

**GIFFORDS  
LAW CENTER**  
TO PREVENT GUN VIOLENCE

**FAITH IN  
ACTION**

  
BBGVPC

# A CASE STUDY IN HOPE

LESSONS FROM OAKLAND'S  
REMARKABLE REDUCTION  
IN GUN VIOLENCE

Mike McLively and Brittany Nieto | April 2019



# Welcome



Giffords Law Center, Faith in Action, and the Black and Brown Gun Violence Prevention Consortium are proud to present *A Case Study in Hope: Lessons from Oakland's Remarkable Reduction in Gun Violence*, the third installment in our series of reports on tackling the gun violence crisis in our cities.



Interpersonal gun violence in the United States has been steadily climbing for the past two decades. In 2017, more than 14,500 Americans were victims of gun homicide, and tens of thousands more were injured in a shooting.

This is unacceptable.

Nowhere is this public health epidemic more evident than in our cities, particularly in underserved communities of color. **Truly making our nation safer requires addressing this violence head-on.**



The good news is that, as this series of reports has shown, urban gun violence *is* preventable. Just ask the residents of Oakland, California, long considered to be among the most dangerous cities in America—where shootings and homicides *are down almost 50% since 2012*. This tremendous progress didn't happen spontaneously. It was the result of hard work and careful planning, collaboration among a wide range of stakeholders, and most of all, hope.

*A Case Study in Hope* tells the remarkable story of Oakland's long struggle to reduce gun violence and identifies key takeaways for cities around the country facing this epidemic.

As Oakland partners have learned, reducing shootings requires true collaboration between community members, law enforcement officers, and city leaders working in concert to intervene with the small population of those at highest risk for engaging in serious violence.

*A Case Study in Hope* lays out in detail the steps Oakland took to get to this point and presents best practices for other cities to learn from this encouraging success. By scaling up strategies like these, we can build the safer, healthier communities that all Americans deserve.

With gratitude,

**Robyn Thomas**  
Executive Director  
Giffords Law Center to  
Prevent Gun Violence

**Pastor Michael McBride**  
Director of Urban Strategies  
Faith in Action (formerly PICO  
National Network)

**Erica Ford**  
Co-Chair  
Black and Brown Gun Violence  
Prevention Consortium

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Many individuals have contributed to this effort who are not specifically named here, but we thank you all for your efforts to make Oakland a safer place.

**Finally, a special thanks to the young men of Oakland who are choosing to put down their guns in favor of a safe and healthy community.**

# Contents

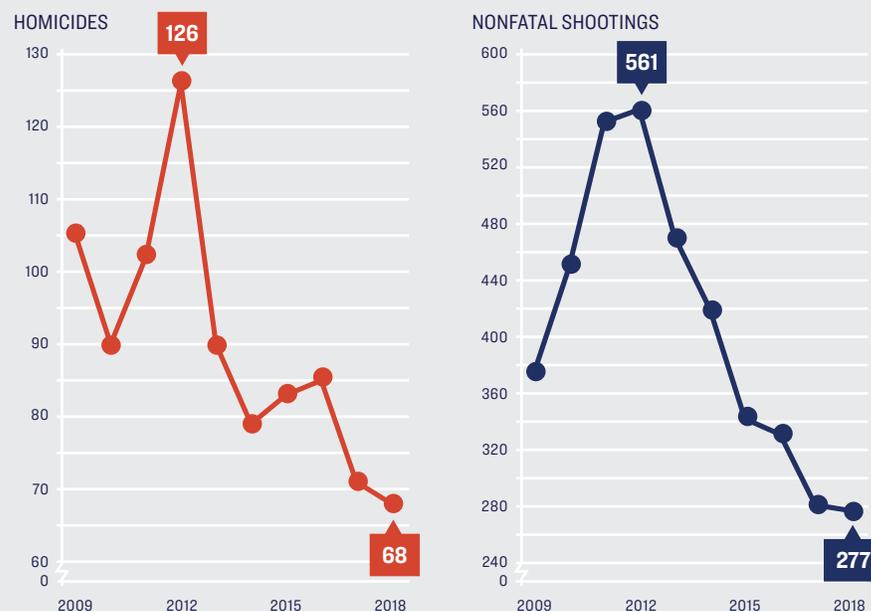
<b>5</b>	<b>EXECUTIVE SUMMARY</b>
<b>12</b>	<b>ACRONYM GLOSSARY</b>
<b>13</b>	<b>INTRODUCTION</b>
<b>18</b>	<b>THE STORY OF OAKLAND</b>
<b>20</b>	Laying a Foundation for Later Success
<b>24</b>	Searching for a Better Strategy
<b>31</b>	The Oakland Ceasefire Partnership
32	Communicating the Message
36	The Problem Analysis
39	Providing Social Services
50	Targeted Law Enforcement Actions
58	Partnership-Based Performance Management
<b>63</b>	Oakland Ceasefire Results
<b>66</b>	<b>TAKEAWAYS FOR KEY STAKEHOLDERS</b>
<b>67</b>	Takeaways for Community Members
<b>74</b>	Takeaways for City Leaders
<b>81</b>	Takeaways for Law Enforcement
<b>88</b>	<b>CONCLUSION</b>
<b>91</b>	<b>ENDNOTES</b>

# THE STORY OF OAKLAND

Oakland, considered for many years to be among the most dangerous cities in America, has **cut its annual shootings and homicides nearly in half since 2012**. Now, city leaders and activists from around the country are traveling to Oakland to learn from this remarkable success. Oakland gives us reason to hope that reducing gun violence in our most impacted communities is possible, and a basic framework for how to get there.

## OAKLAND'S REMARKABLE TURNAROUND

Source: *OPD Annual Crime Reports*



[giffordslawcenter.org/hope](https://giffordslawcenter.org/hope)

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## THE OAKLAND CEASEFIRE PARTNERSHIP

In 2012, after several failures and facing great pressure from community activists, Oakland city leaders committed to launching a citywide violence reduction strategy, known as Oakland Ceasefire, with the help of technical experts from the California Partnership for Safe Communities (CPSC).

Oakland Ceasefire is an ongoing partnership between **community members, social service providers, and law enforcement officials**, who work together to reduce violence, build police-community trust, and improve outcomes for high-risk individuals.

The strategy has five main components:

- 1 Analysis of violent incidents and trends**, referred to as a problem analysis, to identify individuals at the highest risk of participating in serious violence. Oakland's problem analysis revealed a number of misconceptions about the city's violence dynamics. It also showed that **only 400 individuals—just 0.1% of Oakland's total population**—were at the highest risk for engaging in serious violence at any given time. Oakland Ceasefire partners intervene with this population.
- 2 Respectful, in-person communications** with high-risk individuals to warn about the risks of ongoing violence and provide a genuine offer of assistance. With Oakland Ceasefire, these communications primarily take the form of **call-ins**, interventions in which stakeholders communicate with small groups of those most at risk of serious violence, and **custom notifications**, a personalized method of heading off imminent violence.
- 3 Relationship-based social services** provided to high-risk individuals through the Oakland Unite network of community-based organizations. Oakland Unite is a unique city agency that uses taxpayer money to fund

organizations that provide services like **intensive mentoring, economic and educational training**, and **direct assistance** to victims of violence and their families.

**4** **Narrowly focused law enforcement actions** by the Oakland Police Department's (OPD) Ceasefire Section, in addition to ongoing, department-wide training in the principles of **procedural justice** and other strategies to improve police-community relationships. Since reforming its approach to violence, OPD has seen a dramatic increase in its homicide solve rate, while use-of-force incidents and complaints against the department are on the decline.

**5** **An intentional management structure** built around regular communication between Oakland Ceasefire partners and city leaders to stay on top of changing violence dynamics and track progress toward yearly violence reduction goals. Regular meetings include weekly **shooting reviews**, bimonthly **coordination meetings**, and **performance reviews** led by Oakland's mayor.



# BUCKING THE TREND

## COMPARING OAKLAND HOMICIDE NUMBERS TO OTHER MAJOR US CITIES

In recent years, homicides have been on the rise in many major US cities, with a particularly noticeable spike in 2015. As the graphs below illustrate, Oakland has managed to avoid this national trend, seeing an almost 50% drop in homicides. It's worth studying Oakland closely to learn more about how the city made progress on this difficult issue.

Sources: FBI Uniform Crime Reports, 2009–2017; OPD Annual Crime Reports, 2012–2018

### OAKLAND, CA



### BALTIMORE, MD



### CHICAGO, IL



### ST. LOUIS, MO



### CHARLOTTE, NC



### MILWAUKEE, WI



### DENVER, CO



## TAKEAWAYS FROM OAKLAND'S SUCCESS THE ROLE OF THE COMMUNITY

### LESSON ONE

#### DO YOUR HOMEWORK: UNDERSTAND WHAT WORKS IN VIOLENCE REDUCTION

Community members have an important role to play in understanding which strategies have been shown to be most effective in preventing gun violence and educating city leaders about these strategies. Oakland community members learned about and drew inspiration from Boston's Operation Ceasefire after extensive research.

### LESSON TWO

#### CREATE AND MAINTAIN POLITICAL WILL

In cities around the country, community members can write letters, vote, publish reports, and generally engage in the local political process to voice their support for an effective violence reduction strategy. If the community feels ownership over a city's strategy, it's much more likely to survive periods of leadership transition in city government or law enforcement.

### LESSON THREE

#### PARTICIPATE DIRECTLY IN VIOLENCE REDUCTION STRATEGIES

Community members—especially parents who have lost children to gun violence, formerly incarcerated individuals, survivors of gun violence, and grassroots leaders—have a key role to play in a city's violence reduction strategy, including participating in call-ins and custom notifications. Firsthand experience in Oakland and other cities shows that it's more effective for community members to

participate in these interventions than it is for law enforcement to do so alone.

### LESSON FOUR

#### WORK TO STRENGTHEN POLICE-COMMUNITY RELATIONS

Community members can lead or participate in efforts to improve relationships with local police departments. In Oakland, volunteers from the community participated directly in training officers on the principles of procedural justice and helped officers understand what it's like to be on the other end of heavy-handed policing tactics.

### LESSON FIVE

#### LEVERAGE THE FAITH COMMUNITY

Faith leaders hold a position of moral authority in the community, which can make them effective partners in the fight to stop gun violence. In communities impacted by daily violence, faith-based organizations are often central social institutions, and can create an important bridge between the community and the families of both perpetrators and victims.



## TAKEAWAYS FROM OAKLAND'S SUCCESS THE ROLE OF CITY LEADERS

### LESSON ONE

#### BRING IN TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE EXPERTS

An effective technical assistance provider such as the California Partnership for Safe Communities can mean the difference between success and failure in the implementation of a city's violence reduction strategy. A key best practice is for city leaders to seek help from experts who have had success in other cities, several of which are identified in this report.

### LESSON TWO

#### EMPOWER PARTNERS TO WORK TOGETHER

It's important for city leaders to understand that an effective violence reduction strategy requires the buy-in of many different stakeholders, from public health departments to school systems. Leaders can help create incentives to bring these stakeholders together and ensure genuine cooperation.

### LESSON THREE

#### HELP SECURE FUNDING STREAMS

Cities have a wide range of options for funding violence reduction strategies, including local, state, federal, and private funding. Gun violence creates huge expenses that ripple across a number of sectors of a city's economy. City leaders should make the case that investments in effective violence reduction programs will pay for themselves many times over.

### LESSON FOUR

#### STAY INVOLVED AND INSTITUTIONALIZE THE WORK

Once violence reduction strategies have been funded and implemented, the work is far from over. City officials should remain actively involved to ensure the long-term viability of these programs. Once a plan is in place, city leaders also need to make sure that the public is aware of and understands the strategy, and that credit is given to those doing the hard work on the ground.

### LESSON FIVE

#### CREATE A VIOLENCE REDUCTION OFFICE OR AGENCY

One way of institutionalizing a city's violence reduction work is by creating an office or agency, other than law enforcement, that is tasked with addressing serious violence. Violence reduction offices can also help ensure that these strategies survive turnover within city administrations or law enforcement agencies.



## TAKEAWAYS FROM OAKLAND'S SUCCESS

# THE ROLE OF LAW ENFORCEMENT

### LESSON ONE

#### FOCUS ON SERIOUS VIOLENCE

Conducting a problem analysis, a systematic review of all fatal and nonfatal shootings over the past few years, is a critical first step. Once the city has a better grasp on local violence dynamics, law enforcement partners should continue to regularly update this knowledge through shooting reviews.

### LESSON TWO

#### INSTITUTIONALIZE THE WORK WITH A DEDICATED UNIT

Dedicating a unit to respond to serious violence is a key best practice for successful violence prevention, as Oakland did with the creation of its Ceasefire Section. Officers in this unit should be carefully selected and undergo special training in the principles of community policing and procedural justice.

### LESSON THREE

#### DEVELOP EXTERNAL PARTNERSHIPS WITH SERVICE PROVIDERS

In Oakland, coordination meetings provide an opportunity for police officers to share information with the Oakland Unite network of community-based social service providers. Building up external partnerships, particularly with social service providers who are also working to address violence, can have a major impact for police departments in cities around the country.

### LESSON FOUR

#### INITIATE RECONCILIATION WITH THE COMMUNITY

In many communities torn apart by violence, relationships between residents and police are fractured. Law enforcement departments seeking to build trust with the communities in which they operate should first acknowledge past wrongdoing. One way to do this is by hosting forums in which the community has a genuine opportunity to make its voice heard.

### LESSON FIVE

#### EMBRACE POLICY CHANGES INFORMED BY COMMUNITY INPUT

Reconciliation forums are empty gestures if police departments aren't willing to implement concrete policy changes. Examples of steps that departments can take include committing to transparency through the use of body cameras, welcoming higher levels of civilian oversight, providing regular training in the principles of procedural justice, and rewarding officers whose actions demonstrate a commitment to building community trust.



# Acronym Glossary

The following acronyms of key terms and agencies appear throughout this report:

<b>CBO</b>	Community-based organization
<b>CCEB</b>	Catholic Charities of the East Bay
<b>CMT</b>	Ceasefire Management Team
<b>CPD</b>	Chicago Police Department
<b>CPSC</b>	California Partnership for Safe Communities
<b>CSP</b>	Community Safety Partnership
<b>EESS</b>	Educational and economic self-sufficiency
<b>GRYD</b>	Gang Reduction and Youth Development
<b>HSD</b>	Human Services Department
<b>HVIP</b>	Hospital-based Violence Intervention Program
<b>LAPD</b>	Los Angeles Police Department
<b>NNSC</b>	National Network for Safe Communities
<b>OCO</b>	Oakland Community Organizations
<b>ONS</b>	Office of Neighborhood Safety
<b>OPD</b>	Oakland Police Department
<b>OU</b>	Oakland Unite
<b>PSN</b>	Project Safe Neighborhoods
<b>PSO</b>	Problem-Solving Officer
<b>SIU</b>	Special Investigations Unit
<b>USAID</b>	United States Agency for International Development
<b>VOCA</b>	Victims of Crime Act



# **INTRODUCTION**

# Oakland shows us how significant reductions in gun violence can be achieved in a short time.

Since 2012, homicides and shootings in Oakland have fallen by approximately 50%. In 2018 the city recorded its lowest number of homicides in almost two decades.<sup>1</sup> How did this happen, and what can other cities learn from this progress?

Whatever you do, don't call it a miracle. Oakland's effort to reduce serious violence is nothing short of astounding, but it didn't happen spontaneously. Rather, this is the inspiring story of hard work, long-term community activism, and heroism in the face of tragic personal loss.

**Oakland's success holds a number of indispensable lessons for those seeking to effectively address serious violence in their own communities.**

We hope this report empowers activists and leaders in cities disproportionately impacted by gun violence to learn from Oakland's struggles and successes, borrow from their reinvented violence prevention playbook, and, hopefully, avoid some of the mistakes that Oakland made on its long journey to improved public safety.

Oakland, California, is a diverse and bustling coastal city of about 425,000 residents, just across the Bay Bridge from San Francisco. While San Francisco is "the City," Oakland is affectionately known by locals as "the Town." Home for many years to the Golden State Warriors and blessed with a perpetually sunny climate and vibrant cultural scene, Oakland is a place brimming with pride.



Yet the Town has also historically been an epicenter of inequality, violence, and incredibly strained relationships between law enforcement and community members. According to one report, “the City of Oakland has consistently ranked in the top 10 most violent cities in the country for the past four decades. In 2012, Oakland earned the dubious distinction of being the third ‘Most Dangerous’ city in the nation.”<sup>2</sup>

**If effective gun violence reduction can happen here, it can happen anywhere.**

Since the late 1960s, Oakland has suffered from an ongoing gun violence crisis that has claimed, on average, more than 100 lives each year.<sup>3</sup> At the peak of this epidemic, 165 people were killed in a single year.<sup>4</sup> In terms of total homicides in California cities, Oakland is second only to Los Angeles—a city 10 times larger.<sup>5</sup>

The vast majority of serious violence in Oakland is committed with a gun. In 2018, for example, more than 90% of killings involved the use of a firearm.<sup>6</sup> Even though there are no licensed gun dealers left in Oakland and California has the strongest gun laws in the nation, it’s still frustratingly easy for guns to be purchased on the street in the illegal market.<sup>7</sup>

As one Oakland youth said in an interview with reporters in 2008, “It’s very easy to get a gun. Even my little brother can get one, and he’s only nine.”<sup>8</sup>

Like most cities, serious violence in Oakland is disproportionately concentrated in underserved communities of color struggling with the effects of intergenerational poverty, segregation, and systemic oppression, including a historically strained relationship between the police department and community members. There are

*Located across the bay from the City of San Francisco, Oakland boasts a vibrant cultural scene and community members fiercely dedicated to their city’s safety and well-being.*



stark income and wealth disparities in Oakland, with black, Latinx, and Native American residents experiencing poverty at much higher rates than white residents.<sup>9</sup>

Consequently, the majority of serious violence occurs in neighborhoods in East and West Oakland, with most victims and perpetrators being young men of color.<sup>10</sup> Exposure to violence in these areas contributes to ongoing trauma and long-term negative health outcomes.

“In addition to the physical impacts of being a victim of violence, living in a violent community severely impacts those that witness violence and lose family members,” noted one report. “Exposure to community violence is associated with an increase in aggressive behavior and depression over a one-year period, lower self-esteem, higher anxiety, worse school performance and increased absences from school.”<sup>11</sup>

**Communities around the country that are impacted by the vicious cycle of violence don’t have a moment to lose in implementing effective solutions.** While every city is different, there are certain fundamental lessons to be learned from Oakland’s hard-won success, which are distilled in the following pages.

Today, Oakland gives cities around the country reason to hope—but the story begins with a city in despair.

Leverage the legal and policy acumen of our experts to develop a plan for city-level investment in violence reduction strategies. For assistance, please email [lawcenter@giffords.org](mailto:lawcenter@giffords.org).

*The relationship between Oakland community members and the police has historically been strained. Through Oakland Ceasefire and with community input, the Oakland Police Department has taken steps toward building back trust.*

*Noah Berger, AP Images*



# **THE STORY OF OAKLAND**

## After a series of false starts, Oakland’s efforts to address gun violence have evolved into an effective citywide strategy.

In the early 2000s, Oakland, which had long struggled with high levels of violent crime, experienced an 81% increase in homicides between 1999 and 2003.<sup>12</sup> It seemed like everyone in the city agreed on the factors driving this major spike (though they would turn out to be wrong)—they just couldn’t agree on what to do about it.

