

HENNEPIN COUNTY
HUMAN SERVICES

Safe Communities

Report to the Hennepin County Board of Commissioners



September 2023



Safe Communities

We envision a future in Hennepin County where residents are healthy and successful, and where our communities are safe and vibrant.

A safe community provides access to places to work, learn, exercise and play for all residents; youth are engaged with school and extracurricular activities; residents have meaningful employment, income and educational options.

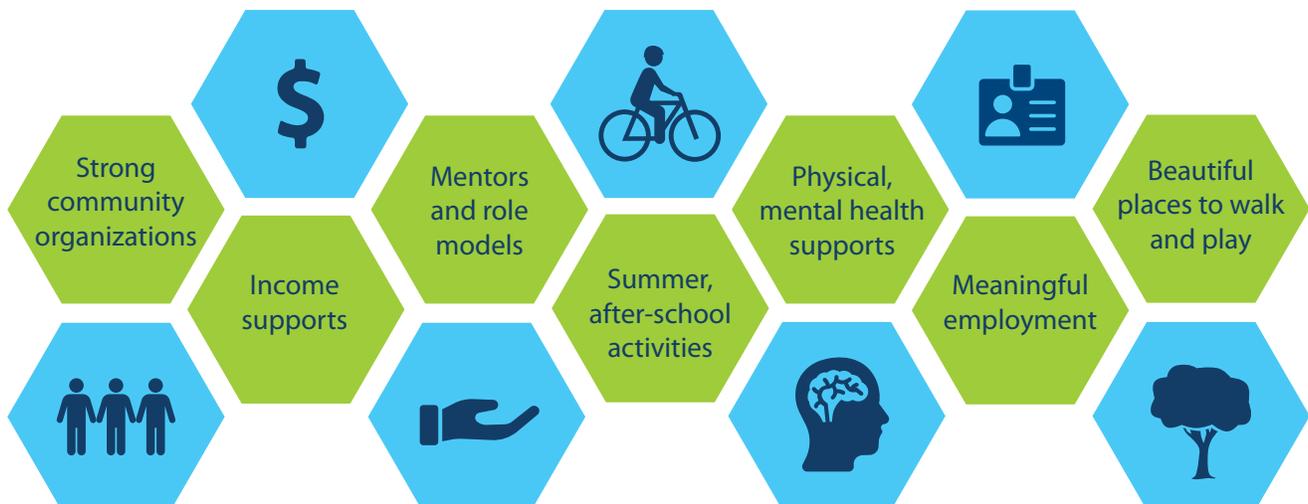
Every day, the headlines remind us of the urgency of our task. The data can be discouraging. Still, we know that each resident whose life is affected by community violence is an individual. Each is someone's son, daughter, friend or neighbor, whose life could take any of multiple paths.

We are energized by Hennepin County's opportunities to be a critical influence for change, in our work with partners and in our direct interventions to offer a mentor, an internship or an activity that could change the trajectory of a young person's life.

The work of Safe Communities is to break the cycle of violence in neighborhoods and families.

We view the work through a human services and public health lens, and we are guided by our conviction that disparities and community violence are inextricably linked. We can't solve for one without solving for the other.

Community assets as the basis for safety



Moving from short-term to sustainable

In response to community unrest and violence after the murder of George Floyd, amid the impacts of COVID-19 pandemic, the Hennepin County Board of Commissioners committed \$10 million of American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funding to be used for efforts intended to prevent, reduce and mitigate gun violence in communities disproportionately impacted by the pandemic.

The initial funds were allocated for short-term efforts focused on providing resources for violence interruption, intervention strategies and wraparound support services, using providers that had capacity and programming ready to provide immediate services.

We are now in a second phase, providing longer-term, widespread funding to community providers who work across a variety of areas.

Thanks to these investments from the board, we are now taking a long-term, layered, person-centered approach to break the cycle of violence and make every neighborhood safer. That's in addition to ongoing partnership with the community to increase safety, support victims and survivors and improve relationships.

Preventing long-term, disproportionate impact of trauma

Community violence, which occurs outside the home and includes gun violence, has serious and lasting effects on people's physical, mental, and social health.

We know that the resulting trauma can impede children's development and contribute to impaired decision-making, learning challenges, decreased connections to peers and adults and lead to trouble coping with stress.

We also know that gun violence disproportionately harms Black residents of Hennepin County. Black men experience firearm-related death rates that are more than twice that of white residents.

