



BAKERSFIELD CALVIP NEEDS ASSESSMENT

Bakersfield, CA - 2023

Introduction

The City of Bakersfield and the larger Kern County region have long outpaced other areas of the State when it comes to shootings. Since 2016, Kern County (of which Bakersfield constitutes the majority of the population) has had the highest homicide rate in the state.¹ Between 2015 and 2022, the County averaged 108 homicides per year—or 12.7 per 100,000 residents,² compared to California’s 5.7 per 100,000 and the national rate of 6.3 per 100,000.^{3,4} Even in 2021, when other regions saw surging gun violence and homicide rates following the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, Kern County still had the highest rate of homicides in the State of California.^{5,6}

In 2022, the City of Bakersfield began to implement a series of gun violence reduction strategies that have shown promising results thus far, including notable decreases in gun violence. Yet there is still work to be done. Taken together, local gun violence trends indicate a clear need for Bakersfield to sustain and strengthen its approach to gun violence reduction while also implementing additional strategies that have proven effective elsewhere. In order to do so, it is essential to first better understand the specific dynamics underlying gun violence in the City and, second, assess the current infrastructure for responding to that violence.

The National Institute for Criminal Justice Reform (NICJR) has conducted this assessment to inform the development of additional gun violence reduction strategies and serve as a springboard for the larger conversation around gun violence within Bakersfield. To that end, this report aims to answer the following questions:

- Who is largely involved in gun violence within Bakersfield?
- Where, specifically, is gun violence in Bakersfield taking place?
- Who are the community-based organizations leading the gun violence prevention and intervention services in Bakersfield, and what services are they providing?
- What support and resources do organizations need to improve and expand the services that are provided to those involved in gun violence?

Below, we present our key findings and an overview of our methodology, followed by the gun violence assessment and an assessment of community-based violence reduction services in Bakersfield. Lastly, we will provide recommendations for potential solutions to further prevent gun violence and reduce its impacts.

Key Findings

Gun violence disproportionately involves Black and Latino residents, men, and young adults and adults.

- While Latinos constituted the majority of shooting victims and suspects, Blacks were also disproportionately represented amongst both groups.
- Victims and suspects were overwhelmingly male in both fatal and non-fatal shootings.
- Victims and suspects were mostly between the ages of 18 and 37.

Gun violence is concentrated amongst a small number of geographically proximate areas.

- Fatal and non-fatal shooting incidents largely took place within the 93304 and 93307 zip codes.

Gun violence incidents primarily take place during the evening and night.

- Fatal and non-fatal shootings primarily took place during the evening and night time.

Existing violence prevention and intervention providers need to be better coordinated in their efforts to combat gun violence within Bakersfield.

- There are a handful of organizations and government agencies that lead violence reduction work in Bakersfield, yet there is limited coordination between them

Existing violence prevention and intervention service providers are in need of funding, additional training, and community trust and support.

- All of the violence prevention service providers expressed an overarching need for adequate, accessible, and flexible funding to better meet community needs and to strengthen and expand organizational initiatives and structure.
- Service providers expressed the need for additional training and technical assistance related to violence reduction.
- Many of the community-based organizations serve a broad population and do not directly target people at the highest risk for shootings.
- Service providers emphasized the role of community support in ensuring services are effective.

Methods

This report takes a mixed-methods approach to analyzing dynamics of gun violence in Bakersfield and assessing the current landscape of services. This includes using publicly available data to characterize the individuals and patterns of gun violence in Bakersfield, as well as interviews with leaders of community-based organizations that work with individuals directly affected by gun violence within Bakersfield.⁷

The Gun Violence Archive,⁸ NICJR's main data source for assessing gun violence patterns, uses automated queries to compile relevant data from over 7,500 sources, including local and state police and government agencies, databases, media, and other sources. Data for each incident is verified through an initial research and secondary verification process.⁹ For all data obtained using the gun violence archive website, NICJR used the National Gun Violence Memorial website to fill in missing demographic data for victims and suspects.¹⁰

NICJR collected data related to the characteristics of those involved in gun violence in Bakersfield over a 19-month period (January 2022 through July 2023). As a part of the data collection and analysis, we checked all data for duplicates and missing information and aggregated age data for each victim and suspect into ranges of 0–17 years, 18–34 years, and 35+ years.

NICJR also interviewed leaders of community-based organizations in Bakersfield, making contact through direct outreach as well as via coordination with collaborative partners. In total, NICJR conducted three key informant interviews with service providers via Zoom. They shared how their organizations provide violence intervention and prevention services, who directly benefits from the services provided, and the needs of their organizations.

Data Limitations

Detailed information for all 75 fatal shootings and 88 non-fatal shootings during the report period is not available, both because this report only draws upon publicly available data, and because suspects have not been identified in many incidents.

