

City of Gainesville

# Youth Steering Committee



**Gun Violence  
Prevention &  
Solutions**

**An Arts and  
Public Health  
View  
FY25**

# Agenda



- Member Introductions
- The Story of Gainesville Youth Gun Violence
- Our Goals and Accomplishments
- Operational Updates and Outcomes
- A Public Health view of Gainesville Youth Gun Violence
- Call to Action





# Members

- Ebony Sheppard
- Marland Perry
- Kione Forrest
- Christopher Suarez
- Victoria Paige – new
- Ethan Jordan - new
- Sinatra Shaw – new
- Journei Anderson – new
- Angelo Footman – new
- Khamanni Smith – new

The Story:  
“We’re not dumb,  
we’re just  
misunderstood”



## CommuniTEEN Empowered Youth Voices:

Gun Violence casts a long shadow over the lives of young people, yet their voices offer a beacon of hope. This story explores their lived experiences, their refusal to normalize fear, and their powerful vision for a safer future.



# Our Committee Goals



- To elevate youth voices on prevention and solutions to youth gun violence and inform City leadership.
- Share information about Gainesville youth gun violence with The Gun Violence Prevention “Alliance”, IMPACT – GNV, and the community.
- Include youth voices city –wide through CommuniTEEN Peer to Peer Dialogues
- Create a community of youth who increase their leadership, advocacy, and well-being skills.
- Have a group of youth from various high schools within Gainesville.

# Accomplishments & Engagements

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- August 2024 – Presentation to City Commission
- September 2024 – Commission Approved \$173, 000 in American Rescue Plan Act funds to go toward the Youth Steering Committee’s recommendations on solutions to youth gun violence.
- October 2024 – Marland Perry presented with Leslie Ladendorf at the National League of Cities “Race Forward Cultural Week of Action”
- October 2024 – YSC – GNV presented to the Alachua County Gun Violence Prevention “Alliance”



