

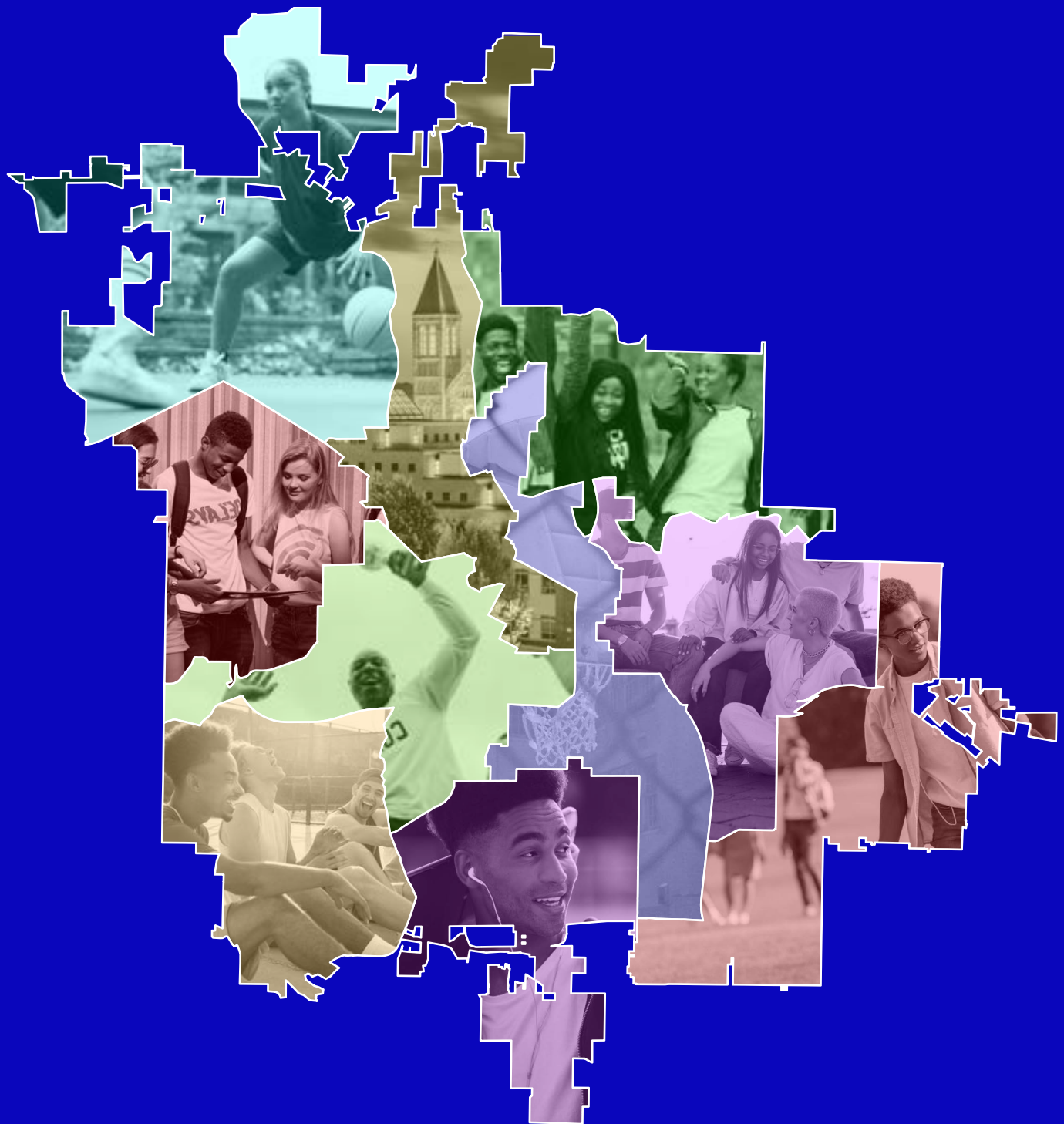


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Letter from Mayor Horrigan

Dear Community Members:

In April of 2019, we released the Youth Violence Prevention Strategic Plan to community members, which was the result of a year-long process led by Crystal Jones, former Executive Director of Project Ujima. The plan was meant to be a living document which would be revised and updated on an ongoing basis, in order to retain relevancy and remain a high priority for our local leaders.

Summit County Public Health had agreed to oversee the implementation of the strategic plan, however, the plan had little to no funding available at the time, only the goodwill and commitment of the Youth Violence Prevention Steering Committee to move it forward.

As the institutional and community stakeholders worked tirelessly to become organized to make a meaningful impact, no one could have imagined what was ahead of us. In March of 2020, the world was faced with a new and deadly respiratory illness which quickly spread across the globe. Our entire community was forced to pivot on a dime and face COVID-19 head on.

In June of 2020, in the wake of George Floyd's murder and a social justice movement sweeping the country, the City of Akron declared Racism as a Public Health Crisis and created the Racial Equity Social Justice Taskforce. One of the recommendations of the Taskforce was for the City of Akron to hire someone to oversee the implementation of the Youth Violence Prevention Strategic Plan.

In April 2022, I hired Denico Buckley-Knight as the City's Youth and Community Opportunity Director. Denico is not only responsible for overseeing the implementation of the Youth Violence Strategic Plan, he also administers the Violence Intervention grant program funded by the American Rescue Plan Act.

Denico has been an excellent addition to the staff and has added value to the ecosystem of violence prevention, out-of-school time activities and holistically providing opportunities for the youth in our community. One of his first assessments was that the Youth Violence Prevention Strategic Plan needed to be updated, as a lot of things happened during the COVID slow down.

Once again, Crystal Jones, former Executive Director of Project Ujima, co-led the efforts in revising the Youth Violence Prevention Strategic Plan and the team has truly focused on implementing attainable goals. Violence in our community didn't increase overnight and it will not decrease overnight. We all want our community to be a safer place to live, work and play, but this can only happen if we are coordinating and aligning our local resources for generations to come.

Finally, my sincerest gratitude goes out to our community partners who are working every day to reduce youth violence in our community, and I encourage every citizen to be an active part of the solution as well.

Sincerely,

Mayor Daniel Horrigan

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Dan Horrigan", followed by a horizontal line.



This document lays out the City of Akron's strategic plan for reducing youth and young adult violent crime, with implementation roles for everyone, including government, businesses, nonprofit agencies and organizations, everyday citizens, and youth themselves.



GOAL

To reduce the number of violent crimes committed by Akron youth ages 13-24 by 10% from 2023 to 2028



1 .

Mentoring

One-on-one and group mentoring targeted to youth and young adults

2 .

Recreation and Discretionary Time

Programs to provide positive, safe recreational and social activities for youth and young adults

3 .

Re-entry Support

Services to help formerly incarcerated youth get their lives back on track and avoid recidivism

4 .

Police-Youth Relations

Initiatives to build and improve relationships of trust between youth and law enforcement

5 .

Mental Health/ Substance Abuse Supports and Treatment

Supports for youth and families struggling with mental health and substance abuse issues

6 .

Gun Violence Reduction

Strategies to reduce young people's unsupervised and unrestricted access to guns

7 .

Community Awareness and Involvement

Structured dialogue and feedback processes to generate sustained community engagement

8 .

Workforce Development and Livable Wage Employment

Training, job placement, and coaching for out-of-school time employment for youth and livable wage employment for young adults

1. Executive Summary

In April 2019, Mayor Dan Horrigan released the Akron Strategic Plan for Youth Violence Prevention (2019 Strategic Plan). It was the product of a year-long process of community stakeholders working together to develop a comprehensive, inclusive blueprint for coordinated, collaborative action to reduce youth violence, with roles for everyone, including government, businesses, nonprofit agencies and organizations, everyday citizens and the youth themselves. Since the release, the COVID-19 pandemic shocked the nation and the world. The shutdowns and shelter-in-place mandates of the pandemic necessitated a pause in the work of the individuals and partner organizations committed to implementing the strategies outlined in the 2019 Strategic Plan.

