SAFER TACOMA

Building a Safer Tacoma:
Research-Informed Strategies

2024

Everyone involved must be open to fresh approaches and trust that diverse community partners are working toward a common goal:

A SAFER TACOMA.

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Introduction

Communities across the nation have reduced crime effectively through well-coordinated, action-oriented planning that engages a diverse spectrum of stakeholders, from government bodies and grassroots organizations to businesses and neighborhoods.[1] In Tacoma, as in many other places, a recent uptick in violence—particularly youth violence—underscores the pressing need for a comprehensive blueprint aimed at enhancing community safety.[2] Although crafting an effective strategy is a complex process, it is necessary to effect meaningful change. This approach also acknowledges the negative consequences of relying on increased incarceration as a primary tool to reduce violence.

Traditionally, public safety has been left to public entities (e.g., police, fire, prosecution) to solve; however, government agencies alone cannot fix these issues. An effective planning process requires input from key stakeholders, community leaders, and ordinary citizens—all of whom must be equally committed to the cause. For Tacoma, this collaborative effort hinges on the hope for a safer tomorrow and the desire to dispel the perception that it is a "dangerous" city. To succeed, everyone involved must be open to fresh approaches and trust that diverse community partners are working toward a common goal: a safer Tacoma.

To develop a comprehensive and actionable community safety strategy, the city must assess its current landscape; identify existing assets; envision its future; pinpoint strengths and opportunities; recognize gaps; and cultivate innovative ideas. This report provides insights and guidance to support Tacoma in this vital undertaking.

1. "Reimagining Public Safety: A Toolkit for Cities and Towns," National League of Cities, January 2022. https://www.nlc.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/YEF-RPS-Toolkit_FINAL.pdf; National Crime Prevention Council, "Creating a Blueprint for Community Safety," U.S. Department of Justice, 1998. https://www.ojp.gov/pdffiles1/Digitization/171674NCJRS.pdf.
2. Aneesa Grant, "Tacoma Takes Urgent Action Against Youth Violence," *The Seattle Medium*, May 24, 2023. https://seattlemedium.com/tacoma-takes-urgent-action-against-youth-violence; Dan Frosch and Zusha Elinson, "Juvenile Crime Surges, Reversing Long Decline. 'It's Just Kids Killing Kids.'," *The Wall Street Journal*, Jan. 23, 2023. https://www.wsj.com/articles/violent-crime-rate-juvenile-11674485556; "Responding to Youth Gun Violence, City Council Unanimously Adopts Resolution 41197 Establishing $300,000 in Additional Funding for Youth Summer Programming in Tacoma," City of Tacoma, Washington, May 16, 2023. https://www.cityoftacoma.org/government/city_council/city_council_news_releases/resolution_41197.

Methodology

To gain a thorough understanding of the increase in violence in Tacoma, we applied a mixed-method approach using community-based, participatory research consisting of qualitative data from 18 interviews involving a total of 27 participants, quantitative data from eight reports/studies, participation in three community meetings, and a review of local crime statistics and media reports. Aiming to obtain a variety of perspectives on the issue, we relied heavily on the Tacoma community to explain challenges and potential solutions and considered that feedback alongside our research and practical expertise. We also analyzed historical records pertaining to violence in Tacoma and attended multiple internal meetings with city staff. While this report addresses a broad range of community safety aspects, the paramount concern of youth violence is our focus.

STUDIES AND REPORTS REVIEWED

- Tacoma Police Department Violent Crime Reduction Plan[3]
- Peace Point Strategic Plan[4]
- Youth & Young Adult Violence Assessment: City of Tacoma[5]
- Report on the Alternative Response Study: Tacoma, Washington[6]
- Tacoma Gang Assessment[7]
- Final Report: Strategic Alliance to End Family Violence[8]
- City of Tacoma Homelessness Strategy[9]
- Pierce County Criminal Justice Review of Policies & Practices[10]

OTHER ITEMS

- *Since I Been Down* (Documentary film)[11]
- Local print news outlets

ORGANIZATIONS REPRESENTED IN INTERVIEWS

- The Big Homie Program
- City of Tacoma–Neighborhood and Community Services
- Imagine Justice Project
- Metro Parks Tacoma
- Pierce County Council
- Pierce County Family Council
- Pierce County Juvenile Court
- Pierce County Prosecuting Attorney's Office
- Tacoma-Pierce County–Eastside Family Resource Center
- Tacoma City Council
- Tacoma Fire Department (TFD)
- Tacoma Police Department (TPD)
- Tacoma Public Schools

3. Michael R. Smith et al., "Tacoma Police Department Violent Crime Reduction Plan, 2022-25," City of Tacoma, Washington, June 24, 2022. https://www.cityoftacoma.org/UserFiles/Servers/Server_6/File/Police/Crime%20Plan.pdf.

4. "Peace Point: The Community-Driven Plan for Youth Safety," Imagine Justice Project, last accessed Oct. 14, 2023. https://www.imaginejusticeproject.org/_files/ugd/3cb5c5_c84a98a7c635414ca64e0cd0900a4c3c.pdf.

5. "Youth & Young Adult Violence Assessment: City of Tacoma," Tacoma-Pierce County Health Department, August 2022. https://www.cityoftacoma.org/UserFiles/Servers/Server_6/File/NCS/2022-08-24YouthandYoungAdultViolenceAssessment.pdf.

6. "Report on the Alternative Response Study: Tacoma, Washington," Matrix Consulting Group, May 21, 2021. https://cityoftacoma.org/UserFiles/Servers/Server_6/File/cms/CMO/Transformation%20Updates/Tacoma%20Alternative%20Response%20Report%205-21.pdf.

7. Michelle Arciaga Young, "Tacoma Gang Assessment," Tytos Consulting, January 2019. https://cms.cityoftacoma.org/ncs/gang-reduction/2019GangAssessment.pdf.

8. "Final Report: Strategic Alliance to End Family Violence," City of Tacoma and Pierce County Human Services, February 2021. https://www.cityoftacoma.org/UserFiles/Servers/Server_6/File/cms/NCS/Domestic%20Violence/Strategic%20Alliance%20Recommendations%20Report%202021.pdf.

9. "Homelessness Strategy: 2022-2028," City of Tacoma, last accessed Oct. 26, 2023. https://www.cityoftacoma.org/UserFiles/Servers/Server_6/File/cms/NCS/NCS/Homelessness%20Strategy-v3_footnotes.pdf.

10. "Criminal Justice Review of Policies & Practices," Pierce County, Washington, Sept. 10, 2020. https://www.piercecountywa.gov/DocumentCenter/View/94647/Digital_Report_Criminal_Justice_Review_Council_Final.
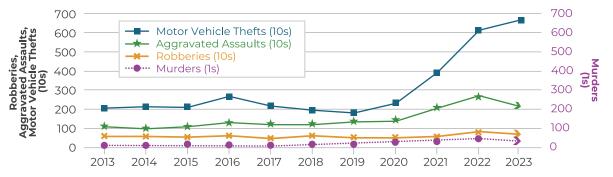
11. *Since I Been Down*, directed by Gilda Sheppard (Jimmie Lewis Productions & Prison Education LLC, 2020). https://www.sinceibeendown.com.

Current Landscape

> " A mid-year update to Tacoma's City Council "reveals a notable 18.6% decrease in violent street crime (robbery, aggravated assault, and murder)…"   ——City of Tacoma[12]

The city of Tacoma has struggled with spikes in violence before. Notorious shootouts and persistent street violence plagued the community in the late 1980s and '90s, bringing national attention and a reputation as one of America's most dangerous cities.[13] Although crime began to abate in the early 2000s, increases in violent crime have led to several studies on gangs and youth violence over the last two decades.[14]

Like many other major U.S. cities, Tacoma struggled with crime throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. Reported crimes spiked from 19,392 in 2021 to 22,860 in 2022.[15] The surge in violent crime, car theft, and gun violence has created widespread concern about a return to previous decades, when murders and drive-by shootings were rampant. In 2021, the city saw its deadliest year on record—a grim milestone surpassed in 2022.[16] Thankfully, the trend cooled off in 2023.[17] The following figure is based on data provided by the TPD.