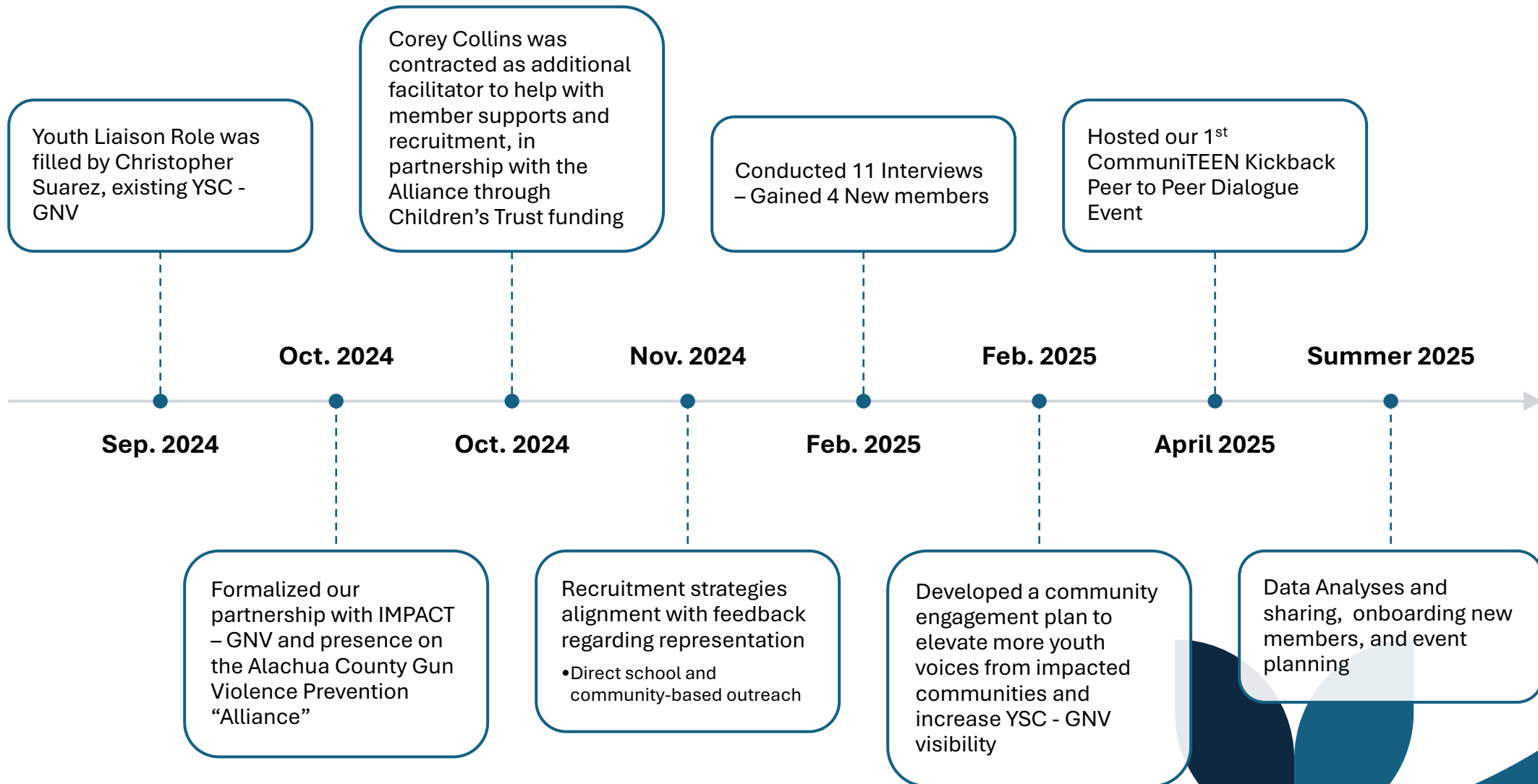
# Accomplishments & Engagements

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- December 2024 – YSC - GNV met with Shaquille O'neal – at A Very GNV Holiday Parade
- January 2025 – Annual State of the City – YSC –GNV Meeting with the Mayor
- February 2025 – Met with the County to share information on how to start a Youth Steering Committee
- April 2025 – July 2025 CommuniTEEN Kickback: Peer to Peer Dialogues Events and IMPACT – GNV Open House tabling



# Operational Updates





# Operational Outcomes



FULL COMMITTEE OF 10 MEMBERS



REPRESENTING 5 HIGH SCHOOLS,  
2 COLLEGES/UNIVERSITIES AND  
OLDER ADOLESCENT YOUTH



COMMUNITEEN EVENTS: 44 YOUTH,  
9 PARTNERS

# CommuniTEEN Kickbacks: Peer to Peer Dialogues

Who: 44 Youth,  
Ages 14 – 24

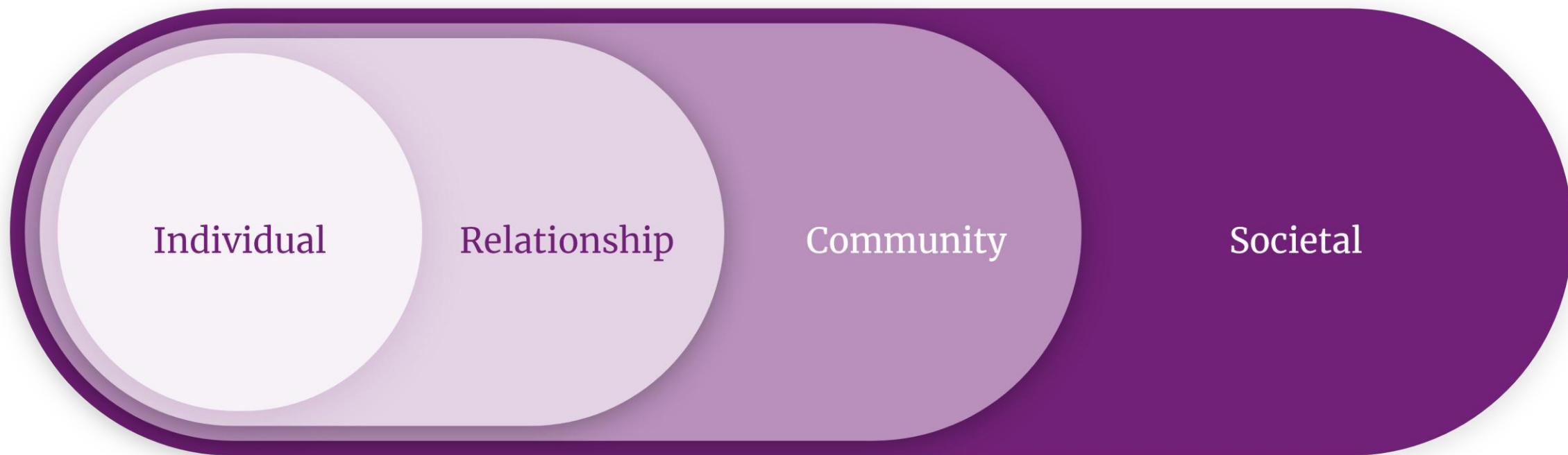
What: Peer to Peer Dialogues  
on youth gun violence to better  
understand the influences and  
solutions to gun violence from  
across Gainesville youth

When: April 2025  
and July 2025

Where: Communities with high  
risks of gun violence  
Residences of Oakview  
Apartments  
& Gainesville Housing Authority  
Youth Leadership Academy

Why: Representation of more  
youth voices creates a greater  
impact, provides a more  
complete story, and allows  
youth to be heard!

