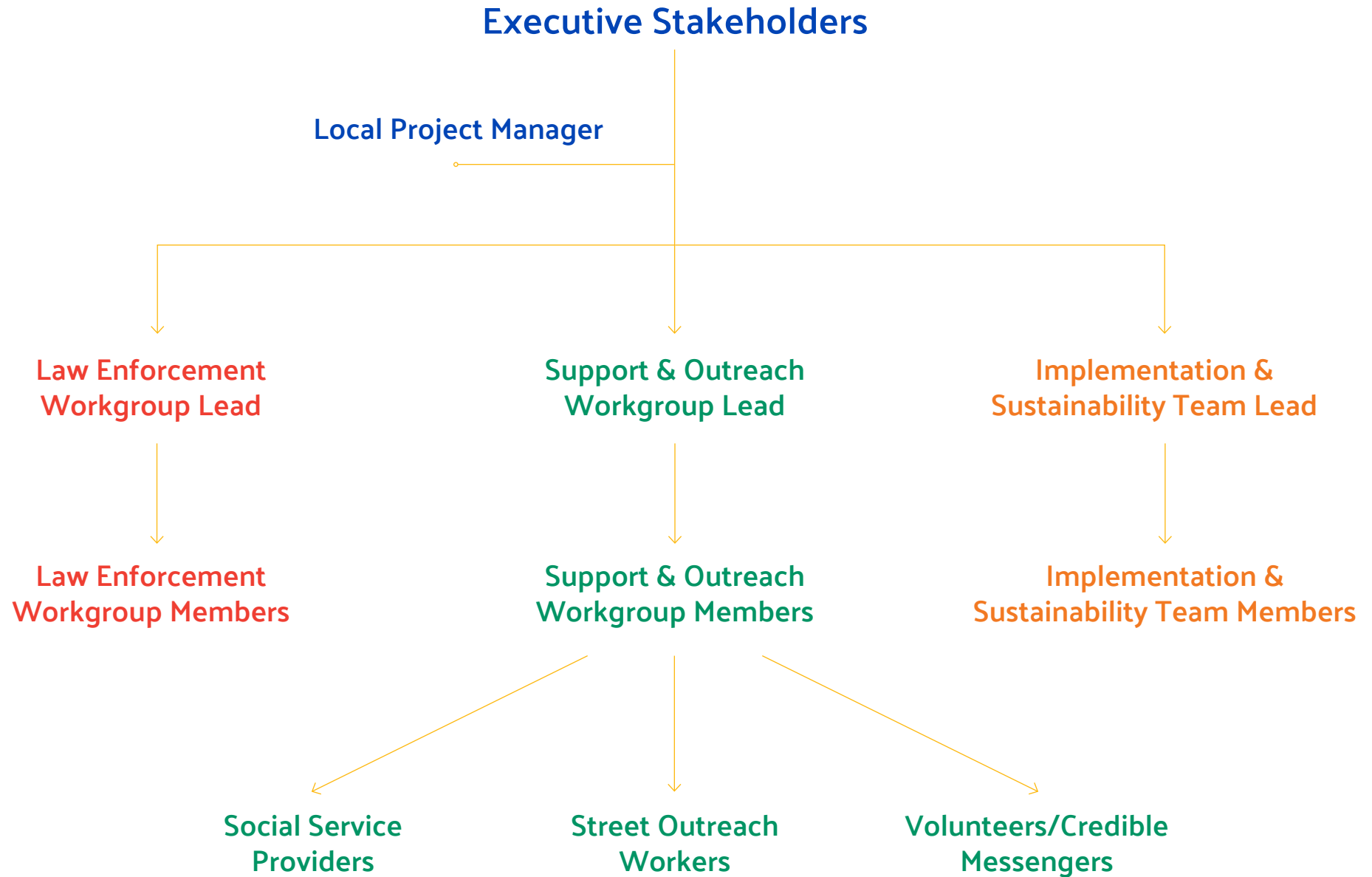
Victimization is reduced, mental health is improved, and access to services is increased.

Sustain the Initiative

- Identify and attract long-term funding sources.
- Build relationships with key funders and stakeholders.
- Demonstrate impact and return on investment.

