

Building Community Collaboration to Prevent Gun Violence

Judith Robinson, *Gun Violence Prevention Working Group of Christ
Church Cathedral*

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**Christ Church
Cathedral**

Gun Violence Prevention in Cincinnati

Since this research was proposed in 2019, over 220 people have died as the result of gun violence in Cincinnati. In 2021, twelve juveniles were charged with murder as shooters.

On January 28, 2022, Aftab Pureval - the new mayor of Cincinnati - declared that gun violence is a public health crisis and a leading cause of premature death in the United States and our city.

It is past time for our community to make informed decisions about measures to address the leading cause of death among so many of our citizens.



BACKGROUND

Mission of The Gun Violence Prevention (GVP) Working Group

The mission of the GVP Working Group is to identify and address the full needs of a Cincinnati neighborhood and coordinate efforts to address the causes of gun violence there. We will identify the demographics and characteristics of the people who live in that community, the needs of those community members and the challenges those community members face, and then we will utilize available resources to help members of that community implement research-based methods to prevent gun violence.

- **Collaboration with key leaders and organizations** involves the participation of representatives of law enforcement, city government, social services, faith communities, education, healthcare, and businesses.
- The tools and techniques to treat the **epidemic of gun violence as a public health issue** are based on research into initiatives that have proven successful in other cities.
- With guidance from the Cincinnati Police Department and community advocates, the pilot neighborhood selected for the public health approach is **Price Hill (Lower, East, and West)**

Milestone #1: Collaboration with Key Leaders and Organizations

- Continue to recruit **city-wide representatives** who are key leaders in gun violence prevention for core ideation
- In **Price Hill neighborhoods**, establish contact with resources in Price Hill neighborhoods who address contributing factors to gun violence
 - *To gather information on their initiatives, their successes and their challenges*
 - *To grow trust and establish credibility*

Milestone #2: Tools/Techniques from Public Health Initiatives to Reduce Gun Violence

- Select research-based tools and techniques to address GVP that are appropriate for Price Hill neighborhoods after determining -
 - *Which initiatives are currently implemented*
 - *Which established initiatives need support*
 - *Which initiatives are missing*
- Build continuing collaboration with city-wide and Price Hill contacts
 - *To find support for existing initiatives*
 - *To find resources to fill missing initiatives*

Milestone #2: Activators and Inhibitors

Activators

- Access to national expert/data on GVP
- Established and motivated Price Hill community groups, addressing –
 - *Safety*
 - *Economics*
 - *At risk youth*
 - *Neighborhood pride*

Inhibitors

- Lack of knowledge and connection in Price Hill neighborhoods
- Competing needs/agendas
- Missing feedback from residents “on the street”
- Reluctance to participate over issues of gun ownership
 - *Gun control versus 2nd Amendment Rights*
 - *Public safety versus Individual security*

Project to Address Milestone #2: Tools/Techniques to Reduce Gun Violence

Purpose: To understand the point-of-view of teens and young adults in Price Hill neighborhoods regarding -

- Their experience with gun violence
- The impact on their daily lives
- The preventive initiatives they consider to be important

Research Design: Interview Price Hill neighborhood residents 12 to 30 years of age

- Employing “Cultural Brokers” familiar to respondents from Community Outreach Advocates and local agencies in Lower and East Price Hill
 - Gratuity (\$50) provided to Brokers for scheduling and conducting interviews
- Respondents receive an incentive (\$25) for a 30-45 minute interview in a location convenient to them
- All interviews were conducted using the same qualitative interview guide. All interviews were observed and hand-recorded by Judith Robinson.



DATA COLLECTION AND RESULTS

Caveats to Project Execution during 2019-2022

- **“Cultural Brokers”** were willing participants but often had to prioritize other responsibilities, resulting in slow data collection
- **COVID-19** caused face-to-face interactions to halt for 12 months
 - During that time, two Brokers relocated to employment that made them unavailable to the project
 - A third Broker ended participation due to the difficulty of recruiting participants
- **Respondents were hesitant** to participate in discussions of gun violence -
 - Trust of “outsiders” is extremely low in general, even with the use of Brokers
 - Trust in confidentiality poses a high risk due to fear of retaliation
 - Twenty-five dollars was considered too little compensation for some young adults
- **Computer crash** in July of 2020 resulted in some loss of data
- **Change in leadership** of the Cathedral resulted in a slow down of some activities of the Gun Violence Prevention Working Group.

