

# KNOXVILLE

## LANDSCAPE ANALYSIS

*GUN VIOLENCE REDUCTION PROGRAMS & INITIATIVES*

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In partnership with the City of Knoxville, the National Institute for Criminal Justice Reform (NICJR) conducted an analysis to gain a deeper understanding of the violence reduction programs, resources, and services currently available to the Knoxville community. By reviewing more than 15 programs during this assessment, this study aims to highlight promising programs and initiatives as well as identify areas where Knoxville requires additional support to effectively address gun violence within the city.

In collaboration with leaders from Knoxville's Office of Community Safety and Empowerment, NICJR began by identifying community-based organizations throughout the city that are working in fields of violence prevention, violence intervention, and community transformation. We then completed a review of identified organizations' websites and engaged in discussions with some of the organizations most directly focused on violence reduction to gain deeper insights into available services.

This assessment has confirmed that Knoxville is dedicated to mitigating gun violence, understanding its local impact, and seeking guidance and resources to enhance support for those in need. At the same time, our research sheds light on local deficiencies related to gun violence. Notably, there are a limited number of programs and services in Knoxville, and those primarily focus on community transformation and violence prevention (via youth development) rather than immediate violence intervention. Although the existing Office of Community Safety and Empowerment (OCSE) is evidence of Knoxville's commitment to creating a safe and healthy environment for its residents, only one community-based organization in Knoxville is exclusively devoted to working with individuals at the very highest risk of gun violence.

A detailed analysis of gun violence in Knoxville conducted in 2022,<sup>1</sup> which examined every single homicide and non-fatal shooting over a period of three years, revealed that the vast majority of victims and suspects in shootings are male, Black, between the ages of 18 and 34, and had, on average, nearly eight arrests prior to the shooting incident. The following tables have been adapted from this analysis.

Table 1: Shooting Victims and Suspects by Sex and Race (2019-2021) <sup>2</sup>

FATAL & NONFATAL SHOOTINGS (n=270)				
	Victims (n=296)	Suspects (n=202)	Victims & Suspects (n=480)	KNOXVILLE POPULATION
<b>Sex</b>				
Male	79.7%	90.6%	83.5%	48.0%
Female	20.3%	9.5%	16.5%	52.0%
<b>Race</b>				
Asian	0.0%	0.5%	0.2%	1.7%
Black	71.6%	81.7%	74.7%	16.9%
Hispanic	0.3%	0.0%	0.2%	5.4%
White	28.0%	17.8%	24.8%	72.4%

Table 2: Shooting Victims and Suspects by Age (2019-2021) <sup>3</sup>

FATAL & NONFATAL SHOOTINGS (n=270)				
	Victims (n=296)	Suspects (n=202)	Victims & Suspects (n=480)	
<b>Age</b>				
17 & Under	10.9%	15.0%	12.4%	
18-24	31.6%	32.0%	31.1%	
25-34	28.9%	30.5%	29.8%	
35-44	16.7%	14.0%	16.0%	
45-44	5.8%	3.5%	4.8%	
55+	6.1%	5.0%	5.9%	
Average Age	29.4	28.1	29.1	

To bridge this gap, Knoxville should foster the creation and expansion of services specifically catering to individuals at the greatest risk of engagement in gun violence. These highest-risk individuals have unique needs, and it is imperative that there are organizations that are strategically positioned to effectively address these needs as a means to immediately reduce violence and improve public safety. Beyond this, the City should prioritize fostering collaboration and transparency across local organizations and the community to address gun violence in alignment with the distinctive needs of the local community.

# INTRODUCTION

Gun violence has a profound and devastating impact on cities, contributing to a pervasive sense of insecurity and fear among residents. Beyond the immediate human toll, it also strains community resources, delays economic development, and diminishes the sense of community cohesion within a city, making it a pressing and multifaceted challenge for urban areas to address.

Knoxville, Tennessee is home to 195,889 people, of which 74.9% are White, 16.4% are Black, 5.7% are Latino, and 1.7% are Asian.<sup>4</sup> Like many US cities, Knoxville experienced an increase in gun violence since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. From 2020 through 2022, the city averaged roughly 37 fatal shootings annually, whereas in 2019 the city experienced 20 fatal shootings.<sup>5</sup> While a handful of organizations have been created in response to the city's gun violence challenges, those organizations tend to focus on upstream prevention efforts with youth or long-term community transformation efforts, rather than immediate violence intervention. There is a lack of programs and organizations that specifically serve those at the highest risk of gun violence.

To address the city's ongoing gun violence issue, a key next step for Knoxville should be investing in the expansion of services for highest-risk individuals and fostering increased collaboration and coordination among existing service providers.

In 2023, the Knoxville Mayor's office, OCSE, the Knoxville Police Department, and other city and county stakeholders began an effort to focus on gun violence reduction. Though that effort was developing in 2023 for a formal launch in 2024, initial progress has already been made. In 2023, Knoxville experienced a 33% reduction in homicides from the previous year, a significant achievement.