# Public Health View of Gainesville Youth Gun Violence



# Individual – Level Factors



## Influences:

- Youth live in a constant state of fear and anxiety
- Many have adult responsibilities
- Identity Struggles
- Emotional Suppression, detachment, lack of Coping Skills and Support
- Results from traumatic experiences and unaddressed emotional wounds
- Feel they need protection and control
- Youth are looking for connection in unhealthy ways

## Solutions:

- Youth want to channel anger and emotions into physical outlets and productive activities
- Have art programs for therapy and expression
- Learn alternatives for emotional release
- Programs to teach taking person responsibility
- Have a therapist, mentor, supportive community programs





***“If you really want to  
stop it, take all the  
built-up anger  
and  
have them put it into  
something productive”***

# Relationships Matter

## Influences:

- Teens point to family problems, negative mentorship, and a lack of adult guidance
- Youth model what they see around them
- Negative mentors and older generations who promote weapons and violence in the community
- Peer pressure and perceived status
- Internal struggles between being yourself and being shaped by your environment
- Trauma influences youth sell drugs and join gangs – to cope and find connection

## Solutions:

- The presence—or absence—of stable family dynamics is a clear theme. Teens express a need for deeper family involvement in youth guidance.
- Youth express a desire for guidance, support, and inspiration from **adults and peers** alike—someone to show them another way forward.





***The message:  
Youth trust what they  
know even if it's  
destructive***

# The Power of Community



## **Influences:**

- Community influences and easy access to guns
- Kids are mentored by people who sell or promote weapons
- Violence and trauma in middle and high schools – KMS, GHS, WMS, SFHS, EHS with lack of effective controls
- Widespread community violence – such as the Easter event
- Escalating nature of violence
- Boredom – kids don't have access to programs they find purpose and channel energy in guns and violence

## **Solutions:**

- Schools to become a safe haven of belonging and trust
- Police and educational alternative programs should focus on enforcement and opportunities
- Structured activities like sports, music, mentorship programs to help kids have a sense of purpose and connection
- Community action through artwork
- Solutions need to be homegrown from the community





***“It’s the worst it’s ever  
been”***

### **Influences:**

- Cyberbullying, harassment and threats have become common and normal on social media
- Many youth create social media identities of protection, toughness, and respect through guns and violence
- Artists are influencers, music can have a positive and negative influence on youth
- Social media, music and online can perpetuate harmful ideas and glorify weapons
- Youth don't believe our country cares about them, and that authority figures in society do what they want
- Society's views on gun access influences how easily guns are available to youth

### **Solutions:**

- Stronger laws and policies to limit gun accessibility
- Painting public anti-violence messages
- Youth want artists to be role models and speak to youth
- Laws that balance artistic freedom and social responsibility
- Using social media to inspire change

# Overcoming Societal Pressures



# Ending the Story



- Youth have a clear desire for PEACE and SAFETY – which starts in their communities, schools, and with their peers
- They want support and guidance from parents, family members, positive community members, counselors, and mentors
- Our youth are longing to feel emotionally safe, capable, and to have outlets to channel their emotions such as youth programs
- Youth want their own communities to be a part of the changes needed to stop youth gun violence.
- Negative societal pressures such as social media, music influencers and individuals in positions of power are part of shaping the norm of non-violence, and youth are asking them to be a part of this change
- Policy reforms are needed to change gun laws

Our youth urgently need practical solutions to complex issues at all levels! Youth gun violence has impacted and shaped them far greater than they ever imagined!

# Call to Action and Next Steps



## City

- Use the Youth Steering Committee – GNV data and solutions to help shape gun violence programming and funding in the areas of personal, relationships and community efforts
- City to include this presentation in the gun violence strategic plan
- Promote positive societal norms around connection, belonging, and safety
- Support laws of increased gun control and educational improvements in our county.

## Youth Steering Committee – GNV

- Continue CommuniTEEN: Peer to Peer Dialogues to include youth voices city-wide in gun violence prevention & solutions
- Continue to present and participate in community events to increase awareness
- YSC – GNV leadership – continue to work with the county to inform county-based youth steering committees
- Use CommuniTEEN data to develop community-specific gun violence prevention plans and programs with partners at Oakview and GHA



Questions





***Thank You***



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**Youth Steering Committee  
Website and Application**  
[GainesvilleFL.gov/YouthSteeringCommittee](http://GainesvilleFL.gov/YouthSteeringCommittee)