Publicly available data for gun violence incidents are scarce. Identifying information is often unavailable for several reasons, including the victim's right to confidentiality and lack of an identified suspect. Location information is also often scarce, although NICJR determined zip code and neighborhood using reported incident addresses whenever possible. Despite the scarcity of some information, NICJR diligently searched multiple sources to collect data and has provided the most comprehensive data available.

Through a snowball sampling method, NICJR identified a total of six community-based providers of violence prevention and intervention services in Bakersfield. Although NICJR contacted all six organizations, only three responded, despite multiple requests: Behavioral Intervention Services, Garden Pathways, Wendale Davis Foundation. There may be gaps in information due to the unavailability of the other organizations.



Gun Violence Assessment

The tables and figures below provide an overview of the characteristics of those involved in gun violence within the city of Bakersfield between **January 2022 and July 2023**.

Table 1. Number of Gun Violence Victims and Suspects with Available Demographic Information

Data available	Fatal shooting victims	Fatal shooting suspects	Non-fatal shooting victims	Non-fatal shooting suspects
Age	64	47	-	34
Race	57	26	-	16
Gender	66	48	83	43

Demographic Breakdown

NICJR found that victims and suspects of both fatal and non-fatal shootings in Bakersfield from January 2022 to July of 2023 were disproportionately Latino males in their thirties.

Based on the available data, the average age of fatal shooting victims was 37, and suspects had an average age of 30. Similarly, the average age of known suspects was 31.

Within fatal shootings, 84.8% of victims and 95.8% of suspects were male, while 79.5% of non-fatal shooting victims and 95.3% of non-fatal shooting suspects were male.

Available information indicated that 71.9% of victims and 69.2% of suspects in fatal shootings were Latino. Among non-fatal shooting suspects, 50% were Black and 43.8% were Latino.

VICTIMS & SUSPECTS
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The majority of shooting victims and suspects were **between the ages of 18-37.**

Figure 1. Average Age of Victims and Suspects of Gun Violence



Table 2. Age Distribution of Victims and Suspects of Gun Violence

Age	Fatal shooting victims		Fatal shooting suspects		Non-fatal shooting victims ¹¹		Non-fatal shooting suspects	
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
Under 18	2	3.2%	2	4.2%	-	-	3	8.8%
18-34	31	48.4%	31	66%	-	-	17	50%
35+	31	48.4%	14	29.8%	-	-	14	41.2%
Total	64	100%	47	100%	-	-	34	100%

The majority of shooting victims and suspects were **Latino**.