## Violence Reduction Framework

The NICJR violence reduction framework around which this report is organized includes three programmatic categories: violence prevention, violence intervention, and community transformation. Each of the violence reduction organizations identified in Knoxville fit within one or more of these categories.

**Violence prevention** refers to the elimination or reduction of the underlying causes and risk factors that lead to violence.<sup>6</sup> Violence prevention efforts are thus designed to prevent violence 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. While violence prevention is a broad field encompassing various types of programs, effective violence intervention is more narrowly defined and focused.

**Community transformation** refers to the elimination of system-level factors that give rise to violence in a neighborhood, such as poverty, blight, low performing schools, disinvestment, and chronic unemployment. While community transformation is a long-term strategy that can take 15–20 years to achieve, if successfully implemented, it can also be most effective at permanently reducing violence. Typically, there are several neighborhoods in cities with high rates of violence that do not need violence intervention programs because there is little violence in those particular communities. All neighborhoods should have a goal of not needing violence intervention programs.



Two additional, interconnected categories intersect with violence prevention, violence intervention, and community transformation: **youth development** and **reentry support**.

The **youth development** program model is designed to leverage the strengths and assets of young people while addressing their specific needs. This approach involves fostering attitudes, competencies, values, and social skills that contribute to the youth's successful transition into adulthood. Notably, youth development experiences correlate with positive outcomes, encompassing pro-social attitudes, self-efficacy, academic achievement, and readiness for employment. This complex strategy can be viewed as a form of violence prevention, as the positive outcomes serve as protective factors against the root causes of violence.

On the other hand, **reentry services** focus on assisting formerly incarcerated individuals in effectively reintegrating into their communities after incarceration. By addressing key components known as the "Big Six" — housing, employment, education, mental health services, necessary drug treatment, and establishing a positive and trusting relationship with an adult (mentor, case manager, life coach, etc.) — these services aim to reduce recidivism, enhance public safety, and improve overall individual outcomes.

# ASSESSMENT OF KNOXVILLE VIOLENCE REDUCTION SERVICES

NICJR interviewed representatives from community-based organizations serving Knoxville to better understand the local continuum of services available to reduce gun violence. We also spoke with the City's Director of Community Safety and Empowerment to gain additional context. This section provides an overview of Knoxville's available services and a brief assessment of service strengths and challenges as identified through those interviews. Additional service providers are highlighted later in this report, under Organization Profiles.

## Overview of Violence Reduction Landscape

### Public Initiatives and Policies

The Knoxville Office of Community Safety and Empowerment was established in August 2021, with Mayor Indya Kincannon appointing LaKenya Middlebrook as the City's first-ever Director of Community Safety and Empowerment.<sup>7</sup> Under Middlebrook's direction, the office spearheads strategies for interrupting violence, orchestrates safety innovation and collaboration among City departments, and strengthens partnerships with individuals and organizations on the ground who are actively striving to enhance safety in Knoxville.<sup>8</sup> OCSE serves as the intermediary between community organizations and the City, addressing the concerns of these groups. It also provides a number of micro grants for youth violence prevention, including funding for spring and summer break youth engagement programs.<sup>9</sup>

Additionally, in May 2023, the City of Knoxville developed a Community-Based Violence Reduction Plan in which the primary strategies are partnership-based, solution-focused, evidence-informed, community-engaged, and humanity-centered.<sup>10</sup> Knoxville has identified a number of strategies that are in either the planning or implementation stage to combat gun violence, including expanding the services of OCSE and creating tools for measuring trust in government.

## Community-Based Efforts

NICJR worked closely with members of OCSE to identify the community-based organizations in Knoxville that provide gun violence reduction services and to select a handful of organizations and leaders for further conversation. The three organizations highlighted below are those that most directly work in the violence reduction space. Each participated in an interview with NICJR, allowing us to better understand their work as well as areas where more support is needed for serving those at risk of gun violence involvement.

### Community Mediation Center

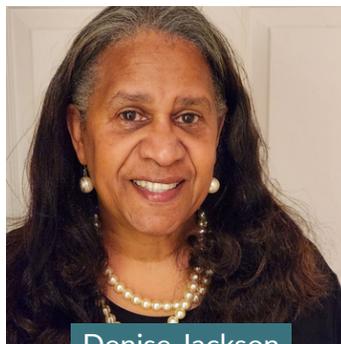
Founded in 1994 and housed within the Knox County Juvenile Court building, the Community Mediation Center is unique among the three organizations highlighted here in that they provide training and support to other frontline violence reduction workers, playing a crucial role in fostering harmony and resolution within the Knoxville community. The Center offers mediation training and conducts workshops aimed at equipping advocates, community-based organization leaders, and community participants with effective de-escalation practices.