The pandemic not only brought a complete halt to everyday lives, unfortunately it also brought an increase in violent crime to communities across the nation. According to crime data collected by the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), the number of homicides spiked almost 30% during the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic¹, a phenomenon seen in cities similar in size to Akron in both Republican and Democratic-leaning states.² The latest report issued by the Council on Criminal Justice (CCJ) evaluates crime data provided by up to 35 US cities and offers a “timely snapshot” of national crime levels in 2022. It indicates that while the number of homicides declined by 4% between 2021 and 2022, the homicide rate was still 34% higher than in 2019, before the COVID-19 pandemic.³ Similar trends exist for other violent crimes such as gun assaults and aggravated assaults.⁴

Nationally, homicides committed by juveniles acting alone rose 30% in 2020 from a year earlier, while those committed by multiple juveniles increased 66%. The most recent federal data shows the number of killings committed by children under 14 was the highest in two decades.⁵

Experts theorize that a number of factors contributed to the rise in homicides and other violent crimes during the pandemic. These factors include the proliferation of guns (acquired both legally and illegally), economic instability, increased social isolation, loss of loved ones, other pandemic-related stressors, and diminished public trust in the police.⁶ FBI data shows a gun of some sort was used in roughly 77% of murders committed in 2020, which is the highest number on record.⁷

Research also shows that black and brown communities have been disproportionately impacted by the increase in pandemic-related gun violence. While Black Americans made up 12.5 percent of the U.S. population in 2020, they were the victims in 61 percent of all gun homicides.⁸ Gun deaths among Latinx people increased 21 percent from 2019 to 2020.⁹

As in other communities, the increase in violent crime during the pandemic has had a devastating impact on the residents of the City of Akron. The Akron Police Department (APD) reported persistently high firearm violence and spikes in domestic and intimate partner violence cases during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The City recognized the need to update the 2019 Strategic Plan to address the unprecedented impact of the pandemic, specifically as it relates to increases in violent crime in Akron (2023 Updated Strategic Plan). In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the United States Congress passed the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 (ARPA) to provide funding and resources to respond to the pandemic and its detrimental effects. Thirty-nine local providers were awarded ARPA grants from the City of Akron (ARPA Grantees) to provide services aligned with the eight approaches in the 2019 Strategic Plan. This 2023 Updated Strategic Plan includes the wide range of services being provided to Akron youth by ARPA Grantees.

1. Executive Summary

(CONT'D)

These “boots-on-the-ground” providers often have the best opportunities to fully engage with youth in the neighborhoods where they live and play. In addition, this 2023 Updated Strategic Plan incorporates the significant work being done by Summit Education Initiative, the Out-of-School Time Network (OST) and Legacy Partners identified in the 2019 Strategic Plan, which are organizations, agencies and institutions that have a broad-reach and extensive tradition of service to the residents of the greater Akron area.

Like the 2019 Strategic Plan, this 2023 Updated Strategic Plan is not intended to be a comprehensive analysis of the causes and effects of youth violent crime, rather it is a plan of action. Its strategies are based on the recognition of the need for better systemic coordination of existing resources and new efforts to maximize the effectiveness and sustainability of youth violence prevention programs and services. The City and community partners remain steadfast in the commitment to take aggressive action to reduce violent crime in Akron.

2. History of Akron's Recent Youth Violence Prevention Efforts

In December 2011, 11 homicides occurred in a two-week period that is often referred to as the “awful week of murders.” All the deaths during this time were the result of gun violence, and several of the dead were under the age of 25. The murders inspired community members to begin the Stop the Violence Movement, which was formed as a way for the community to work through its grief together.

In early 2012, Save a Life (SAL), a grassroots coalition, was formed to find ways to help end violence in Akron. In February 2012, with sponsorship by Akron Summit Community Action, Inc., SAL hosted a public screening and discussion of the critically acclaimed documentary, “The Interrupters,” and followed up with a report of recommended actions offered by participants during the post-screening discussion.

When progress stalled following issuance of SAL’s report, the next groups to work on gun violence prevention were the Healthy Connections Network and the Minority Health Roundtable. In April 2015, the groups sponsored a forum which featured discussion circles on how gun violence affects health and wellbeing. The groups made marginal progress through late 2016, when group members engaged in a series of conversations with Akron City Council members, community members, and staff members of newly elected Mayor Dan Horrigan. The conversations centered on the need for a coordinated response to community violence in general and gun violence in particular.

These conversations revealed the need for a broad strategic plan to outline Akron’s youth violence issues and to identify a path to effectively address those issues. Mayor Horrigan’s office led the effort in creating the Akron Youth Violence Prevention Steering Committee (2019 Steering Committee), a group comprised of a cross-section of agencies and community organizations that work in and around youth violence.

The 2019 Steering Committee was tasked to guide a process for addressing youth violence prevention. A grant was secured through the Ohio Department of Public Safety, Office of Criminal Justice Services to hire Project Ujima, Inc. as a consultant to facilitate community engagement and lead in the drafting of the 2019 Strategic Plan. The Akron Police Department and Kent State University Health and Hazards Lab were valuable partners and provided crime and mapping data. See Section II of the 2019 Strategic Plan for more details on the violence prevention work that preceded this 2023 Updated Strategic Plan.

3 . Review of the 2019 Strategic Plan

The goal of the 2019 Strategic Plan was “to reduce by at least 20% the number of violent crimes committed by Akron youth ages 15-24 by the year 2024.” The working definition of “violent crime” was adapted from the United States Code: “An offense that involves the use, attempted use, or threatened use of physical force against another person.”¹⁰ In selecting the specific crimes to focus on, the Committee relied on crime data provided by APD for suspects ages 15-24, from 2012 through 2016. The following offenses had the highest reporting rates and therefore were selected to be the focus of the 2019 Strategic Plan: assault, felonious assault, discharge of a firearm, family violence, menacing, robbery and sexual assault. Because concern about gun violence was the driving force behind creation of the 2019 Strategic Plan, the number of shots fired and weapon law violations were measured as well.

The data showed the following from 2012 through 2016, for suspects ages 15-24:

AKRON POLICE DEPT. REPORT DATA

ASSAULT	4,844
FELONIOUS/AGGRAVATED ASSAULT	848
DISCHARGE FIREARM	273
FAMILY VIOLENCE	5,027
ROBBERY/AGGRAVATED ROBBERY	2,253
SEXUAL ASSAULT	615
WEAPON LAW VIOLATIONS	1,953
CITY-WIDE SHOTS FIRED “CALLS FOR SERVICE”	7,486

Relying on evidence-based best practices and findings related to youth risk and protective factors, the 2019 Steering Committee identified the following 8 Strategic Approaches as the primary ways to reduce youth violence in the City of Akron: (1) mentoring, (2) recreation and discretionary time, (3) re-entry support, (4) police-youth relations; (5) gun violence reduction; (6) mental health, traumatic stress and substance abuse supports and treatment; (7) community awareness and involvement; and (8) capacity and infrastructure development. Community-based and agency-based partners were identified to co-lead each of the eight approaches. See Section VII of the 2019 Strategic Plan for a list of the lead partners.

4. Updated Goal

With the pause in this work due to the pandemic, political leaders, agencies, and community stakeholders took the opportunity to further explore how and why certain youth violence prevention programs work and the outcomes they impact. The United States Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) Healthy People 2030 plan sets a target of a 20% reduction rate of minors and young adults committing violent crimes from 2020 to 2030.¹¹ This is consistent with the percentage reduction in the 2019 Strategic Plan, although DHHS allotted a 10-year period to achieve the goal versus the 5 years in Akron's 2019 Strategic Plan. DHHS established the goal after analyzing the trajectory of reduction in youth violence prior to 2020 and the anticipated downward trend due to evidenced-based approaches to prevent youth crime. Akron's realigned goal accounts for this reality, as well as the increase in gun-related crimes during and after COVID, and includes a target date of 2028 to allow time to make necessary adjustments based on lessons learned and outcome analysis. The updated goal is to reduce the number of violent crimes committed by Akron youth ages 13-24 by 10% from 2023 to 2028.

The target group has been expanded to include youth ages 13 and 14 to take into consideration the exposure to violent crime many young adolescents face as victims, witnesses, or offenders. Societal, family, peer, and community violence increase the risk of entering a cycle of violence and/or having antisocial and violent behavior.

While the 2023 Updated Strategic Plan focuses on the 13-24 age group, many of the Legacy Partners and ARPA Grantees serve a broader age range, recognizing that many children under the age of 13 are exposed to trauma and violence, as well as adults over the age of 24.

This also acknowledges that children do not exist in a vacuum. Often, their incidents of violence are influenced by the adults in their lives, some who are struggling themselves with adverse circumstances, including poverty, unemployment, incarceration, and lack of hope.

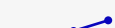
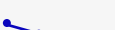
5. Updated Data

The Akron Police Department provided updated data on the violent crimes targeted in the 2019 Strategic Plan for the years 2017 through 2020 and part of 2021.¹² Appendix B contains a data summary prepared by Summit County Public Health Epidemiology and Biostatistics. Although not included in the crimes targeted in the 2019 Strategic Plan, disorderly conduct, trespass and unruly juvenile offenses are included in the updated data, as research indicates that these types of crimes are indicators of adult criminal involvement.

The data shows an overall reduction in youth violence by 13% in Akron between 2017 and 2020. The highest incidents of crime are increasing in specific neighborhoods. These neighborhoods are the same “hot spots” reported in the 2019 Strategic Plan and have the highest need for the targeted intervention and prevention actions detailed in this 2023 Updated Strategic Plan.

Youth Violence by Type of Crime

As indicated in the following table, menacing/aggravated menacing and weapon law violations had the greatest increase between 2017 and 2020, (21% and 17%, respectively). Robbery/aggravated robbery and trespassing incidents had the largest decline during those same years (-53% and -49%, respectively).