High rates of family and interpersonal violence have also plagued the city.[18] And racial disparities among both victims and those arrested are impossible to ignore.[19]

12. Tacoma Police Department, "City Council Briefed on Tacoma Police Department's Violent Crime Reduction Plan Progress," City of Tacoma, Washington, April 16, 2024. https://www.cityoftacoma.org/in_the_news/city_council_briefed_on_tacoma_police_department_s_violent_crime_reduction_plan_progress#:~:text=The%20mid%2Dyear%20update%20reveals,the%20efficacy%20of%20targeted%20interventions.

13. Matt Driscoll, "Tacoma came together 30 years ago to stop a deadly crime wave. Can we do it again?," *The News Tribune*, March 8, 2023. https://www.thenewstribune.com/news/local/news-columns-blogs/matt-driscoll/article263747918.html.

14. Sean Robinson and Ian Swenson, "When it comes to crime, we're No. 1 statewide," *The News Tribune*, Oct. 21, 2017. https://www.thenewstribune.com/news/local/crime/article179865671.html; Young. https://cms.cityoftacoma.org/ncs/gang-reduction/2019GangAssessment.pdf; Tacoma-Pierce County Health Department. https://www.cityoftacoma.org/UserFiles/Servers/Server_6/File/NCS/2022-08-24YouthandYoungAdultViolenceAssessment.pdf.

15. *Crime in Washington 2022 Annual Report*, Washington Association of Sheriffs & Police Chiefs, last accessed Oct. 30, 2023. https://www.waspc.org/crime-statistics-reports.

16. Peter Talbot, "Bucking national trend, Tacoma recorded its highest tally of homicides on record in 2022," *The News Tribune*, Jan. 17, 2023. https://www.thenewstribune.com/news/local/crime/article270902872.html.

17. Michael R. Smith et al., "Tacoma Violent Crime Reduction Project Year 1 Results," Center for Applied Community & Policy Research, Nov. 7, 2023. https://www.cityoftacoma.org/UserFiles/Servers/Server_6/File/Police/TPD-Violent%20Crime%20Prev%20Plan%20brief%2011072023.pdf.

18. "Final Report: Strategic Alliance to End Family Violence." https://www.cityoftacoma.org/UserFiles/Servers/Server_6/File/cms/NCS/Domestic%20Violence/Strategic%20Alliance%20Recommendations%20Report%202021.pdf.

19. "Gun Violence in Washington State by the Numbers," Alliance for Gun Responsibility, last accessed Nov. 27, 2023. https://gunresponsibility.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/GV-Fact-Sheet.pdf; "Criminal Justice Review of Policies & Practices." https://www.piercecountywa.gov/DocumentCenter/View/94647/Digital_Report_Criminal_Justice_Review_Council_Final.

Current Landscape

Differing beliefs exist locally regarding the catalyst for this unsettling progression of criminal behavior, from a void in accountability to increasing economic instability in traditionally marginalized neighborhoods. Nationally, the COVID-19 pandemic and the tragic murder of George Floyd in 2020 had a profound, long-lasting social impact, particularly among young people. Pandemic closures and lockdowns disrupted the lives of many youth and families, leading to isolation, interrupted education, and economic hardship. Combined with increased idle time and limited recreational outlets, these stressors created an environment in which frustration and anxiety could fester. Floyd's murder—and the subsequent widespread protests against police brutality—brought attention to longstanding issues of racial injustice and inequality. For many young individuals, this period of intense social unrest stirred strong emotions that led to a sense of helplessness and anger. The convergence of these factors could have contributed to the surge in youth violence, as individuals sought an outlet for their pent-up frustrations or engaged in acts of rebellion against a system they perceived as unjust. The situation in Tacoma was further complicated by tragic use-of-force incidents like the Manny Ellis case, which increased local tension between law enforcement and the community.[20]

Currently, many working people in Tacoma fall below the poverty line, earning stagnant incomes that can barely support their households in the current inflationary environment.[21] This hardship often compels families to juggle two or three jobs, leaving little time to focus on their children. An escalating housing crisis has forced many into resource-deprived areas.[22] Homelessness in Pierce County has also exploded over the last few years, increasing 40 percent from 2017 to 2022.[23] Though some financial assistance is available, tight family budgets preclude some parents from enrolling their children in prosocial activities. In effect, these children are left to fend for themselves—and, despite its best efforts, the school system cannot fill all the gaps.

While some define youth violence in Tacoma as a "gang problem," police say the organized gangs of the past have been replaced by smaller, looser, unaffiliated neighborhood groups.[24] These groups may sell drugs or engage in violence, but they do not have the hierarchy or structure of gangs—making their actions more difficult to predict. Some interviewees noted the migration of gang violence to Tacoma from unincorporated regions of the county. The allure of these groups in areas like Hilltop and the East Side is potent and enduring because they do not merely offer protection; they also tap into youths' need to belong and offer a sense of control. In these areas, crime

20. Martha Bellisle, "Washington officers on trial in deadly arrest of Manny Ellis, a case reminiscent of George Floyd," *Associated Press*, Oct. 1, 2023. https://apnews.com/article/police-murder-charge-black-man-washington-4e164d9d8f7107ac390b46e100d83ec8.
21. "QuickFacts: Tacoma city, Washington," United States Census Bureau, last accessed Oct. 18, 2023. https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/tacomacitywashington/IPE120222.
22. "Affordable Housing Action Strategy," City of Tacoma, Summer 2023. https://www.cityoftacoma.org/UserFiles/Servers/Server_6/File/cms/Office%20of%20Strategy/AHAS/AHAS%20Publication%20FINAL.pdf.
23. "Homelessness Strategy: 2022-2028." https://www.cityoftacoma.org/UserFiles/Servers/Server_6/File/cms/NCS/NCS/Homelessness%20Strategy-v3_footnotes.pdf.
24. Young. https://cms.cityoftacoma.org/ncs/gang-reduction/2019GangAssessment.pdf.

Current Landscape

and drugs can sometimes be the only route to basic necessities like food and shelter—underscoring the fact that some youth face a necessary choice of evils. To complicate matters, social media has fueled retaliation-based violence.[25]

Interviewees shared that some public parks, which should serve as places of recreation and connection, have become unsafe—particularly locations like Lincoln Park and People's Park. Violence has led to the introduction of private security and active shooter training for Metro Parks Tacoma, along with occasional park closures to ensure public safety. Other parks have faced the risk of losing maintenance in response to unsafe conditions. The TFD has also implemented additional security measures, including ballistic vests for every on-duty firefighter and police escorts for certain high-risk calls.

Multiple interviewees noted that understaffing has compounded the challenges of surging call volumes. For example, the TPD, which has not been immune to the national staffing crisis in law enforcement, continues to experience a double-digit officer shortfall.[26] Further, at the time of this writing, the department does not have the capacity for a gang unit or increased engagement in community policing. Other agencies have also faced significant staffing issues. Metro Parks has had to close city pools on certain days of the week, and the Washington State Department of Children, Youth, and Families is struggling to adequately support children over age 11—a group on the verge of adolescence and at risk of being recruited by a gang.

