



# Disrupting and Healing Trauma Associated with Youth Violence: Root Causes, Service Gaps, and Proven Strategies

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Prepared for Peace Point, Tacoma/Pierce County



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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

**This report is a call to action. It provides background for local discussions of what might work best for Tacoma and Pierce County to address youth violence.** Under the guidance of the **Peace Point Initiative (PPI)**, facilitated by **The Imagine Justice Project, The Big Homie Program, and Tacoma Boat Builders**. Geo Education & Research (Geo) has conducted thorough research and summarized input from many community representatives through a variety of approaches. Throughout, **PPI has amplified the voices of those closest to violence.** The PPI Planning Team will develop recommendations for local action as Peace Point develops a Strategic Plan to encourage and support real changes in the community to address the root causes of youth violence and the resulting traumas for youth and others in the community. The goal of the background research and community engagement reported on here is to **1) identify trends in local youth-related violence where youth are either victims or perpetrators or both, 2) identify the major root causes of violence, 3) identify local gaps in services that could reduce or address the traumas of violence, and 4) identify proven and promising strategies for reducing youth violence and related trauma that are likely to be effective in Tacoma and Pierce County.**

Findings in this report come from a variety of sources including:

- A review of the topic-related literature;
- Research into local and national findings on the root causes of youth violence;
- A study of the gaps in services and resources to address youth violence in Tacoma/Pierce County;
- A review of strategies that are representative of evidence-based and best practices that are proven to be successful;
- Discussions with local practitioners and community members;
- Interviews and surveys; and
- Focus groups including local leaders, youth, program staff, and community activists.

## Trends

**In this context, it is important to keep in mind that there is a system of power which is weighted against Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) and low-income individuals.** This system determines to a large extent which programs and research get funded and therefore what is defined as a “best practice” or “promising program.” Consequently, much valuable lived experience and valuable research is not made widely available to the public. Geo acknowledges that there are many

valuable and effective strategies that are not well known or studied that can nonetheless be effective in Tacoma.

The data that have been reported paint a discouraging picture of the impact of violence in the U.S. According to the Centers for Disease and Prevention Control (CDC), in 2020, firearm-related injuries became the leading cause of death among children and adolescents (ages 1-19). More than 38,000 U.S. children were homicide victims between 1999 and 2020. **Gun violence is also the leading cause of death among children and teens in Washington, where an average of 60 children and teens die by guns every year**, of which 54% are suicides and 43% are homicides. This is significantly different from the national trend in which 35% of all gun deaths among children and teens are suicides and 60% are homicides.

**From 2016 to September 2022, there were 1,148 firearm-related homicide victims in the State of Washington.** In the same period, **there were 214 firearms related homicides in Pierce County including the City of Tacoma (105), equaling approximately 18.6% of total statewide homicides.** By comparison, Tacoma's population is only 3% of the State and Pierce County is 12%. In Tacoma almost one-quarter (24%) of the suspects were under the age of 20, compared to Pierce County (16.8%) and Washington State (15.5%). **In the City of Tacoma, people under age 30 die from assault at a rate of 6.1 per 100,000.** This is higher than the overall Pierce County rate of 4.8 per 100,000. It accounts for 11% of all deaths from injury, including accidents and self-inflicted injuries. Those under age 30 die from assault in Tacoma at a similar rate as they die from car crashes (6.0 per 100,000). More than half of assault deaths are Black (even though only 10.7% of the population of the city is Black). Furthermore, approximately twice as many Black youth die from assault annually compared to either Hispanic or White youth.

**Females are more often affected than males. The rate of emergency room visits due to sexual violence in 2021 was four times higher for females under 30 than for males under 30** (40.1 per 10,000 visits for females, 9.4 per 10,000 visits for males). Emergency room sexual violence visits in 2021 for people under 30 occurred at the highest rates for the under 18 age group (37.6 per 10,000 visits compared to 24.7 for 18-24 years and 14.5 for 25-29 years).

## Key Root Causes of Youth Violence and Impacted Populations

### Populations Most Impacted by Violence

Communities of color, and specifically youth of color, are disproportionately impacted by gun violence and resulting trauma. **Racism—interpersonal, institutional, structural, and intergenerational—is a major root cause of youth violence.** In the US, Black, Indigenous People of Color (BIPOC) are most

vulnerable. Nearly 60% of firearm homicide victims in the United States are Black Americans, yet Black Americans account for less than 18% of the population. A 2013 study found that among Black Americans the likelihood of having someone within their social network die by firearm at some point during their lifetime was more than 95%.

**There are also highly disproportionate impacts of trauma and subsequent violence within the Native American communities nationwide.** Based on data collected by the Association of Native American Affairs, Domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault, homicide, stalking, and sex trafficking disproportionately affect Indigenous people in relation to other racial and ethnic groups. Women, girls, and two-spirit individuals are especially impacted by this violence. Most alarming is that 84.3 percent of American Indian and Alaska Native women have experienced violence in their lifetime.

**While gender is not a predictor of assault, often individuals are targeted, assaulted, "bashed," and harassed because of, or in connection to, gender identity and/or gender nonconformity.** Anti-Violence Programs note that 85% of hate crime victims identify as queer or questioning and 20% identify as transgender or gender non-conforming. In the National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey estimates that 44% of lesbian women and 61% of bisexual women have experienced sexual violence in their lifetimes. This same survey found that 26% of gay men and 37% of bisexual men have experienced sexual violence in their lifetimes.

**Beyond race, there is also a significant concern among LGBTQ+ individuals who are targets of violence due to their gender identity.** According to the Washington Coalition of Sexual Assault Programs, gendered assumptions impact LGBT folks as much as, if not more so than, heterosexuals. Gender socialization is widespread, internalized, and these assumptions and values come from both outside and within the LGBT community. Myths about who can be assaulted or who are the perpetrators are prevalent; however, sexual violence can happen to, and be perpetrated by, an individual of any gender or gender identity.

## Major Root Causes of Violence

**Poverty is associated with higher homicide rates.** There is a strong association was between gun homicides and social mobility, or the ability of people to move to a higher social status than that of their parents—i.e., areas with less social mobility have higher rates of homicide.

Other root causes identified include: easy access to guns by high-risk people; lack of opportunities and a perception of hopelessness; family and neurobiological factors; personality traits and exposure to media violence; alcohol; drug use; mental health; and climate change. In interviews and discussions with key informants in Tacoma and Pierce County and through our review of the research detailed in

this report, we identified many, detailed causes. Table 3 in this report provides many more and compares those causes gleaned from local and national sources.

Significant research has been done into the interrelationships between trauma and youth violence with the recognition that **trauma can be both a cause and effect of violence**. The National Institute of Justice in their report “Examining the Relationship Between Childhood Trauma and Involvement in the Justice System” finds that, “. . . adolescents who witnessed violence or were victimized by violence were more likely to be charged with a crime against a person at a later time. Court outcome severity was higher for this group — that is, youth exposed to violence in this sample experienced more adjudication, were more likely to be assigned to residential placement, and were more likely to be put on probation.” Additionally, research showed that “. . . exposure to community violence is associated with changes that lead toward more court involvement and more severe court outcomes.” In looking at factors that influence the strength of the relationship between exposure to violence and juvenile court involvement, “they found that academic progress reduces the strength of the relationship between exposure to violence and juvenile court involvement, while psychological symptoms of hopelessness as a result of exposure to violence strengthen the likelihood of court involvement<sup>1</sup>.”

## Gaps in Services and Resources for Addressing Local Youth Violence

Geo and other PPI partners collected responses for this analysis from interviews with the PPI Planning Team members, interviews with community agency leaders and youth groups, and online surveys of Tacoma/Pierce County service providers. The most mentioned gaps in services and resources for youth are the following: **Resources** (e.g., Poverty; Lack of funding; Affordable housing; Insufficient youth shelters and emergency housing); **Means to Address Community and Individual Trauma** (e.g., Racism; discrimination; oppression; Lack of strategies to heal from trauma; Lack of clear, consistent, communication among agencies supporting youth; Insufficient mental health services; Youth disengaged from the greater community; Homophobia and transphobia; Institutional barriers to services for youth at risk of violence); **Inadequate Support from the Legal System** (e.g., Law enforcement does not have the trust of youth; Punitive rather than supportive responses by law enforcement); **Lack of Leadership** (e.g., No network coordinating community services; Lack of people stepping up to help; Adults in authority do not earn the trust of youth); and **Substantial Gaps in**

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<sup>1</sup><https://nij.ojp.gov/topics/articles/examining-relationship-between-childhood-trauma-and-involvement-justice-system>



**Support for Youth in School** (e.g., Racism in school; Insufficient support to help students succeed in school).

Given the time and resources, it was not possible to identify all the organizations active in addressing youth violence or to fully represent their service areas, communities served, and numbers of people served. An initial list identified over 200 organizations. As a part of the PPI Strategic Plan, it may be valuable to develop and include a more comprehensive list of organizations actively addressing youth violence directly or through offering pro-social experiences intended to provide alternatives to activities that encourage violent behavior. Such a list would enable all organizations engaged in this work to collaborate in order to coordinate client services in a holistic approach to addressing the needs of youth, and present a united voice to policy makers and funders.

Table 4 in this report lists the Root Causes, Community Assets, Persistent Gaps, Strategies, and Resources by the categories mentioned above.

## Youth Violence Prevention Strategies and Programs

**Youth violence is a multifaceted public health issue that requires a holistic approach and a consistently applied set of both proven and innovative strategies to stop the cycles of daily youth violence, especially in disadvantaged communities of color.** In addition to limiting easy access to firearms by high-risk people, as a society we must address the underlying social and economic inequalities that fuel violence. Simultaneously, communities need adequately funded community-based violence prevention and intervention efforts that build authentic relationships with communities of color who disproportionately experience the vast burden of violence and trauma.

Some of the strategies and approaches mentioned in this report are identified in the research literature as evidence-based, meaning they have been evaluated by rigorous outcome-oriented research, ideally using comparisons to comparable groups which did not receive the same services. Evidence-based strategies and approaches make the results less subjective and raise them to a higher level of accountability. However, there are limitations to identified evidence-based approaches and programs. One serious issue is that withholding the intervention from certain individuals and groups can make the program very hard to implement and potentially unethical. Also, most of the evidence-based work has been with White subjects which makes it harder to generalize to other racial and ethnic groups. Finally, often it takes a lot of money to get a program recognized as evidence-based, and some programs fund this cost by selling rights to their program later. So, instead of focusing on what works, some programs focus on what is copyrightable and what is marketable. Due to these restraints, many of the evidence-based programs do not lead to systemic changes that are required

to respond to the root causes of violence. Rather, they focus on “fixing” the youth and their families and ignoring the barriers and systems that perpetuate the cycle of violence.

**The literature suggests that prevention, intervention, and treatment strategies that are trauma-informed are more effective.** Many youth have experienced traumatic events, including physical, sexual, and emotional abuse; family and community violence; and the ongoing, cumulative impact of poverty, systemic and individual racism, and oppression. Repeated exposure to such traumatic events increases the risk of youth violence. Organizational trauma-informed care that is grounded in a deep understanding of the causes and consequences of trauma can promote resilience and healing, while subsequently reducing youth violence.