Type of Crime	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	Trend	Total	Avg.	% of Total	% Change
Family Violence	994	1002	1001	999	307		4303	999	25%	1%
Assault	875	867	912	725	230		3609	845	21%	-17%
Weapon Law Violations	435	501	452	509	221		2118	474	12%	17%
Menacing / Aggravated Menacing	415	434	428	502	112		1891	445	11%	21%
Disorderly	342	254	403	200	49		1248	300	7%	-42%
Robbery / Aggravated Robbery	369	351	258	174	27		1179	288	7%	-53%
Trespass	332	293	200	170	53		1048	249	6%	-49%
Felonious / Aggravated Assault	139	134	148	130	39		590	138	3%	-6%
Sexual Assault	141	122	100	109	38		510	118	3%	-23%
Discharging Firearms	77	77	108	154	55		471	104	3%	100%
Unruly Juvenile Offenses	116	64	51	28	8		267	65	2%	-76%
Total	4235	4099	4061	3700	1139		17234	4024	4024	-13%

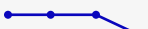
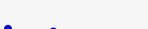
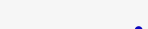
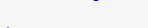
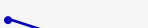
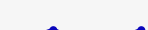
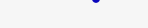
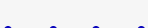
Source: Akron Police Department; Note: 2021 data is incomplete and not included in change statistics

5. Updated Data

(CONT'D)

Youth Violence by Akron Neighborhoods

Of the 24 Akron neighborhoods, three neighborhoods account for one-third of total youth violence incidents and five neighborhoods saw increases in youth violence incidents between 2017 and 2020.

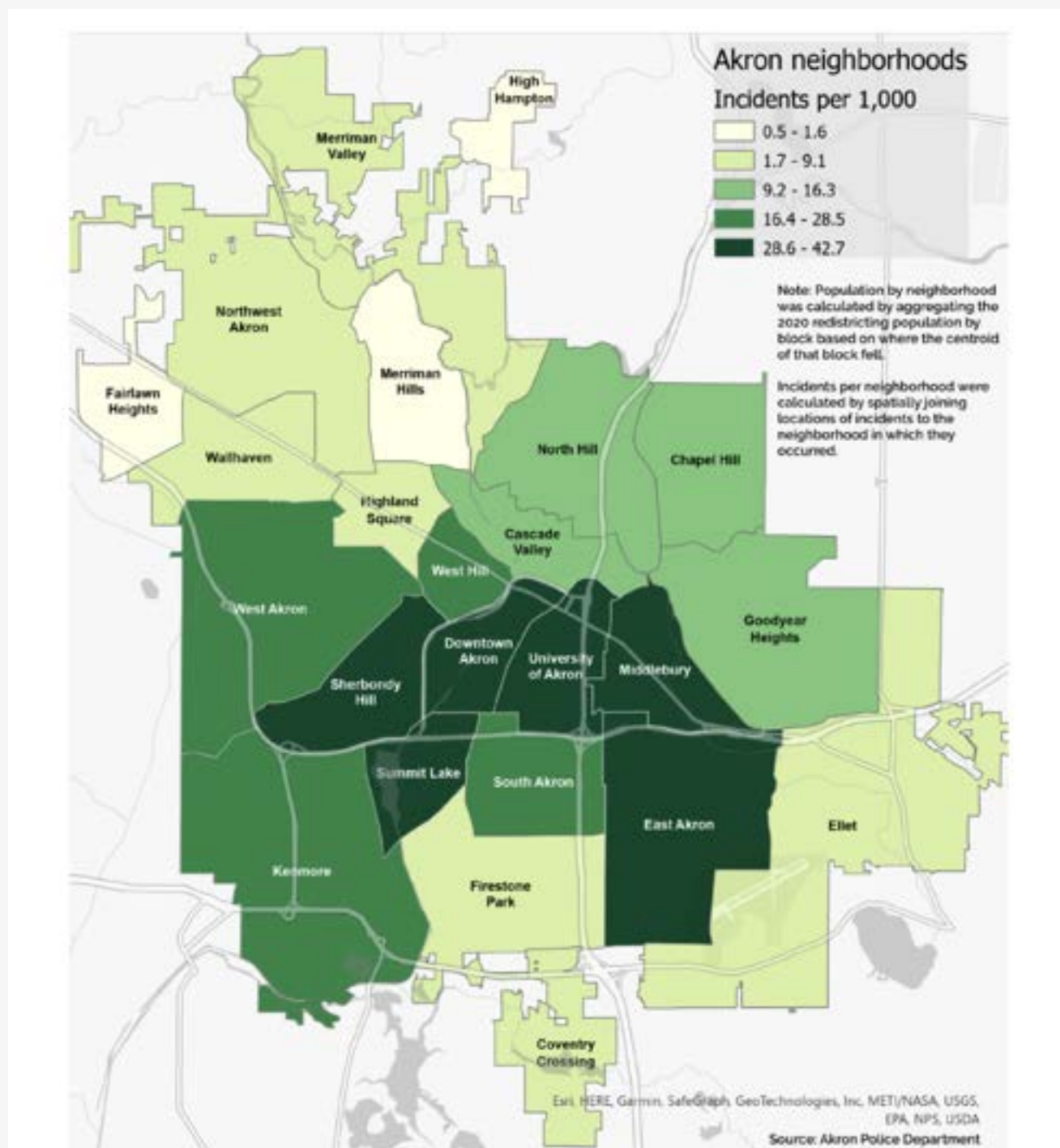
Neighborhood	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	Trend	Total	AVG.	% of Total	% Change
East Akron	469	478	509	534	177		2167	498	13%	14%
Kenmore	455	446	577	490	147		2115	492	12%	8%
West Akron	443	396	371	390	80		1680	400	10%	-12%
North Hill	347	330	334	204	102		1317	304	8%	-41%
Sherbondy Hill	264	305	256	225	79		1129	263	7%	-15%
Goodyear Heights	260	278	274	261	55		1128	268	7%	0%
South Akron	288	282	250	209	99		1128	257	7%	-27%
University of Akron	234	255	227	266	102		1084	246	6%	14%
Ellet	237	177	204	207	52		877	206	5%	-13%
Middlebury	224	174	169	145	54		766	178	4%	-35%
Downtown Akron	206	140	139	95	20		600	145	3%	-54%
Summit Lake	121	169	122	128	28		568	135	3%	6%
Firestone Park	116	106	98	104	22		446	106	3%	-10%
Northwest Akron	102	104	133	93	12		444	108	3%	-9%
Chapel Hill	91	78	119	52	20		360	85	2%	-43%
Highland Square	88	85	71	55	19		318	75	2%	-38%
West Hill	71	98	65	59	16		309	73	2%	-17%
Merriman Valley	100	67	67	51	16		301	71	2%	-49%
Cascade Valley	43	54	27	48	22		194	43	1%	12%
Wallhaven	27	51	20	53	>10		155	38	1%	96%
Unknown	19	16	12	15	>10		68	16	0%	-21%
Coventry Crossing	10	>10	11	>10	>10		40	11	0%	--
Merriman Hills	13	>10	>10	>10	>10		23	13	0%	--
Fairlawn Heights	>10	>10	>10	>10	>10		15	>10	0%	--
High Hampton	>10	>10	>10	>10	>10		>10	>10	0%	--
Total	4235	4099	4061	3700	1139		17234	4024	100%	-13%

Source: Akron Police Department; Note: 2021 data is incomplete and not included in change statistics

5. Updated Data

(CONT'D)

Youth Violence Incidents Per 1,000 Population, City of Akron by Neighborhood, 2017-2021 (partial)



City-wide Shots Fired Calls for Service

The following table shows the number of calls APD received from residents reporting shots fired in 2012 through 2021. Calls increased significantly over this period—up 89% from the lowest number of incidents (1,415) in 2015 to the highest (2,678) in 2021. The data aligns with statements made during interviews with males incarcerated at the Summit County Detention Center. They stated that when they hear gunshots, they do not bother to “duck down,” and if it is at night, they simply go back to sleep. (See Section VI, Youth Voice.) Although these young people have figured out a way to cope with their environment, studies shows that children who have been exposed to gun violence, including hearing gun shots, are much more likely to have negative mental health impacts than children who have not been exposed to gun violence.¹³

2012	1614
2013	1478
2014	1169
2015	1415
2016	1828
2017	1821
2018	1865
2019	2015
2020	2013
2021	2678

*No ages associated, full year 2021. Source: Akron Police Department

Increased Focus on Gun-related Youth Violence

Given the reported increase in gun-related violence that accompanied the COVID-19 pandemic, the list of targeted crimes has been adjusted in this 2023 Updated Strategic Plan to focus more specifically on the following crimes related to gun violence committed by youth ages 13-24:

1. ASSAULT
2. FELONIOUS/AGGRAVATED ASSAULT
3. DISCHARGE OF FIREARM
4. ROBBERY/AGGRAVATED ROBBERY
5. DISCHARGE OF FIREARM
6. WEAPONS LAW VIOLATIONS
7. HOMICIDES
8. AGGRAVATED MURDER
9. VOLUNTARY MANSLAUGHTER
10. INVOLUNTARY MANSLAUGHTER



6 . Research

Many elements come into consideration when evaluating the reasons and life experiences that can lead to adult crime and violence. Research has shown that early onset of violence and delinquency is one of those reasons, especially when adolescents become young adults but continue their violent and/or criminal behavior, bolstered by lack of societal opportunity and responsibility, or by an absence of learned “prosocial behavioral skills”.¹⁴

Risk and Protective Factors

“A dominant narrative in the United States considers violence primarily a problem of personal responsibility. In terms of youth violence, this results in dominant narratives that conjure images of youth as aggressors, troublemakers, or predators, concealing that youth are children with still-developing brains, some of whom have been adversely impacted by extensive or prolonged stress . . . The brain architecture that affects reasoning skills and impulse control is actively developing through the mid-20s.”¹⁵

The authors go on to emphasize that Black youth in particular,

“...are not blind to narrative representations and expectations about who they are and who they can be in the world. Violence prevention efforts focused on enhancing individual resiliency and conflict resolution skills are necessary, but not sufficient. Given the many challenges Black youths face, there is an opportunity for positive narratives that address the personal, cultural, sociopolitical, and spiritual aspects of becoming a health Black youth and that can support the development of critical and collective consciousness and the promotion of equity.”¹⁶

Risk Factors

The Centers for Disease Control and other national researchers have identified the most prevalent risk factors that, if communities do not mitigate, can lead to youth violence. Some are individual, including substance abuse, history of violent victimization, history of treatment for emotional problems, and low IQ; some are relationship-based, such as witnessing violence in the home, parental substance abuse or criminality and having a peer group that is involved with delinquent activities; and some are community-based, such as violence in the neighborhood and a lack of resources for after-school programs and other community recreational activities. Additional identified structural risk factors are poverty/lack of economic opportunity, social inequities (including race discrimination), lack of quality educational opportunities, disenfranchised neighborhoods, culture of violence, family isolation and other stressors.

It is the responsibility of adults and communities to care and protect our children and youth by creating safe, consistent, and nurturing relationships and environments for youth to flourish. These environments do not exist, though, for all children. When children and youth experience serious adversity, such as witnessing violence, adults have a shared responsibility to buffer the impact. If adults in Akron believe that all children deserve these safe, consistent and nurturing conditions, then eliminating systemic inequities, reducing risk factors and providing more opportunities for youth to build developmental assets is the answer.

Protective Factors

Protective factors are factors in the lives of young people that diminish the likelihood of engagement in violent activities. These include healthy social, problem-solving, and emotional management skills, strong academic achievement, healthy relationships with parents, other caring adults, and peers, and activities that keep students busy during and after school. Akron has a wide array of resources that serve youth, many of which provide evidence-based programs and other protective interventions to deter criminal behavior. Akron's challenge is to ensure that these resources are fully integrated so that they provide a seamless system of services to effectively address youth violence.

To identify local risk and protective factors, the 2019 Steering Committee relied on research conducted by Akron area youth services providers and on direct input from the community, including incarcerated youth. This research confirms that Akron youth are impacted by many of the same risk factors identified in the national research.

School-to-Prison Pipeline and Racial Disparities

The school-to-prison pipeline has been defined as the process in which students are pushed out of school through out-of-school suspensions, expulsions and harsh discipline into the prison system.

Data shows that Black students are suspended from school at a rate three times that of white students. According to the U.S. Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights, Black students represent about 16 percent of student enrollment but account for 27 percent of students referred to law enforcement and 31 percent of students who experience a school-related arrest.¹⁷

Students who are arrested, expelled, or suspended from school are often left unsupervised. This provides opportunities for them to associate with and become influenced by people who engage in negative and/or criminal behaviors. Even students who may not have been initially inclined toward negative behaviors can end up on an accelerated path to academic failure, delinquency, and ultimately adult criminal involvement.¹⁸

(See illustration on next page)

Black Students are 3-4x more likely than their white peers of facing multiple suspensions from school*

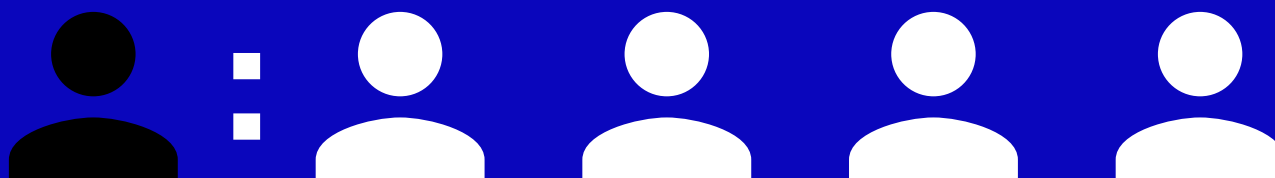
 Black

 White

Risk of Being Expelled



Risk of Facing Multiple Suspensions



*Source: U.S. Dept. of Education, Office for Civil Rights, Civil Rights Data Collection 2009-10

Youth Voice

Along with insight provided by risk and protective factor research, the best insight into why youth turn to crime and violence often comes from the youth themselves. In April and May 2022, the Summit County Upward Mobility Project conducted focus group interviews of males incarcerated in the Summit County Juvenile Detention Center. The following are some of the responses to the interviewer's questions:¹⁹

“What impacted your life the most in terms of the decisions you made?”:

1. “Growing-up [in foster homes], I was constantly moving from home to home, that made me develop trust issues... [I thought to myself], [I'll only be] around... for a while, I'm about to leave, they're probably gonna shove me off somewhere.”
2. “Decisions I made was [due to] my life being easily accessible to death.”

“What can we do differently to improve things?”

1. “Not giving up on yourself because, once you give up on yourself, everyone around you gives up on you.”
2. “I should surround myself with more positive influences. People that do good for themselves. People that want to see people around them do good as well. What played a big part in my life was being around negative people. You could be the nicest person in the world, but if you’re around a lot of ghouls and goblins, that’s what you’re going to become.”
3. “Stay in basketball. When I was going to school, I always played basketball afterwards.”
4. “Mentorship would have had a positive impact on my life...growing up in the conditions I had, I didn’t really have that one person to show me how life could have been instead of me proceeding the way I thought life was.”

“What kind of community exposures did you have as you were growing up?”

1. “A lot of violence. You know it’s bad when you’re trying to sleep and all you hear is gun shots.”
2. “And you still turn around and go back to sleep because, it’s normal.”
3. “When I hear gunshots, I don’t even think you duck down, it’s just normal.”

“What are some other [recommendations]?”

1. “We have community centers, but you don’t ever see anybody inside of them. I feel like they’re there for no reason.”
2. “A lot of kids do stuff because they’re bored. We used to have programs, but they got taken away from us.”
3. We go [to community centers], but we go with guns, because you could be in the middle of a basketball game and start getting shot at. It’s just like that. There ain’t nowhere we’re safe...You can get shot anywhere. Anybody could die. A lot of innocent kids have got killed.”
3. Our community suffer[s] from systematic poverty...If you were to go to our side of town, the first thing you would see is a liquor store.

“What about community athletics?”

1. “None of that. They stopped all of it. Kids eight years old running around on the football field, hearing gun shots.”
2. “Back in the day there used to be certain spots that had certain respect—that nothing could go wrong there.”
3. “Like neutral ground.”
4. “It’s not like that anymore. Older guys...have that respect, but a lot of young kids go there and do what they want to do.”

Additional responses:

1. "From cap guns it turned to Nerf guns, Nerf guns turned to bb guns, bb guns turned to real guns."
2. "Nowadays we're so ignorant because, a lot of people never got taught by someone who knows how to communicate like an adult."
3. "[Not having opportunities] sets us up for failure.... When you're going down so fast, it's hard to get back up."
4. "Open more doors for the black community... White folks don't want to see us win."
5. "Growing-up I didn't have all the stuff I wanted, so that led me to make the choices I made and that led to consequences. And it all just built up. Now I'm here."



7. Strategic Approaches

Seven of the eight Strategic Approaches outlined in the 2019 Strategic Plan remain the same. Approach Eight has been changed to focus on workforce development and livable wage employment. The original intent of Approach Eight was to establish leadership to ensure seamless coordination, integrated implementation and evaluation of the Plan's recommended approaches and actions. For the 2023 Updated Strategic Plan, this leadership is being provided by the City of Akron Director of Youth Opportunity and community members serving on implementation teams for each approach.

Mentoring

One-on-one and group mentoring services targeted to youth and young adults ages 13 – 24, including those who are incarcerated.