Figure 2. Race/Ethnicity of Victims and Suspects of Gun Violence

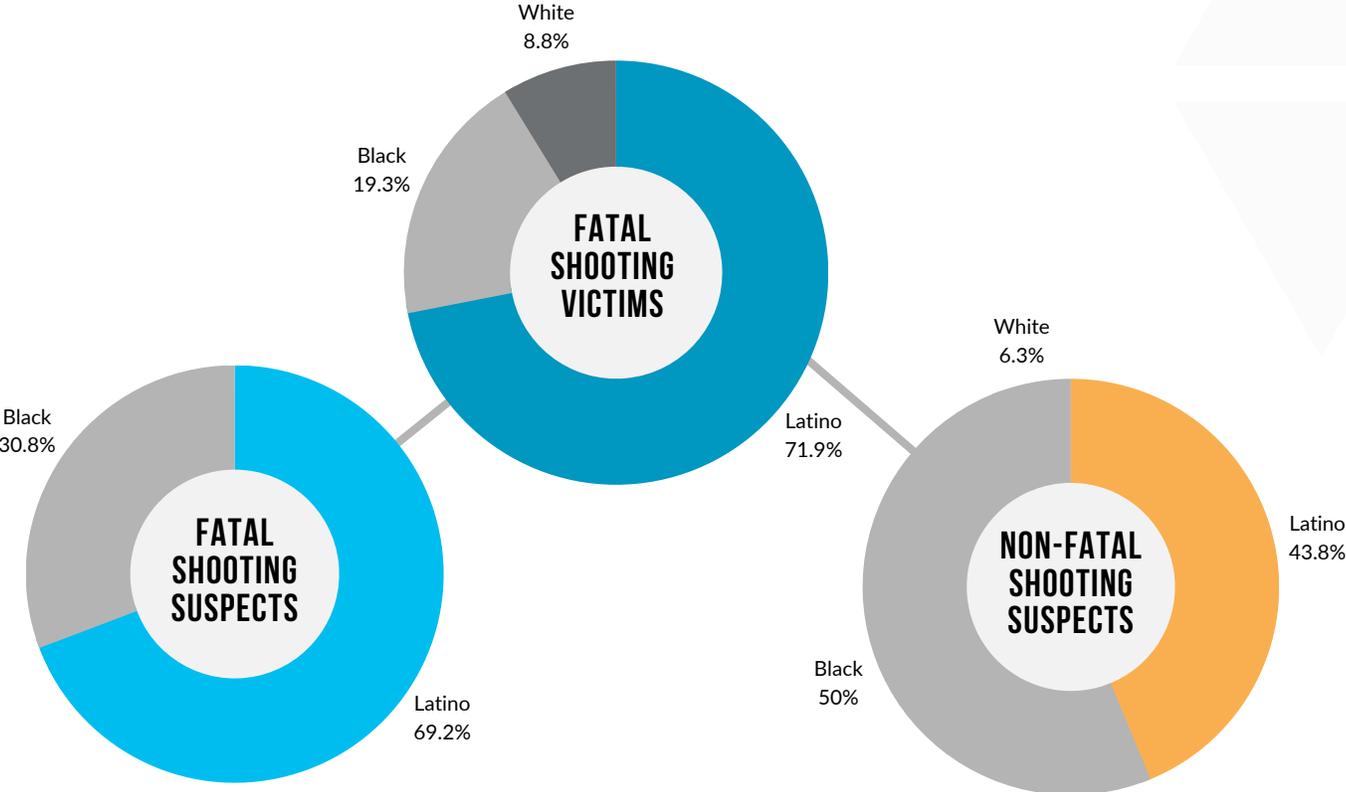


Table 3. Race/Ethnicity of Victims and Suspects of Gun Violence

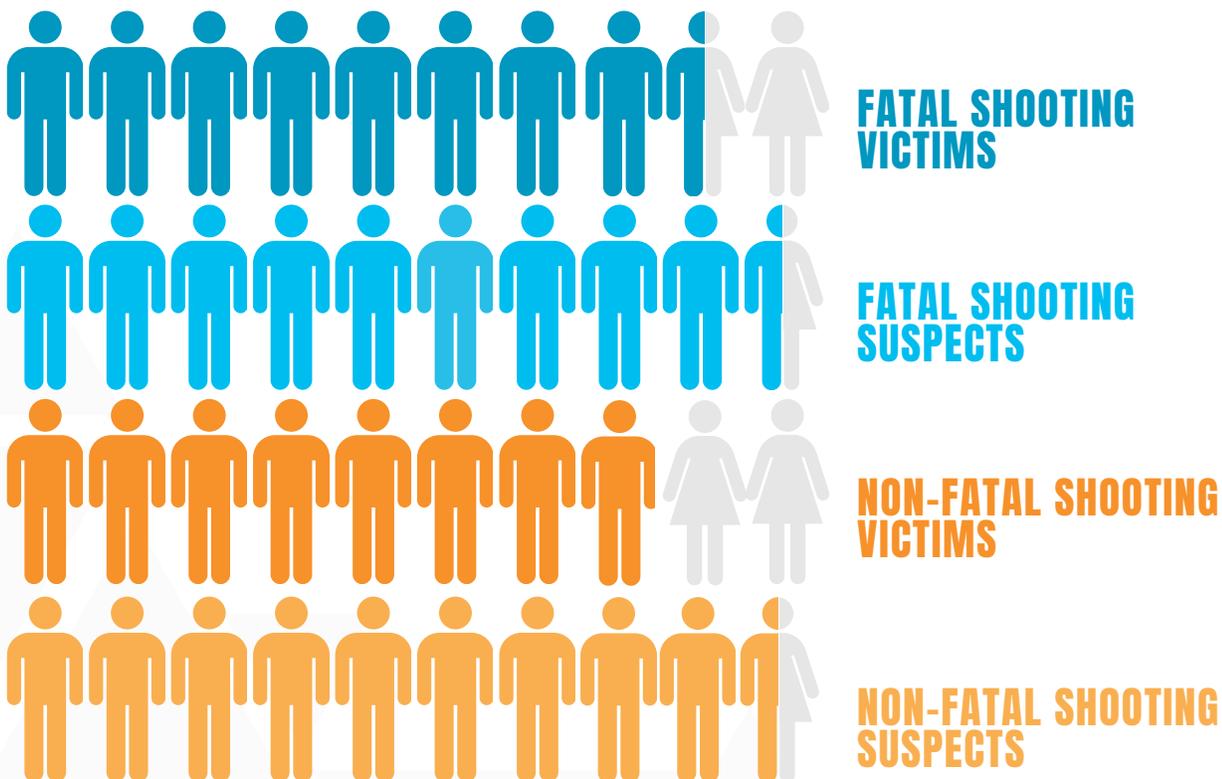
Race	Fatal shooting victims		Fatal shooting suspects		Non-fatal shooting victims		Non-fatal shooting suspects	
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
Black	11	19.3%	8	30.8%	-	-	8	50%
Latino	41	71.9%	18	69.2%	-	-	7	43.8%
White	5	8.8%	-	-	-	-	1	6.2%
Total	57	100%	26	100%	-	-	16	100%

The majority of shooting victims and suspects were **male**.