Shortages in behavioral health treatment options are also a problem. Tacoma has a deficit of juvenile inpatient drug and alcohol treatment facilities, and the outpatient treatment capacity is inadequate—making wait times frustratingly long for those seeking help. This lack of resources is exacerbated by an overrepresentation of youth with mental health challenges in the juvenile justice system and a growing number of homeless youth.[27]

Despite these challenges, several programs and community efforts have emerged to foster safety in Tacoma. Government entities have also worked to pivot and collaborate to implement positive policy changes and programming. It appears these efforts may already be paying off.[28] For this reason, it is important to assess available resources, recent efforts, and current strengths before looking at potential opportunities to fill the gaps that leave Tacoma vulnerable.

25. Liz Szabo, "'All We Want Is Revenge': How Social Media Fuels Gun Violence Among Teens," KFF Health News, Aug. 25, 2023. https://kffhealthnews.org/news/article/gun-violence-social-media-teens.
26. "The State of Recruitment: A Crisis for Law Enforcement," International Association of Chiefs of Police, last accessed Oct. 14, 2023. https://www.theiacp.org/sites/default/files/239416_IACP_RecruitmentBR_HR_0.pdf.
27. Lee A. Underwood and Aryssa Washington, "Mental Illness and Juvenile Offenders," *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health* 13:2 (2016), p. 228. https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4772248/pdf/ijerph-13-00228.pdf.
28. Smith et al., "Tacoma Violent Crime Reduction Project Year 1 Results." https://www.cityoftacoma.org/UserFiles/Servers/Server_6/File/Police/TPD-Violent%20Crime%20Prev%20Plan%20brief%2011072023.pdf.

Vision of a Safer Tacoma

Identifying what community safety looks like is crucial to provide a tangible vision and instill hope for residents. It can also help clarify goals, enable effective resource allocation, and identify measurable progress tracking. Additionally, a vision of safety can inform policy, engage communities in a shared commitment to address violence, and empower residents to actively contribute toward a safer environment. Ultimately, a well-defined vision of community safety serves as a guiding beacon.

This is a visual representation of common themes surrounding Tacoma's vision of community safety, based on our conversations with relevant stakeholders.

Capitalizing on Strengths and Successes

Tacoma will benefit by reflecting on its past successes and recognizing the strengths within its network of partners. The city has a rich history of achievements that should be acknowledged, celebrated, and used to inform future actions. Identifying and embracing these positive aspects not only highlights Tacoma's capacity for progress, but it also provides a foundation on which to build a more resilient and thriving community. Here, we outline several current strengths the city can capitalize on, along with ideas for achieving greater impact.

Strengths, Successes, and Recommendations

Capitalizing on Strengths and Successes

Sustain an unwavering, communitywide commitment to and investment in safety

City leaders should be commended for taking a whole-community approach that brings government agencies and community partners together to assume ownership of public safety. Over the years, the city has adeptly secured various funding sources and judiciously allocated these resources to finance targeted interventions geared toward youth violence. Stakeholders consistently expressed appreciation for the city's financial commitment to tackling violence and bringing partners together to discuss the issue. Further, other government entities, community stakeholders, and members are eager to join forces as allies and contribute their own resources and expertise to address the issue collaboratively.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

Establish an ongoing community-safety coalition involving community members and participants from key agencies to foster continued violence-prevention discussion, interagency collaboration, and accountability. The city could also deepen its commitment by establishing an internal Office of Violence Prevention to spearhead initiatives like community violence intervention and prevention campaigns.[29]

29. "20+ Cities Launch National Offices of Violence Prevention Network, Building on the Movement To Reimagine Public Safety," Center for American Progress, Feb. 2, 2021. https://www.americanprogress.org/press/release-20-cities-launch-national-offices-violence-prevention-network-building-movement-reimagine-public-safety.

Capitalizing on Strengths and Successes

Expand cross-agency collaborative efforts

Successful violence prevention requires collaboration among public, private, and community partners.[30] Interviewees appreciate the level of collaboration within the community and believe there are opportunities to do even more good. Grassroots groups and community-centered government initiatives have provided instrumental feedback and insights to fine-tune localized solutions, tailoring them to meet Tacoma's unique needs. There was some agreement among interviewees that the city has collaborated successfully in the past, though entities often continue to work in silos. This compartmentalization is a barrier to identifying the root causes of problems, and it often leads to more reactive approaches. A focus on aligning goals, sharing resources, and coordinating strategies can help the city achieve a larger impact.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

Communicate all crime prevention and community safety efforts directly to agency partners and disseminate information to the public via press releases, media stories, and town halls. The city should also spearhead conversations with key partners to explore opportunities for pooling resources and collaborating on impactful initiatives.

30. U.S. Department of Justice. https://www.ojp.gov/pdffiles1/Digitization/171674NCJRS.pdf; Violent Crime Working Group, "Saving Lives: Ten Essential Actions Cities Can Take to Reduce Violence Now," Council on Criminal Justice, January 2022. https://counciloncj.org/10-essential-actions.

Capitalizing on Strengths and Successes

Address socio-economics, behavioral health, and other root causes of crime

Several interviewees noted a link between crime, poverty, and behavioral issues. Individuals also noted that children who are routinely exposed to violence or who feel they have nothing to lose—whether due to housing insecurity, neglect, or a grim outlook on the future—are at risk of pursuing detrimental paths. High poverty, unemployment, and income inequality in neighborhoods result in elevated rates of violent crime, underscoring the profound impact of economic health on violence trends.[31] The aftermath of the pandemic has also magnified many societal fractures, with marginalized communities bearing the brunt. Considering that the average age of gang recruitment in Tacoma was found to be 13.7 years, a mindset that emphasizes early intervention is critical.[32]

RECOMMENDATION:

Ensure lasting effectiveness and relevance by incorporating actionable steps targeting the underlying causes of crime into the community safety strategy. Existing resources like the equity index map or crime data maps can help identify priority focus areas.[33] Potential efforts could include providing microloans to support small business development in economically disadvantaged areas, investing in affordable housing initiatives to address homelessness, funding summer youth employment, or subsidizing mental health and substance abuse treatment. Incentivizing businesses to hire formerly incarcerated individuals or creating a transitional job program can help people get back on their feet after prison. Tacoma's state representatives should work to overcome executive branch opposition to pass a Clean Slate bill, which automatically seals the nonviolent criminal records of people who stay out of trouble for a certain period.[34] This kind of legislation would open new doors to employment, housing, and educational opportunities, creating a pathway to prosperity for the 2.1 million Washington State residents with a criminal record.[35]

31. Hanna Love et al., "Addressing the root cause of gun violence with American Rescue Plan funds: Lessons from state and local government," The Brookings Institution, Aug. 15, 2022. https://www.brookings.edu/articles/addressing-the-root-causes-of-gun-violence-with-american-rescue-plan-funds-lessons-from-state-and-local-governments.

32. Young, p. 86. https://cms.cityoftacoma.org/ncs/gang-reduction/2019GangAssessment.pdf.

33. Johnson and Talbot. https://www.thenewstribune.com/news/local/crime/article264204616.html; "Equity Index Map," City of Tacoma, last accessed April 2, 2024. https://tacomaequitymap.caimaps.info/CAILive; "Reported Crime," City of Tacoma, last accessed April 2, 2024. https://data.cityoftacoma.org/datasets/tacoma::city-of-tacoma-reported-crime-tacoma/explore.

34. Rachel M. Cohen, "Washington Governor Vetoes Bill That Would Have Automatically Cleared Criminal Records," The Appeal, May 19, 2020. https://theappeal.org/politicalreport/washington-governor-vetoes-clean-slate-bill; Logan Seacrest, "Clean Slate: Old Arrest Records Hurt Public Safety and Economic Stability," R Street Institute, Nov. 29, 2022. https://www.rstreet.org/commentary/clean-slate-old-arrest-records-hurt-public-safety-and-economic-stability.