**The research presented makes it clear that elimination of violence and improvement of well-being for all members of society cannot be accomplished by one sector of society alone.** Justice, public health, education, health care (mental, behavioral, medical), government (local, state, and federal), social services, business, housing, media, and organizations that comprise the civil society sector, such as faith-based organizations, youth-serving organizations, foundations, and other non-governmental organizations all need to play a role. In addition, the voices of children, youth, and families who are most affected by violence must be front and center. The literature suggests the following skills and factors to be considered when developing interventions to prevent youth violence: **self-control skills; social competence skills; improving parenting and management; minimizing violent media effect; reducing youth access to guns; reducing alcohol and substance use among youth; improving school climate; and trusted adults.**

See the body of the report for descriptions of many strategies, approaches, and specific programs that may be useful in Tacoma and Pierce County.

## Recommendations

Based on our findings, Geo submits the following recommendations to PPI and to the community for their consideration.

- Build an official and lasting **partnership** across the county with service agencies, governmental bodies, and community groups dedicated to addressing all the issues addressed in this report. The partnership should have identified and stable leadership, agreed upon standards and practices, and a system of accountability to the residents of Tacoma, Pierce County, and each other.

- **Establish formal links with the school districts** to coordinate efforts and support providing more qualified staff to work with students in implementing culturally-responsive, preventative strategies as well as trauma-informed interventions.
- **Include youth**, especially those with experience of violence, either as victim or perpetrator (recognizing that many perpetrators are also victims) in all discussions and decisions, and help them become more engaged in actions that improve their lives and communities.
- **Ensure that city and county law enforcement personnel are included** in all discussions and implementation of strategies. Educate them about what residents who are most affected by youth violence feel will be the most effective improvements they can make to their policies and practices. Develop open, ongoing opportunities for communication between law enforcement personnel and local, community-focused experts in ways that lead to consensus on the best approaches.
- Set up a formal process to **lobby the legislature** and other funding agencies for more attention to the issues of youth violence and more funding for intervention.
- Continue to **research effective practices** in Washington and other states, adapting what works to local needs.
- **Build a regularly updated and easily accessible set of resources** on useful approaches.
- **Evaluate the outcomes** of all activities initiated under the Strategic Plan and use the results in a continuous improvement cycle.
- Provide small and large organizations with simple but useful tools for them to **self-assess their effectiveness** and create tools for **ongoing data collection, storage, analysis, and reporting** (perhaps with a common database and tool set to support them).

## INTRODUCTION

In the fall of 2022, Geo Education & Research (Geo) was asked to prepare a report on youth violence, with specific reference to Tacoma and Pierce County, to support the development of a regional strategic plan to address youth violence. **Peace Point (PPI) is the initiative that is coordinating this work facilitated by The Imagine Justice Project, The Big Homie Program, and Tacoma Boat Builders.** Geo is a partner in the research and community planning efforts of the PPI staff, and their many community partners are committed to addressing this effort.

**The purpose of this report is to provide background for local discussions of what might work best for Tacoma and Pierce County to address youth violence.** Recommendations for local action will be developed by the PPI Planning Team as Peace Point develops the Strategic Plan to encourage and support real changes in the community to address the root causes of youth violence and the traumas that stem from them for youth and others in the community as a whole.

Findings in this report come from a variety of sources including:

- A review of the topic-related literature;
- Research into local and national findings on the root causes of youth violence;
- A study of the gaps in services and resources to address youth violence in Tacoma/Pierce County;
- A review of strategies that are representative of evidence-based and best practices that are proven to be successful;
- Discussions with local practitioners and community members;
- Interviews and surveys; and
- Focus groups including engaged, local leaders, youth, program staff, and community activists.

*“Our narrow understanding of the institution (of slavery) . . . prevents us from seeing this long legacy and leads policymakers to try to fix people instead of addressing the historically rooted causes of their problems.”*

~Hasan Kwame Jeffries

Quoted in The 1619 Project, 2021, One World Publishing, p. xxii.

**In this context, it is important to keep in mind that there is a system of power which is weighted against Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) and low-income individuals.** Over one-third of Tacoma residents and one-quarter of Pierce County residents are BIPOC (see Table 1). This system determines to a large extent which programs and research get funded and therefore what is defined as a “best practice” or “promising program.” Consequently, much valuable lived experience and valuable research is not made widely available to the public. Geo acknowledges that there are many

valuable and effective strategies that are not well known or studied that can be effective in Tacoma and Pierce County.

**Table 1 | US Census 2021 demographic characteristics of Tacoma and Pierce County Residents**

	Pierce County (Excluding Tacoma)	City of Tacoma
<b>White</b>	73.1%	63%
<b>Black</b>	8.0%	10.7%
<b>Hispanic</b>	12.2%	11.9%
<b>Asian</b>	7.4%	8.8%
<b>Native American</b>	1.8%	1.7%
<b>Pacific Islanders</b>	1.8%	1.0%
Under 5	6.1%	6.4%
Under 18	23.2%	20.8%
65 +	14.4%	13.6%
Female	49.8%	49.8%
<b>Total population</b>	925,708	219,205

**Although a great deal of work is being done within communities to address systemic racism and oppression, not all the strategies Geo was able to identify are designed to create system changes to address the root causes of violence.** Furthermore, many of the evidence-based strategies and programs are focused on “fixing” youth and families rather than on the broad and lasting changes that address underlying causes of violence and barriers for these youth and their families and communities.

## OVERVIEW OF THE ROOT CAUSES OF YOUTH VIOLENCE

This portion of this report presents the findings of a review of the research on the root causes of violence involving youth. It is not intended to be comprehensive; rather it is a survey of consistent findings in the literature which suggest key strategies relevant to the work of reducing youth violence and the associated trauma in all of its forms. Through understanding of root causes and consistent and thorough application of proven strategies to address them, Peace Point believes that significant progress can be made.

## Definition of Violence

The literature usually defines violence as aggression with the goal of extreme physical harm, such as injury or death.<sup>2</sup> Youth violence is further defined by The Centers for Disease Control as, “the intentional use of physical force or power to threaten or harm others by young people ages 10-24. It can include fighting, bullying, threats with weapons, and gang-related violence. A young person can be involved with youth violence as a victim, offender, or witness.”<sup>3</sup> This report considers all forms of violence and the attendant trauma including both violence against youth and violence initiated by youth.

## Trends

### A National Perspective

According to the Centers for Disease and Prevention Control (CDC), in 2020, firearm-related injuries became the leading cause of death among children and adolescents (ages 1-19). Until 2016, firearm-related injuries in the U.S. were second only to motor vehicle crashes (both traffic-related and non-traffic-related) as the leading cause of death among children and adolescents. As of 2020, this was no longer the case. From 2019 to 2020, the rate of increase in firearm-related deaths for youth was 29.5%—more than double that of the general population (13.5%). This included deaths from all types of violence (suicide, homicide, unintentional, and undetermined). The increase was seen across most demographic groups and most types of firearm-related deaths.<sup>4</sup>

According to a study by researchers at the National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, the U.S. Department of Defense, and Georgia State University's School of Public Health, **more than 38,000 U.S. children were homicide victims between 1999 and 2020**<sup>5</sup>. The study found that in the past decade, the overall rate of homicides in children has grown about 4.3% each year, with a steep rise seen between 2019 and 2020, when the number of youth who died by homicide rose 27.7%. The homicide rates are more alarming for black male teens ages 16 to 17 being 18 times higher than that for white males and 4.6 times higher than for Hispanic males.

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<sup>2</sup>Bushman, B. J., & Huesmann, L. R. 2010. Aggression. In S. T. Fiske, D. T. Gilbert, & G. Lindzey (Eds.), *Handbook of social psychology* (5th ed., pp. 833–863). New York, NY: Wiley

<sup>3</sup><https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/youthviolence>

<sup>4</sup>Lois K. Lee, M.D., M.P.H., Katherine Douglas, M.D., and David Hemenway, Ph.D. 2022. *New England Journal of Medicine* 386:1485-1487

<sup>5</sup>Rebecca F. Wilson; Beverly L. Fortson; Hong Zhou, MS; et al. 2022 Trends in homicide rates for US children ages 0 to 17 years, 1999 to 2020. *JAMA Pediatrics*

## Washington State

**Parallel to the national trend, in Washington, gun violence is the leading cause of death among children and teens.** In Washington, an average of 60 children and teens die by guns every year, of which 54% are suicides and 43% are homicides. This is significantly different from the national trend in which 35% of all gun deaths among children and teens are suicides and 60% are homicides.<sup>6</sup>

**From 2016 to September 2022, there were 1,148 firearm-related homicide victims in the State of Washington,** according to data from the Homicide Investigation Tracking System (HITS), which is managed by Criminal Justice Division of the Washington Office of the Attorney General. Approximately 37% were White males, 23% Black males, and 13% Hispanic males, compared to the 2021 overall state population of 78% White, 4.5% Black, and 14% Hispanic.<sup>7</sup> There were far fewer Asian/Pacific Islander victims (5%), and fewer females homicide victims—White 12%, Black 3%, and Hispanic 2%.

## The Picture in Pierce County and Tacoma

In 2020, the Tacoma-Pierce County Health Department (TPCHD) commissioned a report to better understand the extent of the problem and potential prevention strategies for youth violence in Pierce County and Tacoma. This report defines youth as anyone under 30, which is different than how other research data on youth are reported (typically ages 1-19). Despite this discrepancy, Geo believes that the findings provide important insights into the extent of youth violence in Tacoma and Pierce County and therefore are included in detail in this report.

**From 2016 to 2022, there were 214 firearms related homicides in Pierce County including the City of Tacoma (105), equaling approximately 18.6% of total statewide homicides.**<sup>8</sup> By comparison, Tacoma's population is only 3% of the State and Pierce County is 12%.<sup>9</sup> The firearms related homicides among children and youth under 20 are provided based on suspects' demographics and are presented in the Table 2. In Tacoma almost one-quarter (24%) of the suspects were under the age of 20, compared to Pierce County (16.8%) and Washington State (15.5%).

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<sup>6</sup>2022 update, everytownresearch.org/EveryStat Gun Violence in Washington

<sup>7</sup><https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/WA>

<sup>8</sup> Public Health Centers for Excellence report for Tacoma-Pierce County Health Department, Youth and Young Adult Violence Assessment, City of Tacoma, 2022.

<sup>9</sup>[www.Census.org](http://www.Census.org)

**Table 2 | Number and Percent of Total Suspects by Race and Gender Characteristics of Homicide Suspects Under Age 20 in Washington State, Pierce County, and City of Tacoma in 2016-2022**

	State of Washington	Pierce County (Excluding Tacoma)	City of Tacoma
<b>Male Suspects under 20</b>			
White	46 (3.4%)	3 (2.9%)	4 (4.2%)
Black	72 (5.4%)	11(10.9%)	15 (15.6%)
Hispanic	61 (4.6%)	0 (0%)	2 (2.1%)
Asian / Pacific Islander	8 (0.6%)	1 (0%)	0 (0%)
Native American	5 (0.4%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
<b>Female Suspects under 20</b>			
White	6 (0.5%)	1 (0%)	1 (1.0%)
Black	3 (0.2%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Hispanic	2 (0.1%)	1 (0%)	1 (1.0%)
Asian / Pacific Islander	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Native American	1 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
<b>Total Suspects under 20</b>	<b>204 (15.5%)</b>	<b>17 (16.8%)</b>	<b>23 (24%)</b>
<b>Total Number of Suspects of all ages</b>	<b>1,318</b>	<b>101</b>	<b>96</b>

Source: Homicide Investigation Tracking System (HITS) 2022

**In the City of Tacoma, people under age 30 die from assault at a rate of 6.1 per 100,000.** This is higher than the overall Pierce County rate of 4.8 per 100,000. It accounts for 11% of all deaths from injury, including accidents and self-inflicted injuries. Those under age 30 die from assault in Tacoma at a similar rate as they die from car crashes (6.0 per 100,000). More than half of assault deaths are Black (even though only 10.7% of the population of the city is Black). Furthermore, approximately twice as many Black youth die from assault annually compared to either Hispanic or White youth.