The situation reached a crescendo during a hot July in 2002. Fifteen Oakland residents were killed in a single month, including a 23-year-old mother shot to death as she sat outside with her seven-year-old daughter, who had already lost her father to gun violence earlier in the year.<sup>13</sup>

“That was really shocking,” said one memorial attendee. “When they start shooting in front of a little girl—and she was shot too, in the leg—you know things are out of control.”<sup>14</sup> As senseless violence continued to rise, the community was reaching a breaking point.

Residents, city officials, and police officers all assumed that youth delinquency and drugs must be behind the resurgence of gun violence in Oakland.<sup>15</sup> In a 2002 speech, then mayor Jerry Brown blamed the problem on drug-related disputes. “I don’t think anyone can pinpoint any particular cause,” said Brown. “These things cycle.

Sometimes there are a lot of parolees hitting the streets. There are some serious violent gangsters coming out of the prisons, and basically, they're taking back their corners."<sup>16</sup>

The Oakland Police Department (OPD) estimated that around 10,000 people on either parole or probation were responsible for the majority of killings and that about 80% were drug-related.<sup>17</sup> Like many American police departments, OPD relied largely on dragnet suppression tactics to address violence, focusing primarily on hiring more officers and strictly enforcing infractions related to the possession of drugs and guns. Areas with high rates of crime were flooded with officers and "success" was defined as making as many arrests as possible in geographic areas where violence was prevalent.

"Back then, we were trained that our objective was to lock up as many bad guys as we could—put as much dope, as many guns on the table as we possibly could. That was the metric of a great officer," recounts Captain Ersie Joyner, current captain of OPD's Ceasefire Section and a sworn officer of more than 27 years.<sup>18</sup>

These tactics led to high levels of distrust among Oakland residents, particularly in communities of color.

Despite this, Brown's solution to increasing violence in Oakland was to propose a tax increase to add 100 new officers to Oakland's existing force of almost 750 officers.<sup>19</sup> Many community members objected to this approach, and in 2002, young people carried out a public protest in response.

"Locking people up in prison, where they get even more hardened, isn't the answer," one student was quoted as saying. "I've seen people locked up for possession and end up killing somebody when they get out."<sup>20</sup>

There was simply not community support for addressing gun violence solely by adding more officers to a widely mistrusted police department.

It would take a unique compromise between police, politicians, and key community groups to reach a breakthrough.



*In communities with low levels of trust with the police, crime is often underreported. Community policing aims to increase positive interactions between the police and the community.*

*Paul Sakuma, Associated Press*

## LAYING A FOUNDATION FOR LATER SUCCESS

Coming into 2004, an election year, many Oaklanders agreed that the city needed to pass a new tax via ballot measure to raise additional revenue to address the growing violence crisis. The burning question was where to direct that revenue.

The preference on the part of the political and law enforcement establishment was clear: allocate new revenue to hire more police officers. At a public forum, then mayor Brown asked community members from a faith-based activist group called Oakland Community Organizations (OCO) what it would take for them to support this type of initiative.<sup>21</sup>

OCO conducted a poll among their members and determined that if they were going to commit energy and fundraising power to supporting a ballot measure related to public safety, then they would need to know that officers would be trained in community policing tactics, such as regular beat walks, that would facilitate officers getting to know the community. In addition, a large portion of the revenue would need to go to at-risk youth and community-based violence prevention programs to address the root causes of violence.<sup>22</sup>

Ultimately, the Violence Prevention and Public Safety Act of 2004, better known as Measure Y, was drafted with input from a number of community- and faith-based groups that favored allocating more resources to youth-oriented services and programming, in collaboration with the Oakland City Council, the Human Services Department, the Oakland Police Department, the Alameda County Probation Department, and the Oakland Unified School District.

Measure Y was designed to raise an estimated \$20 million per year through an increase in the parcel tax (with an exemption for low-income households) and parking fees in commercial lots.<sup>23</sup> Sixty percent of this revenue would go to the police department to hire new officers and engage in community policing, while the other 40% would go to community-based violence prevention initiatives with a focus on serving youth and children.<sup>24</sup> Between 1% and 3% of allocated funds would be set aside for the purpose of conducting evaluations.

On November 2, 2004, Oaklanders voted to approve Measure Y, with nearly 70% of residents voting in favor of the measure.<sup>25</sup> The newly approved taxes and fees went into effect on January 1, 2005, and the implementation phase began.

It would take a unique compromise  
between police, politicians,  
and key community groups to  
reach a breakthrough.

Last year, I joined a growing list of Oakland parents who have lost a child to violent crime.

It was June 14th, 2003. My son was celebrating his 22nd birthday with a few friends. He was sitting in his car eating lunch and joking with his friend standing outside. A man approached and fired at least 6 bullets into my son.

My son died instantly.

Like so many other young people in our community, his life was cut short for no good reason. He wasn't a criminal, wasn't involved in drugs or gangs. He was just at the wrong place at the wrong time.

Something has to be done to stop the killing.

I hear some people say that more police is the only way to stop violent crime. Others say more social programs are the only solution.

I'm not sure what the answer is but I do know that we have to start somewhere. We need to help our young people make better decisions and give them options to succeed.

That is why I am supporting Measure Y.

Measure Y will expand violence prevention programs that help children and the young people in our community. Measure Y will also help police target the source of most violent crime—drugs and gangs.

I know that by itself, passing Measure Y won't stop all the crime in Oakland. But if we are serious about finding a solution to violence in our community, we have to take this important first step.

Please vote YES on Measure Y.

Sincerely,



Barbara Lafitte-Oluwale

Last year, the Oakland Police Department reported 113 homicides and 7,645 felony assaults. Alarming statistics reveal that children are often victims or witnesses to the violence:

- ▶ 2,465 Oakland children were the victims of felony assault last year.
- ▶ 42% of homicide victims are 25 years of age and under.
- ▶ 52% of all felony assault victims are 25 years of age and under.

**Vote YES on Y to reduce violent crime in Oakland.**

Critically, Measure Y was designed to be a long-term investment strategy, so the funding stream would be available until 2014, providing enough time for the city to create, test, and evolve a system for providing services to those at risk of participating in serious violence.<sup>26</sup>

While its passage was a victory for public safety advocates, Measure Y had a number of serious flaws, which are discussed below. Despite its problems, Measure Y helped lay a foundation for an ultimately effective citywide violence reduction strategy that combined law enforcement reforms with the delivery of social services.

## COMMUNITY POLICING

As previously mentioned, Oakland has a long history of extremely strained relationships between the community and the police department, particularly in communities of color. One report found that “focus groups of youth and young adults of color that live in Oakland reported a deep mistrust of the police, citing frequent racial profiling and disrespect to the community. One participant reported that the police in his community acted like ‘everyone has to be a criminal.’”<sup>27</sup>

In advocating for Measure Y, community members and city leaders agreed that Oakland needed to enhance its capacity for providing community-oriented policing. At the core of this push was a desire to see officers interact more with community members. Measure Y provided funding for at least 63 new community policing

*Community members like Barbara Lafitte-Oluwale, who lost her son to gun violence, rallied around Measure Y in the run-up to Oakland's 2004 election.*

*Courtesy of Barbara Lafitte-Oluwale*

officers, with the specific goal of hiring one Problem-Solving Officer (PSO) for each of Oakland's 57 community policing beats.

The role of PSOs, according to the language of Measure Y, was to “provide consistent contact and familiarity between residents and officers, continuity in problem solving, and basic availability of police response in each neighborhood.”<sup>28</sup>

However, about two years after the passage of Measure Y, OPD had only hired about half the number of new PSOs mandated under Measure Y, and demands on PSO time led to unexpectedly frequent reassignment and turnover. As calculated by evaluators, PSOs were only providing about 25% of the total community policing coverage required by Measure Y.<sup>29</sup>

In addition, evaluators found a lack of focus about what PSOs were supposed to do. Although Measure Y envisioned community policing as a means to reduce violence, a common sentiment was that “PSOs are working on too many problems at once, making them less effective than they could be.”

Many PSOs had a general understanding that their role was to have positive interactions with the community, but there was no training to help create a unified approach. As one PSO told evaluators, “the problem with Measure Y is that nobody tells you what to do. They hire you, but they don't tell you how to do it.”

**The implementation of community policing in Oakland was also hampered by a lack of participation by a key constituency: community members.** Evaluators found that community meetings with OPD were poorly attended by residents and that this lack of involvement stemmed from a range of factors, including “language and technological barriers, lack of interest, fear of retaliation, lack of awareness, and frustration with the transition of PSOs.”<sup>30</sup>

Meanwhile, violence trends were continuing to move in the wrong direction. In 2005, Oakland suffered 93 homicides, giving it the third-highest murder rate in California, behind only Richmond and San Bernardino, and the 19th-highest rate in the country.<sup>31</sup>

Oakland's initial experience with community policing under Measure Y showed that community policing efforts devoid of focus, meaningful training, or avenues for genuine community engagement are unlikely to be effective at reducing violence.

Measure Y helped lay a foundation for an ultimately effective citywide violence reduction strategy that combined law enforcement reforms with the delivery of social services.

## SOCIAL SERVICES

The second prong of Measure Y involved providing social service programs to Oakland's youth. This focus on youth services was informed by the common—and ultimately inaccurate—belief that juveniles were primarily driving serious violence in Oakland.

Measure Y's social services mandate was carried out by Oakland's Human Services Department (HSD). Using Measure Y funds, HSD funded local community-based organizations (CBOs) to provide services in priority areas identified in conjunction with the mayor, city council, Measure Y Oversight Committee, and community.

This system took some time to get up and running, and it wasn't until the summer and early fall of 2006 that most contracted CBOs actually began their Measure Y-funded activities.<sup>32</sup>

Through its initial process of identifying priorities for addressing violence, HSD identified five areas of perceived need:

- 1. Youth outreach and engagement services**
- 2. Special services for youth exposed to violence**
- 3. School-based services**
- 4. Employment and training services**
- 5. Diversion and reentry services for individuals with more extensive contact with the criminal justice system**

These five areas were identified based on perceived and known risk factors for violent behavior, such as prior exposure to violence. HSD prioritized investments in communities hit hardest by disproportionate levels of violence, particularly in the neighborhoods of East and West Oakland.<sup>33</sup>

However, Measure Y services were directed to a very broad youth population that did not necessarily correspond with need or risk. In 2007 alone, more than 7,000 participants, mostly young people, received services funded by Measure Y.<sup>34</sup>

An initial evaluation in mid-2007 identified a key issue with Measure Y: It was not sufficiently targeting populations at highest risk for engaging in violence. For example, more than 42% of program participants were female, indicating that “grantees may be serving more young women than is optimal given young men's much greater risk of involvement in violence.”<sup>35</sup>

In addition, only about 11% of the Measure Y participants were recruited through street outreach, despite the fact that many of the highest-risk individuals are difficult to contact in formal, institutional settings such as schools. As a result, a key

population that had fallen through the cracks and disengaged from more formal institutions did not have sufficient access to Measure Y services.

Evaluators noted that providing services to lower-risk youth filled program slots that were more desperately needed by others at higher risk of engaging in violence. Several years after its initial implementation, Measure Y did not appear to be having an impact on homicides or shootings. Responding to these early findings, HSD began shifting its efforts to reach higher-risk populations.

Although flawed, Measure Y ultimately helped Oakland establish and refine a network of social service providers, known as Oakland Unite, which would be a critical component of the city's later success. Meanwhile, while the evolution of services funded by Measure Y was underway, Oakland community members continued to search desperately for solutions.

## SEARCHING FOR A BETTER STRATEGY

Oakland community members were acutely aware of the fact that violence trends were still moving in the wrong direction in 2005 and 2006. By the end of 2006, Oakland endured a devastating 145 homicides. This marked a 10-year peak—and a level not seen since the crack cocaine epidemic wreaked havoc in American cities in the early 1990s.<sup>36</sup>

During this time, as Measure Y was slowly rolling out, activists from Oakland's faith community continued to search for solutions to the immediate crisis before them.

As OCO's Barbara Lafitte-Oluwole described, "in our organizing model, once an issue has been identified, then we engage in research in order to understand the issue, and to identify those policy makers who are in a position to help create change in the area of our concern."<sup>37</sup>

## OPERATION CEASEFIRE

While researching solutions, Oakland community activists came across a story that caught their attention: "the Boston Miracle." In

## A STRATEGY WITH A STRONG RECORD OF SUCCESS

Operation Ceasefire, the strategy credited with helping bring about a more than 60% reduction in youth homicides in Boston in the 1990s, has been implemented in a number of cities around the country, with consistently impressive results.

In 2018, criminologists reviewed results from 24 different evaluations and concluded that "the available empirical evidence suggests these strategies generate noteworthy crime reduction impacts and should be part of a broader portfolio of crime reduction strategies."

Specific results in other cities include:

### **New Haven, Connecticut**

35% reduction in group member-involved homicides

### **Indianapolis, Indiana**

34% reduction in total homicides

### **Cincinnati, Ohio**

35% reduction in group member-involved homicides

Source: *Criminology and Public Policy*

Boston during the 1990s, a team led by criminologist David Kennedy, along with a partnership of community members, law enforcement officials, and faith leaders, implemented a citywide violence intervention strategy known as Operation Ceasefire.<sup>38</sup>

The strategy gained national recognition after bringing about a major reduction in homicides in a city that had struggled with record-breaking levels of violence. Ceasefire has since been successfully implemented in a number of other cities around the country.<sup>39</sup>

**The Ceasefire strategy calls for the formation of a true partnership between law enforcement, social service providers, and community groups.** This group of stakeholders identifies the small number of individuals at highest risk of involvement in serious violence and communicates in person a message that can be summarized as “we care about you and we want to see you alive and free, but we want the shooting to stop.”<sup>40</sup>

Interested participants are then connected with social service providers, while narrowly targeted law enforcement actions are taken against those individuals who continue to engage in violent crime after receiving direct communication.

The strategy appealed to Oakland community members for a number of reasons. First, Ceasefire aims to reduce negative contact between law enforcement and the community by focusing on the most serious acts of violence. It emphasizes procedural justice and restoring broken trust between the community and law enforcement, which was badly needed in Oakland.<sup>41</sup>

Second, Ceasefire calls for face-to-face communication to deliver a strongly anti-violence message that is at once credible, respectful, and compassionate. “The undercurrent of this strategy is about love and respect,” explained former Oakland Ceasefire program director Reygan Cunningham. “It’s why we use direct communication as a tool. We know that most of these men respond to love, but they also respond to, and understand, respect.”<sup>42</sup> Oakland community members wanted to be working directly with those “closest to the pain,” and Ceasefire provided a way to do that.<sup>43</sup>

Finally, Ceasefire calls for cities to address the underlying causes of violence in underserved communities through comprehensive social services. Oakland community members understood that day-to-day gun violence is, at its roots, the result of systemic inequalities. Poverty in Oakland, as in many places around

## A NOTE ON TERMINOLOGY

Throughout this report, we use the term “Ceasefire” or “Oakland Ceasefire” to refer to the overarching gun violence reduction strategy that Oakland began implementing in 2012. This term, which the City of Oakland uses to describe this work, encompasses a number of partner agencies and strategies related to reforming both law enforcement and social services provision in Oakland, inspired and informed by Boston’s Operation Ceasefire.

the country, has a disparate impact on communities of color, who are in turn disproportionately impacted by violence.<sup>44</sup>

Oakland's faith-based activists saw a strategy that engaged the community, focused on working directly with high-risk individuals, and had a strong track record of success.

"With the Ceasefire model," said OCO's Barbara Lafitte-Oluwole, "we found a solution we believed in."<sup>45</sup>

## FALSE STARTS

Oakland community leaders and activists were committed to bringing the strategy to the city. In 2007, with a newly elected mayor, Ron Dellums, and political pressure mounting to address ongoing violence, the city attempted to launch a version of Ceasefire. This did not go as planned.

These initial efforts were disjointed and didn't include clear communication or partnership between law enforcement, community members, and Measure Y-funded social service organizations.

According to Reverend Ben McBride, who was involved with a later, successful iteration of the strategy, "these early versions of Ceasefire were unsuccessful because law enforcement and the city took exclusive ownership over the strategy and did not have a deep understanding of the full range of partners, especially community partners, that are needed for this to be successful."<sup>46</sup>

Reverend Damita Davis-Howard recalled another critical element missing from this early effort to implement Ceasefire: a real commitment to the strategy from the mayor and the chief of police. Ceasefire wasn't getting off the ground, she said, "because the people and entities who were needed to implement the strategy were not committed to it."<sup>47</sup>

As a result, the strategy was not adequately resourced, and there was no budget for bringing in badly needed outside assistance.

Without meaningful commitment to the strategy or engagement of the full range of necessary partners, these early efforts were "Ceasefire" in name only and doomed from the start.

This was evidenced by the results of Oakland's first-ever "call-in," an in-person

"With the Ceasefire model, we found  
a solution we believed in."

intervention with high-risk individuals that is at the heart of the Ceasefire strategy. This call-in took place in 2009 at City Hall, far too public a venue for such a sensitive gathering.<sup>48</sup> Organizers failed to take basic steps to help guarantee invitee participation. The goal was to have close to 20 high-risk young men at the first call-in, but only two participants attended.<sup>49</sup>

In addition, contrary to Ceasefire best practice, there was not a strong community presence at the call-in. “The people in attendance were almost entirely law enforcement,” recalls David Muhammad, the executive director of Community & Youth Outreach, a social service provider in the Oakland Unite network who helped build out the later, successful iteration of the strategy. “The entire process was very disorganized.”<sup>50</sup>

Oakland’s initial attempts to implement Ceasefire floundered for several years, and by 2011, largely stalled out. In 2011, Oakland suffered 102 killings and 552 nonfatal shootings.<sup>51</sup>

“Folks at both the community and the city level were becoming less optimistic that the strategy could work in Oakland,” recalled Reverend Ben McBride.<sup>52</sup>

## CALLING FOR FAITHFUL IMPLEMENTATION

A core group of faith-based activists under the umbrella of Faith in Action (formerly PICO National Network), including Pastor Michael McBride; his brother, Reverend Ben McBride; and leaders at OCO, including Reverend Dr. George Cummings and Reverend Davis-Howard, firmly believed that the strategy could still work, if properly implemented, and were determined to see that happen.

“With so many young men being killed each year,” Pastor McBride said at the time, “we believe that as a community of faith, we have to take action and press for the full Ceasefire model.”<sup>53</sup>

This faith-based activist community, frustrated by a lack of progress on the part of the city and police, geared up to compel city leaders to fully commit to the strategy. They built a coalition of community leaders who deeply understood the Ceasefire strategy and who would work together to pressure Oakland public officials to implement it properly.

This included a series of cohort trainings, organized by Pastor McBride and Reverend Dr. Cummings, that brought together groups of 25 to 30 faith and community leaders.<sup>54</sup> These racially diverse, multi-faith cohorts built relationships with one another and met with Ceasefire implementation experts, including staff from the National Network for Safe Communities and faith leaders from Boston who were key partners in the original Operation Ceasefire.