35. Christi M. Smith, "The Pathway to Prosperity: How Clean Slate Legislation Enhances Public Safety and Stimulates the Economy," R Street Policy Study No. 279, March 2023. https://www.rstreet.org/research/the-pathway-to-prosperity-how-clean-slate-legislation-enhances-public-safety-and-stimulates-the-economy; Colleen V. Chien et al., "The Washington State Second Chance Vacatur Gap," Paper Prisons Initiative, June 26, 2023. https://www.paperprisons.org/states/pdfs/reports/The Washington State Second Chance Expungement Gap.pdf.

Capitalizing on Strengths and Successes

Address environmental factors promoting criminal opportunities

Numerous studies have shown the connection between environment and crime. Tackling factors that heighten vulnerability to violence promotes safe, healthy, and supportive environments. Such endeavors can address root causes, support policing efforts, and make community members feel safer. Further, research consistently shows that strong social cohesion and a sense of belonging correlate with reduced rates of violent crime.[36] Local initiatives in line with these goals include free access to community centers for youth and maintaining public spaces. The city should continue to expand such efforts. Notably, while addressing environmental factors generally does not reduce crime in and of itself, it can support direct interventions.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

Improve public lighting, clear overgrown vegetation, change foot or car traffic patterns, and repurpose deserted properties (often hotspots for criminal activity) in vulnerable areas.[37] The city could also identify opportunities for "placemaking"—such as efforts to add green space, increase neighborly interactions, and foster civic pride—to promote a feeling of community, safety, and belonging.[38] While efforts must be tailored to the community, a variety of initiatives model the successes and challenges of this approach.[39]

36. Brian R. Higgins and Joel Hunt, "Collective Efficacy: Taking Action to Improve Neighborhoods," *National Institute of Justice Journal* 277 (September 2016), pp. 18-21. https://nij.ojp.gov/topics/articles/collective-efficacy-taking-action-improve-neighborhoods.

37. Testimony of Thomas Abt, House Committee on the Judiciary, "Reimagining Criminal Justice in the COVID-19 Era," 117th Congress, March 8, 2022. https://docs.house.gov/meetings/JU/JU08/20220308/114470/HHRG-117-JU08-Wstate-AbtT-20220308.pdf.

38. "Placemaking," Center for Justice Innovation, last accessed March 5, 2024. https://www.innovatingjustice.org/areas-of-focus/placemaking.

39. Natalie Kroovand Hipple and Jessica Saunders, "Evaluation of the Innovations in Community-Based Crime Reduction (CBCR) Program: Executive Summary and Final Report," Indiana University, February 2020. https://www.ojp.gov/pdffiles1/nij/grants/254623.pdf; Linda Nubani et al., "Community Engagement in Crime Reduction Strategies: A Tale of Three Cities," *Journal of Participatory Research Methods* 4:1 (Feb. 2, 2023). https://jprm.scholasticahq.com/article/57526-community-engagement-in-crime-reduction-strategies-a-tale-of-three-cities.

Capitalizing on Strengths and Successes

Leverage and expand the Whole Child framework

Launched a decade ago, the "Whole Child" initiative is a comprehensive framework aimed at providing around-the-clock wraparound support for Tacoma's youth.[40] Recognizing that learning extends beyond the confines of the classroom, the initiative takes a multifaceted approach that considers the roles of schools, communities, families, and neighborhoods in nurturing children's emotional self-regulation. It prioritizes physical and emotional safety, with a strong focus on restorative justice principles. Whole Child actively engages youth to ensure their participation and growth both in and out of school settings, emphasizing the importance of maintaining their overall health. A key objective is to get the community involved in developing a shared plan to create neighborhood spaces in every locality, emphasizing collaboration with community partners and fostering initiatives like Beyond the Bell and Club B.[41] Despite its merits, there is a need for increased awareness and understanding of this approach so it can be used more effectively communitywide.

RECOMMENDATION:

Train all city staff on the Whole Child framework, language, and practices to ensure this familiar initiative is woven into actionable steps for youth violence prevention.

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40. "Tacoma Whole Child," Tacoma Public Schools, last accessed Oct. 14, 2023. https://www.tacomaschools.org/departments/tacoma-whole-child.

41. "Beyond the Bell & Club B," Tacoma Public Schools, last accessed Nov. 21, 2023. https://www.tacomaschools.org/programs-services/beyond-bell.

Capitalizing on Strengths and Successes

Develop opportunities for youth outside of school

Youth engagement outside of school is essential to foster a lasting positive impact on individuals and the community as a whole. Providing free entry to community centers for youth and establishing sustainable afterschool programs provides meaningful engagement opportunities during the hours when children may be most likely to get involved in criminal activity. Not only do these programs nurture practical skills, leadership, and personal growth, but they also cultivate a sense of belonging and purpose. Empowering children to become active and responsible contributors to society has been shown to reduce participation in criminal activity.[42] While some programming for elementary and middle schoolers currently exists to fill this need, programs for high schoolers—the group most vulnerable to violence—seem to be lacking. These initiatives are particularly important to help youth regain a sense of belonging following the COVID-19 shutdowns.

RECOMMENDATION:

Allocate support and resources to sustain Summer Late Nights while leading or supporting efforts to establish similar initiatives for high schoolers. Engaging directly with youth would help determine the programs that most interest them, whether that be photography opportunities or a space to create music.[43] The city should monitor these programs to ensure they target identified at-risk youth.

42. Denise C. Gottfredson et al., "Do After School Programs Reduce Delinquency?," *Prevention Science* 5 (2004), pp. 253-266. https://link.springer.com/article/10.1023/B:PREV.0000045359.41696.02.

43. Editorial Board, "Tacoma kids see it all—from guns to Kia Boys. They told us what grownups miss," *The News Tribune*, Feb. 5, 2024. https://www.thenewstribune.com/article284695111.html.

Capitalizing on Strengths and Successes

Prioritize resources and reduce crime through behavioral health support and rehabilitation

Key stakeholders and community members across the board support a rehabilitative approach. One significant upcoming initiative to connect individuals with needed resources is the Holistic Outreach Promoting Engagement (HOPE) Team, which had its soft launch in September 2023.[44] Inspired by successful programs like Crisis Assistance Helping Out on the Streets (CAHOOTS) in Eugene, Oregon, and Support Team Assisted Response (STAR) in Denver, Colorado, the program aims to have dispatchers available 24 hours a day to call in teams of mental health providers, registered nurses, and ongoing case managers to support both juveniles and adults.[45] These types of programs have proven effective at getting repeat users the support they need, deflecting them from jails and hospitals.[46] One study predicted that such efforts would reduce police calls for service by 10 percent in Tacoma, freeing up time for more proactive measures.[47] The Pierce County juvenile courts have also successfully reduced the negative consequences of detention by encouraging rehabilitation practices and enhancing diversion through several youth programs.[48] Additionally, Tacoma Municipal Courts recently created a mental health court and a community court to better address underlying causes of criminal behavior.[49]

RECOMMENDATIONS:

Aim to expand and empower the HOPE Team to act as primary responders for certain dispatch calls. The city should also explore other deflection initiatives, such as law enforcement-assisted diversion or co-responder teams, to effectively respond to communities' behavioral health needs.[50]

44. Maria Lee, "City of Tacoma Provides Update on Alternative Response Efforts," City of Tacoma, Washington, Sept. 19, 2023. https://www.cityoftacoma.org/in_the_news/city_of_tacoma_provides_update_on_alternative_response_efforts.