**Females are more often affected than males.** Of all assault related emergency rooms visits in 2021 in Pierce County (2,141 total visits), 48% of victims were under the age of 30. The rate of assault victims seen in emergency rooms for those under 30 in 2021 was higher for females than for males (87.2 per 10,000 for females, 69.6 per 10,000 for males.) The 2021 assault emergency room victim rate was highest in the 10–19- year-old age group (109.4 visits per 10,000).



**Firearm violence is the most common cause of assault death and hospitalization.** Sixty-four people under the age of 30 died from gun violence in Pierce County from 2016 to 2020. More than half of those deaths occurred within the City of Tacoma. People die from gun violence in Tacoma at a rate of 4.9 per 100,000, which is higher than the Pierce County average (3.6 per 100,000).

**The most common reason someone with an injury was transported by Tacoma Fire Emergency Medical Services (EMS) was for bodily force assault.** Of 198 calls in 2021, 38% were due to violence against youth and young adults through age 25. The second most common reason for EMS transport was injuries related to firearms (21%), including 5% categorized specifically as “assault – firearm.”

**The rates of emergency room visits for suspected child abuse and neglect are similar across age groups.** There were 56.9 per 10,000 visits for 0-4 years old, 56.3 for 5-11 years old and 58.6 for 12- 17 years old. Again, the rate of emergency room visits was higher for females than for males (30.8 per 10,000 visits for females, 22.2 for males).

**Of the violence-related calls responded to by Tacoma Fire EMS involving the under 30 population, about 3% were for sexual assault.** In 2021 in Pierce County, youth were the most likely to receive emergency room care related to sexual violence. Youth younger than 18 made up 45% of all sexual violence emergency room visits. Youth 18-24 made up 18% of the visits.

**The rate of emergency room visits due to sexual violence in 2021 was four times higher for females under 30 than for males under 30** (40.1 per 10,000 visits for females, 9.4 per 10,000 visits for males). Emergency room sexual violence visits in 2021 for people under 30 occurred at the highest rates for the under 18 age group (37.6 per 10,000 visits compared to 24.7 for 18-24 years and 14.5 for 25-29 years).

## Key Root Causes of Youth Violence and Impacted Populations

### Racism and Discrimination

**Communities of color, and specifically youth of color, are disproportionately impacted by gun violence and resulting trauma.**

Numerous scholarly and lived experience publications regarding racism in the United States have received a lot of attention recently, notably the work of Ibram X. Kendi who wrote, “Racism takes several forms and works most often in tandem with at least one other form to reinforce racist ideas, behavior, and policy. Types of racism are . . . individual racism, . . . interpersonal racism, . . . institutional

racism, and . . . structural racism.”<sup>10</sup> Likewise, Ijeoma Oluo, author of [So You Want to Talk About Race](#), talking about the role of education in perpetuating institutional racism in an interview with the *School Library Journal* said, “The numbers don’t lie. If we don’t engage with those numbers and decide to actively be a part of the solution, we are saying some fairly racist things about where these numbers come from. . . . You either believe that black families are four times more dysfunctional than white families, that black students are twice as unmotivated in school as white students, that they are three times more criminal than white students, or you believe there’s a systemic problem.”<sup>11</sup>

**In the US, Black, Indigenous People of Color (BIPOC) are most vulnerable due to living under a system of White supremacy.** Racial trauma, or race-based traumatic stress (RBTS), refers to the mental and emotional injury caused by encounters with racial bias and ethnic discrimination, racism, and hate crimes. When people experience an emotionally painful, sudden, and uncontrollable racist encounter they are at risk of suffering from a race-based traumatic stress injury.

**Experiences of race-based discrimination can have long lasting psychological impacts on individuals and their communities.** In some individuals, prolonged incidents of racism can lead to symptoms like those experienced with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). This can manifest both mentally and physically as depression, anger, recurring thoughts of the event, or physical reactions (e.g., headaches, chest pains, insomnia). Some or all of these symptoms may be present in someone with RBTS and symptoms can look different across different cultural groups. It is important to understand that unlike PTSD, RBTS is not considered a mental health disorder. RBTS is a mental injury that can occur as the result of living in a racist system or experiencing the impact of racism.

**Researchers found strong relationships between race-based traumatic stress and trauma symptoms indicating that race-based traumatic stress are significantly related to trauma reactions** (e.g., dissociation, anxiety, depression, sexual problems, and sleep disturbance).<sup>12</sup>

**An emerging line of research is exploring how historical and cultural traumas affect survivors’ children for generations to come.** Many things are passed down . . . and in some cases, trauma can be inherited, as well. Generational trauma (also known as intergenerational trauma or

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<sup>10</sup><https://nmaahc.si.edu/learn/talking-about-race/topics/being-antiracist>

<sup>11</sup><https://www.slj.com/story/educators-and-race-a-conversation-with-author-ijeoma-oluo-on-tackling-systemic-racism-in-us-education>

<sup>12</sup>Carter, R. T., Kirkinis, K., & Johnson, V. E. 2020. Relationships between trauma symptoms and race-based traumatic stress. *Traumatology*, 26(1), 11–18

transgenerational trauma) is a field of study that researchers have a lot to discover regarding its impact and how it presents in people who experience it.<sup>13</sup>

**The numbers do indeed tell a disturbing story.**

- Nearly 60% of firearm homicide victims in the United States are Black Americans, yet Black Americans account for less than 18% of the population.<sup>14</sup>
- A 2013 study found that among Black Americans the likelihood of having someone within their social network die by firearm at some point during their lifetime was more than 95%.<sup>15</sup>

**There are also highly disproportionate impacts of trauma and subsequent violence within the Native American communities nationwide.** Based on data collected by the Association of Native American Affairs, "Domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault, homicide, stalking, and sex trafficking disproportionately affect Indigenous people in relation to other racial and ethnic groups. Women, girls, and two-spirit individuals are especially impacted by this violence. Most alarming is that 84.3 percent of American Indian and Alaska Native women have experienced violence in their lifetime.

- American Indians and Alaska Natives are 2.5 times as likely to experience violent crimes and at least 2 times more likely to experience rape or sexual assault crimes compared to all other races.
- More than 4 in 5 American Indian and Alaska Native women, or 84.3 percent, have experienced violence in their lifetime.
- Homicide is the third leading cause of death among American Indian and Alaska Native women between 10 and 24 years of age and the fifth leading cause of death for American Indian and Alaska Native women between 25 and 34 years of age.
- In 2017, the top three cities with the highest number of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women (MMIWG) cases were Seattle, WA (45); Albuquerque, NM (37); and Anchorage, AK (31). The top three states were New Mexico, Washington, and Arizona.
- In the U.S. and Canada, an average of 40 percent of the women who were victims of sex trafficking identified as American Indian or Alaskan Native."<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>13</sup>Bezo, B., & Maggi, S. 2018. Intergenerational perceptions of mass trauma's impact on physical health and well-being. *Psychological Trauma: Theory, Research, Practice, and Policy*, 10(1), 87–94

<sup>14</sup>Jacoby SF, et al. 2018. The enduring impact of historical and structural racism on urban violence in Philadelphia. *Social science & medicine*

<sup>15</sup>Kalesan B, Weinberg J, & Galea S. 2016. Gun violence in Americans' social network during their lifetime. *Preventive medicine*

<sup>16</sup><https://www.indian-affairs.org/nativepeoplesandviolence.html>

**Beyond race, there is also a significant concern among LGBTQ+ individuals who are targets of violence due to their gender identity.** According to the Washington Coalition of Sexual Assault Programs, “gendered assumptions impact LGBT folks as much as, if not more so than, heterosexuals<sup>17</sup>.” Gender socialization is widespread, internalized, and these assumptions and values come from both outside and within the LGBT community. Myths about who can be assaulted or who are the perpetrators are prevalent; however, sexual violence can happen to, and be perpetrated by, an individual of any gender or gender identity.

**While gender is not a predictor of assault, often individuals are targeted, assaulted, "bashed," and harassed because of, or in connection to, gender identity and/or gender nonconformity.** Anti-Violence Programs note that 85% of hate crime victims identify as queer or questioning and 20% identify as transgender or gender non-conforming. In the National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey estimates that 44% of lesbian women and 61% of bisexual women have experienced sexual violence in their lifetimes. This same survey found that 26% of gay men and 37% of bisexual men have experienced sexual violence in their lifetimes.

**There may be an actual or perceived lack of accessible and competent sexual assault services for LGBT survivors.** Marketing, outreach, websites, brochures, logos, and agency names that appear geared toward cisgender women create barriers to services for LGBT survivors. Survivors may even have fear of further violence and harassment from the people they turn to for help.”<sup>18</sup>

## Poverty and Income Inequality

**Poverty is associated with higher homicide rates.** A recent study provides new insight into how different social and economic circumstances could be driving gun violence in the US.<sup>19</sup> The study focuses on socioeconomic status, income inequality, and other social determinants of health through the analysis of 13,060 gun-related deaths in all US states. Analyses were based on 13,060 firearm-related deaths in 2015, with 11,244 non-mass shootings taking place in 8,673 census tracts (CTs) and 141 mass shootings in 138 CTs.

This study finds that the rich-poor gap, level of citizens' trust in institutions, economic opportunity, and public welfare spending are all related to firearm homicide rates in the US.

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<sup>17</sup><https://www.wcsap.org/resources/culturally-specific/lgbtq/advocacy-considerations>

<sup>18</sup><https://www.wcsap.org/resources/culturally-specific/lgbtq/advocacy-considerations>

<sup>19</sup>Daniel Kim, 2019. Social determinants of health in relation to firearm-related homicides in the United States: A nationwide multilevel cross-sectional study, *Journal of PMED*:1002978

**The study also found that the strongest association was between gun homicides and social mobility, or the ability of people to move to a higher social status than that of their parents—i.e., areas with less social mobility have higher rates of homicide.** This study used geolocated gun homicide incident data from the US in 2015 to explore the independent associations of key state-, county-, and neighborhood-level social determinants of health - social mobility, social capital, income inequality, residential racial and economic segregation, and public spending with neighborhood firearm homicides and mass shootings in the US.

## The Impact of Trauma

Significant research has been done into the interrelationships between trauma and youth violence with the recognition that **trauma can be both a cause and effect of violence**. The National Institute of Justice in their report “Examining the Relationship Between Childhood Trauma and Involvement in the Justice System” finds that, “. . . adolescents who witnessed violence or were victimized by violence were more likely to be charged with a crime against a person at a later time. Court outcome severity was higher for this group — that is, youth exposed to violence in this sample experienced more adjudication, were more likely to be assigned to residential placement, and were more likely to be put on probation.” Additionally, research showed that “. . . exposure to community violence is associated with changes that lead toward more court involvement and more severe court outcomes.” In looking at factors that influence the strength of the relationship between exposure to violence and juvenile court involvement, “they found that academic progress reduces the strength of the relationship between exposure to violence and juvenile court involvement, while psychological symptoms of hopelessness as a result of exposure to violence strengthen the likelihood of court involvement<sup>20</sup>.”

## Easy Access to Guns

**In Communities of Color everyone is impacted by gun violence and the resulting trauma.** Exposure to gun violence can have lifelong impact on youth brain development, health, and well-being, which exacerbates existing social and economic inequities, contributing to increased gun violence.