Recreation and Discretionary Time

Programs to provide positive, safe recreational and social activities for youth and young adults.

Re-entry Support

Support services to help formerly incarcerated youth and young adults get their lives back on track and avoid recidivism, including support services for re-entry into school or job training, adequate employment, housing, help re-establishing family connections, disconnecting from negative influences, and mental/behavioral health support and treatment.

Police-Youth Relations

Initiatives to build and improve relationships of trust between youth, young adults, and the police.

7. Strategic Approaches

(CONT'D)

Mental Health and Substance Abuse Supports and Treatment

Targeted support to youth and their families who are struggling with mental health and substance abuse issues.

Gun Violence Reduction

Development and implementation of strategies to reduce young people's unsupervised and unrestricted access to firearms.

Community Awareness and Involvement

Development of processes and structures to promote awareness and generate sustained community participation in the collective work of preventing youth violence in Akron.

Workforce Development and Livable Wage Employment

Training, job placement, and coaching for out-of-school time employment for youth and livable wage employment for young adults.

8.

Recommended Actions

8. Recommended Actions

The following actions will guide the work of the ARPA Grantees and Legacy Partners for each of the Strategic Approaches. The list of recommended actions will expand and adapt to reflect changing conditions, lessons learned, and growing partnerships throughout ongoing implementation of the 2023 Updated Strategic Plan. Appendix A shows the specific services provided by each of the ARPA Grantees and the ages they serve.

In addition to recommended actions, included in this section are highlights of initiatives that are currently underway.

Mentoring

- Develop shared evaluation criteria to assess programs’ impact on interruption and prevention of youth violence.
- Educate mentoring leaders on youth violence risk and protective factors and current data trends.
- Coordinate mentoring in areas identified as youth violence hot spots.
- Expand/develop mentoring programs to serve incarcerated and returning youth.
- Provide training to mentors and mentoring programs.

ARPA Grantees

- | | |
|--|--|
| • Akron Dream Center | • Love Akron |
| • Alchemy, Inc. | • 100 Black Men of Akron, Inc. |
| • Dreams Academy | • Project GRAD Akron |
| • Fathers and Sons of NE Ohio | • Red Oak Behavioral Health |
| • GoalGetta Academy | • iC.A.R.E. Mentoring® Program |
| • Kent State University – First Star Academy | • South Akron Youth Mentorship |
| • Law & Leadership Institute | • Wingfoot Church / NOEX Sports / Sip Savor Soul |

Legacy Partners

- Akron Public Schools

8. Recommended Actions

(CONT'D)

Red Oak iC.A.R.E. Mentoring® “Creating authentic relational energy”

Provides caring, consistent adult role models in the lives of youth

Key Components

- iC.A.R.E. Mentoring: Adult volunteers provide one-to-one mentoring with students during the school day. Mentors are asked to commit to one student, one hour each week, for at least one school year.
- iC.A.R.E. Connect: Empowers adolescents in a school-based peer-to-peer mentoring initiative that cultivates a healthy and empowering environment for students to develop interpersonal relationship skills and evolve into competent student leaders.
- iC.A.R.E. Community: Expands the reach of iC.A.R.E. through partnerships with established youth-serving programs by providing training and technical support.

Recreation and Discretionary Time

- Use the comprehensive Out-of-School Time Network for Akron’s diverse organizations and champions of youth development to come together to build public will and expanded systems of support for afterschool and summer experiences. The network will galvanize the entire city to provide equitable and innovative opportunities where youth build the skills needed for success in college, career and life. Opportunities will include re-entry, diversion, academic, enrichment, sports, wellness, work-based learning, and youth employment.
- At City of Akron Community Centers in youth violence hot spots, establish new violence prevention programming, and enhance outreach and referrals of youth to existing resources.
- Use Peace Circle techniques to mediate conflict and resolve peer issues.

8. Recommended Actions

(CONT'D)

ARPA Grantees

- Akron Zoological Park
- Boys & Girls Clubs NE Ohio
- Citizens Akron Church/The Vincent House
- Developing Student Athletes Academy
- He Brought Us Out Ministry
- Keepers of the Art, Inc.
- Students with a Goal (SWAG)

Legacy Partners

- Akron Public Schools
- Summit Education Initiative
- Out-of-School Time Network

Akron's Out-of-School Time Network

Network focusing on the time a young person spends during the hours of 3:00 – 6:00 pm, over the weekend, and during the summer

Key Components

- Guided by the principle of excellence through equity, ensures that all children and youth have equitable access to high quality out of school time programs.
- Enhances positive youth development, educational achievement, and readiness for college and career.
- Coordinates out-of-school time programming to inform decision-making about community needs.
- Identifies gaps and barriers to improve access and contribute to continuous program quality improvements.

8. Recommended Actions

(CONT'D)

Re-entry Support

- Provide one-on-one support to returning youth to assist with re-enrollment in school, job training and employment, housing, and reconnecting with family and children.
- Provide job training in construction, home rehabilitation, commercial cleaning, landscaping and lawn maintenance.
- Provide mentoring services to youth prior to release from incarceration.
- Provide resources to implement job training and apprenticeship programs.
- Create programs involving parents/youth working together, e.g., City's Recreation Bureau offering opportunities for parents/adults/youth to assist with larger events.
- Provide life coaching to help youth set personal goals, identify existing and potential challenges and obstacles and devise a plan of action to achieve specific outcomes.

ARPA Grantees

- Fallen Father's Foundation
- Guys and Gals Community Partnership, Inc.
- South Street Ministries
- Williams Challenge

Legacy Partners

- Summit County Juvenile Court

8. Recommended Actions

(CONT'D)

Summit County Juvenile Court Thinking for a Change

A cognitive behavioral therapy program for youth involved with the Juvenile Court's traditional probation department.

Key Components

- Weekly group meetings with a designated Probation Officer to address the thought processes and habits that lead to a youth's at-risk behavior.
- Curriculum incorporates different role play scenarios, social skill development and problem-solving skills.
- Enables youth to learn how to recognize and positively change their thought-patterns and habits.

Police-Youth Relations

- Develop a youth-led campaign with APD and Akron Public Schools to promote safe, consistent, and nurturing relationships with the schools and community.
- Develop youth-led strategies to increase the dialogue and trust between police and youth, e.g., youth-police dialogue circles, on-going coordination with Akron Community Centers and Community Safety Liaison, and social media video campaigns.
- Maintain targeted APD patrols in youth violence hot spots and provide alerts to service providers of need for increased outreach efforts.

ARPA Grantees

- Akron Urban League

8. Recommended Actions

(CONT'D)

Legacy Partners

- Akron Police Department

Akron Urban League Young Adult Council

Focuses on empowering young adults to be part of the solution through direct engagement in leadership and advocacy activities

Key Components

- Promotes young adults to advise the community and school decision makers.
- Promotes young adults to have and receive respect and empathy with family, friends, and peers.
- Promotes young adults to be a leader and voice for change for healthier communities and schools.
- Identified focus areas are police accountability, police use of force, teacher training, and mental health supports.

Mental Health and Substance Abuse Supports and Treatments

- Continue providing psychological evaluations, individual and group therapy for youth ages 18+.
- Increase mental health and substance abuse prevention services for youth (e.g., peer intervention, grief and stress reduction groups), particularly in hot spot neighborhoods.
- Formalize a plan/policy between Akron Children's Hospital, Cleveland Clinic Akron General, and Summa Health so that as youth age out of the child sector there is a seamless transition to services in the adult sector to ensure continuity of care.

8. Recommended Actions

(CONT'D)

ARPA Grantees

- Greenleaf Family Center
- It's Not a Moment, but a Movement
- Minority Behavioral Health Group
- Victim Assistance Program, Inc.

Legacy Partners

- Summit County Alcohol
- Drug Addiction and Mental Health Services Board (ADM Board)

MBHG Behavioral Health Certificate Program

Provides opportunities for minority men to obtain three nationally recognized certifications within the behavioral health field to address this disparity in the field.

Key Components

- **Peer Support Intervention Model:** Through shared understanding, respect, and mutual empowerment, peer support interventions engage in a wide range of activities including advocacy, community building, sharing resources, and mentorship.
- **Follow up Services:** Crisis intervention, linkages to community-based services, mentoring, home visits, follow-up assistance, and long-term case management provided by culturally-competent frontline workers from the same or similar communities as the clients they serve.
- **Addressing the Social Determinants of Health:** MBHG elevates the issues of the revolving door of violence while addressing inequity and building partnerships with communities and survivors of violence.

8. Recommended Actions

(CONT'D)

Gun Violence Reduction

- Promote and enhance gun safety, awareness, and reduction programs.
- Organize coalition to change state policy on gun access.
- Continue participation in Breakthrough Series Collaborative (BSC) through the Center for Juvenile Justice Reform at the Georgetown University McCourt School of Public Policy. BSC provides an opportunity for community partners and youth justice stakeholders to develop, test, and implement evidence-informed strategies for diversion and other community-based alternatives, in partnership with communities of color most deeply impacted by the system.