We are committed to a holistic approach that identifies drivers of violence, and addresses risk and protective factors. We aim to adopt evidence-based policies, programs and strategies that improve outcomes for communities harmed by community violence.

Disparities show up in every aspect of crime and violence:

- The communities that are most affected
- The characteristics of victims, survivors and perpetrators
- Outcomes in the criminal justice system
- The long-term impacts on families and neighborhoods.

Disparity in 2020 rate of homicide by firearms among youth and men, 10 to 24 years old



Everytown For Gun Safety Impact of Gun Violence on Black Americans. (2023). Everytown. www.everytown.org/issues/gun-violence-black-americans

Homicide by gun is number-1 cause of death

- For young people
- For Black men <55

Men of color are 4-times more likely to be victims of gun crimes

We approach this work with the understanding that addressing disparities leads to safer communities, and that safer communities will experience fewer disparities.

Violence prevention is a complex effort that requires aligning and coordinating multiple stakeholders and partners. Each of the disparity domains is affected by crime and community violence, therefore we are working across domains.

The community is at the center of violence prevention work because of course they are most affected and most knowledgeable about their own needs. Centering the community makes this work better informed and more sustainable.

Interaction and partnership between all the groups highlighted here is a recognition of our interdependence. Safe Communities is not alone in the work of violence prevention; our work is one piece of the multi-layered approach.



Collaboration with community at the center



Creating a different path for young people

We know that breaking the cycle of community violence starts with youth.

Data shows us that youth, particularly young people of color, are much too likely to be witnesses or victims — or to be involved in perpetrating community violence.

We also know that the age of youth involved in unsafe behavior is skewing younger, as young as 10.

Safe Communities work is particularly focused, therefore, on improving outcomes for young people who are at risk of experiencing community violence, with a focus on those between 10 and 24 years old.

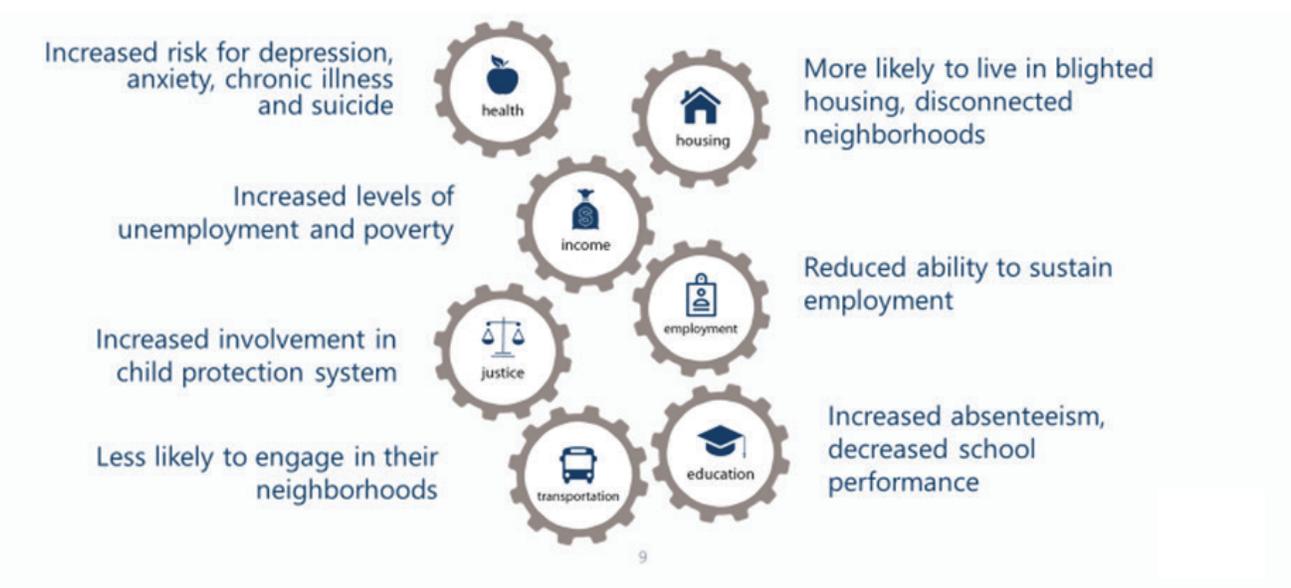
The specific impacts of community violence on youth are staggering, and they reach across disparity domains. They include:

- Graduation rates
- Employment options
- Long-term mental and physical health
- Housing
- Mobility options

Knowing the intense and immediate impact violence has on this population, we are focusing specifically on those youth who are considered to be already involved in violent behavior or are adjacent to it.