- A study that examined 500 African American youth, found that direct exposure to violence was the best predictor of whether an individual would later engage in gun related crimes.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>20</sup><https://nij.ojp.gov/topics/articles/examining-relationship-between-childhood-trauma-and-involvement-justice-system>

<sup>21</sup>McGee ZT, Logan K, Samuel J, & Nunn T. 2017. A multivariate analysis of gun violence among urban youth: The impact of direct victimization, indirect victimization, and victimization among peers. *Cogent social sciences*

- A survey of youth ages 12-24 in the city of Baltimore found that 42% had witnessed a shooting, compared to 4% of suburban youth.<sup>22</sup> Note that 62% of Baltimore is Black and only 27% are White non-Hispanic or Latino.<sup>23</sup>
- A survey of middle school children enrolled in the Richmond, Virginia public school system found that 94% of children reported hearing gunshots, and 44% of boys and 30% of girls reported having witnessed a shooting.<sup>24</sup> Richmond is 46% Black and 41% White non-Hispanic or Latino.

## Lack of Opportunities and Perception of Hopelessness

**Widespread community exposure to gun violence exacerbates already existing social and economic inequalities and further perpetuates gun violence.**

- An analysis of gun violence in Washington DC found that ten additional gunshots in a census tract in a given year were linked to one less new business opening, one more business closing, and 20 fewer jobs.<sup>25</sup>
- An analysis of gun violence in Oakland found that each gun homicide in a census tract in a given year was related to five fewer job opportunities in the subsequent year.<sup>26</sup>

## The Family and Neurobiological Factors

**A great deal of attention has been paid to the role of the family and home environment in relation to anti-social behavior of youth.**<sup>27</sup> These findings, however, need to be seen in the context of children of color growing up in environments shaped by generations of poverty and systemic racism and the trauma and stress this creates.

**It has been established that chronic and traumatic stress resulting from adverse childhood experiences can shape development and have lifelong effect on health and wellbeing.** For example,

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<sup>22</sup>Gladstein J, et al. (1992)

<sup>23</sup><https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/baltimorecitymaryland>

<sup>24</sup>White KS, et al. 1998. Impact of exposure to community violence on anxiety: A longitudinal study of family social support as a protective factor for urban children. *Journal of child and family studies*

<sup>25</sup>McGee ZT, Logan K, Samuel J, & Nunn T. 2017. A multivariate analysis of gun violence among urban youth: The impact of direct victimization, indirect victimization, and victimization among peers. *Cogent Social Sciences*

<sup>26</sup>Irvin-Erickson Y, et al. 2017. *Gun Violence Affects the Economic Health of Communities*. Urban Institute, Justice Policy Center

<sup>27</sup><https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/youth-violence>

family violence and conflict, child physical abuse and neglect, sexual abuse, traumatic separation from caretakers are all contributing factors.<sup>28</sup>

**Many of the well-documented risk factors for youth violence arise in the family, including harsh and rejecting parents, interparental violence, child abuse and neglect, chaotic family life, inconsistent discipline, and poor monitoring by parents of children showing early signs of aggression.<sup>29</sup>**

## Personality Traits and Exposure to Media Violence

**Past behavior is one of the best predictors of future behavior.**

- Individuals who are characteristically aggressive or impulsive and exhibit difficulties in self-control are more likely to engage in later acts of aggression, violence, delinquency, and crime.<sup>30</sup>
- Exposure to media violence is significantly related to violent criminal behavior.<sup>31</sup> Other research has found that exposure to media violence can desensitize people to violence in the real world and that, for some people, watching violence in the media becomes enjoyable and does not result in the anxious arousal that would be expected from seeing such imagery.<sup>32</sup>

## Alcohol, Drug Use and Mental Health

**Access to drugs and alcohol among youth has long been shown to be related to anti-social behavior and acts of violence.<sup>33</sup>** Alcohol and substance abuse have long been associated with risk for youth violence.

**Although severe mental illness is linked with somewhat higher risk of violent acts, only 4% of violent acts are attributable to severe mental illness.<sup>34</sup>**

Many individuals who develop substance use disorders (SUD) are also diagnosed with mental disorders, and vice versa.<sup>35</sup> Although there are fewer studies on comorbidity among youth, research

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<sup>28</sup>Petruccelli K, Davis J, Berman T, 2019. Adverse childhood experiences and associated health outcomes: A systematic review and meta-analysis. *Child Abuse & Neglect*. 97: 104127

<sup>29</sup>Dodge, Greenberg, & Malone, 2008; Loeber & Farrington, 1998, 2012; Lösel & Farrington, 2012; Stoddard et al., 2013

<sup>30</sup>E.g., Loeber & Farrington, 1998

<sup>31</sup>Paik, H., & Comstock, G., 1994. The effects of television violence on antisocial behavior: A meta-analysis. *Communication Research*, 21, 516 –546

<sup>32</sup>American Psychological Association. (2013, November 1). Violence in the media: Psychologists study potential harmful effects. <https://www.apa.org/topics/video-games/violence-harmful-effects>

<sup>33</sup>E.g., Herrenkohl, Lee, & Hawkins, 2012; Loeber & Farrington, 2012; Whiteside et al., 2013

<sup>34</sup>Appelbaum, 2013). Of these acts, few involve guns (Appelbaum & Swanson, 2010

<sup>35</sup>Kelly TM, Daley DC, 2013. Integrated Treatment of Substance Use and Psychiatric Disorders. *Soc Work Public Health*. 28(0):388-406

suggests that adolescents with substance use disorders also have high rates of co-occurring mental illness. Over 60 percent of adolescents in community-based substance use disorder treatment programs also meet diagnostic criteria for another mental illness. Also, having a mental disorder in childhood or adolescence can increase the risk of later drug use and the development of a substance use disorder. One study found that adolescent-onset bipolar disorder confers a greater risk of subsequent substance use disorder compared to adult-onset bipolar disorder.<sup>36</sup> Similarly, other research suggests that youth develop internalizing disorders, including depression and anxiety, prior to developing substance use disorders.

## Gender Differences

**Decisions to incarcerate girls are largely driven by reasons other than public safety and directly contradict best practice**, such as to discipline noncriminal violations (like running away), to protect the young person's own safety, or to provide access to services that all young people have a right to receive in their community.<sup>37</sup> According to Vera Institute, racial disparities have increased rather than decreased, meaning that girls of color are most impacted by girls' increased representation in the system. While Black girls are 35% of the juvenile justice population, they are only 13% of the U.S. population. The pathway to incarceration is different for girls—a history of sexual abuse or other adverse childhood experiences and having been in the foster care system are more prevalent among incarcerated girls. For example, while 20% of girls in the US will experience child sexual abuse, state-level studies have found much higher rates, up to 81% for girls in the juvenile justice system, with girls often reporting multiple incidents of sexual abuse.<sup>38</sup>

## The Role of Climate change

**Numerous cross-sectional and time-series studies using real-world heat and violence data demonstrate that cities and regions with higher temperatures tend to experience more violent crime than cooler regions, even after controlling for a dozen sociocultural factors such as age, race, poverty, and culture of honor.** Other studies have assessed temperature and violence within the same geographic region over time. Across hours, days, months, and even years, similar trends emerge:

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<sup>36</sup>O'Neil KA, Conner BT, Kendall PC. 2011. Internalizing disorders and substance use disorders in youth: comorbidity, risk, temporal order, and implications for intervention. *Clin Psychol Rev.* 31(1):104-112

<sup>37</sup>Vera Institute of Justice Initiative to End Girls' Incarceration

<sup>38</sup>Melissa Sickmund. A. Sladky, and W. Kang, 2021. "Easy Access to Juvenile Court Statistics: 1985-2019." US Department of Justice



**when it is hotter, violence increases.** From Chicago to Brisbane to Vancouver to Dallas, whether looking at domestic violence or physical assault, the same relationship emerges.<sup>39</sup>

Further, as reported by the U.S. Department of Human Services, **“The neighborhoods people live in have a major impact on their health and well-being.** . . . Many people in the United States live in neighborhoods with high rates of violence, unsafe air or water, and other health and safety risks. Racial/ethnic minorities and people with low incomes are more likely to live in places with these risks. In addition, some people are exposed to things at work that can harm their health, like secondhand smoke or loud noises.”

**Interventions and policy changes at the local, state, and federal level can help reduce these health and safety risks and promote health.** For example, providing opportunities for people to walk and bike in their communities—like by adding sidewalks and bike lanes—can increase safety and help improve health and quality of life.<sup>40</sup>

Further, “Indirectly, the physical environment may influence mental health by altering psychosocial processes with known mental health sequelae. Personal control, socially supportive relationships, and restoration from stress and fatigue are all affected by properties of the built environment. More prospective, longitudinal studies and, where feasible, randomized experiments are needed to examine the potential role of the physical environment in mental health. Even more challenging is the task of developing underlying models of how the built environment can affect mental health. It is also likely that some individuals may be more vulnerable to mental health impacts of the built environment. Because exposure to poor environmental conditions is not randomly distributed and tends to concentrate among the poor and ethnic minorities, we also need to focus more attention on the health implications of multiple environmental risk exposure.”<sup>41</sup>

Evidence of the relationship between the physical environment and the economic level of the community can perhaps be seen in this 2011 survey of the tree canopy in Tacoma which shows relatively few trees in the lower income areas of the city, notably the eastside and south-central areas. “This report concluded that Tacoma, with 20% of the land area covered by tree canopy, has the least

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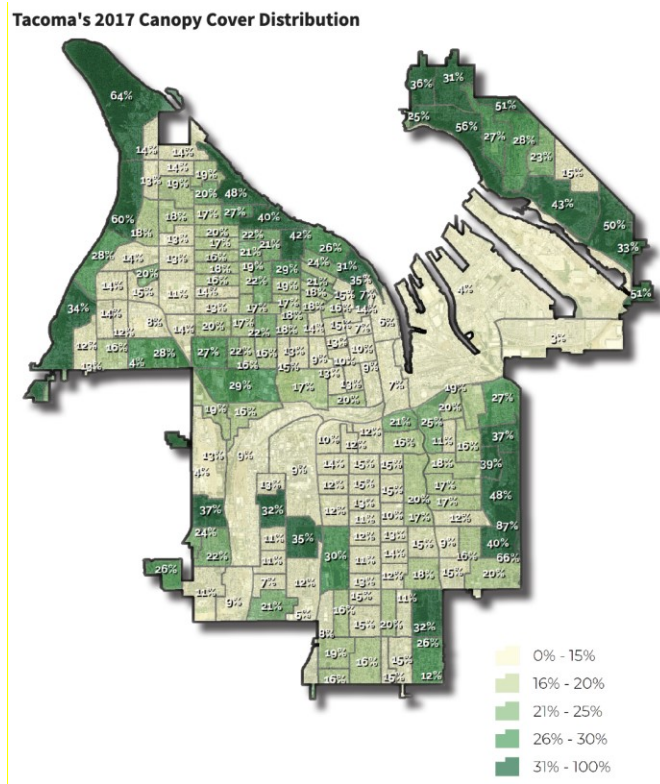
<sup>39</sup>Anderson, C. A., & DeLisi, M. 2011. Implications of global climate change for violence in developed and developing countries. In J. P. Forges, A. W. Kruglanski, & K. D. Williams (Eds.), *The psychology of social conflict and aggression* (pp. 249–265). New York, NY: Psychology Press

<sup>40</sup><https://health.gov/healthypeople/objectives-and-data/browse-objectives/neighborhood-and-built-environment#cit1>

<sup>41</sup><https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3456225>

amount of tree canopy as a percentage of land cover for all communities assessed in the Puget Sound Region.”<sup>42</sup>