“What we learned,” said Reverend Dr. Cummings, “was that unless Ceasefire was implemented comprehensively, it did not have a strong likelihood of success.”<sup>55</sup>

By 2011, recalled Reverend Ben McBride, dozens of individual leaders around the city were ready to work with their congregations and networks to begin concerted advocacy actions to build back political appetite for a new, revamped iteration of Ceasefire.<sup>56</sup>

This required ongoing and persistent advocacy. Reygan Cunningham recalled how “OCO and its allies bused citizens to elected officials demanding that they invest in Ceasefire—at one point they brought in hundreds of citizens and actually shut down a city council meeting to demand that Ceasefire be implemented.”<sup>57</sup>

Activists organized countless other public presentations and meetings with Oakland leaders. **“The idea was to create a citywide climate that was overwhelmingly receptive to the strategy,” explained Reverend McBride, “so that when the right political moment came, a groundswell of community support would already be in place.”**<sup>58</sup>

It didn’t take long for that political moment to arrive. By the end of 2011, the city’s political landscape shifted as Oakland gained new leadership: a new mayor, Jean Quan, and a new police chief, Howard Jordan.

According to Reverend McBride, although Mayor Quan was “rightly skeptical” of the strategy, having witnessed its initial failed iterations during her tenure as a city council member,<sup>59</sup> the powerful community coalition calling for true commitment to Ceasefire was extremely compelling.

*Through a series of actions and demonstrations, Reverend Ben McBride, along with a host of community and faith leaders, demanded that the city implement Ceasefire.*

*Jose Carlos Farjardo,  
Associated Press*

After a great deal of advocacy work, both Mayor Quan and Chief Jordan ultimately committed to implementation of the Ceasefire strategy and, according to Reverend Davis-Howard, “their commitment made all the difference in the world.”

The next critical step Oakland took was to bring in outside help in the form of experienced technical consultants from the California Partnership for Safe Communities.

## BRINGING IN THE EXPERTS

In early 2012, with urging from Oakland’s faith-based activist community, representatives from the National Network for Safe Communities (NNSC) and the California Partnership for Safe Communities (CPSC)—sister organizations dedicated to helping cities implement the Ceasefire strategy—presented their work to police leadership in Oakland.

When NNSC and CPSC staff arrived in Oakland, they recognized that through Measure Y, the city had already built a social services infrastructure that could be adapted to the Ceasefire strategy.

“The city already has all of the resources it needs,” explained NNSC Director David Kennedy in a 2012 interview with the *East Bay Times*. What remained was for Oakland leaders to “make a clear commitment to [launching Ceasefire] properly. The city needs to say, this is going to be the core of our response to this issue,” said Kennedy.<sup>60</sup>

According to CPSC’s Vaughn Crandall, with the incoming group of Oakland political leadership, the police chief and the mayor’s office were finally aligned, a critical element that had been lacking from earlier attempts to implement Ceasefire.<sup>61</sup>

By the end of April, the Oakland City Council’s Public Safety Committee, the chief of police, and the mayor’s senior policy advisor for public safety all publicly acknowledged that Oakland’s past efforts to implement Ceasefire had been inadequate, and pledged to implement a faithful and robust version of the strategy.<sup>62</sup> The concerted advocacy efforts of the Oakland community had paid off—their message had finally gotten through to city leaders.

On April 24, 2012, the Oakland City Council’s Public Safety Committee directed Chief Jordan to implement Ceasefire.<sup>63</sup> Recognizing that outside help would be necessary, a formal contract was put in place with CPSC to assist Oakland with implementation

“OCO brought in hundreds of citizens and actually shut down a city council meeting to demand that Ceasefire be implemented.”

of the strategy.<sup>64</sup> This would turn out to be a key element of success.

“CPSC is best suited to provide technical assistance,” said Chief Jordan at the time, “they possess a unique skill set, have a national and statewide track record of correct implementation, and are best suited to assist Oakland with the full implementation of the strategy.”<sup>65</sup>

Importantly, Oakland’s contract with CPSC also forced the city to put skin in the game: It obligated the mayor to hire a full-time project manager and funded a problem analysis that, through the collection of raw data and interviews with OPD, would provide an in-depth assessment of the violence problem in Oakland.

With this, after years of starts and stops, the city was finally ready to successfully launch Oakland Ceasefire.

HOMICIDES



NONFATAL SHOOTINGS



## OAKLAND IN 2012

In April 2012, the Oakland City Council’s Public Safety Committee directs Chief Jordan to implement Ceasefire. California Partnership for Safe Communities signs a one-year contract with the city in June 2012. In September 2012, Oakland hosts its first night walk, and in October 2012, its first official call-in. Measure Y rebrands as Oakland Unite. Oakland is named the third most dangerous city in the nation, ending 2012 with 126 homicides and 561 nonfatal shootings.

Source: OPD Annual Crime Reports

## THE OAKLAND CEASEFIRE PARTNERSHIP

Oakland Ceasefire has a three-part mission: to reduce shootings and homicides by focusing community and law enforcement resources on those at the very highest risk of engaging in serious violence, to improve life outcomes and reduce recidivism rates for participants, and to build better relationships between the community and police. This is what CPSC staff refer to as the “triple bottom line” of public safety.

The key to the strategy’s success in Oakland was the formation of a core team that included community leaders; local, state, and federal law enforcement agencies; an integrated network of local social service providers through Oakland Unite; a full-time program director; and staff from CPSC.

In David Kennedy’s words, “When it comes to these really serious core violence issues, law enforcement can’t do it alone, communities can’t do it alone, and social services can’t do it alone. It is a partnership.”<sup>66</sup>

Reverend Dr. George Cummings, co-chair of the Oakland Ceasefire Steering Committee, echoed these sentiments. “The single most important thing to the success of the strategy has been the partnership. We’ve had to fight for it, but the partnership is working. Left alone to OPD, this would never have happened. Oakland Ceasefire partners hold each other’s feet to the fire to keep this moving.”<sup>67</sup>

### **The Oakland Ceasefire strategy has five core components:**

- 1. Analysis of violent incidents and trends**, referred to as a “problem analysis,” to identify individuals at the highest risk of participating in serious violence.
- 2. Respectful, in-person communications** with those individuals, in the form of call-ins and custom notifications to warn about the risks of ongoing violence and offer assistance. Organized “night walks” also offer a chance for community members to engage with individuals in impacted neighborhoods.
- 3. Relationship-based social services** provided to high-risk individuals through the Oakland Unite (formerly Measure Y) network of community-based organizations.
- 4. Narrowly focused law enforcement actions** by OPD’s Ceasefire Section, targeting individuals who continue to engage in serious violence, in addition to ongoing, department-wide training in procedural justice principles and other activities to improve police-community relationships.

**5. An intentional management structure** built around regular communication between Oakland Ceasefire partners and city leaders to ensure the city stays on top of changing violence dynamics and on track to meet yearly violence reduction goals.

It would take some time to get all five of the core components in place. The first step for Oakland Ceasefire partners was completing a detailed problem analysis to fully understand Oakland's violence dynamics. With their contract finalized in June 2012, CPSC staff spent the next several months reviewing homicide data and interviewing OPD officers with intimate knowledge of street violence.<sup>68</sup>

By the fall of 2012, CPSC had collected enough preliminary data to reveal that 60% of the city's homicides were happening in East Oakland and roughly 15 street groups were driving the vast majority of the violence.<sup>69</sup> While the full problem analysis was still being completed, Oakland Ceasefire partners moved forward with communicating their message to impacted neighborhoods and high-risk individuals.

## COMMUNICATING THE MESSAGE

With violence escalating throughout 2012, the East Oakland community mobilized to keep pressure on the city and to directly engage residents of the most afflicted neighborhoods in Oakland through weekly showings of support in the form of neighborhood "night walks."

### NIGHT WALKS

Galvanized by a particularly violent summer, on September 13, 2012, Faith in Action affiliates, including OCO, gathered a wide array of community members, faith leaders, and city stakeholders at Allen Temple Baptist Church to discuss how the community should respond to the shootings in East Oakland.<sup>70</sup>

Those in attendance called for Oakland Ceasefire community partners to go into impacted neighborhoods in the evening hours when violence was more frequent and directly engage with young people on the street. Reverend McBride announced that these "night walks" would begin immediately.<sup>71</sup>

A local faith leader with a church in the 20th Avenue blocks of Oakland's San Antonio community, an area popularly known as the "Murder Dubs," offered to host the city's first night walk. Reverend McBride, along with Reverend Dr. George Cummings and Barbara Lafitte-Oluwole of OCO, helped with organizing, while CPSC trained and equipped community members with the right messaging.

The very next evening, night walks began in the heart of the Murder Dubs.<sup>72</sup>



During night walks, Oakland Ceasefire community partners have conversations with people they encounter on the street, build relationships, and let young men in the neighborhood know that the community cares about them and wants to see them alive and free, but that the violence must stop.

**The message, as Reverend Damita Davis-Howard put it, was “we love you, but we want you to put down the guns.”<sup>73</sup>**

Attending Oakland’s first night walk was a life-changing experience for Reverend Davis-Howard, who had to be convinced to attend by OCO’s Barbara Laffite-Oluwole but eventually became a leading organizer. After engaging with young men who seemed to genuinely appreciate the group’s presence and message, she realized that preventing gun violence was more than just a criminal justice issue.

“I thought gun violence was an issue for police and city officials to solve,” she said. “I didn’t understand, until then, how the community could be a part of making that happen.”

Demonstrating broad community support is critical at these events, so East Oakland community members established a rule that if ever fewer than eight people attended a night walk, it would be canceled. In nearly six years of weekly walks, only one has been canceled for this reason.

“We’ve walked in the rain, we’ve walked in extreme heat,” recounted Reverend Davis-Howard. “Demonstrating a commitment to the community is critical.” After more than six years, night walks average about 15 participants per week.<sup>74</sup>

*Community members who have lost family to gun violence are particularly effective messengers for Oakland Ceasefire.*

*Rod Lamkey, Getty Images*

While the problem analysis would eventually reveal that many of the individuals contacted through the night walks—primarily young men and women on street corners dealing drugs or engaged in prostitution—were not responsible for the city’s gun violence, Oakland’s approach to direct community engagement had the effect of mobilizing dozens, and at times even hundreds, of residents on a weekly basis around the issue of gun violence.

“We knew that night walks alone would not reduce gun violence,” said Reverend McBride, “but the necessity of night walks is threefold. First, it brings the Ceasefire narrative directly to the community and ensures that the issue of gun violence remains front and center. Second, this became a space to activate people and educate them about solutions. Finally, this was a powerful expression of community power and agency around gun violence and helped keep the citywide conversation going.”<sup>75</sup>

While night walks were getting off the ground, CPSC was busy training OPD and other Ceasefire partners on how to properly conduct formal call-ins.

#### CALL-INS AND CUSTOM NOTIFICATIONS

Oakland’s first call-in as part of the revamped Ceasefire strategy took place on October 10, 2012.<sup>76</sup> The contrast between this and the city’s earlier attempts was stark. Twenty probationers or parolees who were actively involved in violent groups in East Oakland were given mandatory invitations to participate.

Every single invitee attended.<sup>77</sup>

During call-ins, participants hear from a combination of community members, faith leaders, law enforcement officials, and social service providers. “The tone is serious, but also respectful and compassionate,” explains a CPSC report. “Speakers avoid lecturing or sermonizing. The overarching theme is one of shared concern for the wellbeing of the young men as respected members of the community.”<sup>78</sup>

At a standard call-in, invitees are alerted to their risk of becoming involved in gun violence as either a victim, a perpetrator, or both. **These young men are assured that the community wants to see them alive and free, but that the shooting must stop and, if the violence continues, the law enforcement response will be swift.** Invitees are then connected to support networks and offered social services to help them disengage from street life.<sup>79</sup> Because it’s critical that participants voluntarily choose an alternative path for themselves, these services are optional.

“We engage [call-in participants] and inform them of their risk, of the likely legal consequences if they were to use a gun to retaliate, of the special services and

opportunities and supports that are available to them now and in an ongoing way,” said Vaughn Crandall, co-director for the California Partnership for Safe Communities. “The primary focus is to build trust, help them stay safe and out of prison.”<sup>80</sup>

After an introduction by a faith leader, the typical opening message at a call-in is delivered by a senior law enforcement officer. At a 2014 call-in attended by a *San Francisco Magazine* reporter, Assistant Police Chief Paul Figueroa told attendees: “You have been called here because you or people within your group or gang are actively engaged in violence right now...[O]ur goal tonight is to keep you alive and out of prison. We are all part of the same community, and we care about you, and that’s why we are intervening.”<sup>81</sup>

Those in attendance also hear from members of the community who have been directly impacted by violence: a mother who has lost her son, for example, or a resident who was hit in the face by stray gunfire. After the speakers have concluded, law enforcement is asked to leave the room, and during an informal gathering over a meal, social service providers offer support and begin to build relationships.

In addition to call-ins, CPSC also instituted custom notifications, a highly personalized form of call-ins used to head off imminent violence, such as a threat of retaliation. “When time is of the essence,” a CPSC report explains, “the Ceasefire message is compressed into a one-on-one conversation with a police officer, ideally in partnership with a community or clergy leader, and delivered wherever is most convenient.”<sup>82</sup>

After Oakland’s initial call-in on October 10, 2012, custom notifications were conducted with high-risk individuals through December. Another cycle of custom notifications and an additional call-in followed in March.

**Although 2012 ended with 126 homicides and 561 nonfatal shootings, by April 2013, violence numbers were starting to move in the right direction.**<sup>83</sup> In a report to city leaders, Chief Jordan pointed out that 2013 homicide levels “have been reduced by 44% compared to the same time last year...in Police Districts 4 and 5, where the Ceasefire strategy is focused.”<sup>84</sup>

“If we can continue to accurately implement this strategy,” wrote the chief, “we expect continued reductions in the focus area.”<sup>85</sup>

Because it’s critical that participants voluntarily choose an alternative path for themselves, the social services offered at call-ins are optional.

The city agreed, formally extending CPSC's contract and freeing up resources to bring on Reygan Cunningham, Mayor Quan's senior public safety advisor, as the full-time Oakland Ceasefire program director. Funding for the contract came from a combination of Measure Y and state-level grants.<sup>86</sup>

Hiring Cunningham to manage Oakland Ceasefire on a full-time basis was extremely consequential to the strategy's ultimate success. To David Muhammad, a CPSC consultant, the hiring of a highly competent, full-time program director was "the city's single most important step in successfully institutionalizing the Oakland Ceasefire strategy."<sup>87</sup>

For the remainder of 2013, with its new contract in place, CPSC worked to further enhance partnerships, refine the call-in process, and, perhaps most importantly, finalize the problem analysis.

## THE PROBLEM ANALYSIS: FACING THE FACTS

The problem analysis process formally wrapped up in late 2013. In January 2014, CPSC staff presented their findings to the Oakland City Council.<sup>88</sup>

The problem analysis, based on a comprehensive review of homicide data from January 2012 to June 2013, revealed that the city, police, and community groups had fundamentally misunderstood the dynamics of gun violence in Oakland for years.

"If people don't have information," said CPSC's Vaughn Crandall, "then they continue to tell the stories they've always told each other."<sup>89</sup>

In this case, as in many cities across America, the false narrative being perpetuated was that large groups of young people involved in drug-related disputes were driving the majority of gun violence in Oakland. In 2002, OPD linked 80% of killings to drug-related crime.<sup>90</sup> Even as recently as 2012, OPD estimated that 4% to 5% of the city's population—as many as 20,000 people—was responsible for most of the city's violence.<sup>91</sup> Trying to reach that many individuals seemed like an impossible task.

In reality, Oakland's gun violence problem was far less diffuse, and involved a much older population.

CPSC's problem analysis revealed that there were approximately 50 violent groups or gangs in Oakland with an active membership of between 1,000 and 1,200 people,

Oakland's problem analysis revealed that only around 400 individuals—or 0.1% of the city's population—were responsible for the majority of the city's homicides.

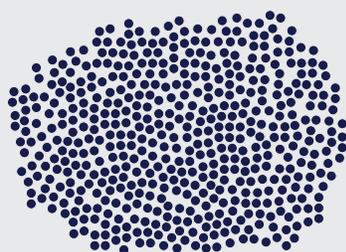
# OAKLAND'S PROBLEM ANALYSIS

The California Partnership for Safe Communities conducted a thorough review of Oakland homicide data from January 2012 to June 2013 and presented its findings to the city council in January 2014. The data revealed that Oakland police, city leaders, and community groups had been operating under mistaken assumptions about the source of the city's gun violence for years.

## HOMING IN ON THE PROBLEM

The Oakland Police Department vastly overestimated the percentage of residents who were involved in serious violence. The problem analysis revealed that only around 400 individuals—or 0.1% of the city's population—were responsible for the majority of the city's homicides.

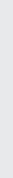
Sources: New York Times; California Partnership for Safe Communities



400,000  
OAKLAND POPULATION  
IN 2012



20,000  
ESTIMATED NUMBER  
OF PERPETRATORS



400  
ACTUAL NUMBER  
OF PERPETRATORS

### AGE

#### ASSUMPTION

For years, the police and many community members assumed that juveniles were driving the majority of violent crime in Oakland.

#### FACT

Fewer than 10% of homicides in Oakland involved anyone under 18. The average age of a homicide suspect in Oakland was 28, and the average age of a victim was 30.

### GENDER

#### ASSUMPTION

Nearly half of Measure Y's social services—resources intended for those at highest risk of involvement with serious violence—were allocated to female clients.

#### FACT

Oakland's problem analysis found that 84% of homicide victims and 94% of suspects were male.

### CAUSES

#### ASSUMPTION

The Oakland Police Department (OPD) assumed most of its serious violence was related to drugs. In 2002, OPD linked 80% of killings to drug-related crime.

#### FACT

As many as 84% of homicides were group member-involved, and the majority of these homicides were the result of personal rivalries between groups.

which represented just 0.3% of the population.<sup>92</sup> These individuals were responsible for up to 85% of the city's homicides and were also the vast majority of homicide victims. Moreover, only a small subset of those groups, about 400 individuals—just 0.1% of Oakland's total population—were at high risk for engaging in serious violence at any given time.

Despite commonly held beliefs that juveniles were driving violent crime, CPSC's problem analysis showed that fewer than 10% of homicides in Oakland actually involved anyone under 18 years old. In reality, the average age of a homicide suspect in Oakland was 28, and the average age of a victim was 30.<sup>93</sup>

The problem analysis also revealed large disparities in violence based on gender and race. Eighty-four percent of homicide victims and 94% of suspects were male, while 87% of victims and 92% of suspects were either Black or Latinx.<sup>94</sup>

Drug crime, which law enforcement and others had estimated was associated with 80% of homicides in the city, actually motivated just 5.3% of homicides in Oakland. In reality, group and gang dynamics played a far more significant role in driving serious violence at the city level. As many as 84% of homicides citywide were group member-involved, and the majority of these homicides were the result of personal rivalries between and among groups, rather than disputes over drugs.

The problem analysis also showed that most victims and suspects had large numbers of interactions with the criminal justice system. In fact, homicide victims and suspects in Oakland were arrested an average of 10 times prior to a killing. Seventy-three percent of high-risk individuals had been convicted of a felony, as many as 80% had been on probation, and approximately 84% had been previously incarcerated at some point.<sup>95</sup>

CPSC determined that an individual most likely to be involved in a shooting in Oakland had "all or at least four" of the following five characteristics:

- 1. A young Black or Latino man ages 18–35**
- 2. A member of an active crew/gang/group in Oakland**
- 3. Extensive criminal justice involvement**
- 4. Previous shooting victim**
- 5. Has a close friend or family member who was shot in the past twelve months<sup>96</sup>**

"Making progress on reducing the risk these young men present to themselves and the community," CPSC staff concluded, "depends on making them a joint and sustained focus of the full range of Ceasefire partners."<sup>97</sup>

This would require making some fundamental changes to the city's approach to violence, including the way social services were being provided under Measure Y, which was set to expire at the end of 2014—unless Oakland voters could be convinced to extend it.