The community sustains an annual investment of \$1.2 million annually in community-based violence intervention (includes in-kind, volunteer, and governmental budget line items).

Structure



Recommended Structure

The structure of a successful comprehensive plan includes:

- Executive Stakeholders.
- Local Project Manager.
- Operational Workgroups and Leads.

EXECUTIVE STAKEHOLDERS

Executive Stakeholders are a governing board and typically do not carry out the work of the strategy directly; they provide additional oversight and support on a communitywide level.

People, agencies, and organizations to consider for the executive stakeholder committee include:

- Mayor.
- City council members.
- Police chief.
- County attorney.
- U.S. attorney.
- Foundation executives.
- Business leaders.
- Respected community leaders.

Executive Stakeholders must commit to working together to build and sustain antiviolence infrastructure by formalizing the government's coordinating role, supporting community-based strategies, and engaging the community to maintain peace. They will need to work internally and externally to calibrate the relationship between law enforcement and community interventions, collect and share data for effectiveness, support effective programs, and provide oversight and support at the city/county level.

Respected community leaders, including law enforcement and key institutional administrators, should regularly convene to:

- Identify and support partners to work with law enforcement, focusing on those at high risk of gun violence.
- Implement evidence-based initiatives like Street Outreach, Custom Notifications, and Call-ins (see glossary for definitions).
- Engage the public through book studies, CVI training, and small group sessions.
- Hire and train a local project manager.
- Ensure law enforcement uses focused deterrence, communicates regularly with partners, and collaborates with the community for precise enforcement.
- Collect and share data to improve practices and measure effectiveness.
- Assess the problem to direct attention and resources effectively.

LOCAL PROJECT MANAGER

The success of a violence reduction plan depends on collaboration among city leaders, law enforcement, community members, and social services. The project manager ensures law enforcement updates intelligence on active individuals and groups and conducts regular incident reviews. Acting as a liaison, the project manager maintains relationships and ensures CVI partners execute meaningful activities. They also provide logistical support by scheduling and coordinating focused, efficient meetings. Establishing and nurturing these partnerships is crucial for the successful and sustainable implementation of CVI projects and includes:

- Overseeing project execution and adherence to established and evidence-based models.
- Holding partners accountable.
- Identifying and addressing short-term operational gaps and long-term sustainability issues.
- Collaborating with law enforcement, community, and social services.
- Coordinating outreach and support for residents at high risk of violent victimization and offending by gun violence.
- Providing field-based case management services.
- Removing barriers to care by identifying critical resources and navigating social services.
- Promoting client safety, well-being, and reintegration.
- Building trust for continued care of socially vulnerable populations.

Additionally, the project manager will be responsible for providing support for and guiding CVI support and outreach efforts as follows:

Support and outreach case management.

- Serves as the lead contact and case manager for all CVI group members.
- Maintains a working knowledge of and strong, collaborative working relationships with community social services, education agencies, mental healthcare providers, public health officials, vocational resources, and the legal system as it relates to services and supports required by youth and families.
- Educates providers about CVI, gains commitment to prioritize clients for support services, determines what resources are needed, and makes the necessary connections and referrals to ensure all group members are getting the support they need.

Support and outreach coordination.

- Facilitates CVI Support & Outreach workgroup meetings.
- Helps to coordinate and/or participates in call-ins, custom notifications, and CVI presence and messaging through community events. Includes putting together the team, transportation, logistics, food, invitations, etc.

Support and outreach data tracking and reporting.

- Maintains confidentiality according to the law and CVI partner policies and in a manner that always prioritizes community safety.
- Coordinates and/or works directly with clients to create safety plans, mediate conflict, dissuade retaliation, and diffuse tensions through follow-up calls, texts and/or visits.
- Gathers and tracks data on custom notifications & call-in participation, basic needs assessment/intake crisis response, supports & service offerings, and safety of clients.
- Provides quarterly reporting to Executive Stakeholders.

OPERATIONAL WORKGROUPS AND LEADS

Workgroups contain coalition partners who carry out the work of the plan in each area of the strategy.