**Figure 1 | Tacoma’s 2017 Canopy Cover Distribution**



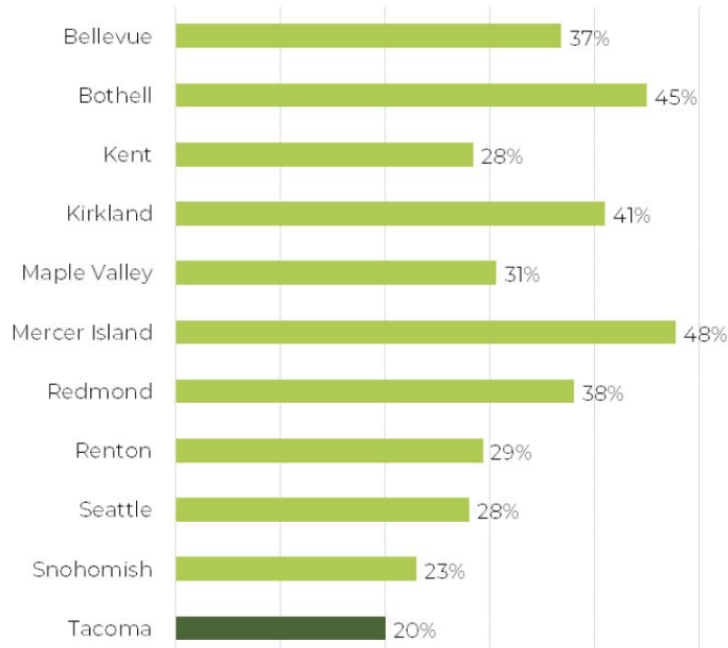
The following chart, from the same study, shows how Tacoma ranks in urban canopy compared to other communities in the greater Seattle area.

**Figure 2 | Comparing Urban Tree Canopy in Nearby Communities<sup>43</sup>**

<sup>42</sup> <https://www.cityoftacoma.org/cms/one.aspx?pageId=35885>

<sup>43</sup> <https://www.cityoftacoma.org/cms/one.aspx?pageId=35885>

### COMPARING URBAN TREE CANOPY IN NEARBY COMMUNITIES



### Summary of Root Causes

The root causes of youth violence in Table 3 were identified through interviews and discussions with key informants in Tacoma/Pierce County and through the review of the research detailed in this report. All of them were mentioned at least once, and many of these causes were mentioned multiple times.

**Table 3 | Root Causes of Youth Violence from Interviews, Discussions and National Research Studies**

Causes Identified from Interviews and Discussions	Causes Found in National Research Studies
Poverty	Poverty, income inequality
Racism & discrimination, oppression	Societal racism and discrimination
Racism in schools	
Drug sales, substance abuse	Alcohol and substance abuse
Law enforcement	
Housing insecurity, redlining	Housing insecurity, homelessness
Mental health issues	
Lack of funding	Differences in public spending by economic status
Lack of job opportunities	Lack of job opportunities
Adults in authority do not earn the trust of youth	
Law enforcement does not have the trust of youth	
Generational community level trauma	
Trauma experienced personally and indirectly	Adverse childhood experiences, trauma
Lack of strategies to heal from trauma	
Inequitable discipline policies in the schools	
Bullying	Bullying
Homophobia and transphobia	
Escalated interpersonal grievances	
Disconnection to community	
Lack of parenting skills	
Absentee parents	
Disconnection to family	Negative family environment
Not keeping children in their families or communities of origin	
Neglect	
Abuse	Sexual abuse
Early childhood experiences	Intra-parental violence
Exposure to violence from early childhood	Child abuse, youth exposure to firearm violence
Lack of positive role models, adult mentors	

**Table 3 | Root Causes of Youth Violence from Interviews, Discussions and National Research Studies (continued)**

<b>Causes Identified from Interviews and Discussions</b>	<b>Causes Found in National Research Studies</b>
Access to weapons	Access to firearms
Lack of social emotional learning	
Lack of coping skills	
Gentrification	
Trespassing and no loitering policies	
Lack of respect for authority	Lack of trust in social institutions
Lack of social interaction	
Lack of social skills	Lack of discipline
Lack of communication	
Social Influences	Violence in the media
Social media	
Lack of activities	
The Covid pandemic	
Lack of health care	Racial differences in access to health care
Lack of trust in health care	
Lack of BIPOC health care providers, especially in behavioral and mental health	
Lack of services	
Youth feeling hopeless	Perception of hopelessness
Concern about the future, climate change	Impact of climate change and the physical environment on mental health
Blaming communities of color for the problems	
Few community members in change maker roles	
Lack of people stepping up to help	
People don't know how to step up	
People do not know history of BIPOC groups	
Not valuing and paying those who try to make change	

## ANALYSIS OF EXISTING PERSISTENT GAPS IN SERVICES AND RESOURCES FOR ADDRESSING YOUTH VIOLENCE IN TACOMA/PIERCE COUNTY

Geo and PPI partners collected responses for this analysis from the interviews with PPI Planning Team members, interviews with community agency leaders, and online surveys with Tacoma/Pierce County service providers. Respondents were asked to state:

- What they think are the root causes of violence;
- What community assets are currently in place to address these causes;
- What are persistent gaps in services; and
- What strategies they think are most effective in addressing these root causes.

The most mentioned root causes are categorized by **Resources, Community and Individual Trauma, Legal System, Leadership, and Education.**

### **Resources**

- Poverty
- Lack of funding
- Affordable housing
- Insufficient youth shelters and emergency housing

### **Community and Individual Trauma**

- Racism, discrimination, oppression
- Lack of strategies to heal from trauma
- Lack of clear, consistent, communication among agencies supporting youth
- Insufficient mental health services
- Not enough family counseling
- Not enough preventive supports for youth entering the cycle of violence
- Youth disengaged from the greater community
- Homophobia and transphobia
- Institutional barriers to services for youth at risk of violence

### **Legal System**

- Drug sales, substance abuse
- Law enforcement does not have the trust of youth
- Punitive rather than supportive responses by law enforcement

### **Leadership**

- No network coordinating community services
- Lack of people stepping up to help
- Adults in authority do not earn the trust of youth

### **Education**

- Racism in school
- Insufficient support to help students succeed in school

Given the time and resources, it was not possible to identify all of the organizations active in addressing youth violence or to fully represent their service areas, communities served, and numbers of people served. An initial list identified over 200 organizations. As a part of the PPI Strategic Plan, it may be valuable to develop and include a more comprehensive list of organizations actively addressing youth violence directly or through offering pro-social experiences intended to provide alternatives to activities that encourage violent behavior. Such a list would enable all organizations engaged in this work to collaborate in order to coordinate client services in a holistic approach to addressing the needs of youth, and present a united voice to policy makers and funders.

Table 4 lists root causes, community assets, persistent gaps and general strategies by the category mentioned above. Information mentioned more frequently is in **bold** type.

Table 5 lists specific strategies that could be pursued.





**Table 4 | Profile of Community Responses regarding Root Causes and Gaps in Services or Resources related to Youth Violence**

RESOURCES			
ROOT CAUSES	COMMUNITY ASSETS	PERSISTANT GAPS	GENERAL STRATEGIES
Poverty	Many caring agencies providing support for low-income youth and their families	<b>Need for more initiatives focused on the root causes of poverty</b> , not only fixing specific instances	Create mechanisms to coordinate the efforts of multiple agencies and funding sources to address the root causes of poverty
Lack of funding	Funding coming from private donors and foundations	Insufficient committed funding from local, state, and national level; Agencies competing for limited funds	<b>Coordinate advocacy at local, state, and federal level for increased funding</b>
Homelessness, housing instability, redlining	Agencies providing housing support	<b>Insufficient youth shelters and emergency housing;</b> Insufficient and inadequate housing options for people experiencing housing instability	Coordinate youth support programs with housing providers Advocate for more funding for housing
Lack of authentic communication	Agencies which provide coordinated services	Information systems built to provide privacy are creating barriers to coordinated support	<b>Work with government and NGOs to build open, yet secure information systems to help organizations communicate and coordinate services</b>
Lack of transportation	Agencies serving youth which are located in their communities	Resources not easily accessible	Work with community transportation providers to create more options
Lack of recreational spaces and opportunities	Some parks and youth centers	Not enough spaces or programs serving enough youth in ways they feel are best for them	<b>More spaces and programs designed with youth input where youth feel safe and want to engage with peers</b>

**Table 4 | Profile of Community Responses regarding Root Causes and Gaps in Services or Resources related to Youth Violence (continued)**

COMMUNITY AND INDIVIDUAL TRAUMA			
ROOT CAUSES	COMMUNITY ASSETS	PERSISTANT GAPS	GENERAL STRATEGIES
<b>Racism, discrimination, oppression</b>	Culturally aware agencies led by people of color	People do not know the history of racism and discrimination in the community	<b>Recruit more leaders of color;</b> Provide more opportunities to learn the relevant histories
Generational community level trauma	Programs in place providing <b>trauma informed case management</b>	<b>Lack of strategies to heal from trauma</b>	Initiate proven trauma-informed programs from research
Disconnection to community	Organizations working together for low-income youth	<b>Lack of clear, consistent, communication among agencies supporting youth</b>	Identify agency to coordinate communication among providers
Exposure to violence from early childhood; Youth feeling hopeless; Concern about the future, climate change	<b>Programs addressing trauma and mental health</b>	<b>Insufficient mental health services;</b> Lack of access to substance abuse treatment	Identify best practices in trauma informed care and identify who can provide training; <b>Expand mental health services of all kinds</b>
Few community members in change maker roles	Adults that match the demographics of the youth they serve	Lack of a mechanism to promote meaningful peer-to-peer relationships where all youth can feel included	Recruit service providers from within the community
Absentee parents; Disconnection to family; Not keeping children in their families or communities of origin	Agencies support collaboration and coordination for young people and their families	<b>Not enough family counseling;</b> <b>Not enough preventive supports for youth entering the cycle of violence</b>	Support legislation to fund more family counseling and parenting resources

**Table 4 | Profile of Community Responses regarding Root Causes and Gaps in Services or Resources related to Youth Violence (continued)**

<b>COMMUNITY AND INDIVIDUAL TRAUMA (continued)</b>			
<b>ROOT CAUSES</b>	<b>COMMUNITY ASSETS</b>	<b>PERSISTANT GAPS</b>	<b>GENERAL STRATEGIES</b>
<b>Mental health issues;</b> Lack of health care; Lack of trust in health care	Community health care providers serving youth at risk and victims of violence	Youth not accessing health care resources	Include health care providers in agency coordination and planning
Lack of constructive activities as an alternative to violence	Local programs which focus on constructive activities	Youth pushed out of school for behavior problems falling into gangs; Negative social media	Partner with community groups to provide creative, constructive activities for youth
Lack of positive role models, adult mentors; Lack of social emotional learning; Not valuing and paying those who try to make change	Availability of mentors	<b>Youth disengaged from the greater community;</b> <b>Youth not being allowed to participate in decision making</b>	Recruit and train mentors from within the community
Homophobia and transphobia; Lack of BIPOC health care providers, especially in behavioral and mental health; People do not know history of BIPOC groups	Support for LGBTQ+ youth	<b>Institutional barriers to services for youth at risk of violence</b>	Provide community resources to increase awareness of LGBTQ+ issues and support
<b>Lack of job opportunities</b>	Focus on career pathways	Gaps in employment/training	Partner with business and vocational resources to provide career pathways for youth