Who We Interviewed

Eighteen interviews were completed between January 2020 and February 2022

Age	10-12 yr	13-18 yr	19-32 yr		
	2	7	9		
Gender	Male	Female			
	10	8			
Incident	Lost family	Lost friend	Wounded	By-stander	Resident
	2	4	2	3	7

Questions We Asked

Four main topics:

- **Experience with gun violence**
- **Perception of presence of guns**
- **Impact of gun violence on daily life**
- **Preventive initiatives considered important**

Including yourself, how many people do you know who have been a victim of gun violence?

How many of those victims survived?*(so X did not survive? That must be hard)*

How many people do you know who have been the perpetrators/shooters?

How often would you say a gun is used as a threat among people you know?

How often would you say an incident with a gun happens among people you know? (shooting with or w/o injury)*(are we talking days/weeks/months?)*

How easy is it to get a gun?

How many people do you know that have guns?

How many people you know carry guns all the time?

What are the ways that people get these guns?*(private sale, family, gun shop, gun show, shared, stolen ...)*

Which is the most common way to get a gun?

How would you describe the impact of gun violence on your life right now?

(If a victim or family member) I want to hear about what happened to you -

Tell me about the incident in which you/your family member was shot -

Did you know the shooter?

Why did the person feel they needed to use a gun?

(If a not a victim or family member) want to hear about what concerns you -

Tell me how guns have had an impact on your life -

Since these shootings, what are your thoughts about personally having guns?

Are there places or situations where you think guns are necessary?

Do you think there should be any restrictions on who has guns?

(If yes) Who should not have a gun and why?

What do you think needs to change so things like this don't keep happening?

Could any of these situations been avoided? Handled differently?

What needs to change in order to make it easier avoid these situations?

Or changed to handle situations differently?

Who do you think is working to change things that lead to shootings?

What are they doing right?

What are they not doing right?

Who do you think of as supporting you? Who can you go to for help?

Where do you feel safe?

If you had the power, what would you do for this neighborhood to reduce the need for guns?

What We Learned: Experience with Gun Violence

- **“Victim of gun violence”** was defined broadly for respondents to include anyone who:
 - ✓ *Died of their gunshot wounds*
 - ✓ *Was shot and survived their wounds*
 - ✓ *Was a bystander at a shooting*
 - ✓ *Had close family or a friend who was shot*
 - ✓ *Was responsible for a shooting*
 - ✓ *(After first interview) Was threatened with a gun*
- With this definition, respondents recounted a range of experiences.
 - The youngest respondent lost her father and grandfather in a targeted shooting in her home.
 - The oldest respondent recently lost a cousin to exchange of gun fire in a public space.
 - One respondent witnessed the shooting death of his best friend
 - Three respondents indicated friends had died from gunshot wounds they did not witness.
 - Two respondents were paralyzed by their gunshot wounds.
 - Three respondents were by-standers to gunfire that did not strike a person.
 - All respondents were aware of pervasive presence of shootings in their community.

What We Learned: Experience with Gun Violence (cont)

- **Estimates of fatal shootings and the frequency of shootings** varied with the "social group" of the respondents.
 - Young teens and females reported awareness of fewer fatalities (<5) and less frequency of shooting incidents (once every 2-3 weeks).
 - Older teens/adults and males self-reported more fatalities (10 or more) and more frequent use of guns (every day).
 - Males who were associated with "street life" gave higher estimates of fatalities and frequency of shots fired.
- Very few respondents reported knowing the **perpetrators** – perhaps due to reluctance to confide that information.
- **The use of guns as threats** – whether they are shown or simply mentioned – was discussed frequently, especially among older teens and adults.
 - Threats of possession among younger teens were more often considered to be "cool talk" rather than a specific warning.
 - Threats of possession among older teens and adults was considered menacing, such as potential coercion or intent to harm.
 - Respondents hypothesize that shootings often originate as menacing that "goes wrong."

What We Learned: Perception of Presence of Guns

- Although not clearly articulated, **illegal possession and legal gun ownership** appeared to be delineated in perceptions of firearms in the community.

“Illegal gun carriers are the problem. I only use if threatened.”

“If my dad had a gun legally I don’t care but I don’t want him to use it to show off!”

- **Legal ownership** of a firearm was considered normative among adults.
 - Most teens indicated they planned to purchase a gun when they turned 21, and most adults already owned one – overwhelmingly for “Protection.”