## PROVIDING SOCIAL SERVICES TO HIGH-RISK INDIVIDUALS

In 2013, Oakland's total homicide count dropped to 90 and nonfatal shootings decreased by more than 15%,<sup>98</sup> an encouraging sign for Oakland Ceasefire partners, but the sunset date of Measure Y loomed.<sup>99</sup>

If Measure Y expired, Oakland's network of community service providers—which was rebranded as Oakland Unite in 2012—would suddenly be stripped of millions of dollars in annual funding.

The renewal of Measure Y was “literally, a matter of life and death,” said one provider. “These are people known to be targets, to be walking around with pistols. If [this funding] goes away, then what happens to hundreds of men and women who...feel like they've been forgotten?”<sup>100</sup>

Now acutely aware of who was responsible for gun violence in the city, Oakland Ceasefire partners prepared to take advantage of an opportunity to restructure Measure Y.

## MEASURE Z TO THE RESCUE

The CPSC problem analysis did not come as a complete surprise to administrators of Measure Y. Feedback from staff and clients, as well as in-house data analysis, had indicated a substantial unmet need in the community among a population that was older, male, and disproportionately involved in the criminal justice system, and Oakland Unite had been moving to meet that need.<sup>101</sup>

However, the language of Measure Y, which focused on “youth and children,” limited Oakland Unite's ability to meet the needs of the city's highest-risk population. This needed to change.

According to Barbara Lafitte-Oluwole of OCO, “Measure Y wasn't working exactly the way we wanted it to, but there were elements that were working.”<sup>102</sup> **The trick would be to renew Measure Y, keeping in place critical funding, while also reforming the elements that were standing in the way of success.**

This was the intent behind Measure Z, which was placed on the ballot in 2014.

Measure Z maintained the same 60/40 funding split between police and community

services as Measure Y, with 3% of funds set aside for regular evaluation, but with a focus on serious violence and high-risk individuals that was missing from Measure Y.<sup>103</sup>

Measure Z—formally known as the 2014 Oakland Public Safety and Services Violence Prevention Act—was crafted to jointly focus on “youth and young adults” at highest risk of violence, “as guided by data analysis.”<sup>104</sup> These critical phrases helped ensure that Measure Z funds would go to support a broader age range of those at greatest risk for becoming involved in violence.

Measure Z was also drafted to specifically highlight Ceasefire. The text of Measure Z identified one of its goals as “sustaining and strengthening of the City’s Operation Ceasefire strategy, including project management and crime analysis positions.”<sup>105</sup>

Despite these changes, advocates for Measure Z faced an uphill battle. “This required a huge effort on the part of community activists,” explained Reverend Ben McBride, “because at this time, there were a lot of bad feelings around Measure Y and we had to overcome that.”<sup>106</sup>

Activists had to make the case that Measure Z would support a focused and data-driven strategy to address violence that would be more effective than its predecessor.

## OAKLAND’S EVOLVING INVESTMENT IN SOCIAL SERVICES

The menu of services offered by Oakland Unite changed significantly after the passage of Measure Z. Oakland Unite’s budget shifted to provide funding for training, technical assistance, and community asset building. Funds were also refocused to better serve those at highest-risk for involvement in violence, a population that was older than many Measure Y clients, predominantly male, and often involved in the justice system.



Sources: Research Development Associates and Mathematica Policy Research. Measure Y amounts for 2010–2011; Measure Z amounts for 2017–2018

● MEASURE Y ● MEASURE Z

Once again, the faith-based activist community, led by Faith in Action affiliates such as OCO, got to work mobilizing support for Measure Z, along with a broad coalition of other stakeholders that included staff and leadership from community-based service providers, who participated in precinct walking, phone banking, neighborhood forums, and general advocacy.

The night walks organized by Oakland Ceasefire partners served as a way to galvanize support. Since Measure Z would extend a \$100 parcel tax increase, explained Reverend Ben McBride, one of the coalition's strategies was to work with congregations to identify Oakland homeowners and then invite them to participate in night walks so they could see firsthand the desperate need for the services that Measure Z would fund.<sup>107</sup>

"After the night walks, we would have very emotional debrief sessions to talk about what people had seen," said Reverend McBride. "Then we explained how Measure Z would help fund efforts to help reduce violence and create safer communities." Coalition members held public events and meetings in their homes to raise awareness. Signs in favor of Measure Z popped up in yards around the city.

Every single candidate in the city's mayoral race and seven of eight Oakland City Council members ultimately endorsed Measure Z.<sup>108</sup>

Measure Z was approved overwhelmingly in November 2014, with 77.5% of Oakland residents voting to extend the tax. It would provide an estimated \$277 million over the next 10 years to help fund the city's violence reduction strategy.<sup>109</sup> Mayor Quan also lost her bid for reelection to Libby Schaaf, a former Oakland city councilwoman who was familiar with and also supportive of the Oakland Ceasefire strategy.

2014 ended with 79 homicides and 420 nonfatal shootings, down from 90 and 471 the year before, an encouraging sign for Oakland Ceasefire partners that their efforts were having an impact and would continue to do so with critical funding now secured.<sup>110</sup>

Since the passage of Measure Z, Oakland has seen a drop in total nonfatal shootings every single year.<sup>111</sup>

## OAKLAND UNITE

The network of social services first created by Measure Y rebranded as Oakland Unite (OU) in 2012. The central goal of OU, a division of the city's Human Services

Activists had to make the case that Measure Z would support a focused and data-driven strategy to address violence that would be more effective than its predecessor.

Department (HSD), is serving those in Oakland at the highest risk of involvement in violence, either as victims or perpetrators.<sup>112</sup> OU administers grants and provides support to a network of local community-based organizations (CBOs) that offer overlapping support services to Oakland's high-risk population.<sup>113</sup> OU's mandate is broader than Ceasefire, as services and interventions focus not only on reducing gun violence but also on supporting victims of domestic violence and youth who experience commercial sexual exploitation.

Even before the passage of Measure Z, OU had been gradually moving away from the original Measure Y mission of providing services to a broad range of lower-risk young people. Between 2005 and 2013, the mean age of OU clients rose from 18 to 20, and the strategy shifted to include more men and more individuals with prior justice system involvement.<sup>114</sup> The CPSC problem analysis helped confirm that this was the most strategic use of resources to help address serious violence.

OU service providers serve participants from a diverse range of referral partners, including Highland Hospital, the probation department, Oakland Unified School District, and other community-based organizations. **For OU's adult life-coaching strategy, Oakland Ceasefire is the largest single source of client referrals.**<sup>115</sup> High-risk young men at the call-ins and custom notifications are regularly encouraged to engage with OU services. In this way, Ceasefire serves as a critical referral pathway into the OU network.

OU approaches violence as a public health issue. "This is healing-centered work with individuals that has relationship building at its core," explains Peter Kim, interim director of Oakland's recently created Department of Violence Prevention and previously the manager of Oakland Unite.<sup>116</sup> As a result, OU services are intended to address the root causes of violence such as untreated trauma, unstable relationships, and lack of economic and educational opportunity.

Oakland Unite is designed to be more than just a channel for funding CBOs. It's also meant to function as a well-integrated network of providers, resulting in better coordination of services and improved outcomes for participants.

"We have a critical role to play as a convener of our partner agencies," said Kim, "and as the funder responsible for holding grantees accountable, we have a real motivational tool to get people together."

As part of this effort, OU staff regularly convene funded agencies to discuss potential referrals, provide training and technical assistance, share best practices, and troubleshoot challenges.

This taxpayer-funded model of service delivery is fairly unique in America. “There are not many places in the country with tax measures dedicated exclusively to community-focused support services for high-risk populations,” said Kim.<sup>117</sup>

Having a city agency centrally coordinating violence prevention and intervention services has helped Oakland break down the silos that often exist between service providers by aligning programming priorities and developing shared standards of practice. OU staff have worked hard to ensure that their services are highly integrated; by design, program participants are often referred to multiple OU providers within the network.<sup>118</sup>

With Measure Z’s increased focus on high-risk individuals, OU intentionally chose fewer organizations to fund than it did under Measure Y. “We were able to offer larger grants and be more strategic and intentional,” Kim explained. “As a result, the service population is smaller than the service population under Measure Y, but they are higher-risk and higher-need because they are more directly involved in and impacted by the violence.”<sup>119</sup>

With a yearly budget of approximately \$14 million, almost \$10 million of which comes from Measure Z,<sup>120</sup> OU funds a variety of CBOs in Oakland to provide services falling under several overarching categories that include: 1) life coaching 2) education and economic self-sufficiency and 3) violent incident and crisis response.<sup>121</sup>

#### **LIFE COACHING**

Intensive case management, or “life coaching,” as it’s called at OU, is an integral part of Oakland’s violence reduction strategy. Life coaching is premised on the notion that many of those at highest risk of involvement with violence lack meaningful support systems to help them make positive changes. Life coaches are often their first and only dedicated advocates.

“Growing up, I didn’t have my mom, my pops, and I turned to the street,” reported one participant. “I went to this program and they filled that family void for me.”<sup>122</sup>

OU’s vision of intensive case management is centered around a relationship-building process between the participant and life coach that involves consistent and frequent contact, conversations focused on self-reflection and behavior change, and coordinated, comprehensive support guided by careful case planning driven by the participant.<sup>123</sup>

Between 2005 and 2013, the mean age of Oakland Unite clients rose from 18 to 20, and the strategy shifted to include more men and more individuals with prior justice system involvement.

OU life coaches are present at every call-in conducted by Oakland Ceasefire partners, making connections and building relationships with Ceasefire clients with an eye toward mitigating their risk of exposure to violence and improving their life outcomes.

Life coaches make it clear that they do not represent law enforcement, that service engagement is always optional, and that all participant-provider interaction is confidential. Still, life coaches must overcome initial client distrust when they are seen at call-ins with members of law enforcement.<sup>124</sup>

As one life coach explained, “It’s a case by case basis, but a person who’s forced to come to a thing where the police are talking about, ‘you gotta make changes, you might get killed,’ then [law enforcement officers] walk out and [service providers] come in, and they make a connection that you’re associated with the police. People will respond differently but that look isn’t the perfect look.”<sup>125</sup>

For OU life coaches, the first interaction with a potential client is an opportunity to get to know the person, and ask some questions aimed at identifying pressing areas of concern. “What do you need?” is a question clients are not used to hearing.

Life coaches make the connection between their past lives, the changes they’ve made, and the people they are today. “One hundred percent, this work is all about relationship building and relationship sustaining,” said OU life coach Kentrell Killens. “You can’t do anything with or for a client without a good relationship.”<sup>126</sup>

OU life coaches use a screening process to determine if a potential client is at high enough risk to engage in the process, or if less intensive services might be more appropriate. They look for a set of risk factors that line up with the risk profile developed in the CPSC problem analysis.

Life coaches ask potential clients if they’ve been the victim of violence in the past year, what neighborhoods they hang out in, where they live, whether they have a group or gang affiliation, whether any of their friends or family have been killed by gun violence in the past few years, and whether they’ve had contact with the criminal justice system.<sup>127</sup>

## OAKLAND UNITE LIFE COACH EMILIO MENA

At the heart of Oakland Unite are brave individuals working with those at the highest risk of becoming victims or perpetrators of violence.

Emilio Mena, a life coach at Oakland Unite, turned his own life around and now puts his safety on the line daily to build relationships with those at risk, mediate potentially deadly conflicts, and steer clients toward resources designed to help address the underlying causes of violence: trauma, lack of economic opportunity, substance abuse, and the impacts of systemic racism.

“Ten o’clock at night, I can call Emilio,” says one former gang member and Oakland Ceasefire participant. “If I run out of gas at three in the morning, I can call Emilio. Emilio’s gonna get out of his bed and come and get me.”

Source: San Francisco Magazine

In alignment with what is known about risk factors for exposure to serious violence in Oakland,<sup>128</sup> the life coaching client population is 96% male, 78% black, 17% Latinx, and almost entirely over age 18.<sup>129</sup>

Life coaches develop what they hear from their clients into a working plan called a “life map.” Clients identify key goals they want to accomplish and explore services that exist to help them achieve those goals. While life maps often include employment or housing needs, they also focus on reducing clients’ risk of involvement in violence, potentially including plans for conflict mediation, such as identifying peers and places the client should avoid, or in more extreme cases, even temporary relocation.<sup>130</sup>

OU life coaches do what they can to ensure that there is no appearance of collusion with OPD. Life coaches do not keep a record of sensitive information or anything that might be incriminating for a client. As a rule, information shared by clients with life coaches is never shared with OPD.

For clients who stay on track and make progress toward achieving their life map goals, financial incentives encourage continued progress. The economic realities of street life are ever-present for clients, and these incentives help participants cope with financial pressures, helping them to stay the course.

Because life coaches are working with an incredibly vulnerable population that is facing a host of problems, from homelessness to criminal justice system involvement, as a best practice, life coaches have caseloads of no more than 15 clients at a time.

Prior to 2014, OU did not fund community-based adult life coaching. Under Measure Z, OU established adult life coaching as a strategy, and as of 2019, funds 14 life coaches citywide. In 2016 and 2017, OU funded four agencies to help pursue the life coaching strategy, including Community & Youth Outreach, the Mentoring Center, Roots Community Health Center, and ABODE Services, with a total grant amount of just under \$1.4 million.<sup>131</sup> This funding allowed 457 high-risk participants to be served during that period.<sup>132</sup>

Life coaching serves as an initial entry point and ongoing source of support to help clients, including Ceasefire participants, navigate the collection of other services that are offered through OU’s network of CBOs.

#### **EDUCATIONAL AND ECONOMIC SELF-SUFFICIENCY**

For clients that may be ready to pursue a GED, start job training, or begin a career, OU

Life coaches must overcome initial client distrust when they are seen at call-ins with members of law enforcement.



funds several CBOs to provide services through the educational and economic self-sufficiency (EESS) strategy, in recognition of the fact that one of the root causes of violence is lack of economic opportunity.

EESS agencies help provide job readiness training, transitional employment, and long-term, career-track employment opportunities. “I like to offer our guys a buffet, as opposed to just a meal,” said OU Life Coach Javier Jimenez, in reference to the host of services available through the OU network.<sup>133</sup>

Much depends on what the individual client is ready for, since simply offering a job to a person who has suffered intense trauma and may have little to no prior work experience, without making sure they have the tools and skills to succeed, can actually cause unintended harm. “It is important to partner with worksites that are understanding of the population Oakland Unite serves and that are able to provide a nurturing work environment,” said one EESS agency staff member.<sup>134</sup>

Groups like the Oakland Private Industry Council, for example, use intensive case management, individual coaching, and wraparound services to help participants through an initial period of employment readiness training and professional development before placement in long-term job opportunities. Staff provide “trauma-informed coaching” to participants throughout the process to help them develop the necessary skills, including fostering relationships with potential employers.

Oakland’s Center for Employment Opportunities (CEO) focuses on providing employment support for adults returning from incarceration. Knowing the challenges

*Oakland Unite’s education and economic self sufficiency programs help youth and young adults achieve important milestones like graduating from high school or obtaining their GED certificate.*

*Photo courtesy of Oakland Unite*

that formerly incarcerated individuals face in transitioning to the workforce, the Center for Employment Opportunities offers transportation assistance and daily pay to clients in transitional opportunities and then continues to provide incentives for clients to retain permanent employment.

“The pay was really the big sell for enrolling in the program,” said one participant. “But once in the program it was the job coaching and welcoming environment” that made ongoing engagement more attractive.<sup>135</sup>

An evaluation of the EESS strategy shows that “participation decreases the likelihood of arrest for any offense in the six months after enrollment by six percentage points.” This is impressive considering the high-risk profile of EESS participants: Almost 40% of adult EESS participants had an arrest prior to enrolling, and 70% of participants self-reported being “actively involved in or at risk of involvement in violence.”<sup>136</sup>

Because life coaching and EESS are designed to be complementary services, OU creates coordinated referral pathways between providers, and clients continue to meet with their life coaches as they engage with employment services to help make sure they are staying away from violent conflict and working toward other life map goals.

While these strategies are geared toward preventing violence before it happens, OU’s violent incident and crisis response strategy is designed to intervene effectively when acts of violence do occur.

#### **VIOLENT INCIDENT AND CRISIS RESPONSE**

One of the biggest risk factors for violence is being the direct victim of an act of violence or knowing someone who is victimized.<sup>137</sup> OU funds CBOs to provide timely services and support to victims of violent crime, with the aim of interrupting cycles of violence and reducing the chances of violent retaliation.

The first of these is a Hospital-based Violence Intervention Program (HVIP), Caught in the Crossfire, which is a program of Youth ALIVE!, a CBO that has been providing violence reduction services in Oakland for almost 30 years.

#### **SUPPORT OUTREACH STAFF**

Effective street outreach work directly engages those at highest risk for becoming victims and perpetrators of violence. This is a challenging undertaking that can be hazardous, stressful, and emotionally taxing. Outreach workers often spend long hours in dangerous circumstances and struggle with losing young men they’ve come to know to gun violence or prison.

Still, in many cities, these concerns are overlooked, resulting in rapid burnout and high turnover that can damage the credibility of the strategy in the community.

“Cities need to understand how much they’re asking of their outreach workers,” insists Oakland Unite’s program planner, Mailee Wang. “They need to be able to care for their staff, be sensitive to their mental health needs, and invest resources to realistically reflect what they’re asking from their outreach workers. It’s a very dangerous job.”

*Source: Mailee Wang interview*

HVIPs provide crisis intervention and case management services to individuals who are treated for violent injury in the hospital. Studies have shown that in many cases, such individuals are at extremely elevated risk of reinjury within a short period following discharge. In urban settings such as Oakland, up to 41% of patients treated for violent injuries such as gunshots are reinjured within just five years.<sup>138</sup>

Being victimized by violence also significantly increases the likelihood that a person will perpetrate violence against others, oftentimes as retaliation for the initial injury. Exposure to firearm violence doubles the probability that a young person will commit a violent act within two years.<sup>139</sup>

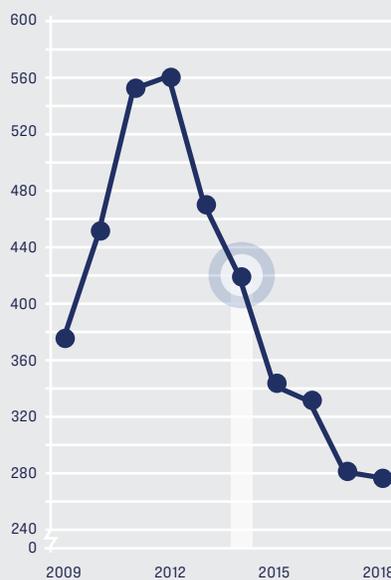
Engagement with clients lasts well after they are discharged, and Youth ALIVE! staff follow up with clients regularly outside of the hospital to provide further support. They work together with OU Violence Interrupters and participants' families to prevent retaliatory violence.<sup>140</sup>

HVIPs have been shown to significantly reduce patient involvement in both violence and the criminal justice system. A study of Caught in the Crossfire in Oakland showed that clients were 70% less likely to be arrested and 60% less likely to have any criminal involvement compared to a control group.<sup>141</sup> Evaluations from HVIPs in other American cities have shown equally promising results.