Workgroup Leads should have the desire, capacity, and authority to convene workgroups on a regular basis (at least monthly, possibly weekly) to coordinate CVI activities in a manner that moves the initiative forward. The Executive Stakeholder group will have the opportunity to provide input and support to the workgroup leads.

Law Enforcement Workgroup

Executive Stakeholders and leading law enforcement agencies will identify leadership to take charge of the law enforcement workgroup, with the project manager playing an active support role. Law Enforcement Workgroup members will do an initial review of gun violence in the community over the past 5 years. This review will require multiple agencies sharing information on individuals known as gun violence victims and offenders and their closest associates. These reviews, that identify individuals at highest risk for gun violence victimization and offending are done with the sole intention of intervening to prevent future harm through coordinated outreach, antiviolence messaging, education around legal consequences of future violence and genuine offers of support. Law Enforcement Workgroup members perform regular shooting reviews which are weekly meetings to review all shootings and determine the best course of action with partners including custom notifications and call-ins. When individuals and/or groups continue with violent activities after being notified, law enforcement are to follow up with enhanced enforcement as promised.

Support & Outreach Workgroup

The Support and Outreach Workgroup is committed to rejecting violence and promoting community love. It coordinates agencies, messaging, services, programs, and partners to provide priority assistance to community members facing violence and in need of support. The team should include outreach workers, social service providers, impacted community members, and credible messengers who represent the community's voice. These individuals should have strong credibility with youth and community members directly impacted by violence, allowing them to express the community's sentiments, aspirations, frustrations, and expectations.

The Support and Outreach Workgroup will also create a plan and structure for how to meaningfully engage youth throughout the plan process, ensuring their voices and perspectives are central to the initiative.

It is crucial for individuals at substantial risk of violent victimization and offending by gun violence to receive a strong, clear message that their community loves them but rejects violence. This is especially powerful in establishing informal social control, which research by the National Network for Safe Communities (NNSC) shows is more impactful than formal legal measures.

Support & Outreach partnering organizations to consider for the workgroup include:

- Mentoring programs.
- Youth programs.
- Trauma care services.
- Reentry programs.
- Street outreach programs.
- City social service agencies.
- Traditional services (education, employment, mental health, substance abuse programs).
- People formerly involved in violent groups.
- Faith leaders.
- Survivors of violence.

Outreach Workers

Outreach workers play a crucial role in mentoring and assisting high-risk youth and young adults. Their responsibilities include:

1. Conducting street outreach and community norm change.

- Collaborating with street outreach to engage with high-risk individuals.
- Promoting community norms that reject violence and support positive behavior.

2. Developing relationships and cultivating community trust.

- Creating protective environments.
- Implementing the Plan initiatives.
- Building capacity within the community to prevent violence.

3. Promoting anti-violence messaging.

- Participating in custom notifications to individuals at risk for group or gun violence, often in their homes or on the street.
- Participating in call-ins (please see glossary for definition), which are face-to-face meetings involving community members, social service providers, and law enforcement to deliver a strong community moral message against violence.

4. Providing support and outreach.

- Addressing social determinants of health that contribute to violence through a health equity lens.
- Providing case management for at-risk youth and their families to address their needs.
- Identifying needs, making referrals, and providing services to youth and their families.

Expected Outcomes

- Reduced acceptance of using guns to resolve disputes.
- Decreased number of shots fired and weapons charges among youth.
- Lower violent crime rates, firearm-related deaths, and youth homicides.

- Increased utilization of community services among at-risk populations.
- Enhanced stability of families and individuals.
- Stronger community engagement and connectedness.

Street outreach workers are essential in conveying the community's love and rejection of violence, thereby establishing informal social control, which research shows is more impactful than formal legal measures. Outreach workers ideally are employed by multiple agencies in a community. Spreading responsibility across multiple entities is essential to avoid overburdening any single organization and helps with accountability and fidelity to the model.