“I’ll buy a gun as soon as I turn 21.”

“I need a gun to protect my family against guys 600 pounds.”

- Legal purchases were expected to be made from pawn shops or from friends.
- It was widely known that felons were restricted from the legal purchase of guns, but these respondents felt there were enough restrictions.

“There are enough restrictions already; felons, have to be 21 ...”

- Mental health was the only additional restriction that was raised as a question.

What We Learned: Perception of Presence of Guns (cont)

- **Obtaining firearms illegally** was considered much too easy and widespread.
- The list of common sources of illegal guns:
 - Friends/family
 - Community gun
 - Straw purchase at pawn shop
 - Stolen gun
- Respondents also talked about **“holding guns”** – in which young teens are asked to carry a gun for someone else who could be arrested for weapons possession.
 - It is hypothesized that the increase in shooting of 14 and 15 year old males is a consequence of holding guns.
- Without question, the factors thought to drive illegal guns in the community are drugs, gambling, money and disrespect.

“Money makes it go around: drugs (pills, snorts), money, “finessing”

“(Guns come out) when we come together: females, money, drugs arguments.”
- The use of drugs themselves was not seen as the problem, but the money associated with dice games and sale of drugs was reported as the cause of conflict.
- It was also noted that “finessing” or disrespect was the cause of violence when self-respect within the community was so low and so tenuous.

What We Learned: Impact on their daily lives

- Young adult and teens recognize that guns have become **normalized** in their lives but also are aware of how little security and safety they feel with more guns.
- Those who feel the greatest impact of gun violence are the ones who lost a parent, been disabled, or had a parent disabled by gunfire – in which case their daily lives are dramatically altered.

“My dad and granddad, someone broke in and shot them ... He had 3 kids who have been sad.”

“I feel bad he can't do everything. I thought we would live with dad forever.”

- The recurring deaths from gun violence have caused some to report being cut-off from their emotions.

“I've gotten used to shootings, not even cried about my cousin ... It's common. Getting t-shirts made with a face is a habit.”

“The idea or rule is if someone does something you gotta shoot at them - you don't even bat an eye. You're not allowed to have feelings about it.”

- One observer noted: the normalization and lack of emotion has become an issue across the community.

“Walking younger sister, just guy shooting down the street to test his gun out; I get out and grabbed her; no one else was around; n one batted an eye, went along with their business ... We have to pretend it's normal to contend with it.”

What We Learned: Impact on their daily lives (cont)

- Teens and young adults report that disputes escalate rapidly into gun shots without any attempts to resolve in other ways.
 - ”No one tried t talk it out. I don’t know why they are shooting.”
 - ”People don’t fight anymore ... They either start shooting or stabbing.”
- The violence has made most teens and young adults avoid ”certain areas and certain people” – especially when shootings are usually attributed to being in the **“wrong place, wrong time.”**
 - “Don’t go around people who are carrying guns.”
 - “I try to stay away from situations where you need a gun. Certain parties, areas of the community. It can happen in certain bars.”
- Although they incorporate it into their daily lives, these respondents report feeling vulnerable anytime they are outside. The possibility of being shot by mistake is always on their minds.
 - “I have to check myself, be more aware. Sometimes you're just minding your business (when people get shot).”
 - “(Gun violence) affects life daily. Being outside, especially with kids.”

What We Learned: Preventive initiatives considered important

With the opportunity to suggest measures to address the prevalence of gun violence, respondents focused on:

- **Safe spaces** for non-school hours, where teens can feel welcome and perhaps get academic help.

“Hubs where kids can hang after school ... Increase size of rec center.”

“Someplace to welcome them, ask about homework.”

- **Youth programs** that provide alternate activities to being on the street and paid opportunities to benefit the community.

” Opportunities for youth outlets/involvement. Better jobs to counteract street life.”

“Community involvement. Teens need something to do.”

- **Mentoring**, especially for juvenile offenders to deal with bullying.

“Adult mediators for bullying ... with positive perspective.”

“Mentor/advocate for kids before incarceration.”

“Arrests don’t change people: it trains them. Change something after their release.”