Table 4. Gender Distribution of Victims and Suspects of Gun Violence

	Fatal shooting victims		Non-fatal shooting victims	
Gender	#	%	#	%
Male	56	84.8%	66	79.5%
Female	10	15.2%	17	20.5%
Total	66	100%	83	100%
	Fatal shooting suspects		Non-fatal shooting suspects	
Gender	#	%	#	%
Male	46	95.8%	41	95.3%
Female	2	4.2%	2	4.7%
Total	48	100%	43	100%

Figure 3. Gender Distribution of Victims and Suspects of Gun Violence



Additional Context

According to the Bakersfield Police Department, prior analyses found that from 2020 through 2022, 77% of fatal shooting victims and suspects had prior involvement in the criminal justice system, in many cases with charges relating to drugs, disorder, or property offenses.

These prior analyses also found that those involved in fatal and non-fatal shootings were largely associated with groups (e.g., gangs, sets, or crews) throughout California, which are primarily made up of Latino and Black individuals. However, actual shooting circumstances included a mixture of group-related disputes and personal disputes. There were a large number of rival group members engaged in personal disputes where their group association did not serve as a primary driver for their involvement as a victim or suspect in a fatal shooting incident.

Shooting circumstances for non-fatal shootings are not widely known due to a lack of victim cooperation.



Zip codes **93304** & **93307** had the highest rates of gun violence.

The majority of shooting incidents (20% of fatal shootings and 17.5% of non-fatal shootings) occurred in the 93304 zip code. The 93307 zip code also saw 18.5% of fatal shootings and 23.8% of non-fatal shootings.