ARPA Grantees

- The House of the Lord
- CORE City Refuge for Everyone

Legacy Partners

- Summit County Sheriff's Office

8. Recommended Actions

(CONT'D)

The House of the Lord (THOTL)

In collaboration with other community partners, THOTL hosts Gun Buyback, Fugitive Safe Surrender, and other safety events at its church, a trusted community site.

Key Components

- Gun buybacks are shown to be effective as a part of the broader effort to reduce gun violence; they can also influence public perception of how authorities are dealing with gun violence and serve as opportunities to educate communities about gun violence reduction strategies.
- Recent Gun Buy Back event was hosted by The House of the Lord on March 18, 2023, in partnership with Acme Fresh Market, Dave's Supermarket and the Akron NAACP. Twenty-six firearms were recovered.
- Gift card incentives were provided: \$150 for operable guns, \$25 for inoperable guns; gun locks and safety materials were also available.
- Fugitive Safe Surrender allows people with outstanding warrants for misdemeanor and low-level felonies in Summit County to voluntarily surrender and clear their court cases.

8. Recommended Actions

(CONT'D)

Community Awareness and Involvement

- Create survey for individuals to report gunshots heard.
- Create an awareness campaign to educate community on what gun violence is and what to do when they witness it.
- Provide clear, comprehensive information to the community on current law enforcement strategies that are in place to interrupt gun violence.
- Increase awareness of violence and other forms of trauma and their effects, improve quality of care and access to evidence based services for individuals and families affected by trauma, and facilitate collaboration across systems.

ARPA Grantees

- Akron AIDS Collaborative
- AxessPointe Community Health Center
- The Battered Women's Shelter
- Project Ujima, Inc.
- Wealthy Place Staffing – Alternative Measures

Legacy Partners

- Summit County Public Health

Project Ujima, Inc. (Collective Work & Responsibility)

Provides a structured circle dialogue process to enable diverse groups of people to address issues of common concern, develop relationships of trust and go from talk to action.

Key Components

- Provides Circle Keepers to facilitate Healing/Peace Circles and other community conversations, including dialogues on racism, intercultural competence, LGBTQ+ related issues, gun violence, infant and, community trauma, safety, and wellness.
- Informs the community of the benefits of utilizing a deliberative dialogue process, which focuses on considering pros, cons and trade-offs of ideas in finding common ground for action.
- Provides training to increase the number of facilitators in Akron equipped to create safe spaces for residents to circle around shared concerns, ensure that all voices are heard, create relationships of trust, and find common ground for action.
- Partners with other community groups to hold informational forums and events on issues affecting the health and wellness of the citizens of Akron.

8. Recommended Actions

(CONT'D)

Workforce Development and Livable Wage Employment

- Provide networking, mentorship, and leadership development opportunities for youth with community and business leaders.
- Teach youth sustainable farming skills.
- Provide health coaching, guidance and mentoring in self-stewardship.
- Ensure stability for youth experiencing housing insecurity by providing safe housing.
- Promote and expand partnerships with businesses, Jobs for Ohio's Graduates, Akron Public Schools College & Career Readiness, Out-of-School Time Network, Summit County Job and Family Services and others to provide a wide array of job and entrepreneurship training and placement opportunities.
- Expand marketing initiatives to increase community awareness of workforce development programs and opportunities.

ARPA Grantees

- Always Climbing Project
- Business Training Capital Resources, Inc. (GodRich Food & Farmer's Project)
- Harmony House
- Tri-County Jobs for Ohio's Graduates

Legacy Partners

- Summit County Department of Job and Family Services
- Jobs for Ohio Graduates
- ConxusNEO
- Out-of-School Time Network

Jobs for Ohio's Graduates (JOG)

Helps youth with multiple barriers to success complete their education and successfully transition to employment at a livable wage or post-secondary training

Key Components

- “One-stop success shop:” Offers a holistic continuum of guidance, leadership development, social services, graduation and employment opportunities to prepare the next generation of in-school and out-of-school youth, ages 14-24 for success at work, home and as community leaders.
- Leadership Development Conferences: Sessions led by national and local motivational leaders on personal development, team dynamics, goal setting and attainment.
- Career Development Conferences: Students showcase their knowledge and skills in one of twelve competitions centered on the soft skills they develop through their time in JOG, such as career preparation, creative decision-making, and employability skills.
- Will coordinate the 2023 summer employment program for Akron's youth.



9. Pending Initiatives

9. Recommended Actions

Health Alliance for Violence Intervention (The HAVI)

Hospital-based violence intervention programs (HVIPs): Multidisciplinary programs that bring trauma-informed care to victims of interpersonal violence while still in hospital-based setting

Key Components

- **Intervention:** Begins with a brief intervention in the emergency department or at the hospital bedside.
- **Care:** Followed by intensive, long-term community-based case management services in the months following the injury.
- **Follow up Services:** Crisis intervention, linkages to community-based services, mentoring, home visits, follow-up assistance, and long-term case management provided by culturally-competent frontline workers from the same or similar communities as the clients they serve.
- **Addressing the Social Determinants of Health:** HVIPs elevate the issues of the revolving door of violence while addressing inequity and building partnerships with communities and survivors of violence.

Out-of-School Time Network Sports & Wellness Youth Development

Physical and wellness activities that provide health benefits and positive life application skills for youth, as well as help mobilize the community by promoting involvement, togetherness and teamwork.

Key Components

- Renovations and upgrades to City of Akron Community Centers to provide expanded programs and activities.
- Community-based sports and wellness programs sponsored by nonprofits organizations, the faith-based community and other community partners.
- Sports programs and activities sponsored and supported by the City of Akron, e.g., Akron Soccer League, serving the community since 1980.
- City-wide partnerships with Akron Public Schools and the City of Akron to sponsor and support school sports and community-based sports and intramurals.



10. Evaluation Strategy and Timeline

The City of Akron Mayor’s Office has contracted with Summit Education Initiative to conduct a six-year, multi-site evaluation of the 2023 Updated Strategic Plan. The 2023 Updated Strategic Plan is funded by the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) of 2021.

The goal of the 2023 Updated Strategic Plan is to reduce violent crime in the City of Akron for youth and young adults ages 13 to 24 years old. Of primary concern are the rising levels of homicide and gun violence in the city²⁰, a trend mirrored in national statistics.²¹

The City has funded a “boots on the ground” approach, acknowledging that community-based providers have the best opportunity to fully engage with youth in their neighborhoods. There are eight strategic approaches outlined in the Strategic Plan, with thirty-nine organizations funded across approaches:

APPROACH	ORGANIZATIONS #
Mentoring	12
Recreation and Discretionary Time	7
Re-entry Support	4
Police-Youth Relations	1
Mental Health and Substance Abuse Supports and Treatment	5
Gun Violence Reduction	1
Community Awareness and Involvement	5
Workforce Development and Living Wage Employment	4

There is one final round of funding to be distributed, which will likely focus on hospital-based violence interrupter programs, services for high-need youth, and sport-based programming, with further inclusion of the faith-based community.

