



The Gun Violence Crisis

The Gainesville City Commission has taken a strong stand against the proliferation of gun violence. In early 2023, the Commission voted to declare gun violence a public health crisis and drafted a motion to that effect. The Commission held a Gun Violence Prevention Summit and allocated American Rescue Plan Act funds to support gun violence prevention efforts.

The troubling trend of gun violence in our community has not abated. In 2023, the Gainesville Police Department reported 14 homicides with 16 victims in the City of Gainesville—13 of those victims were killed by gunfire. There were 60 persons shot or injured by gunfire; and 147 reports of shots fired within the City limits. It is crucial that we as a City strengthen and scale our efforts to curtail gun violence throughout the community.

City of Gainesville Gun Violence Prevention Initiative

The need to connect with and support community organizations capable of working with trusted messengers, conducting high-risk intervention work, and providing trauma informed outreach has been a continuing feature of City Commission policy discussions related to prioritizing gun violence prevention in Gainesville. Commissioners and staff have dedicated time and effort to collaborating with law enforcement, school officials, neighborhood groups, faith-based organizations, outreach providers and other community stakeholders involved in violence prevention.

IMPACT GNV

In accordance with the policy direction set by the City Commission, the Office of the City Manager is moving forward in implementing gun violence prevention strategies to supplement limited American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funding; staff also is concentrating efforts to seek out targeted grant funding for programs. By connecting community and City resources with on-the-ground needs in neighborhoods experiencing stressors, this initiative is uniquely positioned to maximize the impact of culturally sensitive community-based solutions. The implementation of preventative and responsive services in communities impacted by gun violence will be developed as a collaborative effort involving nonprofits, schools, faith-based organizations, grassroots advocates and/or formerly justice-involved individuals, among other partners.

As an engagement strategy, the City is launching its gun violence intervention and prevention efforts under the banner of **IMPACT GNV**. This strategy rests on a coalition designed to provide guidance, communication and support in the establishment of the City’s response efforts. By drawing on the expertise and leadership of the City and other member organizations, **IMPACT GNV** will enhance a community-based localized approach to gun violence prevention while implementing strategies designed to support the continuing enforcement and suppression efforts of the Gainesville Police Department. The work done by the Gainesville Police Department includes enforcement of restored pre-pandemic open container restrictions; the Gun Violence Prevention Initiative; the Co-Responder Program with Meridian Behavioral Healthcare; Gun Buy-Backs; Brass TRAX technology to investigate firearm crime; and other enforcement elements and partnerships.

IMPACT GNV was developed using the “Ten Essential Actions for Violent Crime Reduction” from the United States Department of Justice and with the Center for Disease Control and Prevention’s (CDC) social-ecological model as roadmap. It is administered by Community Health Director Brandy Stone and Gun Violence Intervention Program Manager Brittany Coleman under the direction of Gainesville Fire Rescue Chief Joe Dixon, serving on special assignment as Special Advisor to the City Manager on matters of public health and public safety.

IMPACT GNV incorporates feedback from community engagement efforts and feedback given during City sponsored listening sessions, one-on-one dialogues and the 2023 Choose Peace Gun Violence Summit. It uses this information to create a framework that will:

- Improve Access to mental health services, social support, and the arts
- Mobilize and enhance existing community-based services and groups
- Prioritize public health and safety efforts in areas most impacted by gun violence
- Analyze gun violence data
- Center youth
- Track progress

IMPACT GNV has already begun working within the community with staff attending 24 events to date.

- Reached over 200 people across all events
 - This includes Town Halls sponsored by Florida for All and Moms Demand Action with an

estimated 50 participants

- Held one-on-one meetings with community members from areas impacted by gun violence to hear concerns in a private setting
- Reached an estimated 100 Gainesville Police Department personnel including most patrol officers and detectives through attending Day Shift, Evening, and Midnight Shift Briefings as well as the Criminal Investigations Division Briefing

IMPACT GNV stakeholders and groups engaged include:

- Alachua County Victim Services
- Cease Violence in Da Hood
- Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc., Gainesville Alumnae Chapter
- Faith Leaders
- Florida for All
- Gainesville Fire Rescue
- Gainesville Housing Authority
- Gainesville Police Department
- I Care U Matter
- League of Women Voters
- Moms Demand Action
- Peaceful Paths
- People Against Violence Enterprises, Inc. P.A.V.E.
- Pleasant Street Community (May Meeting)
- Porters Quarters Community (May Meeting)
- Project Youth Build
- Public Defender's Office for the Eighth Judicial Circuit
- State Attorney's Office for the Eighth Judicial Circuit
- Safety Net Collaborative
- System of Care

IMPACT GNV efforts currently underway include:

- Engaging stakeholders in Gun Violence Prevention Month in June
- Developing a gun violence awareness social media and messaging campaign

- Exploring grant funding opportunities
- Taking next steps to establish the Community Gun Violence Prevention Alliance approved by the Gainesville City Commission, Alachua County Board of Commissioners and Santa Fe College Board of Trustees
- Hosting crisis Intervention and de-escalation workshops for community members and health and social service providers in partnership with the Alachua County Crisis Center
- Expanding staffing to place boots on the ground by bringing in four staff members from B.O.L.D. (Brave, Overt Leaders of Distinction) and contracting with the Willie Mae Stokes Community Center / Violence Interrupter Partners

B.O.L.D. (Brave, Overt Leaders of Distinction)

The Brave Overt Leaders of Distinction Program (B.O.L.D.) historically has provided assistance to young men in need of guidance as they navigate life situations and circumstances. Many who benefit from this program have been justice-involved, are working with educational challenges, and are unemployed or underemployed. They receive case management, life skills, and other interventions to spur personal development and growth.

In an effort to maximize and leverage resources, the City will place the B.O.L.D. program on special assignment under Gainesville Fire Rescue Chief Joe Dixon in connection with the City's Community Health / Gun Violence Prevention efforts. The special assignment is effective immediately. The B.O.L.D. program is poised to provide support to gun violence prevention and intervention efforts, as well as partner with the Gainesville Fire Rescue Community Resource Paramedicine program to work with neighbors to more efficiently facilitate access to healthcare, housing, transportation and other needs.

Violence Interrupter Partners (VIP)

Also, the City Manager's Office is entering into a partnership with the Willie Mae Stokes Community Center, a nonprofit, tax-exempt organization that has served the youth of Alachua County, Gainesville and surrounding communities since 2018. Executive Director Bishop Christopher Stokes has more than 20 years of experience engaging youth through community events, outreach and mentoring programs. He has worked with young people involved in the juvenile justice system, and he is a recent recipient of One Nation One Project GNV Phase Two grant funding, with which the Willie Mae Stokes Community Center produced the play, "Who's in the Box?" This theatrical presentation, with two productions to date, addresses the individual, relational, and community level factors related to youth gun violence.

As coordinator of the VIP program, the Willie Mae Stokes Center will be contracted to work with the City of Gainesville in the creation of a community network of Violence Interrupter Partners. This network will extend into

schools, after-school programs, churches, and groups connected to advocacy for reform of justice-involved individuals. It will create an interconnected framework that utilizes prevention and intervention strategies to interrupt violence and provide for positive and supportive structures and programs across the community.

The Willie Mae Stokes Community Center is an organization uniquely positioned to partner with the City and educate young people about the dangers of gun violence, appeal to youth to resist gun violence, and offer methods of resolving conflict without resorting to violence. The City of Gainesville envisions the new partnership as a productive next step to strengthen efforts.

Other IMPACT GNV Program Components

Community Care Callouts (CCC)

The purpose of this collaboration between Gainesville Fire Rescue, the Gainesville Police Department, and other community agencies is to continue building and refining the immediate response solution that has been utilized in neighborhoods including Sweetwater Square and Lincoln Estates. While the broader discussion of gun violence prevention is occurring, these groups will work to ensure an effective short-term response is in place for communities in need. They will visit communities to offer support services, trauma informed outreach and public safety information in the wake of events that involve gun violence.

One Nation One Project (ONOP)

One Nation One Project is a national initiative that began with Gainesville and eight other U.S. cities. The goal of ONOP is to use the arts and culture to promote community healing and well-being. This project unites artists, local governments and community health providers. In January 2022, the City Commission recognized youth gun violence as a local issue of great concern and chose to allocate two-percent of Gainesville's ARPA funds to this effort—almost \$650,000. Over the past two years, the City has created a youth steering committee and pulled in community members in the fields of mental health, youth services and the arts.