45. "CAHOOTS (Crisis Assistance Helping Out On The Streets)," White Bird Clinic, last accessed Oct. 14, 2023. https://whitebirdclinic.org/cahoots; "Support Team Assisted Response (STAR) Program," Denver, the Mile High City, last accessed Oct. 14, 2023. https://www.denvergov.org/Government/Agencies-Departments-Offices/Agencies-Departments-Offices-Directory/Public-Health-Environment/Community-Behavioral-Health/Behavioral-Health-Strategies/Support-Team-Assisted-Response-STAR-Program.

46. Lisel Petis, "Conservative Jurisdictions Champion Diversion Efforts," *R Street Policy Study* No. 252, March 30, 2022. https://www.rstreet.org/research/conservative-jurisdictions-champion-diversion-efforts.

47. "Report on the Alternative Response Study: Tacoma, Washington," p. 3. https://cityoftacoma.org/UserFiles/Servers/Server_6/File/cms/CMO/Transformation%20Updates/Tacoma%20Alternative%20Response%20Report%205-21.pdf.

48. "Programs/Services Offered to Youth," Pierce County, last accessed Nov. 21, 2023. https://www.piercecountywa.gov/1110/ProgramsServices-Offered-to-Youth.

49. Nimra Ahmad, "Washington's trend of treatment courts continues in Tacoma," *Crosscut*, Sept. 26, 2023. https://crosscut.com/news/2023/09/washingtons-trend-treatment-courts-continues-tacoma.

50. Petis. https://www.rstreet.org/research/conservative-jurisdictions-champion-diversion-efforts.

Areas of Opportunity

An effective community safety strategy should include short- and long-term goals, establish key performance indicators, and identify responsible parties. These efforts must be ongoing to keep violence from returning. Actions should be reevaluated periodically to ensure continued success in the current landscape. The following are nine potential areas of opportunity for Tacoma.

Opportunities and Recommendations

Areas of Opportunity

Foster hope amid hopelessness

Several interviewees spoke about a sense of hopelessness shared by youth, residents, and leaders regarding violence. Addressing this concern demands a deliberate focus on cultivating hope across the community. Hope, or the "belief that something is possible," is an important part of any strategy.[51] Positive messaging from the city will be key in empowering residents to envision and work toward a safer community. People will engage in a solution only if they believe the provided outcome is possible. Encouraging a sense of hope can counteract negative influences that contribute to violence and facilitate long-term, transformative change.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

While the city should not ignore negative crime trends, focusing attention on areas or times in which crime has not been as prevalent may prove more effective. Understanding why certain areas or periods have remained relatively crime-free can provide valuable insights to apply elsewhere. City leaders must also use various channels like the media, community meetings, and internal communications to instill hope and demonstrate their steadfast belief in Tacoma's potential to be a safe and secure city.

51. Deborah Mills-Scofield, "Hope Is a Strategy (Well, Sort Of)," *Harvard Business Review*, Oct. 9, 2012. https://hbr.org/2012/10/hope-is-a-strategy-well-sort-o.

Areas of Opportunity

Define what "success" looks like

Defining success is crucial to providing clarity and direction for new and existing efforts and initiatives. It establishes a measurable framework against which progress can be assessed and goals can be achieved. A clear definition of success guides decision making, motivates stakeholders, and ensures actions align with desired outcomes, ultimately maximizing the effectiveness and impact of these endeavors. Several stakeholders commented on misaligned goals, a lack of data to define success, or a lack of clarity around issues. By aligning stakeholders in a single plan, Tacoma can optimize its resources and efforts to ensure initiatives address the root causes of youth violence.

RECOMMENDATION:

Establish clear definitions of success and identify success indicators to measure progress. These indicators may encompass a variety of metrics ranging from crime trends (i.e., gun offenses, violent crime, all crime) to quantifiable preventive measures (e.g., more green space, lights, afterschool programs) to qualitative assessments (e.g., surveys) to gauge feelings of community safety. Consistently monitoring these indicators will allow for strategic adjustments based on emerging trends.

Areas of Opportunity

Collect data to guide strategic decision making

Developing evidence-based strategies to tackle violence necessitates a thorough understanding of its underlying causes and patterns. Interviewees commented that the allocation of funds toward various programs is often driven more by subjective impressions than by concrete information. Too often, decisions are based on raw participation figures rather than actual efficacy. Merging health, economic, and law enforcement data can offer a consolidated view that spotlights areas of opportunity, allowing city officials to focus their efforts more efficiently. Gathering and analyzing data about incidents, demographics, and socioeconomic factors can illuminate trends that inform targeted interventions. Specifically, information about gun violence and who is perpetrating it should be collected. Giving local communities more control over customizing their success metrics can result in more targeted programs based on specific needs.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

Facilitate robust data collection within Tacoma's public safety departments and regularly provide data to the city council. Data points should include violent and property crime rates as well as EMS responses to violent injuries, reoffense rates, community policing efforts, and trauma-informed training. Additionally, health and social service agencies can provide less traditional data points that also strongly correlate with crime reduction. Detailed information on poverty rates, income inequality, housing, exposure to community violence/victimization, adverse childhood experiences, and afterschool/prosocial programs can provide additional insight to guide crime prevention strategies and respond to socioeconomic shifts.[52]

52. John R. Hipp, "Income Inequality, Race, and Place: Does the Distribution of Race and Class Within Neighborhoods Affect Crime Rates?," *Criminology* 45:3 (August 2007), pp. 665-697. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1745-9125.2007.00088.x; Sorin M.S. Krammer et al., "Income inequality, social cohesion, and crime against businesses: Evidence from a global sample of firms," *Journal of International Business Studies* 54:2 (June 2022), pp. 385-400. https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/35729969; Mark R. Lindblad et al., "Sense of Community and Informal Social Control Among Lower Income Households: The Role of Homeownership and Collective Efficacy in Reducing Subjective Neighborhood Crime and Disorder," *American Journal of Community Psychology* 51:1-2 (March 2013), pp. 123-139. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10464-012-9507-9; Erin G. Grinshteyn et al., "The Associations of Area-Level Violent Crime Rates and Self-Reported Violent Crime Exposure with Adolescent Behavioral Health," *Community Mental Health Journal* 54 (April 2015), pp. 252-258. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10597-017-0159-y; Jessica M. Craig et al., "A little early risk goes a long bad way: Adverse childhood experiences and life-course offending in the Cambridge study," *Journal of Criminal Justice* 53 (November 2017), pp. 34-45. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jcrimjus.2017.09.005; Sanford A. Newman et al., "America's After-School Choice: The Prime Time for Juvenile Crime, or Youth Enrichment and Achievement," Educational Resources Information Center, 2000. https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED445823.

Areas of Opportunity

Explore public-private partnerships and streamline funding

Limited financial resources remain a significant obstacle to pursuing sustainable solutions to youth violence, hindering the implementation of crucial programs and initiatives. Several interviewees noted the need to reevaluate how the city provides grant funding, most of which is limited to a one-year term. Many discussed the administrative burden of perpetually seeking funding, which consumes more time and energy than it should. There may be an opportunity to provide funding more strategically by modifying contract durations, potentially stretching them over three years with periodic progress milestones and performance measures. A steady funding stream focused on the long term would help ensure vital programs operate without persistent financial problems. Options for Tacoma to address this challenge include forging partnerships with philanthropic organizations, seeking federal grants, and advocating for increased community investment. By diversifying funding sources, Tacoma can ensure the longevity and effectiveness of its efforts.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

Actively involve the community—including foundations, corporations, and individual philanthropists—in supporting violence prevention initiatives through matching financial contributions. Additionally, to enhance efficiency, the city should streamline funding processes by reducing the length of proposals; shortening the time from request to funding; working with partners (e.g., Pierce County) to align funding cycles, strategies, and final grant awards; and transitioning to multi-year grants (with periodic progress reports to ensure accountability) for trusted partners.