HOMICIDES



NONFATAL SHOOTINGS



## OAKLAND IN 2014

In January 2014, the California Partnership for Safe Communities presents the findings of the problem analysis to the Oakland City Council. In November 2014, Measure Z passes with 77.5% of the vote, providing an estimated \$277 million in funding for Oakland's violence reduction strategies over the next 10 years. Libby Schaaf is elected mayor of Oakland. In partnership with the community, OPD begins Procedural Justice I training. In 2014, there are 79 homicides and 420 nonfatal shootings in Oakland.

Source: OPD Annual Crime Reports.

OU also funds CBOs that provide intensive outreach, mental health services, and sometimes temporary relocation services to those directly affected by violence in Oakland. In addition to the risk posed by potential retaliation, at least some participants “are also often at risk for...depression or self-harm because of grief.”<sup>142</sup> A timely response from the OU network can help prevent both retaliation and self-harm.

When serious violence occurs in Oakland, staff members from Youth ALIVE! and Catholic Charities of the East Bay help families, friends, classmates, and other individuals access grief and trauma counseling services, in addition to other crisis support services. They also help with other immediate needs, such as finding temporary housing or assisting with victims of crime compensation applications to help pay for medical or mental health services. Where there is an immediate threat of retaliatory violence, the OU-funded temporary relocation program will help individuals “transition to a safer location until the situation is abated or until a long-term plan has been established.”<sup>143</sup>

In the case of a homicide, Youth ALIVE! will also assist families with planning and paying for a funeral or vigil, which Oakland families frequently cannot afford.<sup>144</sup>

Through these programs, OU provides varying degrees of support to 95% of homicide victims’ families.<sup>145</sup>

Where there is a real risk of retaliation, OU also deploys Violence Interrupters through its street outreach strategy. Violence Interrupters are hired to “develop deep relationships with active groups and networks, work on long-range truce negotiation, conflict mediation, and address immediate safety concerns.”<sup>146</sup>

Violence Interrupters are trained credible messengers who are first responders to violent incidents with a high likelihood of retaliation. Their objective is to talk to friends or family members of the victim and identify opportunities to mediate further conflict. This could mean talking down friends of the victim who are angry and seeking vengeance.

“We understand the language, the codes, the barriers to a new life for young gang and group members in Oakland’s toughest neighborhoods,” said one Youth ALIVE! staff member.<sup>147</sup> Violence Interrupters often rely on community trust developed over many years to gain access to tense and sensitive situations.

Being victimized by violence significantly increases the likelihood that a person will perpetrate violence against others, oftentimes as retaliation for the initial injury.

Where possible, Violence Interrupters make referrals to other available OU services, such as temporary relocation. A referral may also be made to a life coach for long-term assistance. Those who are “more deeply rooted in the violence often aren’t receptive to services,” said a Youth ALIVE! staffer, “but the Violence Interrupters remain involved with them until they are ready.”<sup>148</sup>

As a key partner in the city’s comprehensive strategy to reduce violence, OU’s role is to work directly with high-risk individuals to build relationships, mediate conflicts, and help address the underlying risk factors of violence. **While OU’s mission is broader than that of Ceasefire, both share the common goal of making Oakland safer by reducing gun violence and saving lives.** Although there can be tensions between social service providers and law enforcement officials, the stakeholders interviewed for this report agreed that both groups are more effective when they work in partnership, provided there are clear protocols and agreements in place to establish roles and boundaries.

In addition to direct communication and the provision of social services, another core component of the city’s strategy is a targeted law enforcement response to serious violence and an ongoing effort to improve strained relationships between police and the Oakland community.

## TARGETED LAW ENFORCEMENT ACTIONS AND IMPROVING POLICE-COMMUNITY RELATIONSHIPS

For individuals who continue to engage in serious violence, Oakland Ceasefire calls for a narrowly targeted law enforcement response. In addition, because trust between police and the community is essential to effective violence reduction work, a primary goal of the Oakland Ceasefire strategy is to improve the historically strained relationship between the Oakland Police Department (OPD) and city residents.

For many years, OPD’s approach to violence was anything but targeted. As part of Oakland Ceasefire, the California Partnership for Safe Communities (CPSC) and its partners worked hard to overhaul the way OPD handles violent crime.

As CPSC’s Vaughn Crandall explained, under Measure Y, “law enforcement in Oakland was trained to help with drug crime and medium-risk young people. The OPD structure had been built to do street-level drug enforcement which, given the problem analysis, was not going to be effective.”<sup>149</sup>

Deputy Chief LeRonne Armstrong echoes this sentiment. “For many years, the OPD strategy was based on suppression and dumping resources into areas with spikes in violence,” he said. “The measure of success was the number of arrests and recovered firearms, without looking at whether crime was going down in the long term.”<sup>150</sup>

In fact, when CPSC first contracted with Oakland in 2012, OPD did not have any units specifically dedicated to addressing serious violence. Instead, OPD's five primary policing units were divided up by geography, and each unit leader set his or her own priorities. The result was a reliance on unfocused tactics such as gang injunctions, curfews, and aggressive street-level drug enforcement that tended to sweep large numbers of young men of color at low risk of violence into the criminal justice system.<sup>151</sup>

"They were not holding themselves accountable for reducing serious violence," said Crandall. "They weren't measuring progress by a reduction in homicides."<sup>152</sup> When CPSC staff first started working with OPD in 2012, their aim was to radically alter the status quo.

One of the first steps they took was to address the lack of resources dedicated to addressing serious violence at OPD.

## THE CEASEFIRE SECTION

At the behest of CPSC, OPD slowly began to move away from its unfocused approach. The vision, Crandall explained, was "to restructure the police department to have a centralized division devoted to understanding and intervening in gun violence."<sup>153</sup>

The first step would be the creation of a "Ceasefire Section" that was hyper-focused on addressing and preventing serious violence, especially group and gang-related homicides, with a special emphasis on shootings.

"We were trying to do too much as an agency...we really didn't have a laser focus," said Captain Ersie Joyner, who became the head of the Ceasefire Section toward the end of 2012. "I'm a firm believer in the idea that the random application of resources always yields random results."<sup>154</sup>

When Captain Joyner was first assigned to OPD's newly established Ceasefire Section, he quickly realized that very few resources had actually been dedicated to the strategy.

"There was Ceasefire in name only," he recalled. "There were no assigned officers to carry out the Ceasefire mission or objectives."<sup>155</sup>

Joyner had to get creative in order to build up the Ceasefire Section, working in partnership with CPSC and Oakland Ceasefire Program Director Reygan Cunningham, who served as a liaison between OPD, city leadership, and community partners. "We robbed, stole, and borrowed from other units, helped out and collaborated with existing teams, and we were able to build something from there," said Joyner.<sup>156</sup>

A primary goal of the Oakland Ceasefire strategy is to improve the historically strained relationship between the Oakland Police Department and city residents.

The turning point came at the end of 2012 when, in the wake of a particularly violent weekend, Joyner was told by a superior to “flip the switch,” which was a mistaken reference to “pulling levers,” a term associated with the Ceasefire strategy. Regardless of the terminology, what OPD leadership wanted was an enforcement action against those responsible for the recent violence.

Joyner responded, “We don’t have staff dedicated to this and you’ve not done anything to put this into place, so you can’t just ‘flip the switch.’”<sup>157</sup>

OPD wanted to show the community that it was committed to addressing serious violence as an Oakland Ceasefire partner, but didn’t have the resources in place to take meaningful action. “That’s when they started giving dedicated people to do this,” Joyner recalled.<sup>158</sup>

With support from OPD leadership, newly allocated resources, and ongoing assistance from CPSC, the Ceasefire Section evolved into a citywide team comprised of nearly 40 officers from four different subunits, each under Joyner’s command.<sup>159</sup>

These “special investigations units,” or SIUs, were built to correspond with historical trends in violence and known gang dynamics in Oakland. Two Ceasefire SIUs are focused on East Oakland, one is focused on West Oakland, and another specializes in citywide gang activity.<sup>160</sup>

The Ceasefire units use intelligence-led policing to accomplish this. In practice, this means that an “intelligence cell” comprised of a sergeant and multiple officers comb through social media, track shooting incidents, review regional crime data, and put out a daily intelligence summary, which helps the Ceasefire SIUs determine enforcement priorities.

Officers in the Ceasefire Section are selected based on specific criteria. According to Joyner, OPD looks for people who know how to express empathy and communicate well in the community. Ceasefire officers undergo “special training and field-based skill-development,” such as how to deliver custom notifications, to assist them in their primary task of working to reduce and prevent instances of serious violence, particularly group-related shootings and homicides.<sup>161</sup>

Ceasefire units “make a careful effort to focus on the right people, and they know exactly who they’re stopping and what they’re stopping them for,” said

“Now we have a strategic, mindful process that minimizes our footprint on the community. I’m able to go to bed every night and hold my head up high.”

Joyner.<sup>162</sup> This has made his team more productive and efficient while reducing the likelihood of negative contact between community members and the police.

“I’m more proud of the work that’s being done now than I ever was when we were back in the ‘good-old days’ of OPD, when locking people up was doing, ‘tremendous work,’” Joyner said. “Now we have a strategic, mindful process that, in my opinion, minimizes our footprint on the community. I’m able to go to bed every night and hold my head up high.”<sup>163</sup>

One of the essential mechanisms for keeping OPD and the Ceasefire Section focused on the “right” people are weekly shooting reviews, a process introduced by CPSC.

## SHOOTING REVIEWS

CPSC’s initial problem analysis was an invaluable resource, but violence dynamics in a city are ever-changing, and it’s important to have a way to stay on top of emerging trends. Oakland Ceasefire’s law enforcement partners accomplish this through shooting reviews.

CPSC staff helped establish the shooting review process, which they describe as a convening of “knowledgeable practitioners, most often police and law enforcement, to systematically analyze and respond to recent shootings.”<sup>164</sup>

As Deputy Chief LeRonne Armstrong explained, “Success on the enforcement side is now all about arresting the right people, understanding the impact of that, and prioritizing the hottest people. So, at a shooting review, you talk about the highest priority targets and whether their arrest will help to reduce the likelihood of a shooting or homicide.”<sup>165</sup>

The weekly shooting review in Oakland includes area commanders, crime analysts, the Criminal Investigations Division, the crime lab, the Investigative Division, representatives from other local police departments, the Housing Authority, the District Attorney’s Office, the FBI, the Drug Enforcement Administration, and US Marshals, among others.<sup>166</sup> A team made up of senior and mid-level OPD leadership, working closely with a crime analyst and a researcher, facilitates the shooting reviews.<sup>167</sup>

The group reviews every shooting that occurred in the city that week, including the date, time, place, and people involved. “We look at intel regarding fatal shootings, injury shootings, and non-injury shootings,” said Cunningham. “It’s still incredibly important to know if a house or car got shot up, even if nobody was actually hit.”<sup>168</sup>

The shooting review team works through a series of analytical questions about the

circumstances of each shooting and the motives of those involved. A certain pattern of disputes, for example, may be likely to result in retaliation, in which case OPD may plan a custom notification or targeted enforcement action, or share key information with Oakland Unite staff, who then pass on pertinent information to their provider network to inform their support and prevention efforts.

Shooting reviews, which can have as many as 80 people in attendance, are all about “getting investigators and external partners in the room and talking about every shooting in the city,” said Deputy Chief Armstrong. “On the victim’s side, we worry about retaliation and services, and we work with Oakland Unite to address those needs.”<sup>169</sup>

With the Ceasefire Section and shooting reviews, OPD has drastically reformed its approach to serious violent crime. By moving away from broad enforcement tactics, and focusing on solving and preventing serious violence, OPD actions are seen as less random and more legitimate.

## PROCEDURAL JUSTICE

An important element of Oakland Ceasefire is building trust between OPD and Oakland community members, a relationship that has long been strained. “We intentionally used the word ‘build,’” said Reygan Cunningham, “because it’s unclear if there was ever trust between law enforcement and the community here in Oakland.”<sup>170</sup>

“We’re going to communities that need us the most, but trust us the least,” said Oakland Ceasefire Captain Ersie Joyner.<sup>171</sup>

When residents are distrustful of police, they are less likely to report crime and cooperate with law enforcement, and consequently, more incidents of serious violence are left unsolved. This leads to low solve rates for serious crimes such as homicide, which creates an impression that the police are either unwilling or unable to protect the community. This contributes to a cycle of retaliatory violence when victims or their loved ones decide to take matters into their own hands.<sup>172</sup>

Procedural justice, a theory of policing that holds that law enforcement should act respectfully in the communities they police, whether they are walking the beat or conducting a traffic stop, is intended to disrupt these cycles of violence.

“The research evidence is clear,” declared a CPSC policy brief. “Any comprehensive

With the Ceasefire Section and shooting reviews, the Oakland Police Department has drastically reformed its approach to serious violent crime.

strategy to strengthen police-community relations must ensure police consistently treat people with dignity and respect; give them ‘voice,’ a chance to tell their side of the story; make decisions fairly, based on facts, not irrelevant factors such as race; and act in a way that reassures people of their good will.”<sup>173</sup>

For Oakland Ceasefire partners, the effort to improve police-community relations began with a department-wide effort to conduct trainings with OPD officers about the tenets of procedural justice. “It’s one thing for the chief of police to say they’re committed to these principles,” said Reverend Dr. George Cummings, “but without a whole lot of re-education, it just won’t happen with the rank-and-file.”<sup>174</sup>

In early 2013, staff from CPSC contacted procedural justice experts from Yale University, including Professors Tracey Meares and Tom Tyler, who had recently worked with the Chicago Police Department (CPD) to develop an eight-hour, evidence-based curriculum intended to serve as the foundation for rebuilding police-community relations.

In the fall of 2013, CPSC and CPD cohosted a weeklong “train the trainer” workshop with Oakland Ceasefire partners, which kick-started the process of tailoring the CPD curriculum to Oakland.

An important element in building this curriculum was community involvement. At the insistence of Oakland Ceasefire community leaders, OPD partnered with clergy and community leaders including Reverend Dr. Cummings, Reverend Damita Davis-Howard, and Reverend Ben McBride, to design and teach a module on the history of policing and race in Oakland.

“We had to demand that the department include direct community participation, but to their credit, they ultimately agreed,” recalled Reverend Ben McBride. “This was a sign we were building more of a two-way partnership.”<sup>175</sup>

All of this culminated in the creation of a full-day procedural justice course for OPD officers known as “Procedural Justice I.” This course, taught by a combination of officers and community members, addressed core concepts of procedural justice and its benefits for both officers and community members, the importance of understanding and recognizing implicit bias, and the history of policing in America, with an emphasis on OPD’s historically strained relationship with the community.

## THE IMPORTANCE OF PROCEDURAL JUSTICE

There is increasing evidence that people are most likely to follow the law when they have positive interactions with law enforcement and perceive the procedures used to enforce the law as fair and just.

In many urban areas with high levels of violence, police-community relations are often highly strained, decreasing the legitimacy of law enforcement efforts. Procedural justice training helps officers think critically about how they’re perceived by the communities they’re tasked with protecting.

Incorporating principles of procedural justice is an important way for police departments to build trust and improve their ability to effectively solve violent crime.

Reverend McBride helped facilitate these trainings on a volunteer basis. “I give them theory, but I also use the personal,” he said. “I talk about my great uncle in the South who was killed by the KKK, made up of off-duty police officers. How my father at 13 was arrested demonstrating with Martin Luther King. How the only gun ever pointed at me was by a San Francisco police officer when I was coming home from work as a college student.”

“An officer might say ‘I’ve only been on the force three years, why do I get the heat?’ I explain they have stepped into a 50- or 100-year-old story about policing.”<sup>176</sup>

This discussion sometimes produced moments of extreme tension, Reverend McBride recalled. At one meeting, when the room became noticeably tense, officers told him they had reservations because, as a civilian, he “didn’t know what it was like to walk in their shoes.” He found this to be a valid point, and from then on at trainings, he would start by holding up his size-14 shoes.<sup>177</sup>

“I don’t know what it feels like to walk in your shoes,” he would tell gathered officers, “I only know what it means to walk in these shoes, but my hope is that if I talk about these shoes enough, we can get these shoes and your shoes together on the same journey.”

One of the most heartening moments, he said, was when a particularly tough officer surprised him at the end of a training session by raising his hand. “You’re right,” the officer said, “I don’t know what it’s like from the community’s perspective, and I’m realizing that if I had those experiences, I wouldn’t trust the police either.”

**At the end of the day, Reverend McBride emphasized, “if you can humanize both sides, that’s when you can have breakthroughs in this work.”<sup>178</sup>**

In addition to community perspectives, the procedural justice training was also tailored to the lived experience of officers, with an emphasis on the impact that dealing with daily emergencies and negative situations can have on an individual.

“We focus on not allowing those experiences to affect the way they treat people,” said Deputy Chief Armstrong. “We explain that even with those negative experiences, citizens need to be treated with dignity and respect. Every encounter with a citizen is an opportunity to put forth a positive image of the department.”<sup>179</sup>

Procedural Justice I training began in 2014, and, according to Deputy Chief Armstrong and other Oakland Ceasefire partners, all sworn officers and non-sworn

It’s essential to translate training and community input into everyday departmental policy and practice.

personnel at OPD—more than 1,100 people—have completed the course. **During the 22 months it took to complete the initial round of Procedural Justice I training, there was not a single officer-involved shooting in Oakland.** It is now a mandatory training for all new staff and OPD Academy students.<sup>180</sup>

Of course, training alone cannot suddenly repair decades of mistreatment and mutual distrust. It's essential to translate training and community input into everyday departmental policy and practice. Procedural justice training is meant to complement other structural changes designed to improve accountability to the community, including body-worn cameras, citizen review boards, and improved practices at homicide crime scenes.<sup>181</sup>

Although it's difficult to measure the strength of police-community relations, a number of important metrics have improved in Oakland in recent years. Use-of-force incidents involving officers have dropped from 1,246 in 2012 to 317 in 2017,<sup>182</sup> a 75% reduction.<sup>183</sup> The number of legal claims of officer misconduct also dropped by 74% during this period.<sup>184</sup>

Moreover, the homicide solve rate in Oakland has improved dramatically in recent years, from a low of 29% in 2011, the year before Oakland Ceasefire launched,<sup>185</sup> to more than 70% in 2017.<sup>186</sup>

Deputy Chief Armstrong says that improved police-community relationships are a major reason for this progress. “More witnesses are coming forward. People are now providing video evidence, where they didn't used to do that even when they had it,” he said. “That happens when you are seen as a professional department.”<sup>187</sup>

Despite this progress, many Oakland Ceasefire community partners still feel that there is a long way to go in order to reconcile relationships between police and community in the most impacted neighborhoods. For example, although community representatives were deeply involved with Procedural Justice I trainings, Oakland Ceasefire partners report that the next phase of the program, Procedural Justice II, took place without direct community involvement.<sup>188</sup>

“Community partners have felt very strongly that the procedural justice training process was an important part of the trust-building agenda,” said Reverend Dr. Cummings. “This process cannot exclude community partners. That's the kind of thing that could lead to the community walking away from the table.”<sup>189</sup>

“Every encounter with a citizen is an opportunity to put forth a positive image of the department.”

Despite the setbacks and frustrations, Oakland Ceasefire partners are constantly looking for new ways to move trust-building work forward. In early 2018, OPD was selected as one of five grantees to participate in the Collective Healing Initiative, funded by the federal Office of Victims of Crime, which is a three-year project designed to assist police departments with trauma-informed strategies, policies, and interventions to promote community engagement and healing related to negative incidents.<sup>190</sup>

The necessary work of trust building will continue. Although progress has been made, Oakland Ceasefire partners are under no illusion that this problem has been solved.