**Table 4 | Profile of Community Responses regarding Root Causes and Gaps in Services or Resources related to Youth Violence (continued)**

LEGAL SYSTEM			
ROOT CAUSES	COMMUNITY ASSETS	PERSISTANT GAPS	GENERAL STRATEGIES
Drug sales, substance abuse	Service agencies aligned with juvenile justice system	Youth not feeling safe to access services	Work with City and County government to strengthen alignment with juvenile justice
Law enforcement does not have the trust of youth	Law enforcement leadership has a plan to focus on building relationships rather than just enforcement	<b>Punitive rather than supportive responses by law enforcement</b>	Work with law enforcement to increase their awareness of the needs of youth
Access to weapons	Gun buy-back programs in place	People do not feel safe in their homes	Advocate for reasonable gun laws and increased buy-back opportunities
Discriminatory trespassing and loitering policies	Law enforcement is listening to youth to some extent	Community members not feeling protected by law enforcement; Officers not reflective of the community	Reinforce support for constructive changes in law enforcement and advocate for more change; <b>Promote law enforcement working in tandem with mental health providers</b>
LEADERSHIP			
ROOT CAUSES	COMMUNITY ASSETS	PERSISTANT GAPS	GENERAL STRATEGIES
Lack of respect for authority	Young leaders of color stepping up	Silos on support to youth; Not enough empowerment of women of color	Through schools and community partners, support youth with leadership potential
Blaming communities of color for the problem	Leaders with lived experience	<b>Lack of people stepping up to help;</b> People don't know how to step up	Communicate and fund leadership opportunities for individuals with lived experience
Adults in authority do not earn the trust of youth	Locally embedded agencies feel accountable to their community	<b>No network coordinating community services</b>	Reach agreements among agencies providing service to youth as to their accountability to the community and monitor compliance

**Table 4 | Profile of Community Responses regarding Root Causes and Gaps in Services or Resources related to Youth Violence (continued)**

EDUCATION			
ROOT CAUSES	COMMUNITY ASSETS	PERSISTANT GAPS	STRATEGIES
Inequitable discipline policies in the schools, bullying	Support from school counselors	Lack of school involvement in developing social-emotional skills	Strengthen partnerships with school districts and support counselors in connecting to community resources
<b>Racism in schools</b>	In-school activities to support youth at risk	<b>Insufficient support to help students succeed in school</b>	Strengthen partnerships with school districts to provide agency resources for constructive in-school and after-school activities



**Table 5 | Specific Strategies Suggested by Participants in Local Data Collection**

Expand economic opportunity for youth under 16
Provide better transportation to get to supportive programming
Provide more mentorships in schools beyond teachers and principals – we need extra people meeting with youth in the halls getting to know them in a setting that matters
Expand collaboration with the public schools
Provide additional academic support in schools
Expand services around families and parents; support legislation to fund more family counseling and parenting resources
Provide more stable housing and more programming for housing
Make fewer restrictions on funding
Provide more funding for the direct needs of youth
Support elementary and middle schoolers more
Implement more after school programs
Work with law enforcement personnel to increase their awareness of the needs of youth
Have law enforcement provide more community engagement
Provide youth with transition support from middle to high school
Have the older generation connect with the middle and younger generation with the middle generation being a bridge.
Provide more meaningful trauma informed support across systems - schools, law enforcement, health systems
Provide more opportunities for young people to be leaders, to have alternatives to violence through schools and community
Encourage partners to support youth with leadership potential
Provide better programming that is expansive and collaborative
Create more cultural Hubs in communities
Invest more in mental health services and expand mental health services of all kinds
Find more ways to build trust between systems
Create more workshops that address problems
Teach young women about the consequences of having children at a young age
Teach historical to modern day history; teach history relevant a person’s culture, like the true history of Black people
Make a massive expansion of positive youth development approaches that reach more kids
More intentional programming that is led by young people
Enhance safety and caring in the physical environments where people live; make them safe and caring (e.g., with playgrounds, trails, parks, people, lighting, sidewalks, crosswalks)
Increase outreach to high-risk children/youth in areas that lack safety and caring; build relationships, empathy, social connections, and belonging
Provide continuity of opportunities (e.g., jobs and school activities for positive youth development; social emotional learning + opportunities + paid work)

**Table 5 | Specific Strategies Suggested by Participants in Local Data Collection (continued)**

Make substance abuse and mental health awareness accessible and inviting and provide education, prevention, and treatment
Address family conflicts; every family should have access to the tools, techniques, and support to mitigate and prevent family conflict
Get the guns off the streets; take a hardline approach; advocate for reasonable gun laws and increased buy-back opportunities
Work more with urban communities
Make youth more aware of the American model and teachings around capitalism and their responsibilities in community
Engage with youth and find out more about who they are
Address the non-tangible things and the things we do not see
Provide access to right- and left-brain activities
Go to different neighborhoods and educate young people through street outreach
Teach youth to accept and handle change—mostly change within themselves
Help youth value and respect life and others
Help youth analyze the things in the media, like movies and video games
Help youth advocate and articulate their issues; use adults to be advocates for the youth and let them see that
Incentivize family involvement in programs
Create mechanisms to coordinate the efforts of multiple agencies and funding sources to address the root causes of poverty
Coordinate advocacy at local, state, and federal levels for increased funding
Coordinate youth support programs with housing providers
Work with governments and NGOs to build open, yet secure information systems to help organizations communicate and coordinate services
Recruit more leaders of color
Initiate proven trauma-informed programs from research; identify best practices in trauma informed care and identify who can provide training
Identify an agency to coordinate communication among providers
Recruit service providers from within the community
Recruit and train mentors from within the community
Provide community resources to increase awareness of LGBTQ+ issues and support
Work with city and county governments to strengthen the alignment of services with juvenile justice
Communicate and fund leadership opportunities for individuals with lived experience
Partner with business and vocational resources to provide career pathways
Give opportunities to create art; art will save the people in seven generations



## EVIDENCE-BASED YOUTH VIOLENCE PREVENTION STRATEGIES AND PROGRAMS

### Successful Strategies for Disrupting and Healing Trauma Associated with Violence

**Youth violence is a multifaceted public health issue that requires a holistic approach and a consistently applied set of both proven and innovative strategies to stop the cycles of daily youth violence, especially in disadvantaged communities of color.** In addition to limiting easy access to firearms by high-risk people, as a society we must address the underlying social and economic inequalities that fuel violence. Simultaneously, communities need adequately funded community-based violence prevention efforts that build authentic relationships with communities of color who disproportionately experience the vast burden of violence and trauma.

**Research provides evidence that there are multiple prevention strategies that are scientifically proven to reduce youth violence, victimization, perpetration, and associated risk factors.<sup>44</sup>** Evidence-based youth violence prevention programs and policies benefit all youth regardless of their level of risk. Because youth violence results from multiple individual, family, and environmental factors that can accumulate over a child's development, a comprehensive approach that targets multiple risk and protective factors is essential to having an impact that moves the needle on youth violence.

Some of the strategies and approaches mentioned in this report are identified in the research literature as evidence-based, meaning they have been evaluated by rigorous outcome-oriented research, ideally using comparisons to comparable groups which did not receive the same services. Evidence-based strategies and approaches make the results less subjective and raise them to a higher level of accountability. However, as mentioned above, there are limitations to identified evidence-based approaches and programs. One serious issue is that withholding the intervention from certain individuals and groups can make the program very hard to implement and potentially unethical. Also, most of the evidence-based work has been with White subjects which makes it harder to generalize to other racial and ethnic groups. Finally, often it takes a lot of money to get a program recognized as evidence-based, and some programs fund this cost by selling rights to their program later. So, instead

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<sup>44</sup>David-Ferdon, C., & Simon, T. R. .2014. Preventing youth violence: Opportunities for action. Atlanta, GA: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

of focusing on what works, some programs are focused on what is copyrightable and what is marketable. Due to these restraints, many of the evidence-based programs do not lead to systemic changes that are required to respond to the root causes of violence. Rather, they focus on “fixing” the youth and their families and ignoring the barriers and systems that perpetuate the cycle of violence.

**The literature suggests that prevention, intervention, and treatment strategies that are trauma-informed are more effective.** Many youth have experienced traumatic events, including physical, sexual, and emotional abuse; family and community violence; and the ongoing, cumulative impact of poverty, systemic and individual racism, and oppression. Repeated exposure to such traumatic events increases the risk of youth violence. Organizational trauma-informed care that is grounded in a deep understanding of the causes and consequences of trauma can promote resilience and healing, while subsequently reducing youth violence.<sup>45</sup>

**The research presented above makes it clear that elimination of violence and improvement of well-being for all members of society cannot be accomplished by one sector of society alone.** Justice, public health, education, health care (mental, behavioral, medical), government (local, state, and federal), social services, business, housing, media, and organizations that comprise the civil society sector, such as faith-based organizations, youth-serving organizations, foundations, and other non-governmental organizations all need to play a role. In addition, the voices of children, youth, and families who are most affected by violence must be front and center.

The literature suggests the following skills and factors to be considered when developing interventions to prevent youth violence.

- **Self-Control Skills** - Self-control and regulation training delivered directly to children can increase self-control and decrease delinquency.<sup>46</sup>
- **Social Competence Skills** – Building skills that increase empathy, social problem-solving, anger management, and alternative ways of interpreting social cues and coping with rejection and disappointment can increase self-control and decrease delinquency.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> <https://youth.gov/youth-topics/youth-mental-health/trauma-informed-approaches> (Youth.gov provides interactive tools and other resources to help youth-serving organizations and community partnerships plan, implement, and participate in effective programs for youth.)

<sup>46</sup>Diamond, A., & Lee, K. 2011. Interventions shown to aid executive function development in children 4 to 12 years old. *Science*, 333, 959 –964

<sup>47</sup>Heckman, J. J. 2013. *Giving kids a fair chance*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press

- **Improving Parenting and Management** - Evidence suggests that improving parenting and family management can reduce aggression and violence in youth.<sup>48</sup>
- **Minimizing Violent Media Effect** - Parents can have an important role in reducing the negative impact of violent media on their children. For example, instructive mediation, which involves parents talking to their children about violent media content (e.g., alternative means of solving conflict besides aggression, why it is unrealistic, why guns are dangerous), can reduce the harmful effect of violent media on children.<sup>49</sup> Media literacy programs can also help children become more intelligent and critical media consumers. In one study, for example, middle school students who were randomly assigned to participate in a violent media literacy program were 2.16 times less likely to push or shove another student and were 2.32 times less likely to threaten to hit or hurt someone in comparison to control students.<sup>50</sup>
- **Reducing Youth Access to Guns** - High standards for legal gun ownership, certain policies to deter transfers of guns to high-risk people, and overall interventions that are designed to detect and deter illegal gun carrying in high-risk settings have consistently been shown to reduce gun violence.<sup>51</sup>
- **Reducing Alcohol and Substance Use Among Youth** – Studies suggest that alcohol and substance use among youth are associated with aggression and violence. Interventions focused on reducing alcohol and substance use among youth can reduce youth violence.<sup>52</sup>
- **Improving School Climate** – Interventions that focus on creating a safe environment where youth feel a sense of belonging and there is trust between youth and adults can reduce youth violence.<sup>53</sup> Specifically, the development of mechanisms that can build social trust between youth and adults, both in schools and in communities is essential. Social trust has been demonstrated to be an important aspect of school climate in preventing violence.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>48</sup>Welsh B.C. et al. 2012. Promoting change, changing lives: Effective prevention and intervention to reduce serious offending. In R. Loeber & D. P. Farrington (Eds.), *From juvenile delinquency to adult crime: Criminal careers, justice policy, and prevention* (pp. 245–277). New York, NY: Oxford University

<sup>49</sup>Nathanson, A. I. 2004. Factual and evaluative approaches to modifying children’s responses to violent television. *Journal of Communication* 54, 321–336, Nathanson, 2004

<sup>50</sup>Fingar, K. R., & Jolls, T. 2014. Evaluation of a school-based violence prevention media literacy curriculum. *Injury Prevention*, 20, 183–190

<sup>51</sup>Grossman, D. C., et. al., 2012. Improving firearm storage in Alaska native villages: A randomized trial of household gun cabinets. *American Journal of Public Health*, 102, S291–S297

<sup>52</sup>David-Ferdon, C., & Simon, T. R. 2014. *Preventing youth violence: Opportunities for action*. Atlanta, GA: National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

<sup>53</sup>Carter, P. L. 2012. *Stubborn roots: Race, culture and inequality in U.S. and South African schools*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press

<sup>54</sup>Williams, K. R., & Guerra, N. G. 2011. Perceptions of collective efficacy and bullying perpetration in schools. *Social Problems*, 58, 126–143

Table 6 shows the results of a study published in the Journal of Adolescent Health. Researchers found that the following indicators had a significant effect on the social attitudes of middle school students participating in brief school-based interventions.