Violence prevention work needs to be as complex and multidimensional as the root causes of violence. Structural racism and poverty, lack of opportunity, perceptions of hopelessness, and gun violence all play a part.

Impact of violence on youth and families



Centering the work with guiding principles

The Centers for Disease Control, which describes gun violence as a critical public health problem, has created a framework for community violence

prevention that organizes the work across multiple levels. Safe Communities is focused on three of the framework pillars:

Creating protective environments

First, we are working to create protective environments. When young people feel — and are — physically safe, they are able to focus on something besides their immediate physical safety; they can be an active part of the community, and plan for their futures.

We are reducing exposure to community crime by supporting violence intervenors and disruptors who can step in as a conflict is happening. We know that violence intervenors, in connection with other services, change the dynamic in critical situations.

We are also working to enhance physical and social environments by supporting safe and beautiful places to play, walk and exercise.



Finally, we support providers to do street outreach, and work with community coalitions and leaders on changing the narrative of their communities.

Connecting young people to caring adults and activities:

When young people have the support of caring adults and interesting things to do, they feel valued, have a purpose, inspiration and hope for the future.

The programs we support in this area promote healing-centered engagement. We support mentoring, youth programming, healing circles, employment opportunities and summer and after school programs.

Participating in these programs acts as a preventive measure that allows youth and families to heal from past violence and connect to positive futures .



Strengthening Youth People's Skills

We also know that preventing violence is about more than merely moving the problem to another street. We need to give young people the skills to do productive things, and to resolve the conflict that comes into their lives.

We are doing this by supporting creative approaches to workforce development, job skills training, job shadowing and apprenticeships.

We are also offering training on conflict resolution skills, decision making tools, and building a support structure. These efforts are all aimed at providing young people with their own abilities and skills, to gain confidence and experience, and break the patterns of negative behavior.



Partnering with the community to prevent violence

The work of supporting local providers to do community-based prevention and intervention work is grouped together under the heading, Community Violence Prevention. This summer, we chose 46 community providers in a competitive process, to offer a variety of services and programs in the community.

While we know that violence prevention requires a sustained, long-term effort, we also know that young people have an immediate, urgent need for options. In preparation for summer, providers and county staff came together last spring to ensure that young people have a variety of opportunities and services, especially those who are most who are most harmed by community violence.

Activities have naturally aligned along the three pillars, to meet the need now and to further support violence prevention work.

Quarterly convenings: Providers will meet regularly as a community violence prevention network, sharing best practices and increasing organizational capacity.

Summer opportunities for young people



Creating protective environments

- Street outreach
- JCPP community events in 9 cities
- Cope trauma response



Connecting youth to caring adults, activities

- Youth outdoor activities
- Mentoring opportunities
- Coordination with community coalitions and neighborhood groups on summer events



Strengthening young people's skills

- Youth workforce development
- Internships, job shadowing, apprenticeships
- Conflict resolution

Preventing and addressing hate and bias



Another critical new area is working to prevent and address hate- and bias-motivated crimes and incidents.

Hate crimes and bias-motivated incidents are on the rise across the U.S. and in Minnesota. Locally, we've seen a series of news stories about shocking attacks on mosques and synagogues. Despite the headlines, we don't have hard data regarding where, when and how these incidents occur in Hennepin County. This matters because without data, we struggle to create policies and services to prevent incidents and mitigate harm.

We know that victims and survivors in Minnesota describe being unable to make reports because they don't know where or how to report, or police don't believe them when they do. Police reports often do not contain adequate information to charge cases, due to cultural misunderstandings or a lack of awareness. Police officers, policymakers, and community members often don't understand the impact of hate and bias incidents.

Hate crimes increasing, nationally and locally

2020 to 2021	United States	Minnesota
Incidences of hate crimes	+34.6%	+50.5%
People victimized by hate crimes	+25.3%	+37%

U.S. Department of Justice, Federal Bureau of Investigation. (2023). Uniform crime reporting handbook: UCR. [Washington, D.C.]: U.S. Dept. of Justice, Federal Bureau of Investigation.