“To sustain change, we have to have ongoing, continuous, and honest dialogue with the community that informs changes within the department,” said former Oakland Ceasefire program director Reygan Cunningham, who is now a consultant to the city through CPSC. “So we have a long way to go, but we are moving forward together.”<sup>191</sup>

## PARTNERSHIP-BASED PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT

The final core component of Oakland Ceasefire is partnership-based performance management, which includes regular communication between partners and meetings with key stakeholders to foster collective accountability.

In Oakland, creating the right managerial framework required technical advisors and city leaders to think outside the box. In 2015, Mayor Libby Schaaf issued Oakland’s first-ever “executive directive,” which helped establish an effective and durable management structure.<sup>192</sup>

While improving this framework was a key to success, it was just as important to create structures to ensure ongoing accountability. **Oakland Ceasefire partners achieve this with three regular meetings: shooting reviews, coordination meetings, and performance reviews.** According to CPSC staff, “These meetings build on each other in fast-moving weekly cycles, progressively tackling analytic, strategic, and implementation challenges.”<sup>193</sup>

## THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTIVE

After Oakland Ceasefire partners and community activists rallied to pass Measure Z, many groups returned to their silos. It became difficult to keep agencies focused on the strategy. In 2015, with guidance from CPSC, Oakland’s mayor issued an executive directive calling on OPD and the Human Services Department to develop the infrastructure necessary to successfully manage the Oakland Ceasefire strategy in true partnership.<sup>194</sup>

This action resulted in the permanent shifting of resources within OPD. Through the directive, technical advisors compelled OPD to create a stable Ceasefire Management Team (CMT) that would be responsible for overseeing and institutionalizing the strategy and would have “no changes in membership” for the next 18 months.<sup>195</sup> The CMT, which reported directly to the chief of police, included Ceasefire sergeants, then Ceasefire program director Reygan Cunningham, and OPD Captain Ersie Joyner, who heads the department’s Ceasefire Section.<sup>196</sup>

Prior to the directive, law enforcement in Oakland had not always made a concerted effort to support the strategy, and the Ceasefire Section sometimes lacked the intel and resources to follow through on its promise of a sure and swift response to violence. “We were writing checks we couldn’t cash,” recalls Captain Joyner.<sup>197</sup> However, the Ceasefire Management Team gave key leaders of OPD’s Ceasefire Section direct access to the chief of police, ensuring that the team had access to what it needed to build an effective response to violence.

Additionally, the executive directive called for OPD to build its analytic capacity by hiring additional crime analysts and to ramp up its procedural justice training and other activities in order to improve police-community trust.<sup>198</sup>

To further hold partners accountable, Oakland Ceasefire Program Director Reygan Cunningham was given more authority and began reporting directly to both the chief of police and the mayor. In addition, Oakland Unite was instructed to “prioritize expansion of case management capacity” as well as “an agreed upon referral process for outreach and support for individuals receiving custom notifications.”<sup>199</sup>

To ensure that OU was focusing on the people most active in gun violence, the agency was also tasked with developing its own shooting reviews, similar to those conducted by OPD. The resulting coordination meetings are discussed in detail below.

Oakland Ceasefire partners have since made tremendous progress toward meeting the requirements of the executive directive. OPD developed a more capable, intelligence-led enforcement team, better relationships with city and community partners, and an effective, well-institutionalized management structure, while OU’s service network has grown more robust, better connected to the Ceasefire strategy, and more capable of addressing the needs of those most likely to become victims or perpetrators of violence.<sup>200</sup>

In 2015, Mayor Libby Schaaf issued Oakland’s first-ever executive directive, which helped establish an effective and durable management structure.

## COORDINATION MEETINGS

The purpose of coordination meetings is to create a space to facilitate structured communication between law enforcement officials and Oakland Unite management staff, with the goal of creating plans for intervening in potentially deadly conflicts and preventing violence before it occurs. Twice monthly coordination meetings include community and faith leaders, police and probation officers, and OU management staff.

“OU staff know a lot, but they don’t always know who is at highest risk of retaliation,” said Reygan Cunningham. “They realized they essentially needed a version of the shooting review for service providers, so that’s why we started doing the coordination meetings.”<sup>201</sup>

In order to protect the credibility and safety of OU-funded social service providers, there is an intentional one-way flow of information at coordination meetings. This includes an update from OPD Ceasefire representatives related to **1) which groups and networks are actively violent 2) an analysis of conflicts across and within those groups and 3) the identification of individuals at especially high risk.**<sup>202</sup>

“Partnership with law enforcement provides real-time information for the OU network,” said Peter Kim, interim director of the Department of Violence Prevention and former Oakland Unite manager. “Equipped with that kind of information, our providers are better able to connect with those who need support services and work to prevent serious violence.”<sup>203</sup> At the same time, Kim said, it’s incredibly important that law enforcement understands and respects the one-way flow of information in order not to jeopardize the trust that service providers have earned with the community or compromise the integrity of their work.

“OPD had to get to a point where they understood the need for our separate lanes and learned to put those agreements in writing,” Kim said. “It’s taken years of consistently coming to the table and having hard conversations, but there is a willingness now to respect the data-sharing limitations between service providers and law enforcement partners.”<sup>204</sup>

While there are still tensions, OU staff see the benefit of this exchange. “There’s now an understanding that OPD has data that’s necessary to do the work,” said Mailee Wang, a program planner at OU who helps oversee the life coaching strategy. “They provide information that helps keep life coaches safe and shows when clients might need additional contact. There needs to be separation though, and that’s still a challenge.”<sup>205</sup>

OU’s service network has grown more robust, better connected to the Ceasefire strategy, and more capable of addressing the needs of those at highest risk of violence.

OPD also sees the value of this arrangement. “They can get where law enforcement can’t,” said Deputy Chief Armstrong. “Mediating small conflicts that could have otherwise been a war is very powerful.”<sup>206</sup>

Partners at the coordination meetings identify short-term steps designed to reduce the risk of violence. Those assembled discuss who among them is best positioned to try to mediate a particular conflict and brainstorm the most effective strategy for connecting a young person to needed services.

Sometimes the causes of violence can be shockingly simple. “One individual was shot over a \$300 dispute over rims for his car,” said Kim. “So it would have taken just \$300 to resolve, and he would have walked away.”<sup>207</sup>

Kim gave another example of a young man who was deeply involved in violence. While he was in police custody, his home was shot up and his mother was tragically killed. OPD was concerned that he would retaliate and set off a chain reaction of further violence if released by the court. Despite the circumstances, the court ordered his release.

OU assigned this young man a life coach, picked him up from custody, and brought him directly home, checking in on him daily. Violence Interrupters frequently visited his home to provide additional support to the family. Crisis response workers helped with funeral arrangements and other logistics related to his mother’s death. After the funeral, OU even arranged for the young man to temporarily relocate with family members outside the county.

“Ultimately, he wasn’t involved with more violence,” said Kim. “Multiple service providers came together to make this happen. Despite OPD’s objections, the judge decided to let him come home. So our job was to receive him with open arms and do all we could to help make that transition successful.”<sup>208</sup>

“Police departments think they can do it all, be counselors, do social services, but they can’t,” said Deputy Chief Armstrong. “We’ve learned to embrace what the community and service providers can offer in terms of outreach and support.”<sup>209</sup>

Another regular meeting in the Oakland Ceasefire management structure—performance reviews—helps ensure that city leaders are kept abreast of violence dynamics and can direct resources in a way that will minimize violent crime over the long term.

## PERFORMANCE REVIEWS

Performance reviews are designed to create accountability for Oakland Ceasefire

partners at the highest levels of city leadership. These semi-monthly meetings are led by the mayor and include a variety of stakeholders, including community leaders, department heads, and the Oakland Ceasefire program director.

According to CPSC staff, these stakeholders come together at performance reviews to “review data on the quality of implementation in order to solve operational challenges, refine strategies, and monitor progress toward violence-reduction goals.”<sup>210</sup>

Performance reviews consist of three parts. The first involves looking at data to assess how much progress is being made toward established violence reduction goals. **For Oakland, city leaders and Ceasefire partners agreed at the outset to a goal of an annual reduction of at least 10% in the number of homicides and nonfatal shootings.** Regular performance reviews help all partners measure progress and remain accountable to those core objectives, while recognizing that there is no “acceptable” level of violence.

In order to assess progress with respect to this ongoing goal, the most relevant data is compiled into a single document, a dashboard that allows busy city and community leaders to quickly and easily understand recent changes in violence dynamics.

Next, those at the performance review assess the quality of implementation based on the core components of Oakland Ceasefire, including communication, outreach and support, enforcement, and coordination.

With respect to communication, for example, the group will review the number of call-ins and custom notifications that have been conducted to date. Those in attendance will ask questions designed to improve processes: Are the right people being invited to call-ins? Should community members always be present for custom notifications? Are communications being delivered in a respectful manner?

Sometimes the causes of violence can be shockingly simple.

The core aim, according to CPSC staff, is to ensure that partners remain “focused on the small proportion of individuals actually driving violence; working at a scale that promises citywide results; and implementing in a way that is consistent with best practice and evaluation findings on effectiveness.”<sup>211</sup>

The third and final element of the performance review is an ongoing conversation about the policy changes that might be needed to strengthen implementation. This includes topics such as the potential reallocation of funding, new funding opportunities, the modification of program activities, and the resetting of priorities.

These conversations have led to substantive policy changes, including the 2015 executive directive referenced above.<sup>212</sup>

All of the core elements discussed above have contributed to a remarkable reduction in gun violence in Oakland since 2012. “The true unsung heroes are the young men in our community who have made the decision to do something different and made different decisions in regard to their involvement in violence,” said OPD Captain Ersie Joyner. “It takes way more courage to not retaliate than it does to pull a trigger.”<sup>213</sup>

## OAKLAND CEASEFIRE RESULTS

Oakland Ceasefire has produced extremely impressive results. When the strategy first started rolling out, toward the end of 2012, Oakland suffered a devastating 126 homicides.<sup>214</sup> In 2018, Oakland sustained 68 killings—still far too many, but its lowest total in nearly two decades and an almost 50% reduction from six years earlier.<sup>215</sup>

Nonfatal shootings in Oakland have also dropped dramatically, from 561 in 2012 to 277 in 2018, a more than 50% reduction.<sup>216</sup> “We’re seeing the payoff for sticking to a solid game plan,” said Mayor Libby Schaaf, a vocal proponent of the Oakland Ceasefire strategy.<sup>217</sup>

As a report by the National Institute for Criminal Justice Reform noted, “reductions in violent crime have also extended beyond shootings and homicides.”<sup>218</sup> In 2013, there were 2,764 armed robberies using a firearm in Oakland. In 2018, firearm robberies were down to 866, a nearly 70% reduction.<sup>219</sup>

In August 2018, criminologist Anthony Braga and a group of researchers released the results of an in-depth evaluation of Oakland Ceasefire. The primary goal of this evaluation was to determine if the strategy had significant impact on Oakland’s impressive reductions in fatal and nonfatal shootings, and to assess how Ceasefire partners and community leaders perceived the implementation of the strategy.

Researchers looked at shooting trends in Oakland neighborhoods in which Ceasefire was active versus neighborhoods where it was not. **Their analysis associated Ceasefire with an estimated 31.5% reduction in Oakland gun homicides controlling for seasonal variations and other trends, including gentrification.**<sup>220</sup>

Moreover, geographic comparisons showed that neighborhoods with gangs or groups involved with Oakland Ceasefire experienced significant reductions in gun violence, including both fatal and nonfatal shootings. Statistical analysis showed a 43.2% drop in group-involved shootings and a 23.2% reduction in shootings that did not involve a group.

The evaluation also compared monthly gun homicide counts from 2010 to 2017 for Oakland and 12 other comparison cities in California, finding that only two of the comparison cities experienced significant reductions in gun violence during this time period. **This indicated that the Oakland Ceasefire strategy “was associated with a noteworthy citywide reduction of gun homicide in Oakland that seemed distinct from gun homicide trends in other California cities.”**<sup>221</sup> One exception was the city of Stockton, which has also been working with CPSC to implement a strategy very similar to Oakland Ceasefire.

“These results suggest that the Ceasefire intervention reduced shootings involving treated gangs/groups and their rivals and allies,” researchers concluded.

The study also incorporated the perspectives and experiences of local stakeholders. Researchers conducted 21 interviews with call-in clients; city, clergy, and community leaders; police and probation officers; and social service providers.

Although those living and providing social services in the most disadvantaged neighborhoods agreed that too much violence persists, there was strong consensus among respondents that Oakland Ceasefire improved the city’s capacity to “systematically and thoughtfully reduce shootings and homicides.”

Importantly, the majority of participants reported that police-community relations in Oakland had improved since Ceasefire began, noting that strategy partners had

HOMICIDES



NONFATAL SHOOTINGS



## OAKLAND IN 2018

In August 2018, criminologist Anthony Braga and his team release the results of an in-depth study of Oakland Ceasefire, finding that Oakland Ceasefire is associated with a 31.5% reduction in Oakland gun homicides. In 2018, there were 68 killings in Oakland—the city’s lowest total in nearly two decades and an almost 50% reduction from six years earlier. Oakland also experienced a more than 50% reduction in nonfatal shootings, from 561 in 2012 to 277 in 2018.

Source: Anthony A. Braga, et al.; OPD Annual Crime Reports

deliberately enlisted and mobilized people of color to work toward improved police-community relations.

Researchers found that study participants “prefer Ceasefire over indiscriminate and heavy-handed policing initiatives that have the potential to criminalize entire communities,” although there were concerns among respondents that call-ins are not always conducted in a respectful manner.

Study participants also applauded Oakland leadership for its commitment to the strategy. “Respondents openly acknowledge that the current political support is unprecedented,” researchers noted, “deserving a great deal of credit for the observed success.”<sup>222</sup>

**The evaluation showed, both quantitatively and qualitatively, that Oakland Ceasefire has had a major impact on levels of serious violence.**

“Our community has come together to offer individuals a new path forward,” said Oakland Mayor Libby Schaaf. “This study proves that while we have made great strides to save lives and reduce the trauma of gun violence in our neighborhoods, we still have much work to do.”<sup>223</sup>

According to lead researcher Anthony Braga, “The City of Oakland deserves credit for the investments they’ve made to do this important work and to sustain it. They’ve put the structures in place to ensure its success, and a lot of other cities are now visiting Oakland to learn how to do it.”<sup>224</sup>

The next section of this report looks at the lessons learned from Oakland’s experience, as well as the experiences of a number of other cities implementing similar strategies, and identifies takeaways for key stakeholders.



# **TAKEAWAYS FOR KEY STAKEHOLDERS**

# Every city can learn from Oakland's hard-earned success.

Oakland found that addressing violence requires engagement from a wide array of stakeholders working in true partnership—requiring collaboration between community members, city officials, and law enforcement officers.

This section of the report looks at the most salient takeaways from Oakland's experience for each of these key stakeholder groups. Where helpful, this analysis draws on examples of successful efforts from cities around the country engaged in similar efforts.

## TAKEAWAYS FOR COMMUNITY MEMBERS

Community members and activists in cities across the country have a crucial role to play in addressing serious violence.

City leaders come and go—the police chief may retire, the mayor may lose a bid for reelection—but community members are there for the long haul. A violence reduction strategy that comes from the top down, without genuine community partnership, is destined for failure, as was the case with the early iterations of Ceasefire in Oakland.

There are many ways in which community members can engage in violence reduction, from education, to advocacy, to direct participation in a city's violence reduction strategy. The following sections outline various responses to the often-asked question: "What can I do to help?"

LESSON ONE

## DO YOUR HOMEWORK: UNDERSTAND WHAT WORKS IN VIOLENCE REDUCTION

As Oakland learned firsthand, the implementation of an effective violence reduction strategy is no easy task. It often requires multiple stakeholders to completely change a city's "business as usual" approach to violence, which won't happen without large amounts of political will that community members can help generate. The first step of this process is for community members to identify effective solutions.

A number of existing resources identify evidence-based violence prevention and intervention practices. The 2016 United States Agency for International Development (USAID) report, *What Works in Reducing Community Violence*, contains a comprehensive meta-review of more than 1,400 studies on this subject.

USAID researchers found that the "focused deterrence" strategy at the heart of Oakland Ceasefire "has the largest direct impact on crime and violence, by far, of any intervention in this report."<sup>225</sup> The authors pointed to a major study, which looked at 10 different cities implementing the model and found that nine out of 10 showed "substantially reduced crime and violence, with homicide reductions ranging from 34% to 63%."<sup>226</sup> A number of other studies confirm these findings.<sup>227</sup>

Strategies with no evidence of efficacy include "Scared Straight" programs, where participants are exposed to violent images or real-life victims of violence in an effort to provide a sort of warning against violent behavior, and gun buyback programs, where incentives are offered to individuals for turning in firearms.<sup>228</sup>

Cities United, a national organization focused on eliminating violence in communities of color in American cities, issued a report called *Interventions For Reducing Violence And Its Consequences For Young Black Males In America*, which presents the results of an "extensive scan of the research literature relating to violence prevention interventions."<sup>229</sup>

In this report, Cities United recommends that cities "focus violence prevention interventions and resources on the highest risk individuals," and "use data and analysis to develop an ongoing focus on those most at risk for violence"—exactly the approach taken by Oakland Ceasefire partners.<sup>230</sup>

Finally, Giffords Law Center, in partnership with Faith in Action (formerly PICO National Network), conducted a thorough review of the available literature and

There are many ways in which community members can engage in violence reduction, from education, to advocacy, to direct participation in a city's violence reduction strategy.

published a report in 2016 outlining the most promising violence reduction strategies in a report called *Healing Communities in Crisis: Lifesaving Solutions to the Urban Gun Violence Epidemic*.<sup>231</sup>

The report identifies **focused deterrence**, **street outreach work**, **hospital-based violence intervention**, and **citywide violence reduction agencies** as among the most promising practices, each of which is a component of Oakland's successful response to violence.<sup>232</sup>

There is a growing consensus about what works when it comes to reducing violence. These resources provide a good starting place for community members looking to educate themselves and others on these evidence-based strategies.

## LESSON TWO

### CREATE AND MAINTAIN POLITICAL WILL

City support for Oakland Ceasefire only came after extensive advocacy on the part of the community. For community members, direct advocacy for violence reduction strategies may mean attending city council meetings, showing up and speaking at public safety committee meetings, and generally participating in the local political process.

“To place pressure on city officials, we engaged in countless political advocacy actions,” recalled Reverend Damita Davis-Howard. “We attended so many committee meetings, community meetings, and had one-on-ones with each new police chief, the mayor, and other city leaders.”<sup>233</sup> This kept local leaders focused on the issue of gun violence and invested in Oakland Ceasefire as the city's primary response.

Advocacy can also take the form of publishing reports, which help generate media coverage and increase visibility for community members fighting for a more effective city response to serious violence. In this case, a successful community-led effort out of Los Angeles is instructive. There, community groups galvanized by a spike in violence in 2007 published a report titled *A Call to Action: A Case for a Comprehensive Solution to L.A.'s Gang Violence Epidemic*, highlighting the failed approach the city had been taking for years and laying out a roadmap for how to address serious violence going forward.<sup>234</sup>

The report generated an enormous amount of media attention. Community organizers were determined to use the report not just to make a few splashy

There is a growing consensus  
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reducing violence.

headlines but also to catalyze long-term structural changes in the way the city approached violence.