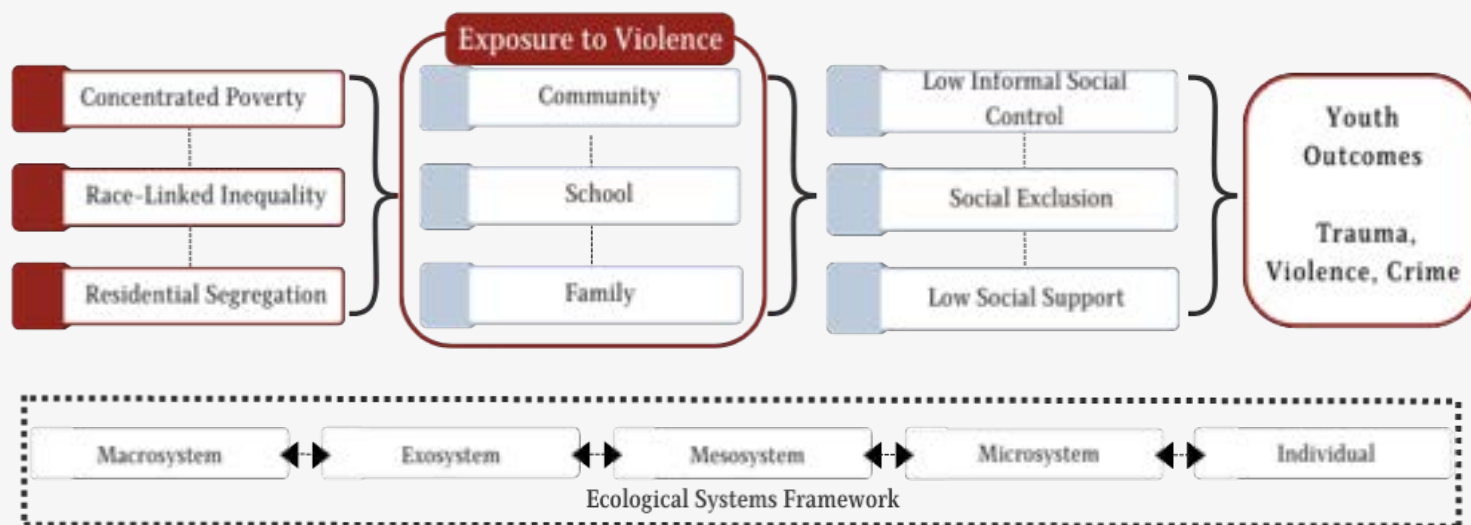
Socio-Environmental Context

In the 1930s, many neighborhoods in the city of Akron were redlined by the federal Home Owners’ Loan Corporation (HOLC), compounding racial and economic segregation that persists today.²² The city currently has a poverty rate of 23%, compared to the national rate of 11.6%.²³ Most of the city is designated as a Qualified Census Tract (QCT) because at least half of households have lower income than most of the surrounding region, disproportionately affecting people of color.²⁴ Racism has been declared a public health crisis in the City of Akron, Akron Public Schools, and Summit County.²⁵ Youth living in Akron are exposed to high levels of crime and violence²⁶ that has likely resulted in significant trauma and cyclical violence.^{27, 28}

The socio-environmental context and program logic and design fit within an Ecological Systems framework,^{29, 30} where structural conditions like concentrated poverty, race-linked inequality, and residential segregation affect risk for trauma, violence, and crime through community, family, and school process variables, especially low informal social control, social exclusion, and low social support.^{32, 33, 34, 35} Figure 1 shows one way that structural conditions affect youth outcomes through social process factors.

FIGURE 1

FIGURE 1. STRUCTURAL CONDITIONS AFFECT YOUTH OUTCOMES THROUGH SOCIAL PROCESS FACTORS



Developmental Assets Approach

There is considerable evidence that a positive developmental trajectory is enabled when youth are embedded in multiple relationships, contexts, and ecologies that nurture their development.^{36, 37} Risk behaviors (e.g., fighting) are reduced and thriving behaviors (e.g. academic achievement) are increased by the accumulation of assets and positive ecologies. Developmental assets have been shown to protect youth from negative outcomes and also have a compensatory impact among youth who otherwise are at higher risk for aggression and violence.³⁸

Exposure to harmful structural conditions and violence increases one's risk for trauma, violence, and crime,^{39, 40} however, it is not deterministic. Youth who subsequently develop into thriving adults often are able to tap into developmental assets that, "tip the balance from vulnerability in favor of resilience."⁴¹ For example, studies have shown that specific clusters of developmental assets, including positive peer influence, supportive relationships

with adults, school engagement, neighborhood collective efficacy, and peaceful conflict resolution skills, can explain significant variation in adverse outcomes, including violence.^{42, 43} Building assets in youths' lives helps reduce violence both directly and indirectly by promoting prosocial behaviors, connection to social institutions, and socially integrative norms.⁴⁴

Decades of evidence shows that developmental well-being is promoted via:⁴⁵

- **Relationships:** embeddedness in peer and adult networks of people who model socially responsible behaviors and commitment to positive social norms
- **Opportunities:** young people have opportunities to develop specific prosocial skills such as leadership and peaceful conflict resolution
- **Skills:** there are plentiful opportunities for youth to feel genuinely connected to social institutions such as schools, youth organizations, and religious organizations; allow youth to explore talents and capabilities

10. Evaluation Strategy and Timeline

(CONT'D)

The assets approach to reducing violence includes broader institutional and systems-level change. Ideally it is a permanent part of the formal and informal climate repeatedly expressed in the behavior, attitudes, and commitments of youth, family, staff, and community members.

The City of Akron's approach to violence intervention and prevention is aligned with a developmental assets framework, particularly due to its collaboration with and coordination of over fifty community organizations and partners, and the comprehensive programmatic emphasis on mentoring, recreation and discretionary time, reentry support, mental health and substance abuse supports and treatment, and workforce development and living wage employment.

Thus, it is expected that youth risk for crime, violence, and particularly homicide and gun violence will be reduced through community violence intervention and prevention programming that increases developmental assets, promotes prosocial behaviors and socially integrative norms, and improves connections to social institutions.⁴⁶

Process and Outcome Evaluation

The strategy to evaluate the 2023 Updated Strategic Plan employs a community-based approach that centers organizational leaders, program administrators, and staff as experts and seeks to work alongside them to identify and understand program processes, outputs, and youth outcomes. In general, the evaluation is designed to help organizations identify successes, opportunities, best practices, and paths to sustainability. Tools from the Center for Disease Control's VetoViolence and EvaluACTION program will be used where possible.⁴⁷

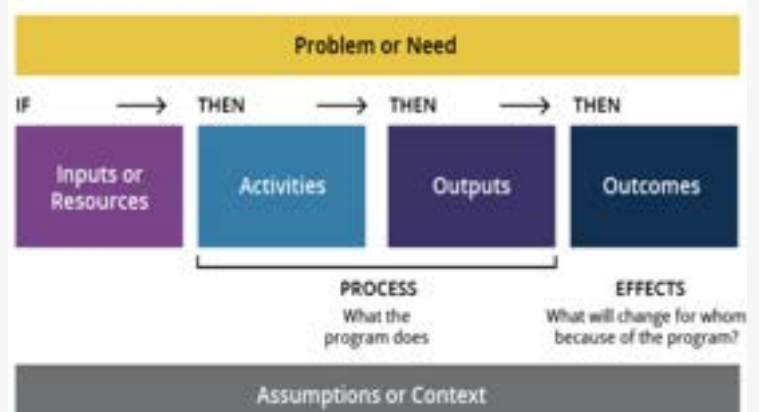
Process Evaluation

The process evaluation will include the development of logic models with each organization in order to connect project elements to a theory of change, measurable outcomes, and program sustainability efforts. The process evaluation will also highlight the alignment of programs with violence prevention evidence, best practices, and racial equity efforts.

Logic models link contextual conditions and program theory to strategies and goals to explain how or why programs work and includes identification of program inputs (e.g. staff, funding), activities (e.g. 1:1 mentoring), outputs (e.g. dosage and duration of services), and outcomes (e.g. reduced delinquency, increased assets). Information and data will be collected from the funded organizations. The basic format for logic models is shown in Figure 2.

As a first step, all funding applications will be collected and reviewed to begin the initial development of the logic models. Program administrators and staff will be asked to respond to the initial model and provide feedback and input. As information is obtained through collaboration with each organization, the model will be revised and improved over time. Each organization will have a unique approach to youth violence prevention that will be reflected in individual logic models.

Logic Model Components



Outcome Evaluation

Progress towards reaching the goals of the 2023 Updated Strategic Plan will be measured by ongoing evaluation of outcome measures, including rates of violent crime for youth ages 13 to 24. The selection of additional program outcome measures is being determined in collaboration with the strategic planning committee and with input from the funded organizations. Program outcomes will be strength-based (e.g. assets, academic achievement) and deficit-based (e.g. school discipline, crime).

Data for the outcome evaluation will be collected from Akron Police Department, Akron Public Schools, Project Ujima, the Out-of-School Time (OST) Network, Summit Education Initiative, Summit County Juvenile Court, and funded partners. Other existing data sources may be identified after the fourth round of funding is completed.

Comparison groups will be identified which may include youth who started but did not complete program services. Both aggregate and individual-level data are requested for program participants and associated comparison groups.

Under consideration and development is a baseline and follow-up survey to assess risk and protective factors, a selection of the 40 Developmental Assets, and approach-specific outcomes (e.g. re-entry support). The survey would be distributed and collected by program staff.

The basic conceptual model for the outcome evaluation is presented in Figure 3 and will be refined as needed.

Conceptual Model for Outcome Evaluation



10. Evaluation Strategy and Timeline

(CONT'D)

Storytelling / Photojournalism Project

Under consideration is a proposal for SEI to work with APS and/or a funded community partner to create a photojournalism-type project that tells the story of the 2023 Updated Strategic Plan and the people it touched through pictures. The results of this project would be embedded in the evaluation reports submitted to the City.