After providing smaller grants to local organizations in Phase One of the program, last year began Phase Two. Grants totaling \$200,000 were awarded to six area organizations including Aces in Motion, Dream on Purpose, the Hippodrome, and the Willie Mae Stokes Community Center. The next major ONOP milestone is the July 27, 2024 National Community Culminating Event, produced by ONOP Artistic Director Marion J. Caffey, Gainesville native and producer of *Amateur Night at the Apollo*, the longest running talent competition in American history.

Positive Engagement to Guide Young People

Mirror Image Leadership Academy Gala Co-Presenting Sponsorship - \$10,000

The City of Gainesville serves as co-presenting sponsor for the official gala celebrating the graduation of the first cohort of young scholars to complete the three-year program at Mirror Image Leadership Academy (MILA). The ceremony on Thursday, May 16, 2024, marks the success of this leadership discovery experience for incoming seventh graders. Primarily targeting African American students, the academy's comprehensive curriculum comprises a School Year Academy, an Extended Day After-school Program, and a Summer Academy featuring local, national, and international travel opportunities that in 2023 brought these inaugural scholars on a journey to Ghana. Each year, MILA is committed to expanding young minds through exposure to diverse people, places, and ideas.

P.A.V.E. (People Against Violence Enterprises) – est. \$60,000 since 2000

P.A.V.E. is an organization dedicated to paving the way for a more peaceful community for our youth. Founded by Rev. Karl Anderson, a Senior Pastor of Upper Room Ministries, P.A.V.E. was established in August 2000 in response to news reports of violence in the schools. In the nearly 25 years since, the group has hosted many events to promote violence prevention education and mediation. In addition, P.A.V.E. and primary sponsor Meridian Behavioral Healthcare have distributed approximately 50,000 backpacks as part of a communitywide "Back to School" rally promoting student health and safety. Since its inception, the City of Gainesville has annually assisted these efforts with funding support. With recent funding through the American Rescue Plan Act Violence Intervention project in the amount of \$20,000, the total level of City support is an estimated \$60,000.

"Class of Her Own" Documentary Film Screening

(Co-Sponsored with Alachua County Public Schools)

A critically acclaimed documentary about a highly innovative teacher from east Gainesville will anchor the Journey to Juneteenth Film Festival at 6 pm June 8 at the A. Quinn Jones Museum and Cultural Center. Brought to Gainesville for a community screening through a partnership between the City of Gainesville Department of Parks, Recreation and Cultural Affairs and Alachua County Public Schools, "Class of Her Own" tells the story of Duval Elementary teacher Gloria Jean Merriex's reinvention of her school's curriculum to draw on the power of hip-hop, dance, and call-and-response to teach reading and math.

Coordination with Federal Gun Violence Prevention Efforts

In September 2023, President Joe Biden established the first-ever White House Office of Gun Violence Prevention to implement and expand upon key executive and legislative actions taken to save lives. The Office of Gun Violence Prevention is overseen by Vice President Kamala Harris, who has been a key leader in the Biden-Harris

Administration's effort to end our nation's gun violence epidemic.

- **District 3 Commissioner Casey Willits** met with staff from the White House Office of Gun Violence Prevention on Dec. 1, 2023. The Commissioner shared materials from the City of Gainesville's Gun Violence Prevention Summit and discussed grant programs.
- **Mayor Harvey Ward** met with staff from the White House Office of Public Engagement on Feb. 7, 2024 to discuss a number of issues including gun violence.
- **Mayor Pro Tem Cynthia Moore Chestnut** met with United States Representative Maxwell Frost (D-Orlando), the Vice Chair of the Congressional Gun Violence Prevention Task Force, on March 12, 2024; they discussed gun violence among other issues.
- **Government Affairs and Community Relations Director John Alexander and Legislative Affairs Coordinator Dr. Thomas Harrington** met with United States Department of Justice staff on March 13, 2024 to discuss gun violence and other funding opportunities.