In response, the city formed the Mayor's Office of Gang Reduction and Youth Development (GRYD) to coordinate violence reduction services focused on districts most impacted by violent crime. Since launching GRYD in 2007, Los Angeles has seen a 31% reduction in its homicide rate.<sup>235</sup>

Once city leaders have committed to a strategy, community members have a vital role to play in making sure the effort is sustained over time. In many city leadership positions, turnover can be extremely common. Community members are in a unique position to advocate for continuity when turnover happens.

In Oakland, for example, community leaders made it a point to meet with each new mayor and police chief in order to emphasize the importance of sticking with the Ceasefire strategy.

"The strategy must live in the community," said CPSC Co-Director Vaughn Crandall. "Being in partnership with community members and organizations enables you to demand support even as administrations and leadership change."<sup>236</sup>

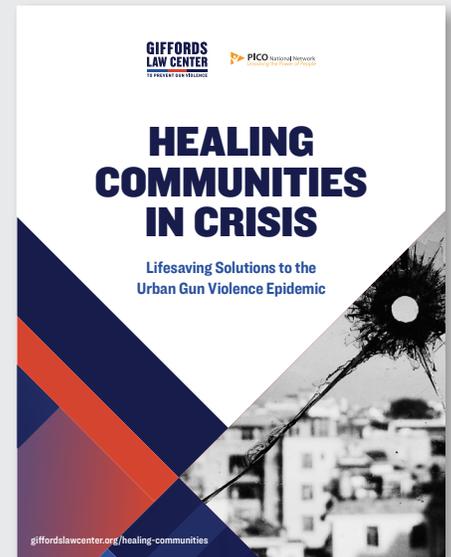
### LESSON THREE

## PARTICIPATE DIRECTLY IN VIOLENCE REDUCTION STRATEGIES

In addition to being powerful advocates for a comprehensive violence reduction strategy, community members can actively participate in the strategy itself.

Call-ins and custom notifications present a critical opportunity for community members to communicate with high-risk individuals. The best practice for conducting these important communications, according to technical assistance providers at the National Network for Safe Communities, is for the "moral voice" of the community to actively participate in the process.<sup>237</sup>

As part of Oakland Ceasefire, community partners helped identify individuals who would be able to speak to attendees with a voice of authenticity and respect. At one call-in that took place in 2018, speakers included a mother who had lost her son



### READ THE REPORT

Giffords Law Center's 2016 report *Healing Communities in Crisis: Lifesaving Solutions to the Urban Gun Violence Epidemic*, explores evidence-based approaches to urban gun violence. Our report also lays out the policy reforms most likely to reduce the supply of crime guns in impacted communities, including universal background checks, permit-to-purchase laws, gun trafficking regulations, and prohibitions on large-capacity ammunition magazines.

to gun violence and a young woman who had been shot at random in East Oakland while riding in a car with her friend.

Oakland's experience affirms the importance of community involvement. "Oakland began keeping data on custom notifications made by law enforcement and those made by community members," recalled David Muhammad, an Oakland Ceasefire consultant. "They saw a substantial difference in their success rates. Almost none of the people contacted solely by law enforcement followed up to receive services compared to 50% of those contacted by a community member."<sup>238</sup>

Visible and ongoing community participation can help high-risk participants overcome their initial distrust of a strategy that involves exposure to government officials and law enforcement officers.

**Community members who are fed up with violence can also play a role in directly reaching out to impacted neighborhoods, making their presence felt and opening up lines of communication to those who may be at risk for engaging in violence.**

Oakland's night walks and community feedback sessions give community members an opportunity to "welcome high-risk people back into the community, build relationships with them, and shower folks with affection and support."<sup>239</sup>

Whatever their specific role, community members can and should be intimately involved with the process of communicating with those at risk of involvement with serious violence.



*In 2003, Barbara Lafitte-Oluwole's 22-year-old son Tokumbo was sitting in his car with friends when he was shot six times, dying instantly. Ever since, Barbara has been actively involved in Oakland's gun violence reduction efforts.*

*Photo courtesy of Barbara Lafitte-Oluwole*

LESSON FOUR

## WORK TO STRENGTHEN POLICE-COMMUNITY RELATIONS

Public safety is often left exclusively to law enforcement, but police leaders have stated time and again that they cannot address violent crime alone. Police departments need the participation of community members in order to do their jobs effectively.<sup>240</sup>

For many communities, engaging with public safety often means overcoming decades of serious mistrust of the police. In Oakland, police historically responded to violence by flooding impacted communities with officers and judged “success” largely by the number of arrests made.<sup>241</sup> These tactics contributed to mass incarceration and strained relationships between police and the community.

Oakland Ceasefire partners recognized this and have made building trust between OPD and the community a top priority. In Oakland, community member volunteers such as Reverend Ben McBride participated directly in training officers on the principles of procedural justice and helped officers understand what it’s like to be on the other end of heavy-handed tactics.<sup>242</sup>

**Although there is much work to be done, these efforts have helped increase OPD’s homicide solve rate at a time when use-of-force incidents and complaints against the department are on the decline.**

The Los Angeles neighborhood of Watts provides an additional model of how violence can be reduced through community participation in a process of mutual reconciliation and trust building with law enforcement.

In the mid-2000s, Watts, an area of historic conflict between police and the community, was averaging 23 homicides per year, making its per capita homicide rate on par with some of the most dangerous cities in the country.<sup>243</sup> In late 2005, a series of seven gang-related killings prompted local community members, including former gang members, to advocate for change.

They approached their councilwoman and demanded she do something about rampant violence. Her response was to call a meeting with the community. She arrived with Phil Tingirides, the captain of the Southeast Division of the Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD). The community took this opportunity to voice their many complaints to Tingirides in no uncertain terms. What Tingirides did was unexpected: He listened.

For many communities, engaging with public safety often means overcoming decades of serious mistrust of the police.

The group continued to meet regularly in the ensuing weeks. Eventually, the meetings involved a wider group of community members and LAPD officers and became formalized as the Watts Gang Task Force, which continues to convene weekly to this day.<sup>244</sup>

The introduction of basketball and softball games between residents and LAPD allowed for humanization on both sides and the start of trust building. Then came a program where officers went into classrooms to read to neighborhood kids. Many of these ideas were sparked by conversations between community members and officers at the Watts Gang Task Force meetings.<sup>245</sup>

Watts was able to further formalize the process of improving police-community relationships in 2010, when a coalition of community groups, led by the Urban Peace Institute, LAPD, and housing authority leaders, established the Community Safety Partnership (CSP). CSP expanded and formalized the trust-building efforts already underway in Watts, committing significant resources and structure to a philosophy of relationship-based policing.

According to an Urban Peace Institute report, the success of these community-driven initiatives “has been nothing short of transformative. Not only have violent crimes decreased precipitously, but arrests have gone down by 50%, with ordinary citizens telling visitors that they actually feel safer and know and trust police officers who have become a part of the community’s day-to-day landscape.”<sup>246</sup>

A variety of resources are available to help community members learn more about how to create opportunities for police-community reconciliation and cooperation around addressing violent crime. These include: *Reconciliation Between Police and Communities: Case Studies and Lessons Learned* by the National Network for Safe Communities, *Procedural Justice in Homicide and Shooting Scene Response* by the Urban Institute, and the *Final Report of the President’s Task Force on 21st Century Policing*.

## LESSON FIVE

### LEVERAGE THE FAITH COMMUNITY

The Oakland faith community has played an integral role in the city’s violence reduction strategy from the beginning. Faith-based organizations have unique assets, including access to hundreds of congregants and a position of moral authority in the community, which can make them particularly effective partners in the fight to stop gun violence.

Police departments need the participation of community members in order to do their jobs effectively.

“It is essential that there be robust participation from the faith community in the work,” said Oakland Ceasefire Steering Committee Co-Director Reverend Dr. George Cummings. “The faith community represents commitment to those most impacted, and often has direct connections with families of both victims and perpetrators of gun violence.”<sup>247</sup>

According to researchers from Rutgers and Northeastern University, **clergy—particularly clergy from black churches—can play critical roles in the development and implementation of community-based violence reduction strategies**, due to the position of churches as central social institutions in many communities of color.<sup>248</sup>

“What we found through Oakland Ceasefire is that many young men of color who are wrapped up in gun violence have family members that belong to congregations,” said Reverend Ben McBride. “This gave us a way to directly reach and impact these young men.”<sup>249</sup>

Community members in Oakland were able to help broker a successful peace deal between rival gangs, arranging for a pivotal meeting to take place at a nearby church, where violence was not likely to break out because many of those involved had family members who belonged to local congregations.

“The close proximity between communities of faith and shooters in impacted communities creates opportunities,” said Reverend McBride. “We need to leverage faith-based institutions to help create safe spaces in our neighborhoods.”<sup>250</sup>

## TAKEAWAYS FOR CITY LEADERS

The political leadership of a city, including mayors, city council members, agency heads, and others, has a key role to play in helping implement and sustain an effective violence reduction strategy. Oakland’s experience in this regard is illustrative. After years of starts and stops, the Oakland Ceasefire strategy only really gained serious traction when it received support from a combination of the mayor, police chief, and the majority of members of the Oakland City Council.

From contracting and supporting knowledgeable technical assistance providers; to helping to secure a combination of local, state, federal, and private funding streams; to effective messaging, Oakland leadership took a series of actions that city leaders across the country can learn from in implementing their own violence reduction strategy.



## LESSON ONE

### BRING IN TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE EXPERTS

Oakland's experience makes it clear that city leaders need to recognize their own lack of expertise in a given area and hire or contract with expert consultants who can fill those gaps. In Oakland, this meant working with the California Partnership for Safe Communities (CPSC).

Leaders on the Oakland City Council approved a one-year contract with CPSC in June 2012, and CPSC staff immediately got to work conducting an in-depth problem analysis to help Oakland leaders understand what exactly was driving violent crime.

It should not be assumed that the “conventional wisdom” about what’s driving serious violence in a city is correct. **As Oakland’s experience shows, all stakeholders can be in complete agreement about violence dynamics and still be wrong.** CPSC’s problem analysis showed that a very small number of people close to age 30 was responsible for the vast majority of serious violence in Oakland.<sup>251</sup> By challenging accepted beliefs and insisting on a deep review of existing data conducted by outside experts, cities can create the basis for game-changing reforms.

Oakland leaders recognized the value that CPSC was bringing to the table and had the foresight to extend their initial contract. Given the extreme costs associated with gun violence, this ongoing investment in competent outside consultants has arguably paid for itself many times over.

Captain Joyner of OPD recognized that CPSC was essential to many of the reforms

*In order to ensure the success of violence prevention initiatives, cities must bring all relevant stakeholders to the table, including law enforcement, elected officials, and community leaders.*

*Eric Risberg, Associated Press*

Oakland put in place in recent years. “They are the heart and soul of all this,” he said.<sup>252</sup>

CPSC was intimately involved in setting up Oakland’s first true call-ins. Other key elements of OPD’s revamped approach to serious violence—the Ceasefire Section, the shooting reviews, efforts to address police-community relationships—were all driven by CPSC as an outside consultant teaching the city a totally new way of doing business with respect to violent crime. CPSC also acted as a neutral third party and intermediary between different agencies such as OPD and HSD, which have different missions and were not necessarily accustomed to working together.

Leaders in cities impacted by serious violence would be wise to recognize that their city might need outside help in designing and implementing effective violence reduction strategies. They should also recognize this will likely be a long-term engagement, as it has been in Oakland.

Other groups that are available to provide technical assistance with respect to the implementation of effective strategies to reduce violence include the National Network for Safe Communities, Cities United, Cure Violence, and the National Network of Hospital-based Violence Intervention Programs.

## LESSON TWO

### EMPOWER PARTNERS TO WORK TOGETHER

In 2015, Oakland was making progress with implementing Ceasefire, but CPSC was having difficulty getting various agency partners to change their established patterns of behavior around serious violence. What was needed was for the mayor to send a signal that city leadership was committed to institutionalizing the Oakland Ceasefire strategy and to provide partners with additional incentives and tools for doing so.<sup>253</sup>

To address these issues, CPSC worked with the mayor to issue an executive directive, executed in 2015, which created the management structure necessary to resource, implement, and institutionalize the strategy, and essentially instructed city agencies to use Ceasefire as their primary strategy for violence reduction and increase their mutual coordination and accountability.<sup>254</sup>

In short, it was a vote of confidence and support from Mayor Libby Schaaf that facilitated a recommitment to the strategy from key city agencies. This was especially important for an agency such as the Oakland Police Department, which was suffering from extreme leadership turnover at this time, having had nine different police chiefs within a five-year period.<sup>255</sup>

CPSC Co-Director Vaughn Crandall cited the executive directive as the “single most important thing” that kept the mayor and the city locked in on successfully implementing the Ceasefire strategy.

Leaders in cities across the country have different political structures to work with, but they should use all the tools at their disposal to ensure that key stakeholders in their city’s violence reduction strategy are empowered and working in the same direction.

### LESSON THREE

## HELP SECURE FUNDING STREAMS

City leaders have a critical role to play in ensuring that adequate long-term resources are available to support violence reduction efforts. This is work that cannot be done properly without sufficient financial support. In Oakland, the Ceasefire partnership has benefited from leveraging a variety of funding streams, including Measure Z, which the city created for the specific purpose of addressing serious violence.

Leaders in other cities struggling with high levels of violence should use the tools available to them to help identify and secure a range of funding sources. This starts with a commitment from the city itself.

## LOCAL FUNDING

In Oakland, as described above, local public financial support for violence reduction work came primarily from a voter-approved ballot initiative, originally passed in 2004 (Measure Y)<sup>256</sup> and renewed with some critical changes in 2014 (Measure Z).<sup>257</sup> Of course, not all cities can or will need to go through the ballot initiative process in order to generate resources for a violence reduction strategy. The most straightforward way to fund this work at the local level is to make it a recurring appropriation in the city’s general fund, as Los Angeles has done.

Los Angeles’s mayor, city councilmembers, and many other city leaders came together to create the Mayor’s Office of Gang Reduction and Youth Development (GRYD), which was funded largely out of an appropriation from the city’s general fund.<sup>258</sup> In order to free up resources to fund GRYD, city leaders followed the recommendation of community activists to take resources and funds from districts with relatively low levels of violent crime and reallocate them to districts with high levels of violence.<sup>259</sup>

**Since the implementation of GRYD in 2007, LA has seen a more than 34% reduction in homicides.**<sup>260</sup> A March 2017 assessment by researchers at California State University, Los Angeles, found that GRYD incident response teams—just

one of many GRYD programs—prevented an estimated 185 gang retaliations citywide from 2014–15, resulting in estimated savings of \$110.2 million over two years.<sup>261</sup>

## STATE FUNDING

In addition to local resources, city leaders can help with identifying and securing state-level funding opportunities. In 2018, the City of Baltimore applied for and received almost \$3 million in funding for violence prevention work through Maryland’s new Violence Intervention and Prevention Program,<sup>262</sup> which Giffords Law Center helped to draft and enact, along with partners including Marylanders to Prevent Gun Violence.

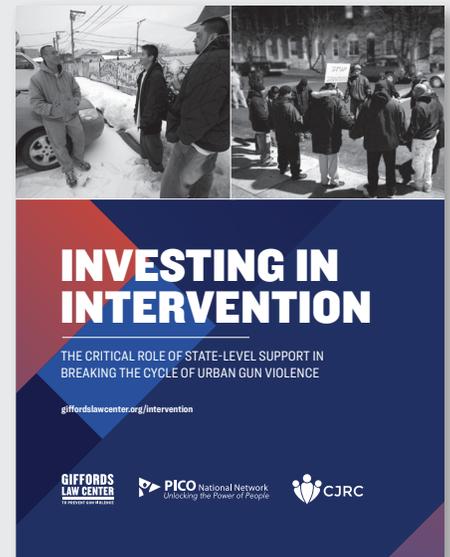
This initiative was enacted by the legislature and signed into law by Governor Larry Hogan as a way of supporting local, evidence-based violence reduction strategies. Rather than indiscriminately spreading resources around the state, this program strategically directs resources to the areas of Maryland most impacted by serious violence.

As we pointed out in our second report in this series, *Investing in Intervention*, not enough states are currently making these types of investments.<sup>263</sup> Only six states—California, Connecticut, New York, Maryland, Massachusetts, and Illinois—provide substantial assistance to local governments to implement evidence-based violence reduction strategies.<sup>264</sup>

## FEDERAL FUNDING

The federal landscape has shifted dramatically in recent years with respect to the availability of funds for community-based violence reduction efforts. One of the programs left in place by the Trump administration is Project Safe Neighborhoods (PSN),<sup>265</sup> a nationwide initiative that brings together elected officials, prosecutors, and community members to develop solutions to violent crime. US attorneys have large discretion over how these funds are used, and city leaders should be aware of the opportunity to use PSN funding as a resource for a citywide violence reduction strategy.

In particular, the Innovations in Community-Based Crime Reduction Program, which is part of PSN, provides federal grant dollars for “persistently distressed neighborhoods that face significant violent and serious crime challenges.” This



## READ THE REPORT

Giffords Law Center’s 2017 report *Investing in Intervention: The Critical Role of State-Level Support in Breaking the Cycle of Urban Gun Violence*, takes a deep dive into the concrete ways state leaders can support and scale up the community-driven solutions that have a lasting impact on gun violence in urban neighborhoods.

program provides funding for a “consortium of criminal justice, community, and/or human service partners” in these communities to plan and implement a targeted strategy addressing serious violence.<sup>266</sup>

Finally, since there is such a strong relationship between violent victimization and future perpetration of violence, it is possible to secure funding through sources such as the federal Victims of Crime Act (VOCA).<sup>267</sup> City leaders in underserved communities should be aware of this opportunity and lobby state administrators for assistance. VOCA Assistance grants, which are awarded directly to organizations serving victims of crime, provide an opportunity for cities to strengthen their ability to serve individuals injured by violence.



*Oakland Mayor Libby Schaaf played an instrumental role in ensuring the institutionalization of Oakland Ceasefire.*

*Eric Risberg, AP Images*

#### LESSON FOUR

### STAY INVOLVED AND INSTITUTIONALIZE THE WORK

City leaders can help create accountability mechanisms for various stakeholders to maintain commitment to the city’s violence reduction strategy. In Oakland, this is achieved with twice-monthly performance reviews, in which top-level officials, including the mayor, receive direct reports from Oakland Ceasefire partners.<sup>268</sup> This includes a review of success metrics such as the annual number of shootings to evaluate whether the city is on pace to reach its established violence reduction goals.

City leaders should take whatever steps necessary to create a direct and personal connection to serious violence. **“Gun violence is very personal for me, but you shouldn’t have to have directly lost people to care about this issue,”** said Mayor **Michael Tubbs of Stockton**, which has seen large reductions in shootings since implementing many of the same strategies discussed in this report, with outside help from CPSC.<sup>269</sup>

Oakland Mayor Libby Schaaf personally writes a letter to the family of each and every homicide victim in Oakland.<sup>270</sup> In addition to sending the message that city leaders care about the impact of serious violence, it directly connects the mayor with the pain and urgency of this problem.

Leadership turnover can be a major threat to a city's violence reduction strategy. A strategy like Oakland Ceasefire will only be successful if implemented over the long term, far longer than the four or eight year term that most mayors serve.<sup>271</sup>

**Ideally, with support and correct messaging, a city's violence reduction strategy will be institutionalized over time in such a way that it becomes business as usual for all key stakeholders.** It takes a great amount of care and work to get to that point, however, and city leaders should look for any and all opportunities to institutionalize the work.

## LESSON FIVE

### CREATE A VIOLENCE REDUCTION OFFICE OR AGENCY

Creating an office or agency, outside of law enforcement, that is tasked with addressing serious violence is a key best practice. Oakland approved its own Department of Violence Prevention in 2017 and is currently in the strategic planning phase.