Timeline

The official kick off of the 2023 Updated Strategic Plan begins May 17, 2023, at the Health Equity Summit at the John S. Knight Center in Akron. The process and outcome evaluation will be completed within six years, using the following timeline as a guide:

Year 1 (March 2023 – February 2024)

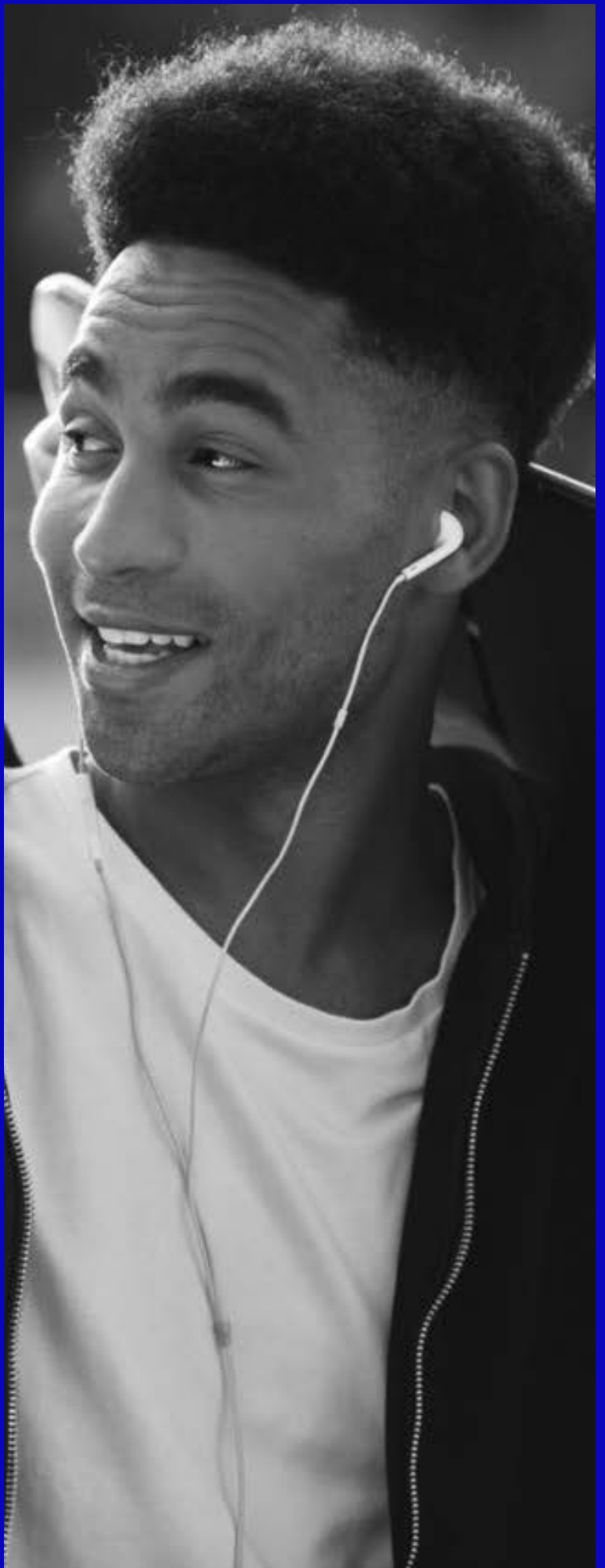
- Program & evaluation design and implementation
- Process evaluation
- Quarterly updates beginning August 2023
- Annual report

Years 2-5 (March 2024 – February 2028)

- Process evaluation
- Outcome evaluation
- Quarterly updates
- Annual report

Year 6 (March 2028 – February 2029)

- Outcome evaluation
- Quarterly updates through November 2028
- Final report with recommendations
- Community presentations and dissemination



11. Implementation Plan

A strategic plan is only as effective as its implementation. Much of the work outlined in the 8 Strategic Approaches and recommended actions is underway by ARPA Grantees, Legacy Partners, and other community partners. Implementation of the 2023 Updated Strategic Plan will build upon this work and foster transparency and accountability from all stakeholders.

Implementation of the 2023 Updated Strategic Plan will be the primary responsibility of the following work groups (1) Oversight Team; (2) Communications Team; and (3) Strategic Approaches/Action Teams.

Oversight Team

The Oversight Team will be led by the City of Akron Director of Youth Opportunity and will include the Akron Police Department, Akron Public Schools, Axesspointe Community Health Centers, Community Legal Aid, Out-of-School Time Network, Project Ujima, Inc., Summit County Public Health, and Summit Education Initiative. This team will provide leadership to ensure seamless coordination, integrated implementation, and evaluation of the 2023 Updated Strategic Plan's Strategic Approaches and actions. Specific tasks will include:

- Marketing the 2023 Updated Strategic Plan
- Convening the Oversight Team regularly to analyze data and feedback to assess and develop strategies for continuous improvement;
- Gathering data and feedback through multiple sources, including individuals and families in the community to monitor progress toward desired outcomes;
- Communicating with providers, leadership, community partners and residents about implementation progress, improvement strategies and successes;

- Addressing ongoing obstacles and barriers, modifying and redefining existing programs, and improving implementation infrastructure and supports based on collected data; and
- Planning for and securing any resources needed to sustain implementation of the 8 Strategic Approaches and recommended actions.

Communications Team

The Communications Team will consist of the Oversight Team, two ARPA Grantee representatives and at least one Legacy Partner representative from each of the 8 Strategic Approaches Teams. The Communications Team's role will be to coordinate continuous communication and collaboration among members of the 8 Strategic Approaches Teams via meetings, emails, and sharing of best practices, event information, and data. The objective is to provide an effective, seamless continuum of care through information sharing and services integration.

Strategic Approaches/Action Teams

Each of the 8 Strategic Approaches Teams will be comprised of the ARPA Grantees and Legacy Partners providing services under the Strategic Approach.

Each team will meet bi-monthly and set interim goals to accomplish their work, using the following template to guide goal setting and progress tracking:

(CON'D ON NEXT PAGE)

11. Implementation Plan

(CONT'D)

Implementation Goal

(Why is this important—how does it help to reduce youth violent crime?)



Strategies

(What tasks need to be done to accomplish this goal?)



Timeline

(Start-Finish)



Person(s)/
Organizations
responsible for each task



Resources needed



Anticipated Challenges



How will we know we're
making progress?



(What data will be used?)

11. Implementation Plan

(CONT'D)

The bi-monthly meetings will also provide organizations the opportunity to share individual goals, successes, and challenges and identify ways to continuously coordinate and complement each other's work. At each meeting the teams will conduct a Judging Our Progress (JOP) assessment of its collective progress toward implementing the Recommended Actions listed in Section VIII.

Judging Our Progress

- What did we set out to do during this two-month period?
- Did we accomplish our goal?
- If not, why?
- What did we learn?
- Do we need to re-examine any of our assumptions?
- What do we need to do differently or additionally going forward?
- What additional resources, supports, and collaborations are needed to accomplish any unmet goals and/or to meet future goals?
- What is our implementation goal for the next two-month period?

Community Input and Assessment

Ongoing community engagement will be essential throughout the implementation process. Partnering with community members to select, implement, and monitor prevention activities helps foster accountability and ensures that actions are community driven and effective at preventing and reducing community violence.⁴⁸

Community circles will be held on a semi-annual basis to provide safe space for community members to share their ideas and perspectives on progress and challenges related to the reduction of crime in their neighborhoods. Two circles will be held yearly for each of the 8 Strategic Approaches to allow residents to attend the circle that interests and impacts them the most. Circle participants will include service providers, law enforcement, and community residents. The community circles will provide ongoing opportunities to continue building and nurturing relationships of trust among all stakeholders through storytelling, information sharing, transparency and accountability.

12. Conclusion

The law defines a juvenile as individuals under the age of 18. However, the length of adolescence has generally been extended to include the mid-to late twenties. The strength of this 2023 Updates Strategic Plan is the diversity of programming deeply rooted in neighborhoods since one size does not fit all. National research shows us programs that address multiple risk factors and focus on specific age groups are more effective than those that address only one risk factor and multiple age groups. Programs that operate across social settings – including the family, schools, peer groups and the wider community – are more effective than programs that are isolated within one area of a young person’s life.

Through the development of the 2019 Strategic Plan, coupled with this 2023 update necessitated by watershed events of the intervening four years, Akron makes a resounding (re)commitment to take action in the face of its crisis of community violence. Because Akron had developed the 2019 Strategic Plan and convened the core group of people collaborating to interrupt the crisis, Akron already had a framework in place that it could build on. When the City dedicated ARPA dollars to hire the City of Akron Director of Youth Opportunity, it filled a huge gap that was perhaps the primary reason that the work had stagnated.

This 2023 Updated Strategic Plan is more ambitious in its reach – not only funding dozens of “on the ground” community organizations, but also requiring them to collaborate to achieve measurable impact. It is also better grounded in evaluation, with the evaluators integrally involved in identifying the metrics and strategies essential to telling the story of this work. It continues to be ambitious (while also being reality-based) in its goal – to reduce the number of violent crimes committed by Akron youth ages 13-24 by 10% by the year 2028. The current effort to address community violence as a crisis has been building for a decade.

The many events, both local and wide-reaching, that have brought this pivotal moment add trauma-laden weight to the burden of many in Akron. It is incumbent on the leadership, stakeholders, and residents of Akron to redeem these events with positive results.

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Akron Public Schools

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Community Legal Aid

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