Figure 4: Gun Violence in Bakersfield between January 2022 -July 2023¹²

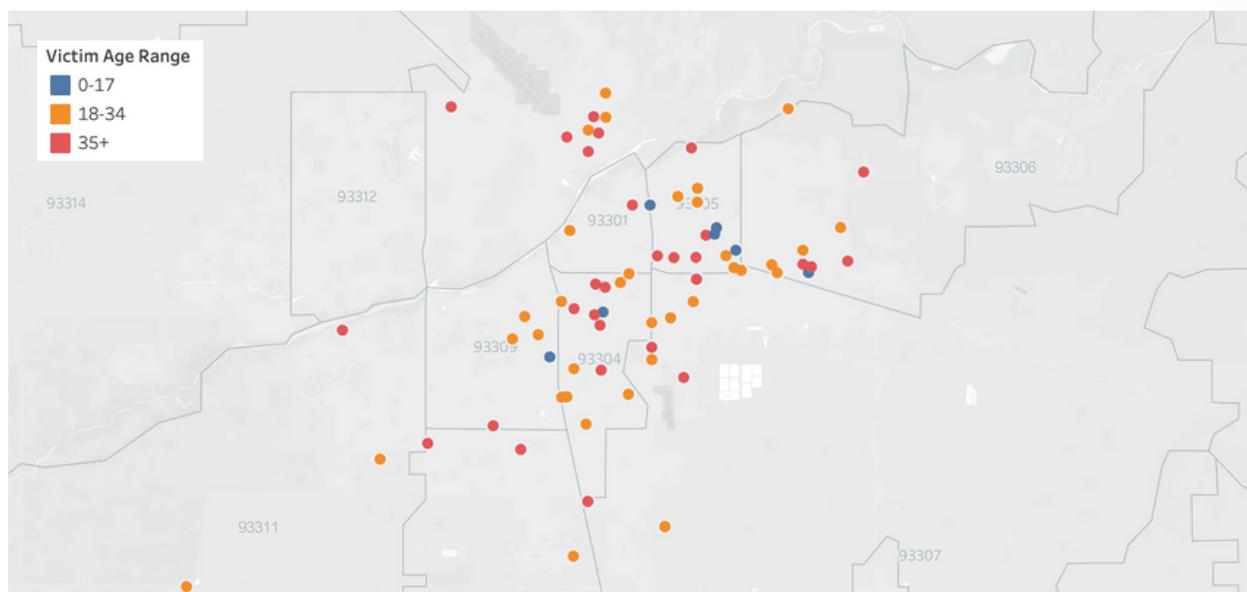
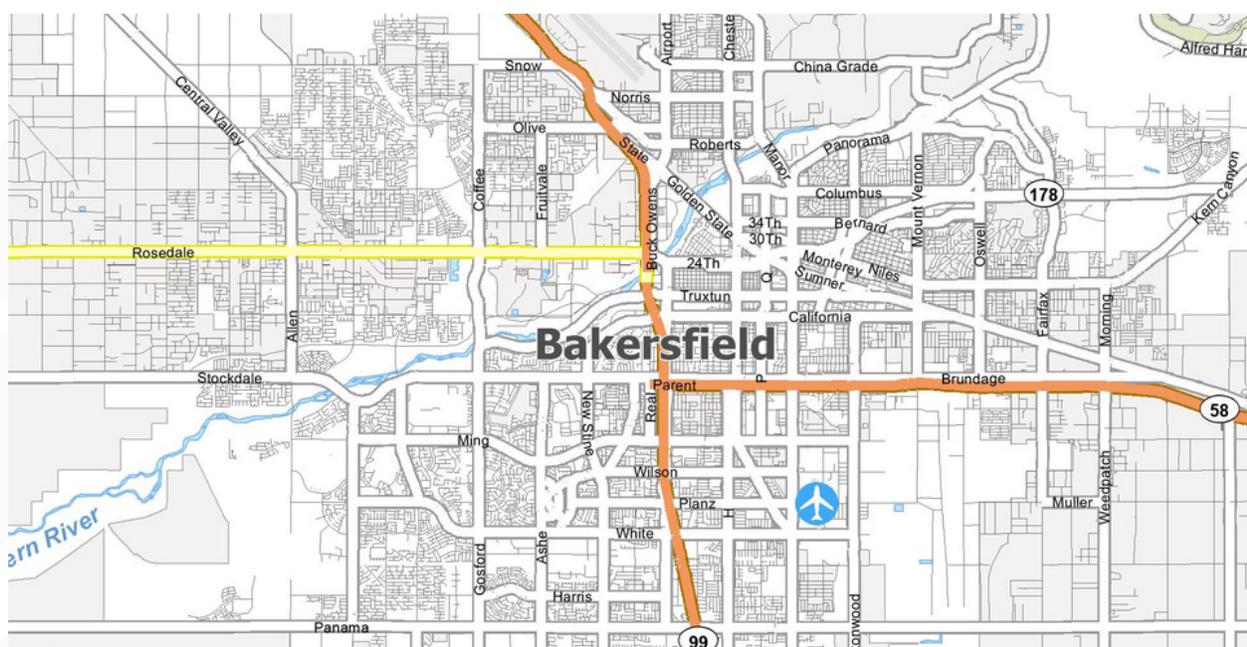
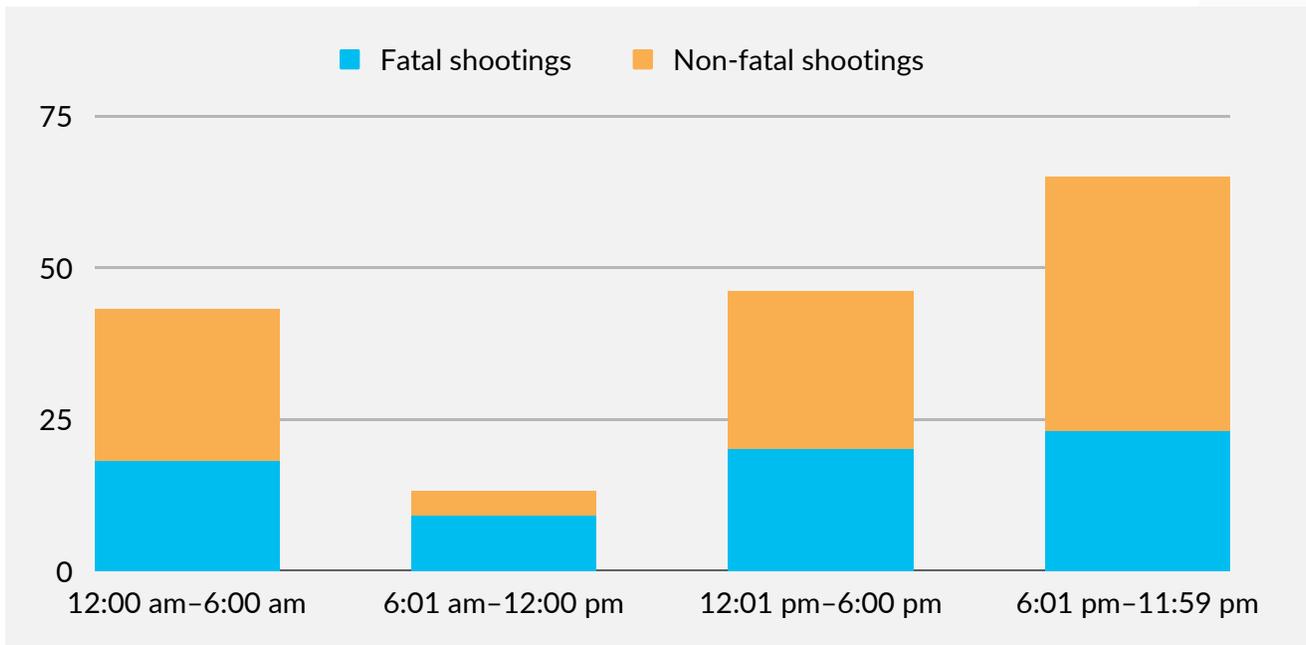


Figure 5: Map of Bakersfield, CA



The majority of shootings occurred during the evening and nighttime.