Another, more established example of this comes from Richmond, California. In 2007, Richmond was considered one of the most dangerous cities in America, with an extremely high homicide rate. In response to this crisis, the city took the innovative step of creating a new city agency, the Office of Neighborhood Safety (ONS), responsible for "building partnerships and strategies that produce sustained reductions in firearm assaults and related retaliations and deaths in Richmond."<sup>272</sup> Reducing gun violence is the exclusive focus of ONS, an agency that is expressly unaffiliated with local law enforcement.

ONS coordinates a variety of violence reduction strategies. The office employs neighborhood change agents to do street outreach work, building relationships and directing high-risk clients to services, while also intervening and moderating potentially violent situations when they arise.<sup>273</sup>

In addition, ONS implements a direct, intensive mentoring program for the most at-risk individuals, called the Peacemaker Fellowship. This innovative program is completely voluntary and lasts 18 months. Participants receive daily contact from mentors, create a life map of both short-term and long-term goals, have the opportunity to travel outside Richmond, and are connected with social services.<sup>274</sup>

Richmond's violence prevention efforts are funded with money from the city's general fund, supplemented by state, federal, and philanthropic grants to expand the

Richmond has seen an almost  
80% reduction in homicides and a  
76% reduction in nonfatal shootings  
since launching its Office of  
Neighborhood Safety in 2007.

programs offered. In fiscal year 2013–14, for example, the total ONS budget was \$3 million for a city of just over 100,000 residents, with roughly half coming from city funds and the other half coming from state and federal funding, foundation grants, and private donations.

Richmond has seen an almost 80% reduction in homicides and a 76% reduction in nonfatal shootings since launching ONS in 2007.<sup>275</sup>

Other examples of cities creating offices of violence reduction services include the Mayor’s Gang Prevention Task Force in San Jose,<sup>276</sup> the Mayor’s Office to Prevent Gun Violence in New York City,<sup>277</sup> the San Francisco Mayor’s Office of Violence Prevention Services,<sup>278</sup> and Stockton’s Office of Violence Prevention.<sup>279</sup>

## TAKEAWAYS FOR LAW ENFORCEMENT

For many decades, the communities most impacted by violence have been simultaneously over- and under-policed. Residents who most need the protection of the police are least likely to see law enforcement as a positive presence, and therefore unlikely to cooperate with investigations. This contributes to a vicious cycle of violent retaliation, where police appear unable or unwilling to solve cases involving violence, and loved ones of victims may take matters into their own hands.<sup>280</sup>

Experiences in Oakland and other cities shows how, with outside help, a police department can take steps to put in place a focused strategy to address serious violence while reducing negative interactions with community members. Every police department is different, but there are important, fundamental lessons to learn from OPD and other departments’ efforts to focus on addressing serious violence in partnership with the community.

### LESSON ONE

#### FOCUS ON SERIOUS VIOLENCE

Understanding the dynamics of violence in a city through a formal process known as a problem analysis, described in detail earlier in this report, is the first and most important step in implementing an effective violence reduction strategy.

Police departments around the country have an important role to play in this process, as officers often have intimate knowledge about recent shootings and homicides and possess valuable information about the individuals and groups involved in these incidents.

However, just because a department has access to this data does not mean it will necessarily have a strong grasp on local violence dynamics without resources and assistance to conduct a deep analysis.

When Oakland first tried to implement the Ceasefire strategy in the late 2000s, OPD operated under the incorrect assumption that most shootings and homicides were committed by youth and young adults engaged in drug-related crime.<sup>281</sup>

It wasn't until Oakland brought in outside help from CPSC, which conducted an in-depth problem analysis, that police leaders began to realize that the conventional wisdom about violence was based on incorrect assumptions. "That's why you need an evidence-based strategy," insists OPD's Deputy Chief LeRonne Armstrong, "You might think you know what's driving the problem, but the evidence could show you something different."<sup>282</sup>

For many decades, the communities most impacted by violence have been simultaneously over- and under-policed.

**Because the information provided in the problem analysis quickly becomes stale, it's also important to have a process in place to keep information about local violence dynamics up to date.** This is the function of shooting reviews. The NNSC recommends that partners revisit information gleaned from shooting reviews on at least a quarterly basis to assess findings and incorporate any necessary changes.<sup>283</sup>

The shooting review process in New Haven, Connecticut, where gun violence is down to its lowest levels in decades,<sup>284</sup> shows that these important information-sharing meetings can be held as frequently as law enforcement partners are willing to have them. A large group of law enforcement officials meets in New Haven four days a week to conduct a shooting review in which they discuss how best to respond to instances of violence and identify emerging problems. These near-daily meetings now include as many as 50 participants from within and around New Haven—all focused on crafting an effective response to serious violence.<sup>285</sup>

This cooperation leads to interagency information sharing, which improves the ability of law enforcement to address and solve violent crime. "I can't stress enough, how much of an impact these meetings have had on stopping crime," said Police Sergeant Karl Jacobson.<sup>286</sup>

Archie Generoso, the assistant police chief for investigations in New Haven, tells the story of a young man released from juvenile detention who was being tracked down by rivals intent on killing him. When New Haven law enforcement officials became aware of this situation, they quickly helped relocate the young man to a different city.<sup>287</sup> When information is shared on a regular basis at shooting reviews, this type of creative problem solving becomes possible.

## LESSON TWO

### INSTITUTIONALIZE THE WORK WITH A DEDICATED UNIT

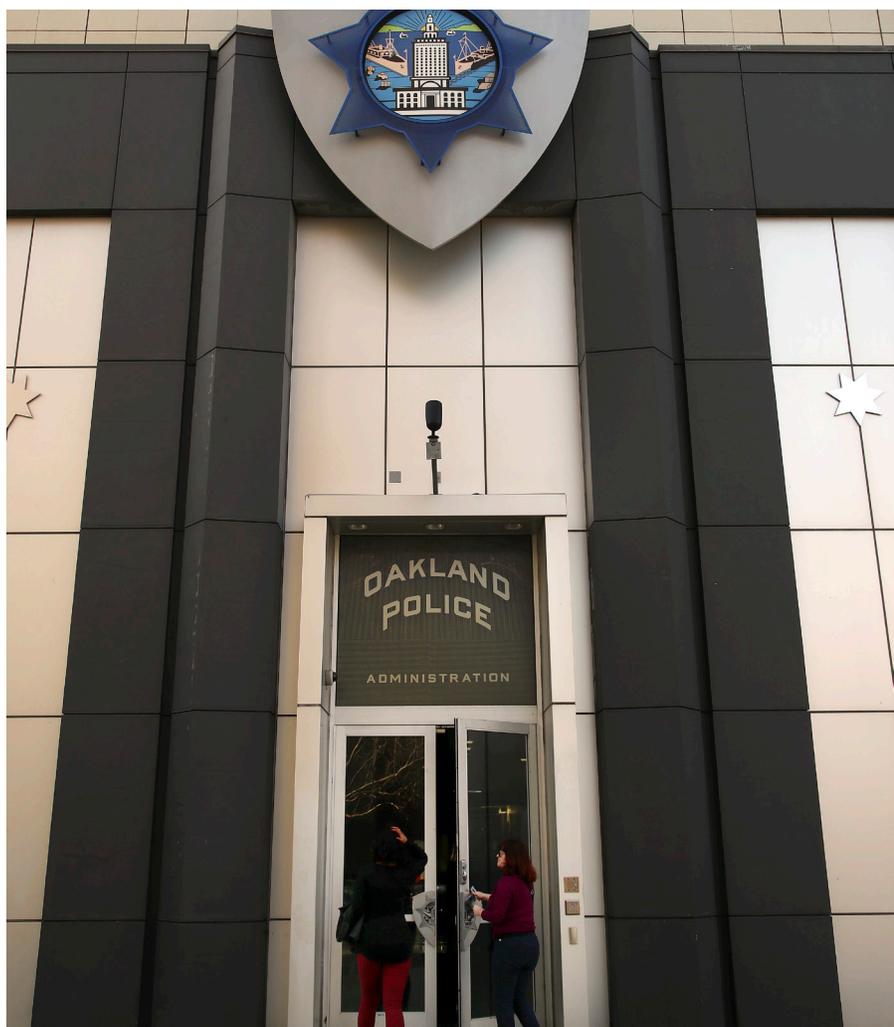
Departments trying to develop a targeted response to violence may encounter a number of political and structural changes, scandals, or shake-ups that can disrupt and even dismantle a violence reduction strategy. There are a number of actions a department can take to help institutionalize the effort and improve its long-term viability.

In Oakland, technical assistance providers from CPSC worked closely with OPD to create and sustain institutional capacity to respond to violence, including launching the Ceasefire Section, a multi-unit team dedicated specifically to addressing serious violence.<sup>288</sup>

After a series of false starts described in detail in the first part of this report, **today OPD's Ceasefire Section benefits from dedicated resources, a more stable structure that helped ensure the department's commitment to the strategy, and consistent technical assistance from CPSC.** The Ceasefire Section eventually went from an unorganized patchwork of officers to a nimble section made up of four specialized enforcement teams, or Special Investigations Units (SIUs), deployed to areas that correspond with historical trends in violence and known gang dynamics in Oakland.

As a report by the National Institute for Criminal Justice Reform states, the result was that “OPD's proactive units spend far less time doing unfocused, area-based enforcement with low-risk individuals, and a much greater amount of time understanding the current violence dynamic and focusing on the very small number of individuals driving that violence.”<sup>289</sup> The Ceasefire Section has become institutionalized as an integral part of OPD's response to violent crime.

For departments in cities struggling with violence, the creation of entirely new units may not be necessary—what's most vital is focusing on serious violence and making dedicated resources available to carry out that mission.



*Oakland Police Department's Ceasefire Section consists of a carefully selected, highly trained group of officers focused on serious violence.*

*Ben Margot, AP Images*

In Stockton, California, which has seen a large reduction in homicides and shootings since implementing its own version of the Ceasefire strategy, this took the form of a department-wide prioritization of serious violence over other forms of crime, led by Chief Eric Jones. “Starting at the top, you need to show the city that you are going to focus on gun violence,” said Chief Jones.<sup>290</sup> From 2017 to 2018, homicides in Stockton are down 40% and nonfatal shootings have declined by 31%.<sup>291</sup>

### LESSON THREE

#### DEVELOP EXTERNAL PARTNERSHIPS WITH SERVICE PROVIDERS

Oakland’s experience shows that law enforcement has an important role to play in ensuring that social service providers and other external partners have critical information needed to help prevent violence.

CPSC introduced regular coordination meetings to Oakland, which present an opportunity for OPD to share information with Oakland Unite (OU) leadership, who then pass on that information to their network of community-based social service providers.<sup>292</sup> The information that partners receive from OPD via OU helps them tailor services to the specific individuals most likely to be involved in violence. For example, OU life coaches are often given advanced notice when someone of interest is returning home from prison so that they may begin pre-release outreach and engagement, or Violence Interrupters may learn of a brewing conflict they can mediate without the need for law enforcement involvement.

Although Oakland Ceasefire partners at OPD and OU meet regularly to discuss how to intervene with potential perpetrators of violence, these agencies have processes in place to ensure a healthy amount of separation, since the safety of OU service providers may be compromised if they are viewed as cooperating with the police.

OU is careful to ensure that information only flows in one direction, and OPD respects this. OU personnel are never used as informants or as an intelligence-gathering arm of OPD, and dispelling any perception of collusion is paramount to maintaining the safety and credibility of OU case managers and outreach workers in the community.<sup>293</sup>

Ultimately, working together more closely has been tremendously beneficial to reducing shootings and homicides. Law enforcement and social service partners know they need each other to do this work.

Oakland Ceasefire partners from OPD and OU have worked through a number of challenges together and developed a better working relationship. While they don’t always agree, according to Oakland Unite Program Planner Mailee Wang, a mutual

understanding exists that “there can be conflict and you can still be partners through it.”<sup>294</sup>

The important takeaway for police departments around the country is that building up external partnerships, particularly with social service providers who are also working to address violence, can have a major impact. Processes should be put in place to encourage regular contact and cooperation with external partners, with an understanding that in certain situations, information may need to flow in just one direction.

#### LESSON FOUR

### INITIATE RECONCILIATION WITH THE COMMUNITY

When it comes to addressing serious violence, law enforcement can’t do it alone. In many cities, police and city leaders must collaborate to try to repair the strained relationship between police and community members.

To properly execute a strategy like Oakland Ceasefire, law enforcement partners have to come to the table ready to try new approaches and willing to partner with impacted communities.

“The first thing is that we need to admit that there’s a problem,” said OPD’s Captain Joyner, who commands the Ceasefire Section.<sup>295</sup> Oakland Ceasefire partners recognized this and have made building trust between OPD and the community a top priority.

While the dynamics between police and community members in every city are unique, the National Network for Safe Communities offers a useful guide called *Reconciliation Between Police and Communities: Case Studies and Lessons Learned*, which provides an overview of the common elements a police department should pursue in order to begin the process of earning back lost community trust.<sup>296</sup>

The first step toward reconciliation in police-community relationships is “a public acknowledgment of the harm caused by police.”<sup>297</sup> In Stockton, which is implementing a strategy very similar to Oakland Ceasefire with technical assistance from CPSC, Chief Eric Jones initiated this process in 2016 before a group of Stockton community members. The chief acknowledged past harm committed at the hands of the police department, recognized the extreme injury caused by police misconduct, and committed to doing better.

By creating spaces for sharing and listening, police departments can gain valuable insight into community grievances that can then be used to implement policy change.

According to NNSC, the full process “relies on hearing, exchanging, and capturing the grievances, aspirations, and narratives of the full range of voices in a community.” In some communities, executive-level officers have set up regular listening sessions with a cross section of local residents.

During these meetings, community members are asked to “describe their primary concerns and aspirations regarding the police department, policing in general, their communities’ relationship with and trust of law enforcement, and their personal stories that animate their and their communities’ perception of policing.”<sup>298</sup> The role of police is mainly to listen. A person is assigned to take notes to help highlight key themes and causes of distrust.

By creating spaces for sharing and listening, police departments can gain valuable insight into community grievances that can then be used to implement policy change, which is ultimately the most important way for a department to demonstrate its commitment to reconciliation and repairing community trust.

## LESSON FIVE

### EMBRACE POLICY CHANGES INFORMED BY COMMUNITY INPUT

Concrete actions taken by law enforcement are what best demonstrate a commitment to reconciliation with the community. As the NNSC guide states, “reconciliation requires committing to substantive changes in the behaviors and policies that brought about and continue to drive distrust. These changes can range from revisions to police protocols...to less formal measures.”<sup>299</sup>

This includes committing to transparency through the use of body cameras, welcoming higher levels of civilian oversight, providing regular training in the principles of procedural justice, and changing department policies to reward and promote officers whose actions demonstrate a commitment to building community trust. Community input is the key to these reforms.

For example, Oakland community members reported to Ceasefire partners that after a shooting, a body sometimes remained in the street for hours while the coroner’s office was en route. Community members also reported officers acting in an insensitive manner to friends and family of the victim.<sup>300</sup>

Upon learning this, Oakland Ceasefire partners worked to get a federal grant to partner with the Urban Institute to determine best practices for applying procedural justice techniques at homicide and shooting scenes. Based on its findings, the Urban Institute recommended several policy changes, including training around handling sensitive crime scenes through a procedural justice and trauma-informed lens

and partnering with community groups to provide a strong non-law enforcement presence at scenes.<sup>301</sup>

**As a result of this work, OPD is in the process of changing its crime scene response,** and Oakland Ceasefire partners have worked to secure a grant to provide canopies at crime scenes so that bodies will not remain exposed in the street.

In Watts, LAPD listened to the community in 2010 when creating the CSP unit, a special unit of about 50 officers who were assigned to each of the area's major housing projects.<sup>302</sup> Deep structural changes were made to this unit to account for community concerns and distrust. To address their first concern, that officers were constantly being reassigned, the minimum assignment length for CSP officers became five years.

To attract the right kind of officer, LAPD offers instant promotions, pay raises, and specialized training to CSP officers. LAPD made it part of the job description for CSP officers to regularly attend community events and work with residents to address public safety issues. Department policy is to reward CSP officers not for the number of arrests they are making but for actions that demonstrate improved community relationships.<sup>303</sup>

The NNSC guide provides a useful roadmap for departments around the country that want to embark on a process of reconciliation with the communities they serve. This can have a direct impact on levels of serious violence and help residents in impacted neighborhoods get one step closer to the safe and thriving communities that all Americans deserve.

# CONCLUSION

## Oakland's progress is nothing short of remarkable—but it was no miracle.

Oakland cut homicides and shootings roughly in half in a few short years because of the hard work and persistence of its community members, the willingness of voters and city leadership to invest adequate resources in long-term strategies, the expertise of the technical assistance providers who helped implement those strategies, and the commitment of law enforcement to make meaningful changes in day-to-day policing practices.

We hope this report elevates the critical work that these individuals, agencies, and organizations have done for years and continue to do every day, and does justice to their unwavering dedication and perseverance.

Of all of the lessons to be gleaned from Oakland's story, one stands above the rest:

**The remarkable transformation Oakland experienced would not have been possible without true partnership between a diverse array of committed stakeholders.**

As daunting and entrenched as this problem often seems, violence in urban communities is not inevitable. If you're a member of a community afflicted by serious violence, we hope you find this report helpful in your quest to make your neighborhoods safer places to live, work, and play. Likewise, we hope that law enforcement and city leaders will be motivated to action by the lifesaving work being done in Oakland and take concrete steps to implement these changes in their own communities.

Attorneys at Giffords Law Center are committed to helping scale these solutions to every city that is grappling with this epidemic. Our team of experts is available to consult with legislators and activists who are trying to implement effective solutions and secure funding for evidence-based violence reduction strategies.

The technical assistance providers referenced in this report, including the California Partnership for Safe Communities, the National Network for Safe Communities, Cities United, Cure Violence, and the National Network of Hospital-based Violence Intervention Programs, are excellent resources to help cities implement these strategies effectively.

The story of Oakland isn't a miracle, and it isn't an aberration. **Other cities across the country can experience similarly remarkable reductions in violence—they just need the political will, resources, and tools to do so.** We hope that many of them will be inspired by Oakland's journey and use this report, and the resources it references, as a starting point and a roadmap for leveraging the power of partnership to address serious violence.

When it comes to breaking the cycle of violence in our most impacted cities and communities, we don't have a moment to lose.

Leverage the legal and policy acumen of our experts to develop a plan for city-level investment in violence reduction strategies. For assistance, please email [lawcenter@giffords.org](mailto:lawcenter@giffords.org).



*If effective gun violence reduction can happen in Oakland, it can happen anywhere.*

# ENDNOTES

## INTRODUCTION

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## [giffordslawcenter.org](http://giffordslawcenter.org)

For 25 years, the legal experts at Giffords Law Center to Prevent Gun Violence have been fighting for a safer America by researching, drafting, and defending the laws, policies, and programs proven to save lives from gun violence.

## [faithinaction.org](http://faithinaction.org)

Faith in Action, formerly PICO National Network, is a national network of faith-based community organizations that gives people of faith the tools that they need to fight for justice and work towards a more equitable society.

## [blackbrowngvp.com](http://blackbrowngvp.com)

The Black and Brown Gun Violence Prevention Consortium is a strategic partnership of people of color led institutions working to create equitable opportunities and safe communities by using proven indigenous grassroots gun violence reduction strategies.