Responding with head, heart

Responding to the rise in hate crimes and the active work of community providers, Safe Communities' Anti-Hate Initiative has dedicated up to \$1 million to support eight providers working in three areas:

Data collection

Developing training materials addressing:

- How to identify incidents of hate, bias-motivated incidents and crimes
- How to document incidents that do not rise to the level of a chargeable crime
- How to connect victims with resources.

Awareness and education

Developing educational materials, including:

- A youth-led response protocol to address identity-based harm in collaboration with Brooklyn Bridge Alliance
- A public service awareness campaign to debunk myths and combat biases associated with members of the LGBTQ and immigrant populations
- Anti-hate and anti-bullying materials to be used by culturally specific student groups in high schools and secondary schools, which will provide support and instructions on how to report a hate crime.

Convening community providers

Guiding ongoing work to create a way for stakeholders to meet and share strategies:

With our support, providers are developing innovative educational materials, training community members how to report incidents and creating culturally specific support services. Our goals are to increase understanding of this critical issue, provide more and better resources for victims, while building a plan for future work.

Creating a strong start for young people in the workplace

Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development (DEED) research has shown that the number one predictor of future success in the workforce is early exposure to work experience.

Youth work experience research indicates:

- Contextual or hands-on learning improves student's grades, attendance, and graduation rates.
- Youth who have an opportunity to gain work experience as teens are more likely to stay in school and avoid involvement in crime, gang behavior, drugs, and unwanted pregnancies.

- Teen employment contributes to significantly higher wages as young adults enter their twenties.
- Youth in low-income families have the least access to jobs.

Safe Communities is working across Hennepin County and with our community partners to offer access to internships, apprenticeships, job shadowing, short term trainings for youth most likely to be at risk of gun violence.

Helping young people see a different life

Early work experience exposure is

#1

predictor of future success



Hands-on learning improves

- Grades
- School attendance
- Graduation rates
- Future wages

Youth employment decreases

- Dropouts
- Crime and gang involvement
- Drug use
- Unwanted pregnancies

Preventing, addressing sexual exploitation and trafficking

Violence shows up in many forms in our community. In some cases, predators aim to control young people's very bodies, minds and autonomy.

The No Wrong Door program offers victims and survivors of sexual exploitation and trafficking safe places to live, heal and rebuild their lives, while also working to prevent trafficking through education and other services.

From the Minnesota Student Survey, we learn that over 5,000 middle school and high school students said they have traded sex for food, shelter, money and basic needs. That number is probably an underestimate.

The average age of entry of is 11 to 14 years old.

The FBI has identified the Twin Cities as one of the top locations in the United States for child sex. COVID-19 increased all vulnerabilities, putting more young people in front of more screens, making it even easier for traffickers and sex buyers to use the Internet to connect with a victim. Predators quickly adapted to these changes and we must as well.

This issue is real, it's happening here in our communities, and Hennepin County is responding.

In Minnesota, in 2011, the Minnesota Safe Harbor law authorized the creation of a victim-centered, statewide response for sexually exploited youth. No Wrong Door is Hennepin County's response model in action.

No Wrong Door's ultimate mission is to fight the sexual exploitation of youth. This includes young people 24 years old or younger who are at risk or who are already being exploited.

For young people, we provide access to vital services, such as:

- Emergency intervention
- Health care
- Counseling and holistic therapy
- Emergency shelter and housing
- Case management.
- Sex education and awareness

With our partners, we lead additional areas of work, such as prevention, training, and more.

Leveraging strong partnerships

At-risk youth and youth who have been exploited often engage with county systems and the community. We know that it is essential to collaborate with other areas across Hennepin County and leverage our relationships with community-based agencies.

We have eight formal contracts with community-based agencies, some of which we share with the Hennepin County Department of Community Corrections and Rehabilitations (DOCCR), and we recently released an RFP requesting proposals to expand the work.

We also have many informal partnerships with Hennepin County. In addition to DOCCR, we collaborate with Child Protection, the Hennepin County Attorney's Office, the Security Division, and Child Welfare — which also includes a unit dedicated to serving sexually exploited youth.