Areas of Opportunity

Focus prevention efforts on the most at-risk populations

While prioritizing all children is admirable, focusing on "at-risk" youth can be more effective at preventing violence. Research shows that gun violence is concentrated among a small number of people who are often caught in cycles of harm and retaliation.[53] Identifying individuals who are most vulnerable to falling into a cycle of violence due to factors like trauma, family instability, or prior involvement in the justice system is essential. Exposure to violence is one of the strongest predictors of future violence, with one study showing that youth who suffer from chronic exposure to violence are 32 times more likely to become violent offenders.[54] Tailoring interventions to their specific needs can prevent them from becoming victims or perpetrators of violence and provide opportunities for positive growth.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

Prioritize funding programs that target the most vulnerable populations, such as at-risk youth, rather than focusing on the number of individuals served. Community violence intervention programs can help identify these at-risk populations using "credible messengers" who interrupt violence before it occurs.[55] This type of programming aligns with TPD's long-term strategy for focused deterrence, making it a complementary addition to their efforts. Prioritizing funding for programs focused on at-risk youth could also be effective. Priority should be given to evidence-based programs like those mentioned in the "Programming and Policy Gaps" section of this report.

53. "Community Violence Intervention," Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health, last accessed Oct. 26, 2023. https://publichealth.jhu.edu/departments/health-policy-and-management/research-and-practice/center-for-gun-violence-solutions/solutions/strategies-to-reduce-community-gun-violence.

54. Rachel Wamser-Nanney et al., "Childhood Trauma Exposure and Gun Violence Risk Factors among Victims of Gun Violence," *Psychological Trauma: Theory, Research, Practice, and Policy* 11:1 (2019), pp. 99-106. https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7043369.

55. Josh Weber, "Restorative Justice Practices and Credible Messengers: Promising, Innovative Approaches for Improving Outcomes for Youth in the Juvenile Justice System," The Council of State Governments Justice Center, February 2024. https://csgjusticecenter.org/publications/restorative-justice-practices-and-credible-messengers-promising-innovative-approaches-for-improving-outcomes-for-youth-in-the-juvenile-justice-system.

Areas of Opportunity

Use credible messengers to engage at-risk youth in choosing a more positive lifestyle

Mapping shows that the majority of recent homicides have occurred in neighborhoods southeast of Interstate 5, in the South End and Eastside. The tightest concentration of lethal violence has occurred along a half-mile stretch of South Hosmer Street, a commercial corridor on the South End.[56] Generally speaking, city decision-makers have a limited connection to struggling neighborhoods like Hilltop or Eastside because they are less likely to live in those neighborhoods. Some interviewees spoke about the need to target zip codes that law enforcement has identified as hot spots or that the health department has determined to have greater health disparities. Crucial to engaging residents of these neighborhoods is the use of "credible messengers" who have already earned the trust and confidence of their community. Programs like the Big Homies Project that leverage individual community members with lived experiences can play a pivotal role in this effort.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

Proactively engage and recruit residents from communities disproportionately impacted by violence and related disparities—especially those with lived experiences in the justice system—to serve as credible messengers.[57] It is important to ensure these efforts are inclusive, effective, and representative of the diverse needs of the community. To accomplish this, the city should explore financial assistance for youth and adults to participate in violence-prevention efforts, revisit city hiring criteria to address criminal history disqualifiers, and use a variety of different channels to attract credible messengers (such as word-of-mouth recruitment or referrals from nonprofits supporting justice-impacted individuals). Credible-messenger training must also be prioritized.

56. Shea Johnson and Peter Talbot, "Tacoma's deadliest street is spiraling out of control. How did it become a 'War Zone'?," *The News Tribune*, Sept. 29, 2022. https://www.thenewstribune.com/news/local/crime/article264204616.html.

57. Ivy Allotey et al., "Breaking the Cycle of Incarceration: A Roadmap to Credible Messenger Recruitment," Columbia University School of International and Public Affairs, May 2022. https://www.sipa.columbia.edu/sites/default/files/migrated/downloads/For_Publication_NeighborhoodBenches_Pincus_v2.pdf.

Areas of Opportunity

Navigate state-level policy changes together

Recent legislative changes and judicial rulings, including the *State v. Blake decision* and policies related to juvenile interrogations and failures to appear, have affected prosecutors' ability to hold juveniles accountable.[58] For instance, after the Supreme Court's Juvenile Criminal Rule 7.16 took effect in 2021, judges could no longer issue bench warrants to juveniles for failing to appear in court unless there was an imminent public safety threat.[59] Some believe this has decreased the rate at which juveniles show up to court, which has implications for youth violence. Similarly, after the passage of HB 1310, which limits situations in which police can use force, police felt they could no longer respond appropriately to high-risk mental health calls, leaving a gap in response.[60] Understanding these changes and responding with effective strategies is vital. Collaboration among legal experts, community partners, and key stakeholders can help align responses with the evolving legal landscape while upholding public safety.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

When new legislation is enacted that affects public safety agencies, the city should convene key players, such as impacted agencies and the city attorney, to evaluate its impact on Tacoma and how to best navigate the policy change. Additionally, agencies should coordinate efforts to collect data and narratives illustrating legislative deficiencies to advocate for amendments that better protect Tacoma.

58. "Blake Refund Bureau," Washington Courts, last accessed Oct. 26, 2023. https://www.courts.wa.gov/newsinfo/index.cfm?fa=newsinfo.blakerefundbureau.

59. "Quashing and Issuing Warrants," Washington Supreme Court, Feb. 1, 2021. https://www.courts.wa.gov/court_rules/pdf/JuCR/SUP_JuCR_7_16_00.pdf.

60. "HB 1310 - 2021-22," Washington State Legislature, last accessed Nov. 9, 2023. https://app.leg.wa.gov/billsummary?BillNumber=1310&Year=2021.

Areas of Opportunity

Empower community members as co-conspirators in public safety

Though reducing crime in Tacoma will require direct action from the city, police and municipal staff alone cannot create community safety. Violence reduction requires an "all-hands-on-deck" response, with all community members and partners willing to become part of the solution. First responders are a necessary component to the equation, but intervention strategy and the underlying systemic and institutional factors that perpetuate crime must be addressed collectively. Shifting the public safety paradigm beyond law enforcement toward a conception of crime reduction as everyone's responsibility will be key to this approach. To get there, the city must engage residents, non-governmental entities, and youth—not only to identify solutions, but also to participate as partners in achieving those solutions.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

Consult with community members and agency partners via town halls, surveys, or community conversations when creating the community-safety strategy. Further, the city should actively engage stakeholders in the strategy's implementation. Buy-in from partners and community members will be key to fostering true collaboration. The city may want to establish formalized memoranda of understanding that delineate the responsibilities of each party to achieve shared goals. A strong example of this approach exists in Newark, New Jersey.[61]

61. "About," Newark Public Safety Collaborative, last accessed March 4, 2024. https://newarkcollaborative.org.

Areas of Opportunity

Build, heal, and repair relationships with law enforcement

Cultivating positive police-community relations demands greater transparency today than ever before. The city can help foster a spirit of trust, accountability, and cooperation by directly addressing the profound impact of events like Manny Ellis' tragic death. Embracing community-oriented policing models, establishing oversight mechanisms, and investing in comprehensive officer training on important topics like de-escalation and implicit bias are crucial steps. Research shows transparency and open communication can enhance perceptions of law enforcement legitimacy and repair broken relationships between police and the communities they serve.[62]

RECOMMENDATION:

Robust data on how and when police use force provides a factual reference point to anchor productive dialogue on sensitive issues. Private companies can help—for example, Washington-based Police Strategies LLC offers a powerful software platform to help law enforcement agencies collect and share use-of-force data.[63] These tools can put high-profile tragedies like the Manny Ellis incident into context, ensuring conversations are based on evidence rather than intuition. Use-of-force data is useful for all city agencies to inform decisions on procedures, training, tactics, equipment, and strategies to keep citizens and public servants safe. For police, a data-driven culture can help identify problematic trends before they become systemic, enabling officers to learn from the mistakes and successes of fellow officers and contributing toward a higher degree of professionalism.