Figure 6. Gun Violence Incidents by Time of Day



Assessment of Bakersfield Violence Reduction Services

As noted above, NICJR interviewed representatives from three community-based organizations serving Bakersfield to better understand the local continuum of services available to reduce shootings and homicides. This section provides an overview of available services, followed by a brief assessment of service strengths and challenges.

Violence Reduction Framework

The organizations identified in Bakersfield fit within two violence reduction programmatic categories: violence prevention and violence intervention.

Violence prevention refers to the elimination or reduction of the underlying causes and risk factors that lead to violence.¹³ Violence prevention efforts are thus designed to prevent violence from occurring in the first place. **Violence intervention** efforts, on the other hand, are designed to prevent the recurrence of violence or intervene and prevent the imminent act of violence.

Both violence prevention and intervention hinge on deploying services that identify and address age- and context-appropriate risk and protective factors. Violence prevention efforts are most often targeted toward children and youth, as well as reentry populations, whereas violence intervention efforts are focused on the people who are at the greatest immediate risk of violence, typically young adults and adults. While violence prevention is a broad field encompassing various types of programs, effective violence intervention is more narrowly defined and focused.



Key Violence Prevention and Intervention Services in Bakersfield

Garden Pathways

Garden Pathways provides violence intervention and prevention programming to individuals as young as 12 years old and adults. Their services include but are not limited to case management, mentoring, educational and workplace readiness skills, and anger management courses.¹⁴ Among the more than 400 people currently served by Garden Pathways, roughly 30% have been directly affected by gun violence, and almost all have been impacted by community violence. Nearly 95% of those partaking in services at Garden Pathways Comprehensive Mentoring Facilities are currently or formerly incarcerated.

In 2021, Garden Pathways partnered with Kern Medical to launch Kern County's first hospital-based violence intervention (HBVI) program.¹⁵ When a victim of violence arrives at the trauma center or ER at Kern Medical, nurses and social workers screen them to determine if they are eligible to participate in Garden Pathway services. Those who qualify receive access to resources such as food boxes, therapy, support with medical bills, and additional victim support services. Garden Pathways also operates a street outreach team that provides services to those at the highest risk of violence and their families.¹⁶ This team of credible messengers is widely trusted throughout different communities and conducts outreach in jails, schools, juvenile centers, hospitals, and directly in the neighborhoods most impacted by the violence.

Wendale Davis Foundation

The Wendale Davis Foundation is a nonprofit community outreach organization that seeks to educate, motivate, and rehabilitate at-risk youth through counseling, mentoring, social interaction, and community support.¹⁷ The Foundation primarily serves those who are directly impacted by violence and geographically centered in gang-affiliated neighborhoods.

With a staff that is largely composed of system-impacted adults, the Wendale Davis Foundation offers a number of services geared toward youth ages 12 through 17 who are responsible for violence within the City of Bakersfield. The Foundation works with nearly 100 youth per week, providing life skills and etiquette training, substance use disorder counseling, anger management courses, educational and employment readiness services, and more.

Behavioral Intervention Services

Behavioral Intervention Services provides court-required courses in anger management, healthy parenting, and domestic violence prevention for those referred through the Kern County Courts, Child Protective Services, and Probation Department.¹⁸ The organization estimates that 60–70% of those they serve are Latino individuals, who are primarily male and have previous gang affiliation.

Violence Reduction Strengths and Challenges

Overall, community-based organizations within Bakersfield have been steadfast in their efforts to combat gun violence. Organizations such as Garden Pathways, the Wendale Davis Foundation, and Behavioral Intervention Services serve as community anchors who provide multi-purpose services and solutions. Such organizations are a driving force in the community and are dedicated to the long-term work that is needed to sustainably reduce gun violence within Bakersfield.

One notable strength within Bakersfield's current community-based violence reduction landscape is the use of evidence-based approaches. Garden Pathways and the Wendale Davis Foundation both use credible messengers to work with those at risk for and directly involved in gun violence – a proven strategy for building trust with populations that may be difficult to engage. Hospital-based violence intervention programs have also been proven effective for interrupting cycles of violence,¹⁹ so the establishment of such a program in Bakersfield is a major milestone. Another strength is the diversity of programming available. The highlighted organizations include both prevention and intervention providers, and they target an array of age ranges, with Garden Pathways and the Wendale Davis Foundation working with youth and young adults and Behavioral Intervention Services providing services for adults. Finally, all of the organizations interviewed by NICJR clearly demonstrated a strong desire to grow and learn how to better serve their community and reduce gun violence. This commitment to growth and improvement will be key to the work moving forward.