**Table 6 | Indicators Having Significant Effect on Social Attitudes of Middle School Students<sup>55</sup>**

At school there is an adult who:	Pre-Intervention % Agree	Post-Intervention % Agree
Cares about me	58%	76%
Tells me when I do a good job	54%	72%
Listens to me	52%	77%
Believes that I will be a success	68%	85%

- Trusted Adults** – The 2022 report commissioned by Tacoma Pierce County Public Health Department highlighted the importance of having trusted adults in the community for youth to ask for help and guidance, in different settings such as in school or in the community. Other strategies include providing resources to strengthen family units to help them create greater stability at home.

## Evidence-Based Youth Violence Prevention Strategies

### Center for Disease Control

Table 7 presents the Center for Disease Control’s recommendations for youth violence prevention strategies.<sup>56</sup>

<sup>55</sup>[https://www.jahonline.org/article/S1054-139X\(22\)00467-0/pdf](https://www.jahonline.org/article/S1054-139X(22)00467-0/pdf)

<sup>56</sup>CDC, 2016. A Comprehensive Technical Package for the prevention of Youth Violence and Associated Risk Behavior

**Table 7 | Center for Disease Control’s Recommendations for Youth Violence Prevention Strategies**

Strategy	Approach
<b>Promote family environments that support healthy development</b>	<p><b>Early childhood home visitation</b> programs provide information and training about child health, development, and support families in their home to access services.</p> <p><b>Parenting skill and family relationship programs</b> equip parents with problem-solving, and behavior monitoring and management skills.</p>
<b>Provide quality education early in life</b>	<p><b>Preschool enrichment with family engagement programs</b> supports economically disadvantaged families to build a strong foundation for the children’s future learning and healthy development.</p>
<b>Strengthen youth skills</b>	<p><b>Universal school-based programs</b> support children and youth to enhance interpersonal and emotional skills, including communication and problem solving, empathy, emotional awareness and regulation, conflict management, and teamwork.</p>
<b>Connect youth to caring adults and activities</b>	<p><b>Mentoring programs</b> connect youth with a volunteer from the community in order to foster a relationship that will contribute to the young person’s growth opportunities, skill development, and academic success.</p>
<b>Create protective community environments</b>	<p><b>Modifying the physical and social environment</b> - Enhancing and maintaining the physical characteristics of settings promotes and foster social interaction and strengthen connectedness.</p> <p><b>Reducing exposure to community-level risks</b> such as concentrated poverty, residential instability, and density of alcohol outlets can potentially impact youth violence outcomes.</p> <p><b>Street outreach and community norm changes</b> connect trained outreach staff with residents to mediate conflicts, promote norms of nonviolence, and connect youth to community supports to reduce risks against violence.</p>
<b>Intervene to lessen harms and prevent future risks</b>	<p><b>Treatment to lessen the harms of violence exposures</b> can mitigate the behavioral and health consequences of witnessing or experiencing violence in the home and community.</p> <p><b>Treatment to prevent problem behavior and further involvement in violence approaches</b> develop youth’s social and problem-solving skills, provide youth with therapeutic services to address behavioral and emotional issues, reduce conflict, improve communication, and enhance parents’ skills.</p> <p><b>Hospital-community partnerships</b> provide support to youth shortly after receiving care in emergency departments for acute issues.</p>

## Community-Based Public Safety Collective

**Community-Based Public Safety Collective (CBPS Collective) is a strategy which includes a public health approach to strengthening community.**<sup>57</sup> The strategy focuses on training and hiring community members to decrease community violence and increase community wellness in their own communities without the harmful, inequitable consequences of the current arrest and incarceration approach. Investing in community-based public safety leaders is seen as an impactful strategy in stopping violence, ending mass incarceration, and setting the nation on a transformational course toward a shared safety model rooted in systems of care, healing, and community empowerment.

**The CBPS Collective consists of premier national experts who help CBPS rapidly build the infrastructure and the capacity support needed to scale with public funding to building neighborhood leadership to advance safety.** These experts are the individuals and groups on the ground that work every day to mediate conflict and help youth in crisis get into supportive services to put them on a path away from violence toward stability. The collective represents and supports the small, nonprofit, community-led grassroots organizations that have consistently shown up with little support or official recognition from policymakers, elected officials, or funding agencies.

### ***Newark Opportunity Youth Network***

**Newark Opportunity Youth Network (NOYN) was established to provide young people ages 16-to-24 years old who are not in school with an opportunity to earn a GED while gaining on-the-job training through community building projects.** Through the collective work of public and private organizations, youth are supported and prepared for post-secondary learning, careers, and life.<sup>58</sup>

NOYN has grown rapidly and achieved early success, including creating over 250 new or redesigned “high-quality educational seats”—spots for disconnected youth in alternative district schools, charter schools, and programs run by community-based organizations providing high school or equivalent degrees. As of September 2018, NOYN programs had conducted intake for 1,843 and placed almost 700 students in its high school degree or equivalency learning programs.

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<sup>57</sup>[CBPScollective.org](http://CBPScollective.org)

<sup>58</sup> <https://www.newark-oyyn.org/>

### ***The Peacemaker Fellowship***

**The Fellowship enrolls a small number of the most violent and hard to reach members of a community experiencing gun violence.** The program offers an intensive 18-month of trauma-informed, healing-centered, anti-racist mentorship, education, social services, and life opportunities. Through daily adult mentoring and coaching, youth co-create a set of goals, take group classes in conflict resolution and other essential life skills, and learn how to navigate social services.

While more research is needed to document the impacts of the program on gun violence in communities, after one year of street outreach and Fellow data, it is estimated that the program prevented between 16 and 41 potential shootings which might have resulted in deaths.

The Community Based Public Safety (CBPS) Collective notes that evaluations of community-based programs need to be culturally and socially responsive to the targeted community. They recommend that the research and evaluation itself be community-based, participatory, and offer meaningful outcomes that reflect the needs of the community being served. This means that the research practices are properly vetted, organizations can be credited and compensated fairly for their data and research, and the evaluation process itself can turn into a career path for community-based public safety professionals beyond “street work.” This approach to evaluation requires multi-method data collection by soliciting feedback and community input through surveys, interviews, and focus groups to paint the community context for crime data. It does not rely solely on crime statistics as the measure for success.

## **Youth Violence Prevention Programs & Organizations**

### **Blueprint Programs**

**The Blueprints for Healthy Youth Development target many levels of need, from broad prevention programs that promote positive behaviors while decreasing negative behaviors to highly-targeted programs for at-risk children, troubled teens, or formerly incarcerated offenders that get them back on track.**<sup>59</sup> The following are programs listed as Model and Model Plus programs that have

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<sup>59</sup>Blueprints for Healthy Youth Development – Committed to Healthy Youth, Families and Communities - [blueprintsprograms.org](http://blueprintsprograms.org)

demonstrated efficacy for changing outcomes over time and are recommended for large-scale implementation.

***Functional Family Therapy (FFT)***

FFT is a short-term family therapy intervention and youth diversion program helping at-risk children and youth to overcome adolescent behavior problems, conduct disorder, substance abuse, and delinquency.

***Generation Parent Management Training Oregon (Generation PMTO)***

Generation PMTO provides parent training program that can be implemented in a variety of family contexts. The program aims to teach effective family management skills in order to reduce problematic behavior in children who range in age from 3 through 16 years.

***Life Skills Training (LST)***

LST is a classroom-based prevention program designed to prevent adolescent tobacco, alcohol, marijuana use, and violence. Three major program components teach students personal self-management skills, social skills, and information and resistance skills specifically related to drug use.

***Multisystemic Therapy (MST)***

MST provides intensive family- and community-based treatment program that focuses on the multiple, causes of serious antisocial behavior in juvenile offenders. This program uses the strengths in each system (family, peers, school, and neighborhood) to facilitate change.

***The Blues Program (Cognitive Behavioral Group Depression Prevention)***

The Blues Program is a school-based group intervention that aims to actively engage high school students with depressive symptoms or at risk of onset of major depression.

***Project Towards No Drug Abuse (TND)***

TND is a drug prevention program for high school youth who are at risk for drug use and violence-related behavior. The program provides instruction in motivation activities to not use drugs and builds skills in self-control and communication.



### ***The PATHS Curriculum***

The PATHS Curriculum is a comprehensive program for promoting social and emotional skills and reducing aggression and behavior problems in elementary school-aged children (grades K-6). At each grade level children learn self-control, emotional understanding, positive self-esteem, improved relationships, and interpersonal problem-solving skills.

### ***Treatment Foster Care Oregon (TFCO)***

TFCO is an alternative to group or residential treatment, incarceration, and hospitalization for adolescents who have problems with chronic antisocial behavior, emotional disturbance, and delinquency. Community families are recruited, trained, and closely supervised to provide TFCO-placed adolescents with treatment and intensive supervision at home, in school, and in the community.

### ***Positive Action***

Positive Action is a school-based social emotional learning program for students in elementary and middle schools to increase positive behavior, reduce negative behavior, and improve social and emotional learning and school climate.

## **Building Resilience Awareness & Variations of Excellence (BRAVE)**

BRAVE was established in 2011. In partnership with YWCA Central Family Emergency Housing, BRAVE provides programming for young adult mothers living in the YWCA shelter.<sup>60</sup> The program introduces youth to social justice awareness while cultivating positive self-identity with a commitment to strengthening their communities. Over the years, BRAVE has partnered with Cleveland High School, Garfield High School, Washington Middle School, South Lake High School, Talbot Hill Elementary, Therapeutic Health Services and many more nonprofit and educational institutions.

### ***BRAVE Trailblazers Program***

The BRAVE Trailblazers Program empowers youth to become critical thinkers, emerging as leaders as they explore the four pillars of: Personal Development; Social Justice; College, Career, and Entrepreneur Exploration; and Student-led Professional Development. The Trailblazers mentoring component fosters a greater sense of community and belonging. Students experience motivation through mentorship, including through exploring college campuses with their mentor.