62. Seth W. Stoughton et al., *Evaluating Police Uses of Force* (New York University Press, 2021), pp. 124-151. https://nyupress.org/9781479814657/evaluating-police-uses-of-force.

63. "Home," Police Strategies, last accessed March 14, 2024. https://policestrategies.com.

Programming and Policy Gaps

Certain gaps become evident when examining the landscape of existing programs and policies in Tacoma. Despite considerable efforts and progress, these gaps signify areas in which current approaches may fall short of fully addressing critical issues and where opportunities for improvement and refinement exist. This section sheds light on potential policies and programs the city could lead, implement, or support to address community safety. Other areas of exploration that fall outside the scope of this report include environmental upgrades, economic support, and early childhood protective factors. By identifying the following actions and sharing the research that supports them, we aim to pave the way for more comprehensive, effective, and smart solutions that can serve Tacoma's needs successfully.

Programming and Policy Recommendations

Programming and Policy Gaps

Collect data and ensure transparency to guide action steps

Translating data into a simple format and making it easily accessible to those who need it will be key to engaging the community and tracking success. This will allow the city and crime prevention partners to evaluate community safety strategies and quickly identify emerging patterns, resulting in the timely adjustment of policies and interventions. It also fosters transparency and accountability, as residents can access and understand community safety data which, in turn, builds trust between the community and law enforcement.

RECOMMENDATION:

Develop a transparent, real-time public dashboard to track key success indicators, providing residents with accessible and up-to-date information regarding progress on various issues and fostering accountability and community engagement. In addition to key indicators like violent and property crime rates, the city should track other statistics— such as domestic violence, gang violence, and gun violence—and delve into broader areas that address underlying factors. This could include examining Tacoma's Equity Index within the areas most significantly affected by violence.[64] Dashboards can be managed by a community justice council, prosecutor's office, police department, or municipality.[65]

64. "Equity Index Map." https://tacomaequitymap.caimaps.info/CAILive.
65. Dane County Community Justice Council, "Dashboards," County of Dane, Wisconsin, last accessed Oct. 26, 2023. https://cjc.countyofdane.com/Data-and-Dashboards; First Judicial District Attorney's Office, "Data Dashboard," State of Colorado, last accessed Oct. 26, 2023. https://data.dacolorado.org/1st; Mayor's Office of Neighborhood Safety and Engagement, "Baltimore Public Safety Accountability Dashboard," City of Baltimore, Maryland, last accessed Oct. 26, 2023. https://monse.baltimorecity.gov/baltimore-public-safety-accountability-dashboard.

Programming and Policy Gaps

Shift perception and engage community in finding solutions

In pursuit of a safer and more resilient community, the city should create a comprehensive public engagement campaign leveraging media relationships, social media, and community partners. The objective is to change public perception regarding Tacoma's designation as a "dangerous" city while galvanizing both youth and adults to actively participate in efforts to create a safer community. The aim is to renew and reinvent Tacoma, emphasize that "youth violence is preventable," offer actionable steps community members can take, and provide a sense of "belonging" by being a part of the solution. Decades of research support public education campaigns to create positive change, and recent slogans like "Vegas Strong" and "We are all in this together" have united communities. Messaging must be balanced between "we will not stand for violence" and providing hope through alternatives.

RECOMMENDATION:

Create a violence-reduction communications campaign and promote it throughout Tacoma on banners, stickers, billboards, and posters. A corresponding website should include information on what the city is doing to reduce violence and how the community can help. The slogan must be balanced between "we will not stand for violence" and "empowering individuals to live a life free from violence." Campaigns are most effective when they are easy to understand, truth-forward, and concurrent with supporting policies and programs.[66] The campaign theme could be as simple as "Transform Tacoma: Protect our Neighbors, Reject the Violence," but it must target local audiences based on their values. Partnering with the media will be key, and including local celebrities in the initiative could further engage community members.

66. Melanie A. Wakefield et al., "Use of mass media campaigns to change health behavior," *The Lancet* 367:9748 (Oct. 9, 2010), pp. 1261-1271. https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4248563.

Programming and Policy Gaps

Focus on family violence

Domestic violence—a top cause of murder in Tacoma in 2022—has long-lasting effects on children, with a strong intergenerational link between violence in the home and future violence of household members.[67] Children exposed to domestic violence often experience trauma and learn harmful patterns of behavior, increasing their risk of becoming both victims and perpetrators of violence as they grow into adolescence and adulthood.[68] Parent-child violence also appears to have been an issue for Tacoma in the past. Notably, in the 2019 Tacoma Gang Assessment, 85 percent of gang members interviewed had an adverse childhood experience (ACE) survey score of three or above.[69] Family violence and its consequences (e.g., incarcerated parent, parent with mental health issues) result in high ACE scores and lead to many negative outcomes. To achieve long-lasting violence prevention, family violence must be integrated into the broader discussion.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

While reducing youth-on-youth violence is important, equal attention should be paid to addressing family violence, which poses significant risks to both immediate and long-term safety. Strategies to combat family violence should be integrated as prominently as those for youth violence, with actionable steps in the strategy reflecting this importance. Support for programs like Intimate Partner Violence Intervention could also be explored.[70]

67. "Children Exposed to Violence," U.S. Department of Justice Office of Justice Programs, last accessed April 1, 2024. https://www.ojp.gov/program/programs/cev.
68. Ibid.
69. "Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs)," Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, last accessed Oct. 26, 2023. https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/aces/index.html.
70. "Intimate Partner Violence Intervention," National Network for Safe Communities, last accessed Oct. 26, 2023. https://nnscommunities.org/strategies/intimate-partner-violence-intervention.

Programming and Policy Gaps

Support evidence-based violence-reduction programs

- **Group violence intervention**

  This focused deterrence strategy is a coordinated, proactive approach to gun violence that could be a helpful model for TPD as it moves into the third phase of its Violence Reduction Plan.[71] Generally led by a working group composed of representatives from law enforcement, the community, and social services, the model has three goals: to engage local, state, and federal law enforcement to share information on individuals and groups known for gun violence in order to coordinate actions; to tap into the expertise of social service organizations to provide the support and tools necessary to help individuals move away from a life of violence; and to empower community members to establish unequivocal standards, expectations, and prohibitions against violence in their neighborhoods. The working group convenes regularly to coordinate the actions of their respective operational teams. At the core of this approach lies a three-pronged, anti-violence message of accountability (from positive-influencing friends, family, and other credible messengers), hope (to show an alternative life path), and pain (detailing the consequences of continued involvement in violence). These messages are relayed during one-on-one meetings with at-risk individuals as well as through "call-ins," which are larger meetings between group members and collaborative partners. Studies show these programs to be very successful, depending on how they are implemented.[72] Great success has been seen in places like Cedar Rapids, Iowa, and York, Pennsylvania.[73] It is also important to note that youth-focused deterrence may require specific considerations.