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When discussing the state of gun violence reduction services and strategies in Bakersfield, all of the organizations interviewed by NICJR identified stable funding as their number one barrier to preserving, expanding, and creating services for those directly impacted by and involved in gun violence. Two organizations, in particular, noted a number of times when executive directors and other organizational leaders have had to use personal finances to support the clients they serve. Another noted that since most of their clients are obligated to complete particular courses, they have needed to create a sliding-scale fee schedule and payment plans to provide flexibility to clients who are in need of financial assistance.

Because much of the funding available for this work is awarded through grants, there is a constant need to identify and apply for funding, as well as a significant administrative burden of tracking and reporting on awarded funds, which are often restricted to specific uses. In some cases, this creates inequities for smaller organizations that may not have the same skills and capacity as larger organizations to pursue and administer funding. Interviewees expressed the hardships they experience when funding does not directly reach the organizations on the ground who complete key front-facing work, and they emphasized the need for equal access to funding and greater autonomy over directly addressing identified needs.



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Another strong theme among interviewees was the need for greater collaboration and coordination across violence reduction efforts, including among local and county government agencies, across community-based organizations, and with community members and business leaders. Two of the three organization leaders noted previous collaborative efforts within the City, yet expressed that many organizations remain siloed in their efforts. Likewise, all interviewees expressed the need for partnership among Kern County Probation, Kern Behavioral Health and Recovery Services, the Kern County Public Health Department, and other county-level departments. At the same time, interviewees highlighted the need for community buy-in and support. In particular, both community members and law enforcement have a high level of trust in the community-based organizations engaged in this work, but there is very little trust between the community and law enforcement. Finding ways to extend the trust in those community providers to build trust between the community and law enforcement is a significant challenge and need.

Finally, interviewees identified capacity-building needs at the organizational level. Two organization leaders noted barriers related to staff capacity, particularly the need for solid role models for youth who can create and maintain positive relationships and reinforce good behavior. Interviewees also emphasized the need for additional training and technical assistance as related to best practices for gun violence reduction programming.

Although they remain committed to the work, Bakersfield is in need of additional capacity to effectively target those directly involved in gun violence. The city must prioritize immediate responses to violence that incorporate conflict de-escalation and mediation. This can be accomplished through a violence interruption model, which requires neighborhood change agents to build meaningful connections with those at the center of gun violence. Organizations like Garden Pathways and the Wendale Davis Foundation have made strides to implement such models but are in dire need of additional resources such as funding, staff, training, and community buy-in to expand and enhance their services.

Conclusion

There are a handful of programs and organizations that provide violence reduction services in Bakersfield. A key next step and area of focus for Bakersfield is investing in increased collaboration and coordination of violence prevention and intervention services.

The time for action is now. Kern County consistently ranks highest in the state for homicide, averaging over 100 homicides every year since 2015. To alter this trajectory, leadership within the City of Bakersfield must be keenly focused on providing the necessary service coordination and accountability framework for transformation, as well as the resources needed to expand key violence reduction organizations and develop additional services for those at the highest risk of involvement in gun violence.



Recommendations

Recommendation #1. Establish formal infrastructure to increase collaboration and coordination amongst existing violence prevention and intervention organizations.

Although Bakersfield is a large city with high rates of violence, there are only a few organizations in Bakersfield that are involved in violence reduction work. There is a real need for continued efforts to streamline violence reduction work within the city and ensure all age groups have access to services. This can happen in a number of ways. However, we suggest the following steps:

- Create a citywide violence reduction plan that includes proven strategies to reduce gun violence and focuses on the communities and populations most impacted by violence in Bakersfield, as indicated by the gun violence assessment and ongoing data analysis.
- Implement a strategy that would streamline efforts to engage those at the highest risk for gun violence.
- Create collaborative partnerships among organizations to coordinate violence reduction efforts. These partnerships should:
 - Provide space for information sharing;
 - Produce collaborative and innovative strategies to combat gun violence;
 - Include mechanisms for transparency and accountability across partners; and
 - Include a wide variety of organizations, agencies, and stakeholders, ranging from those with evaluation, policy, research, and technical assistance expertise to those who provide direct services to clients.
- Create and implement services which serve the primary age groups involved in violence, ages 18-34.

Recommendation #2. Provide training and technical assistance to organizations already engaged in violence reduction work.