What We Learned: Preventive initiatives considered important (cont)

- **Training in conflict resolution** to provide alternatives to violence.
“Help with judgement; teachers, mentors, adults in the neighborhood. Get to know each other.”
“They could let you know how to calm down.”
- **Centers with physical activities to work on conflict.**
“Have more places to fight, like boxing. Other ways to talk things out.”
- **Reduction of drug traffic in the community** to eliminate the conflict it brings.
“Get drugs off the streets. 70% of shootings is about drugs and money.”
“End drugs; they hurt me and I don’t even do them.”
- **Opportunities for families to build stability and dignity**, through chances to move out of poverty.
“Family need to feel they can do something with their lives.”



CONCLUSIONS

Conclusions: Insights into Community Gun Violence

- **Experience with gun violence has become normative** for teens and young adults in these neighborhoods in which the presence of guns is commonplace.
 - Being “cut-off” from emotions about the violence has become a means of coping with the trauma.
- **Impact of gun violence on daily life** is greatest for those who have been disabled or who lost family/friends, but it also has caused the community at large to **suppress vulnerability and fear**.
 - While conversations may sound brave and in control, there is an underlying level of trauma that manifests as a **pervasive lack of safety and loss of control**.
- **Illegal guns are seen as easy to acquire**, and people who carry them to protect drug and gambling money are considered the problem.
 - The practice of young teens “holding guns” for adults is seen as the source of the most concerning violence, because they either become a target or use the gun impulsively.
- As a consequence of this violent environment, **legal ownership of guns is considered necessary for protection**: most young adults have access to a firearm and teens aspire to own one.
 - Although unlikely to be discussed in these interviews, it is likely that many teens will carry a gun illegally for protection.

Conclusions: Insights into Community Gun Violence

(cont)

- The most valuable output of this research is insight into **the preventive initiatives most likely to address gun violence from the perspective of that teens and young adults who live with it daily/**

Initiatives that benefit the community at large

- **Reduction of drug traffic** to eliminate the conflict it brings
- **Opportunities for families to build stability and dignity**
 - Affordable housing
 - Job opportunities

Initiatives that benefit teens/young adults

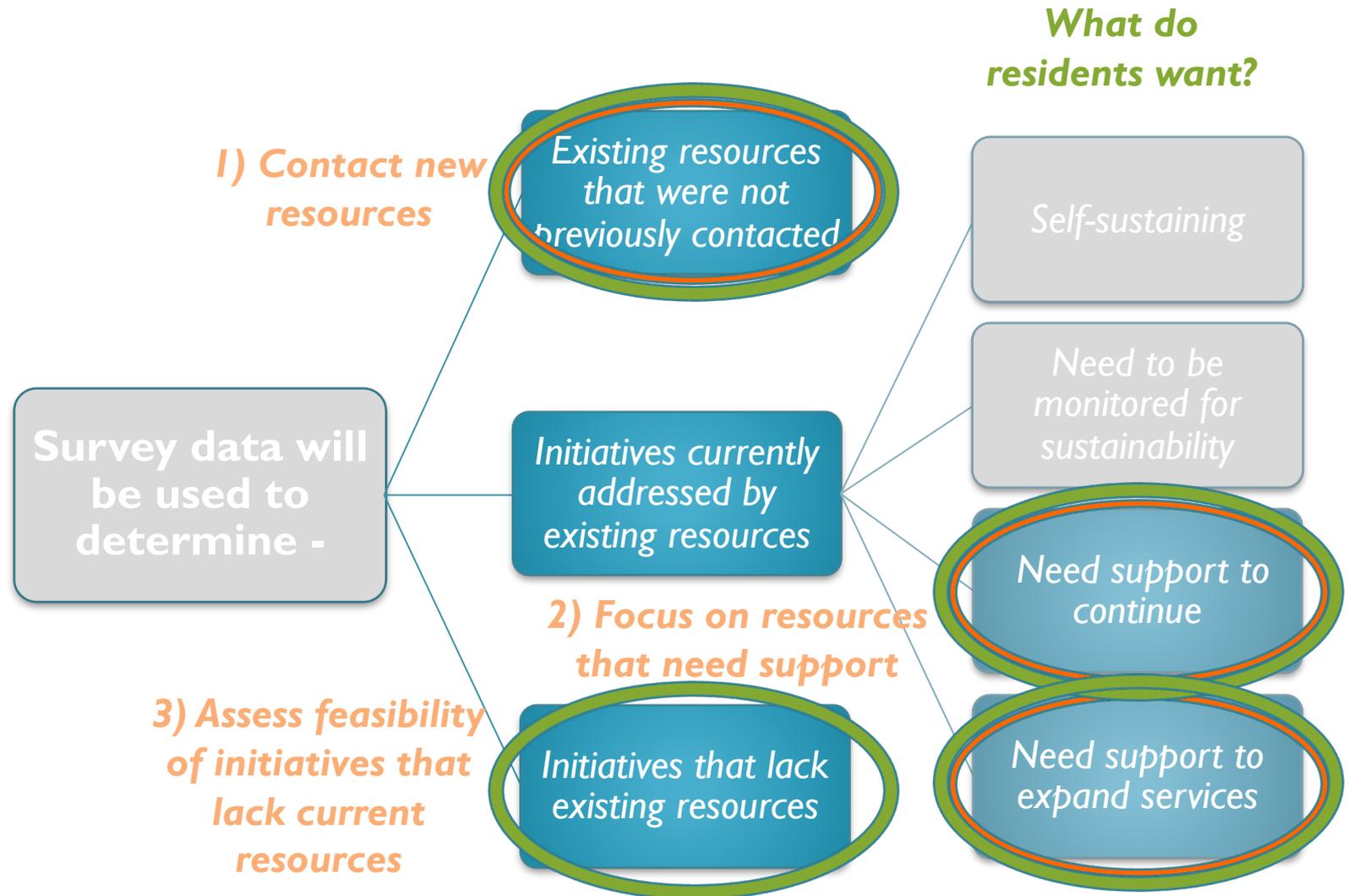
- **Safe spaces** for non-school hours, to provide a sense of security.
- **Youth programs** with alternate activities to “being on the street” and to prepare to meet long-term goals. Aspects of youth programming that elicit the most interest:
 - **Mentoring**, to provide positive role models, specific skills, and a sense of worth
 - **Training in conflict resolution**
 - **Physical activities** to work-out conflict and emotions
 - **Paid opportunities** to benefit the community and develop job skills