- **Juvenile deflection**

  Police-led deflection programs reframe the role of police from antagonists to advocates. One example of a model deflection program is the Safety Net Collaborative in Cambridge, Massachusetts, which provides young people with individually tailored treatment in lieu of arrest to avoid the negative downstream effects of formal system involvement.[74] Rather than making courts de facto service providers simply because no other system exists, this program proactively positions police officers as the gateway to rehabilitation. Safety Net's goal is to break down silos and fix service fragmentation by linking police officers, psychologists, school personnel, and social services to provide contextually relevant treatment for youth. This type of multi-

71. "Group Violence Intervention," National Network for Safe Communities, last accessed Oct. 26, 2023. https://www.nnscommunities.org/strategies/group-violence-intervention.

72. "New Analysis: Focused Deterrence Strategies Save Lives," John Jay College of Criminal Justice, last accessed Nov. 21, 2023. https://www.jjay.cuny.edu/news-events/news/new-analysis-focused-deterrence-strategies-save-lives.

73. "Cedar Rapids sees first month without shootings in over two years, reduction in violence," Iowa's News Now, Dec. 6, 2023. https://cbs2iowa.com/news/local/cedar-rapids-sees-first-month-without-shootings-in-over-two-years-reduction-in-violence; Michael Gorsegner, "'It's finally happening.' Gun violence numbers are way down in the City of York," CBS 21 News, Oct. 3, 2023. https://local21news.com/news/local/its-finally-happening-gun-violence-numbers-are-way-down-in-the-city-of-york.

74. "Safety Net Collaborative," City of Cambridge, Massachusetts, last accessed Oct. 26, 2023. https://www.cambridgema.gov/services/safetynetcollaborative.

Programming and Policy Gaps

Support evidence-based violence-reduction programs (continued)

agency, cross-system collaboration stands in stark contrast to typical police-mental health partnerships, which often involve an officer handoff with no further outreach. The program has been effective, reducing juvenile arrests compared to local and national averages.[75]

- ## Prevention of retaliatory violence

Different types of programs have emerged to provide resources to victims of crime in an effort to reduce incidents of retaliatory violence. Research shows that individuals with a history of committing violent crimes have a higher risk of becoming victims themselves.[76] The opposite is also true, as victims of violent crimes are much more likely to commit subsequent violent acts. Moreover, studies show that few victims of violent crime receive or use direct assistance.[77] This number dwindles further for unreported crimes. Trauma Recovery Centers (TRCs) support the needs of underserved crime survivors—those who often come from traditionally marginalized communities and are at greatest risk of experiencing gun violence.[78] Some cities, such as Austin, Texas, have taken a prominent role in bringing this type of resource to their community.[79] TRCs offer an array of services, including trauma-informed clinical case management; evidence-based individual, group, and family psychotherapy; crisis intervention; medication management; legal advocacy; assistance in filing police reports; and access to victim compensation funds—all at no cost to patients. Similarly, hospital-based violence interrupter programs use credible messengers to engage victims of violence at the hospital, discouraging retaliation by connecting them with services and support.[80] Timely, proactive intervention can mitigate escalating risks and prevent further harm.

- ## Collaborative management program

In Colorado, local collaborative management programs bring together agencies and services for at-risk, high-systems-use youth and families.[81] Key partners include county departments of human/social services; local judicial districts; health departments;

75. Logan Seacrest, "Data-Driven Deflection: A Systems Approach to Reducing Juvenile Arrests," *R Street Policy Study* No. 290, June 2023. https://www.rstreet.org/research/data-driven-deflection-a-systems-approach-to-reducing-juvenile-arrests.

76. "The Overlap Between Those Committing Offenses Who Also Are Victims: One Class of Crime Victim Rarely Seeks or Receives Available Services," National Institute of Justice, March 11, 2021. https://nij.ojp.gov/topics/articles/overlap-between-those-committing-offenses-who-also-are-victims-one-class-crime.

77. Alexandra Thompson and Susannah N. Tapp, "Criminal Victimization, 2021," United States Department of Justice, September 2022, p. 9. https://bjs.ojp.gov/content/pub/pdf/cv21.pdf.

78. "Trauma Recovery Centers," Alliance for Safety and Justice, last accessed Oct. 26, 2023. https://www.traumarecoverycentermodel.org.

79. "Austin City Council approves resolution for Texas' first Trauma Recovery Center," FOX 7 Austin, March 24, 2022. https://www.fox7austin.com/news/austin-city-council-approves-resolution-for-texas-first-trauma-recovery-center.

80. "Community Violence Intervention." https://publichealth.jhu.edu/departments/health-policy-and-management/research-and-practice/center-for-gun-violence-solutions/solutions/strategies-to-reduce-community-gun-violence.

81. "Collaborative Management Program," Colorado Department of Human Services, last accessed Oct. 26, 2023. https://cdhs.colorado.gov/collaborative-management-program.

Programming and Policy Gaps

Support evidence-based violence-reduction programs(continued)

school districts; community mental health centers and behavioral health organizations (or regional accountable entities); parent or family advocacy groups; and community agencies. With different models used throughout the state, these programs are dedicated to cultivating a more cohesive system of collaboration by streamlining services, eradicating system redundancies, eliminating fragmentation, and more actively engaging at-risk youth and their support systems using a restorative justice-based approach. Studies show these programs are effective at reducing substance abuse as well as future involvement with the criminal justice system.[82]

• **Restorative justice**

Restorative justice is an alternative approach to juvenile delinquency focused on repairing harm and restoring relationships. Restorative programs like Make it Right in Alameda County, California, bring together victims and those who have caused harm to collaborate on a plan to repair the damage.[83] Until recently, restorative justice in the United States had largely been applied to first-time offenses or misdemeanors. Make it Right is interesting because it is geared toward more serious offenses (e.g., robberies, assaults, weapons violations) before formal charges are filed. The program's pre-charge nature allows the county to keep costs as low as possible by avoiding the use of court time, probation officers, and other judicial system resources.[84] A randomized controlled trial—the gold standard for social science research—found that juveniles in the intervention group were, on average, 19 percent less likely to be rearrested than those in the control group.[85]

RECOMMENDATION:

Take a proactive role in spearheading and facilitating the development of programs similar to those listed here. While direct management of some programs may not fit within the city's purview, convening stakeholders, securing grant funding, offering resources like office space or in-kind donations, and providing financial support for consultancy services can significantly aid in the initiation and success of these programs.

82. Social Work Research Center, "Collaborative Management Program (CMP) Evaluation Report," Colorado State University, 2019. https://spl.cde.state.co.us/artemis/huserials/hu118internet/hu1182019internet.pdf.

83. "Make it Right," San Francisco District Attorney, last accessed Oct. 26, 2023. https://www.sfdistrictattorney.org/policy/restorative-justice/make-it-right.

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Conclusion

Crime is a multifaceted problem, and tackling it requires addressing not only its symptoms, but its underlying causes as well. Reducing crime will require every individual and organization in the community to commit to introspection and continuous improvement. This entails a willingness to explore new approaches, which may involve shifting away from a traditional "top-down" model in favor of greater involvement of grassroots groups as equal partners in the effort. While the city of Tacoma is taking the lead in formulating this plan, it must be a community-driven initiative.

Tacoma stands to benefit significantly from investing in and leveraging its current successes but should also look to new solutions. A thoughtful and community-centered approach should guide the establishment of any new policies, programs, or partnerships to ensure genuine alignment with community needs and values.

It is also necessary to strike a balance between prevention and enforcement. While immediate and targeted interventions are essential to address pressing issues and respond to existing crime trends, long-term crime reduction primarily hinges on proactive prevention measures. By investing in strategies to address the root causes of crime, Tacoma can become a city where crime is less likely to occur in the first place. Thus, a community-safety plan for Tacoma should encompass a strategic blend of preventive initiatives that address these root causes and targeted interventions and enforcement efforts that respond to immediate challenges—ultimately fostering a safer and more resilient community.

About

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