While there are a handful of organizations that are already doing remarkable violence reduction work within the city, it is not clear if any have the type of sole focus on the very highest-risk people that is needed to achieve significant gun violence reduction in the near term. There is a need for additional training to ensure these organizations holistically understand Bakersfield's gun violence problem and are equipped to implement transformative strategies that have worked for other cities in combating gun violence. Technical assistance may include evaluations of existing services, programs, and initiatives within these organizations; general capacity-building training for organizations; recurring on-site technical support to provide consistent feedback; support in implementing program benchmarking and performance measurement tools; and intensive data collection for continuous analysis of those involved in shooting incidents.

Recommendation #3. Clarify and communicate service types.

Services providers should work to clearly communicate the type of programs they offer, their geographic service area, and their target population, both to ensure that those who are seeking services are able to find them and to create more transparency and opportunities for collaboration among community-based organizations and with local government agencies. As a first step, organizations should ensure they communicate these things clearly in public-facing materials (e.g., organizational website, social media accounts, brochures, etc.). In the longer term, the compilation of a comprehensive provider directory would be a valuable contribution to the city's violence reduction efforts. NICJR recommends incorporating the following data fields:

- **Service Type**
 - Violence prevention
 - Violence intervention
 - Re-entry
 - Youth development
 - Community transformation
- **Target Geographic Area**
- **Target Population**
 - Children (0-12)
 - Youth (12-17)
 - Transition Age Youth/Young Adults (18-21)
 - Adults (21 and older)
 - Gender-specific
 - Re-entry specific
 - Homeless specific
 - Other specific populations

Appendix

Garden Pathways

Address: 1616 29th Street, Bakersfield, CA 93301

Organizational Overview: Garden Pathways aims to transform lives from the inside out through loving, mentoring relationships.

Program/Services: Garden Pathways provides a wide range of life-building services through comprehensive mentoring, employment and educational strategies, art mentoring, anger management courses, and tattoo removal, as well as medical services through their hospital-based intervention services. Garden Pathways is a first-line provider to families in crisis. They also provide services for community violence intervention and prevention.

Population served: At-risk youth and adults

Annual budget: \$2,859,713²⁰

Website: <https://gardenpathways.org/about-us/>

Wendale Davis Foundation

Address: 730 Chester Avenue, Bakersfield, CA 93301

Organizational Overview: The Wendale Davis Foundation aims to educate, motivate, and rehabilitate at-risk youth and their families through counseling, familial support, social interaction, and mentoring.

Program/Services: The Wendale Davis Foundation provides counseling, life skills and etiquette training, substance use disorder counseling, anger management courses, and educational and employment readiness services.

Population Served: At-risk youth ages 12–17

Annual Budget: Unavailable²¹

Website: <https://www.wendaledavisfoundation.org>

Appendix

Behavioral Intervention Services

Address: PO Box 13488, Bakersfield, CA 93389

Organizational Overview: Behavioral Intervention Services provides counseling and educational classes in the areas of domestic violence, anger management, parenting / child neglect, failure to protect, and child abuse / child endangerment.

Population served: Adults with court-ordered training or counseling requirements through the Department of Child/Family Services, Kern County Courts, and Kern County Probation.

Annual budget: Unavailable

Website: <http://www.bisclasses.com/>



Endnotes

1. [Kern County homicide rate is highest in California - CalMatters](#)
2. [Homicide Tracker](#); Note: all types of homicides included in calculation
3. [Crime in California 2022](#)
4. [Chart: U.S. Homicide Rate Comes Down From Pandemic Peak | Statista](#)
5. ['Devil on the loose': What's behind Kern County's soaring homicide rate?](#)
6. [Bakersfield's Gun Violence Reduction Strategy Implementation Report 2022](#)
7. Please note, this assessment focuses on the violence reduction work of community-based organizations in Bakersfield rather than the current role of government agencies in this work. The government's role is described in some detail in the [Bakersfield's Gun Violence Reduction Strategy Implementation Report 2022](#).
8. [Gun Violence Archive](#)
9. [Gun Violence Archive, About](#)
10. [National Gun Violence Memorial](#)
11. Age and race data for non-fatal shooting victims is not available.
12. [Gun Violence in Bakersfield, CA between January 2022 -July 2023 - Tableau](#)
13. [The VPA Approach](#)
14. [Services - Garden Pathways](#)
15. [Community Violence Intervention and Prevention - Garden Pathways](#)
16. [Community Violence Intervention and Prevention - Garden Pathways](#)
17. [Wendale Davis Foundation](#)
18. [Behavioral Intervention Services](#)
19. [Hospital-Based Intervention Programs Reduce Violence and Save Money - Center for American Progress](#)
20. [Garden Pathways Inc - Nonprofit Explorer - ProPublica](#)
21. [The Wendale Foundation-Non Profit Explorer - ProPublica](#)

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