Conclusions: Insights into Community Gun Violence

(cont)

- Although not articulated by respondents, this research suggests that preventive initiatives should also include **services to address the community trauma of pervasive gun violence.**
 - **The normalization of the presence of guns** in public spaces and the acceptance of shootings as commonplace has resulted in disassociation from emotions.
 - **The lack of a basic sense of safety and security** may contribute to symptoms of post-traumatic stress which result in high-risk behaviors.
 - While teens and young adults in these communities are unlikely to respond to mental health services or services identified to address trauma, they are likely to respond to services that address –
 - “Life skills” to enhance employment opportunities
 - Opportunities to expunge juvenile or adult offenses

Next Steps for Gun Violence Prevention Working Group



Next Steps for Gun Violence Prevention Working Group: Sustain and Share the Collaboration

- Contact new resources in Price Hill neighborhoods to **expand opportunities for support of initiatives deemed important**
- Focus on **existing resources that need support and are wanted by residents**
- Host a forum with Cincinnati city-wide partners to –
 - Present results of the interviews
 - Reinforce and amplify initiatives that focus on
 - **Reduction of drug traffic in the community**
 - **Opportunities for families to build stability and dignity**
 - **Safe spaces** for non-school hours,
 - **Youth programs** that include:
 - **Mentoring**
 - **Training in conflict resolution**
 - **Physical activities**
 - **Paid opportunities** to benefit the community and develop job skills
 - **Trauma services**
- Communicate the results to decision-makers for city government

Research Notes

Accessing information in teens and young adults

In addition to obtaining insights into gun violence from the perspective of teens and young adults in Lower and East Price Hill, the execution of this project provided learnings about conducting research with this population.

- **Trust is paramount.** An established relationship with the Brokers and the Brokers' relationships with the respondents is essential. While data collection may seem inconsequential to us, these respondents come with inherent mistrust and concern that they may be perceived as informants.
- **Research is not the respondents' priority.** Even with a modest gratuity, they would prefer to spend their time elsewhere. Selection of a convenient time and place to interview is key.
- **Research is not the Brokers' priority.** Even when they are committed to the subject matter and the outcome of the research, they have other commitments that are more important and require their time. They deserve patience and respect for their contribution.
- **Language is not uniform.** In meeting respondents "where they are," let them speak in their own words, ask for clarification as needed, and try to reflect their language in question formation. Accessing information through storytelling is useful, because it allows them to speak at length, can be followed with clarifying questions, and can be used to create context for further discussion.