Antiviolence Messaging

Support and Outreach providers deliver a credible moral message against violence and make a genuine offer of help for those who want it through participation in:

- **Call-ins:** A key communication tool for CVI, a call-in is a one-hour meeting in which law enforcement, community members, and social service providers deliver a no-violence message to group members and their associates. This meeting, typically held in a significant civic location, is the traditional method of conveying this message, though other notification methods are also used. (Please see glossary for definition.)
- **Custom notifications:** Support customized visits, conducted in homes, hospitals, or jails, where partners deliver a no violence message to individuals known to be at highest risk for violent victimization and/or offending by gun violence. These visits can quickly interrupt violence cycles, address retaliation and disputes, calm hot spots, and reach individuals in the community who are at risk but not under court supervision. (Please see glossary for definition.)

- **Community events:** Promote higher levels of social cohesion, greater informal social control, and regulated activity in public spaces to control the threat of violence through coordination of a Support & Outreach presence and CVI messaging at community events.
- **Public campaigns:** Reinforce messaging, using consistent communication through various channels like brochures, door hangers, cards, t-shirts, yard signs, billboards, and social media.

Training & Development

Outreach workers provide training and technical assistance to sustain ongoing CVI engagement with nonprofit orgs, public health, law enforcement, and support & outreach workers through facilitated trainings such as trauma-informed care, cognitive behavioral therapy, culturally responsive care, restorative practices, multi-sector collaboration/coalition-building, care for the caregivers, group violence intervention, and hospital-based interventions.

Crisis Response

- Coordinates immediate and/or quick response and critical interventions via phone, in homes, neighborhoods, schools, and hospitals.
- Coordinates 24/7 hotlines, helplines, and/or mobile crises unit response.
- Ensures availability of CVI-trained staff and/or volunteers.
- Provides for emergency needs and low-level but critical resources that are often ignored and not budgeted. This could include but is not limited to assistance with clearing outstanding warrants, licensing and ID assistance, phone and mail service, childcare, transportation, emergency housing and food assistance, funeral costs, navigating bureaucracy, etc.

Implementation & Sustainability Workgroup

The Implementation & Sustainability Workgroup (ISW) is responsible for implementing the plan and sustaining activities in the community. Their tasks include:

- Researching potential grant and training opportunities.
- Writing proposals and submitting grants to sustain engagement.
- Attracting additional funding and increasing investments in violence intervention from project partners, as well as corporate, private, state, and federal funders.

Other sustainability efforts focus on building the capacity of community and nonprofit organizations to prevent violence. This includes identifying local and national partners to provide technical assistance, professional development, and training for partners. Supporting organizations, often small or emerging, helps them sustain their work. The ISW will advocate for funding for activities and direct existing human resources towards implementing the plan. Additionally, the ISW activities may involve pursuing research opportunities with universities or public health entities and seeking funding from philanthropists and foundations.

Funding

Securing sustainable funding is a key priority. One possibility of sustainable funding is for governmental agencies to include dedicated budget line items for CVI work in their annual budgets. Funders, including corporate entities, private foundations, and individuals, should share the funding responsibility to legitimize the community's commitment and avoid overburdening any single funder. Partners should collaborate to seek external funding from federal, state, and private sources.

The Cost of Violence and the Value of Prevention

Violence is costly, but investing in prevention and intervention can yield significant benefits. Money lost due to violence can be redirected to meet basic needs and help the most vulnerable. When people avoid areas due to violence, it drains the civic and commercial life of those places. For example, in five cities, each homicide lowered nearby property values by 1.5% the following year. Studies estimate the cost of a single murder to be between \$10 million and \$19.2 million, including direct costs like lost labor and medical expenses, as well as indirect costs like reduced quality of life and avoidance behaviors. (Abt, 2019)

To achieve the vision of a diverse and thriving community requires support for the sustainability of the nonprofit sector. Aligning funding with outcomes and accountability can foster an ecosystem that enhances innovation, data analysis, knowledge exchange, and partnerships across the human service sector. This will result in a strong, well-resourced nonprofit sector that delivers effective programs and services, ultimately improving health, education, and economic self-sufficiency for those served.

Grants & Fund Development

Given that many executive stakeholders, workgroup leads, and team members will be volunteering and have other full-time commitments, it is important to have funds available to pursue grant opportunities, particularly federal funding through the CDC and OJJDP. These funds will enable responsiveness to potential research funding in partnership with universities. Having these funds on hand will allow for capacity to respond to opportunities as they arise.