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<sup>60</sup>HOME | BRAVE | Nonprofit Youth & Educator Programs | Seattle, WA ([braveyoungpeople.org](http://braveyoungpeople.org))

## Hawaii Community-Based Responses Organizations and Programs

### ***Kaiwaloa Youth and Family Wellness Center***

In 2018, the Kawailoa Youth and Family Wellness Center was created to transform a former correctional center for youth into a place of healing. Almost all youth in their care had experienced trauma through abuse, neglect, homelessness, drug addiction, mental health issues, and experiences in foster care. Buildings and grounds formerly used to jail juveniles were transformed into community- and family-oriented program spaces including a young adult homeless shelter, a residential vocational training program for youth and young adults, and an assessment center and shelter for young victims of sex trafficking. By using Hawaiian healing practices and integrating them with therapeutic programming, in just a few years, the number of youth incarcerated at HYCF dropped from nearly 100 at its peak to about 25 on any given day.

### ***Project Kealahou***

Project Kealahou (PK) is another successful example of improving coordination among gender appropriate and trauma informed systems of care for at-risk females ages 11–18 years who have experienced psychological trauma. The project is a six-year, federally-funded program aimed at improving services and outcomes for Hawaii's female youth who are at risk for running away, truancy, abuse, suicide, arrest, and incarceration. PK builds upon two decades of sustained cross-agency efforts among the state's mental health, juvenile justice, education, and child welfare systems to promote system-of-care principles of community-based, individualized, culturally and linguistically competent, family driven, youth-guided, and evidence-based services. The program offers one-on-one mentoring in which the girl meets with an adult female staff member and youth participate in activities to meet with other girls in the program.

Additionally, the program provides trauma-focused, cognitive behavioral therapy in partnership with Hawaii Families as Allies (HFAA). Parents are also linked to HFAA to participate in family activities to reemphasize and reinforce family structure. The project is built around the idea that one of the important steps in working with traumatized youth is creating a safe environment and sense of normalcy, allowing youth to feel safe to express difficult and strong emotions they may normally keep inside.

Preliminary Evaluation results indicate significant improvement from baseline to six-month follow-up on measures of youth strengths, competence, depression, impairment, behavioral problems, emotional problems, and care giver strain.

### ***Peer Support Specialist Program***

The Peer Support Specialist Program (AKA Peer Support Kōkua Project) provides certified peer specialists who work with Native Hawaiians to provide training and employment of Native Hawaiians and help them navigate the child welfare and criminal/juvenile justice systems. This Program was awarded a three-year grant from the Administration for Native Americans.

### ***Hale Lanipolua***

Hale Lanipolua is an assessment center for survivors of trafficking which offers shelter and emergency services for youth up to age 18 on Oahu. The Program focuses on youth who have been abused or who are neglected, homeless, or facing a personal crisis. Youth work toward educational and vocational goals and learn life skills as they transition out of homelessness.

### ***Pearl Haven***

Pearl Haven is Hawaii's first long-term residential care facility for survivors of trafficking and sexual exploitation. The facility provides a 32-bed residential treatment program and provides trauma-informed therapeutic services for youth ages 11-17. The youth served typically have complex trauma or are diagnosed with Serious Emotional and Behavioral Disturbances (SEBD) as a result of likely sexual exploitation or trafficking.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

The roots of youth violence in America go very deeply into the nature of our society - our history and our institutions. As the research described above demonstrates, there is a complex interplay of racism, poverty, personal and community trauma, lack of resources, a failure of institutions to provide a sufficient and appropriate response to the needs of individuals at risk or fair treatment for everyone. All of these contribute to this ongoing crisis. The system of power in American society at all levels is weighted against Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC), people who identify as LGBTQ+, and low-income individuals. This manifests itself in a large number of ways which lead to many youth becoming victims of violence and many others acting out in counter-productive ways that can lead to trauma, death, and community disfunction, which primarily impact people who are in greatest need.

In their search for solutions, those with wealth and power, those from the dominant culture, tend to provide more resources to programs and to research that emphasizes quantitative outcomes and quick fixes, often disconnected from the lived experiences of those who have deep insights into youth violence.

Consequently, many of the “evidence-based” strategies we were able to find in the research are focused on “fixing” youth, intervening after the fact, rather than proactively addressing the root causes of violence or reducing the service gaps in meaningful ways that are likely to lead to long term, lasting changes.

For these reasons, in addition to our background research on useful policies and practices, we spent more time talking to local “experts”—people with lived experiences, people who work directly with local youth and their families, people in BIPOC communities most affected by violence toward or from youth. We looked at local statistics and local programs for viable solutions that may be equally or more effective than the so-called “best practices.” These more well-studied interventions may be useful too and should be considered, but often they have not been tested with clients or communities with diverse demographics. So rather than adopt a set of programs based on external reviewers' opinions, we have put equal emphasis on looking at what might be useful approaches from the viewpoints of key and representative local community members and activists.

## Key Background Findings from the Research

- **From 2016 to 2022, there were 214 firearms related homicides in Pierce County, 18.6% of the homicides in Washington State, despite the fact that Pierce county’s population constitutes 12% of the state.**
- **In the City of Tacoma, people under age 30 die from assault at a rate of 6.1 per 100,000.** This is higher than the overall Pierce County rate of 4.8 per 100,000. It accounts for 11% of all deaths from injury, including accidents and self-inflicted injuries.
- **48 percent of assault victims in 2021 were under the age of 30.**
- **Females are more often affected than males.**
- **Firearm violence is the most common cause of assault death and hospitalization.**
- **People die from gun violence in Tacoma at a rate of 4.9 per 100,000, which is higher than the Pierce County average (3.6 per 100,000).**
- **The most common reason someone with an injury was transported by Tacoma Fire Emergency Medical Services (EMS) was for bodily force assault.** The second most common reason for EMS transport was injuries related to firearms (21%), including 5% categorized specifically as “assault – firearm.”

- **In 2021 in Pierce County, youth were the most likely to receive emergency room care related to sexual violence.** Youth younger than 18 made up 45% of all sexual violence emergency room visits. Youth 18-24 made up 18% of the visits.
- **The rate of emergency room visits due to sexual violence in 2021 was four times higher for females under 30 than for males under 30.**

## Key Root Causes of Youth Violence

The elements of our society which consistently are identified in our research as contributing, directly or indirectly, to youth violence include the following.

### Racism and Discrimination

- This includes both individual race hatred and societal/institutional/structural racism and acts of discrimination.
- Racial trauma or race-based traumatic stress impact all BIPOC communities in the US. LGBTQ+ and Native American communities also suffer this trauma.
- Experiences of race-based discrimination can have long lasting psychological impacts on individuals and their communities.
- There is a strong relationship between race-based traumatic stress and trauma symptoms.
- Historical and cultural traumas can affect survivors' children for generations to come.

### Poverty and Income Inequality

- Easy access to guns by high-risk people, the rich-poor gap, low levels of citizens' trust in institutions, lack of economic opportunity, and inadequate public welfare spending are all related to firearm homicide rates in the US.

### Lack of Opportunities and Perception of Hopelessness

These often lead to:

- Current and generational family stress and trauma;
- Maladaptive personality traits and exposure to media violence;
- Alcohol abuse, drug use, and mental health;
- Disproportionate incarceration rates by race and gender; and

- The increasing negative impact of climate change on the environment and on the minds of youth.

## Persistent Gaps in Services and Resources

Many of the root causes of youth violence and gun violence have been known for many years, but our research shows that as a nation we consistently fail to provide the level of support youth and individuals at risk need to live safe and productive lives.

In addition to our review of the research, Geo gathered data from a broad sample of individuals involved or affected by violence in Pierce County. Among the service gaps consistently identified by our respondents are the following.

- A lack of economic resources such as financial help for families and individuals experiencing poverty, a dire lack of affordable housing, and insufficient youth shelters and emergency housing increase behaviors (e.g., theft) that lead to youth violence.
- The failure to adequately address community and individual trauma, especially insufficient counseling and mental health strategies to heal from trauma prevent healing that would likely lead to more pro-social and less anti-social behaviors (including criminal activity).
- The legal system does not adequately address the needs of the community and does not have the trust of youth due to punitive rather than supportive responses to what is happening in the community.
- A perceived lack of leadership including no coordination of a local network of community services, a lack of people stepping up to help, and those in authority not earning the trust of youth makes it appear to them that no one is taking responsibility for addressing key community needs. Respondents frequently cited a lack in employees in supportive services and law enforcement who come from communities of color or those with lived experience of the issues facing youth.
- Youth under the age of 19 spend most of their day in school, but they report they find few resources there to address the racism, crime, trauma, and physical and emotional violence they experience in and out of school. A shortage of counselors was frequently cited, as well as few staff members to whom the youth could relate.

## Evidence-Based and Locally-Identified Strategies

Despite the ongoing failure to fully address youth violence nationally and locally, the research documented above identified several promising practices that have had a significant impact on youth and communities. The agencies that have implemented these strategies recognize that to disrupt and heal trauma related to youth violence they must approach it as an issue of public health which requires working with multiple partners who deeply understand the needs of all the individuals affected, especially in already disadvantaged communities of color. Because youth violence results from multiple individual, family, and environmental factors that can accumulate over a child's development, a comprehensive approach that targets multiple risk and protective factors is essential to moving the needle on youth violence.

**The literature suggests that prevention, intervention, and treatment strategies that are trauma-informed are more effective.** Organizational trauma-informed care that is grounded in a deep understanding of the causes and consequences of trauma can promote resilience and healing, while subsequently reducing youth violence.

**The research makes it clear that elimination of violence and improvement of well-being for all members of society cannot be accomplished by one sector of society alone.** Justice, public health, education, health care (mental, behavioral, medical), government (local, state, and federal), social services, business, housing, media, and organizations that comprise the civil society sector, such as faith-based organizations, youth-serving organizations, foundations, and other non-governmental organizations all need to play important roles. In addition, the voices of children, youth, and families who are most affected by violence must be front and center.

Our findings suggest that the following skills and factors must be addressed when developing any intervention to prevent youth violence:

- Self-control skills,
- Social Competence skills,
- Improving parenting and family management,
- Minimizing exposure to violent media,
- Reducing youth access to guns,
- Reducing alcohol and substance abuse among youth, and
- Improving social relationships, resources, and management in schools.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on our findings, Geo submits the following recommendations to PPI and to the community for their consideration.

- Build an official and lasting **partnership** across the county with service agencies, governmental bodies, and community groups dedicated to addressing all the issues addressed in this report. The partnership should have identified and stable leadership, agreed upon standards and practices, and a system of accountability to the residents of Tacoma, Pierce County, and each other.
- **Establish formal links with the school districts** to coordinate efforts and support providing more qualified staff to work with students in implementing culturally-responsive, preventative strategies as well as trauma-informed interventions.
- **Include youth**, especially those with experience of violence, either as victim or perpetrator (recognizing that many perpetrators are also victims) in all discussions and decisions, and help them become more engaged in actions that improve their lives and communities.
- **Ensure that city and county law enforcement personnel are included** in all discussions and implementation of strategies. Educate them about what residents who are most affected by youth violence feel will be the most effective improvements they can make to their policies and practices. Develop open, ongoing opportunities for communication between law enforcement personnel and local, community-focused experts in ways that lead to consensus on the best approaches.
- Set up a formal process to **lobby the legislature** and other funding agencies for more attention to the issues of youth violence and more funding for intervention.
- Continue to **research effective practices** in Washington and other states, adapting what works to local needs.
- **Build a regularly updated and easily accessible set of resources** on useful approaches.
- **Evaluate the outcomes** of all activities initiated under the Strategic Plan and use the results in a continuous improvement cycle.

Provide small and large organizations with simple but useful tools for them to **self-assess their effectiveness** and create tools for **ongoing data collection, storage, analysis, and reporting** (perhaps with a common database and tool set to support them).







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