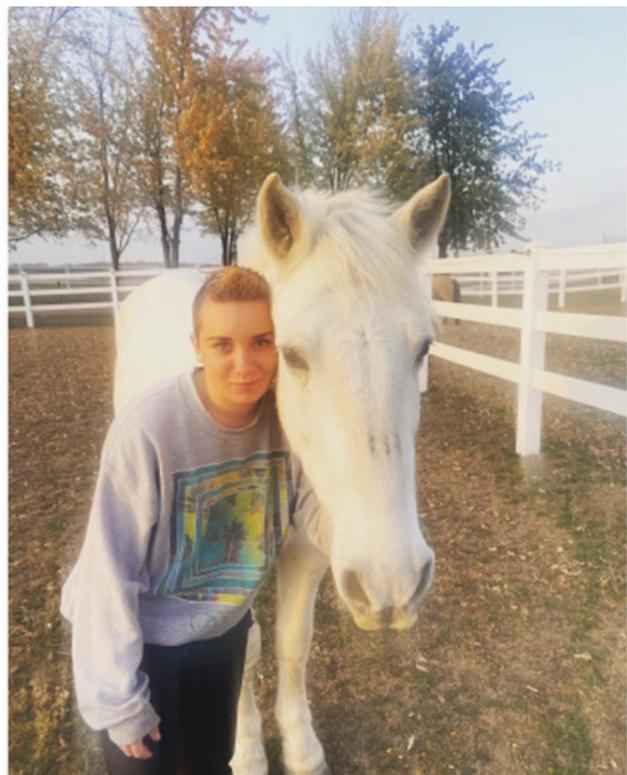
Through our contracts, from the Link's Passageways youth shelter to Hold Your Horses, we provide access to a range of services — from a safe bed to sleep in to unique, holistic therapy in a farm setting. This range of services meets each youth's needs, where they are, in the way best suited for them.

Young people healing and moving forward

We are supporting young adults to:

- Find housing and employment
- Explore their worlds
- Achieve sobriety
- Improve mental health
- Build healthy relationships
- Overcome trauma

Photo: The Hold Your Horses program provides equine therapy, including to survivors of sex trafficking.



Offering resources, preventive help to abuse victims and offenders

The first pillar of Community Violence prevention is to create protective environments — one way we can do that is by supporting the victims and survivors of domestic violence, also known as intimate partner violence. Working closely with the Domestic Abuse Service Center (DASC) and the Department of Community Corrections and Rehabilitation (DOCCR), Safe Communities supports community providers who offer services and supports for victims and survivors, and offender treatment.

Success in domestic abuse prevention



Preventing violence, supporting victims

Domestic abuse programming
\$2.1 million

13 contracts with community providers

- Victim supports
- Offender treatment
- Community training and education

Connections with DOCCR and Domestic Abuse Service Center

Culturally specific engagement

Based on results of gaps analysis study, 2022 cohort of provider agencies is focused on meeting the needs of targeted communities, including:

- Hmong
- East African
- Hispanic

Improving trust, relationships between community, police

We know that communities with strong, positive relationships between law enforcement and the communities they serve, provide a protected environment that is ultimately safer. The Joint Community Police Partnership (JCPP) fosters these relationships through a long-term commitment from Hennepin County and nine community police departments.

Eight embedded liaisons in nine cities create programming tailored to the needs of each community, including youth events and educational forums. Each city also has a Multicultural Advisory Committee that meets at least monthly with police leaders to discuss concerns, topics and trends. By building these relationships over time, communities are prepared to work together to handle conflict that arises, and resolve issues through communication and cooperation.

Joint Community Police Partnership: Trust and safety in interactions with police

			
Elevating community voice	Reflecting our communities	Educating and empowering residents	Facilitating positive interactions
8 embedded liaisons	Working with law enforcement to increase understanding	Multicultural advisory committees	800+ community events annually

Bloomington, Brooklyn Center, Brooklyn Park, Crystal, Edina, Hopkins, New Hope, Richfield, Robbinsdale

Moving forward

As a result of the work so far, Safe Communities has built a solid foundation for what is to come; our relationships within the community are strong and we have engaged with our partners to create a sustained effort.

Our work is helping young people to be safe and thriving today and to prevent the kind of toxic stress that can stay with them and their communities for years.

This is critical work that requires a sustained, multilayered, collaborative effort from staff and from leadership. We know that our work is only one piece of a larger puzzle. But we also know that our work today to provide opportunities for young people can have an impact that lasts for generations as young people create their own families and communities. We are energized about the relationships we've formed and the structures we've built so far.

The work we are now leading in Safe Communities requires building trust and relationships. We share in the urgency to address crime and violence in Hennepin County, as well as the desire for a sustained effort. We bring both to our work each and every day, and we will work together to make our communities safer and better.