Community Engagement and Outreach

Allocating funds for stipends to support volunteer participation in community outreach and engagement events is recommended. This helps incentivize community members to get involved in the CVI program. Additional funds should be budgeted for small group programs, such as cognitive behavioral therapy, conflict mediation, and rites of passage groups for youth, which are key components of the CVI approach.

Technical Assistance

The budget should include funds for technical assistance and consulting from subject matter experts, such as the National Network for Safe Communities or Thomas Abt at the University of Maryland's Violence Reduction Center. These experts can provide coaching and guidance on implementing the CVI model effectively. Local and state organizations, like CCDC, can also be engaged to provide training on custom notifications, community outreach, and building community capacity to prevent violence.

Professional Development

Significant investment in the first year for professional development is recommended, including attendance at statewide and national conferences on the CVI model. This ensures that outreach workers, project managers, and executive stakeholders have a strong understanding of the model and can implement it with fidelity. Ongoing professional development, particularly around trauma-informed care and mental health support for outreach workers, should also be budgeted to sustain the program.

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The Safe and Thriving Youth coalition would like to thank the more than 150 organizations and individuals that came together over an 18-month period. This was truly a collaborative process with the goal of reducing youth gun violence on a path that was uncharted. Directed by the steering committee, the coalition partnered with Rachel Rockwell and Tony Wilson of Cultivating Culture Developing Community to facilitate the group and create a community plan. This plan is the result of a diverse group of stakeholders coming together and has set the groundwork for continued collaboration toward systems-level change.

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Glossary

Call-ins

Call-ins are part of focused deterrence strategies that involve law enforcement, community members, faith-based leaders, community-based service providers, and influential leaders in the community who gather together to communicate to a targeted group of people engaged in violence that the next instance of violence will be met with the full impact of the legal system and that services are available to help them leave their current lifestyle (Reichert et al. 2018).

Community violence intervention (CVI)

This is an umbrella term for efforts to address community gun violence through means other than incarceration, focusing on relational work with people most likely to commit gun violence, intervening to interrupt and mediate conflicts, connecting people to social and economic services and resources, and addressing intergenerational cycles of poverty, violence, and trauma that give rise to gun violence.

Credible messengers

Credible messengers are people who can motivate and cultivate transformative relationships with people with whom they share similar backgrounds. In the context of this practice guide, credible messengers are people who are trusted by gang/group members or people involved in the criminal legal system. They promote risk reduction through positive relationship building and mentoring.

These relationships work because credible messengers are viewed as living examples of change and have relevant shared experience, such as shared community membership and experience with incarceration or general justice involvement.

Custom notifications

Part of focused deterrence strategies, custom notifications involve intervention partners—usually law enforcement, service providers, and/or outreach workers and credible messengers—visiting people who are at risk of violence and/or legal consequences to notify them of the risk, express concern for their overall well-being, and provide services to help lower their risk of violence or victimization.

Focused deterrence

Focused deterrence interventions are aimed at influencing people's criminal behavior through the strategic application of enforcement and social service resources to facilitate desirable behaviors. These interventions are often framed as problem-oriented exercises where specific recurring crime problems are analyzed and responses are highly customized to local conditions and operational capacities (Braga et al. 2019).

Multi-sector approach

A multi-sector approach involves collaboration among various public and private sectors—such as business, education, healthcare, law enforcement, social services, community organizations, and government agencies—to address complex issues through coordinated efforts, leveraging diverse expertise and resources for a more comprehensive and effective solution.

Public health model

The public health model emphasizes the prevention of violence and classifies efforts by victimization risk level with the understanding that as risk levels increase, fewer people are implicated. Public health interventions use outreach workers who are independent from law enforcement to target high-risk people and behaviors without the threat of punishment (Abt 2017; Jannetta et al. 2010).

Systems-level change

Systems-level change involves creating an interconnected, multi-sector, and broad-based geographic focus. This type of change means making deep, lasting improvements to the way things work in a community, instead of focusing on singular organizations, programs, or people.

Systems-level change focuses on changing the bigger system—such as policies, practices, or community norms—that are linked to these problems.

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