The Center also provides volunteer-led mediation services to individuals involved in juvenile, family, civil, and criminal court cases, demonstrating a commitment to addressing a broad spectrum of community needs regardless of ability to pay for services.<sup>11</sup> Additionally, the Center provides parenting education classes, acknowledging the importance of familial relationships in maintaining a harmonious society.<sup>12</sup> The Center also actively engages the community through various events such as foundational mediation resource workshops, mediation training sessions, and peace walkouts, fostering a culture of peace and understanding throughout the year.<sup>13</sup> Overall, the Community Mediation Center stands as a pillar of support and education, promoting a resilient and interconnected community in Knoxville.

#### Community Mediation Center Leadership



Jen Comiskey



Denise Jackson



Jackie Kittrell



## Turn Up Knox

Turn Up Knox is the only organization in Knoxville that specifically serves young adults who are at the highest risk for gun violence involvement. This community-informed violence intervention program was founded in July 2022. It serves as a catalyst for gun violence reduction efforts in Knoxville and supports, equips, and empowers members of the Knoxville community to lead safe and healthy lives.

Turn Up Knox's work is organized around violence intervention as a short-term strategy for violence reduction, violence prevention as a medium-term strategy, and community transformation as a long-term strategy. Their work includes providing wrap-around services for high-risk youth, hosting community outreach and public awareness events, and offering familial support to system-involved adults as well as impacted youth. Turn Up Knox also hosts restorative events throughout the community and utilizes violence interrupters on the ground.

As a young organization, Turn Up Knox has prioritized building strong relationships with the community and other local organizations, as community referrals are key to effective engagement with those who are at high risk of gun involvement. Turn Up Knox has made over 100 community connections to date, held 21 events where they were primary lead or cosponsors, made roughly 20 client referrals to mental health services, and logged a number of volunteers who participate with the organization.<sup>14</sup>

## Drums Up, Guns Down

Drums Up, Guns Down stands as a powerful initiative in the face of escalating gun violence in Knoxville, Tennessee. Born out of the founder's direct experience with students impacted by gun violence, the organization takes a unique and culturally rich approach by integrating African Drumming into its program for the city's youth.<sup>15</sup> This choice is not arbitrary; it resonates deeply with Knoxville's culture, recognizing the historical significance of drumming as a therapeutic tool for coping with trauma.<sup>16</sup>

Annually, Drums Up, Guns Down offers a transformative seven-week summer camp designed to immerse youth in West African drum and dance, along with lessons in life skills and discipline, STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics), arts and crafts, the performing arts, mental wellness, and nutrition.<sup>17</sup> Upon completion, students receive more than just musical skills—they are awarded their own drum kit; a mobile app for continued learning; and, crucially, ongoing support from dedicated instructors or program mentors throughout the year.<sup>18</sup>

Drums Up, Guns Down serves 60 to 75 youth ages 5 through 18 each year through their summer camp and throughout the school year. Drums Up, Guns Down goes beyond conventional methods, using the power of rhythm and cultural heritage to provide a holistic and sustained approach to combating gun violence in Knoxville.



Drums Up, Guns Down

# Violence Reduction Strengths and Challenges

## Strengths

One major strength related to gun violence reduction in Knoxville is the presence of the OCSE. The establishment of such an office is a major milestone, as it highlights the city's investment in and commitment to violence reduction strategies. As an intermediary that connects community-based organizations and city agencies, OCSE is a key resource for providing programs and services to community members and thus creating a safer city.

Another strength is the diversity of programming available within the three violence reduction-focused community-based organizations described above. The highlighted organizations include both prevention and intervention providers, and they target an array of age ranges, with Drums Up, Guns Down and Turn Up Knox working with youth and young adults and the Community Mediation Center providing services for all ages, with specific development workshops for service providers.

The three interviewed organizations' collaborative efforts are another considerable strength. The leader of Drums Up, Guns Down mentioned how members of Turn Up Knox have assisted in organizational duties in their absence, such as driving students to and from classes. Members of the Community Mediation Center noted that their training for members of Turn Up Knox has enhanced the organization's violence intervention strategies. These three organizations have exhibited their dedication to collective action and their investment in working together to save lives— a major asset to the city's violence reduction efforts.

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.

Organizations such as Turn Up Knox; Community Mediation Center; and Drums Up, Guns Down 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 Knoxville. Paired with the leadership and coordination now provided by OCSE, there is great potential for considerable impact moving forward.

## Challenges

Overall, a pressing challenge facing the City of Knoxville is the lack of organizations specifically designed to directly serve those who are at the highest risk of involvement in gun violence, especially young adults. While upstream violence prevention and long-term community transformation efforts are an important part of the violence reduction ecosystem, addressing this gap is crucial to interrupting immediate cycles of gun violence and promoting community safety.

A detailed analysis of gun violence in Knoxville conducted in 2022, which examined every single homicide and non-fatal shooting over a period of three years, revealed that the vast majority of victims and suspects in shootings are male, Black, between the ages of 18 and 34, and had, on average, nearly eight arrests prior to the shooting incident.

Through interviews with OCSE and leadership from the three primary organizations who are engaged in this work, several additional challenges emerged. The first, which was a unanimous concern among interviewees, was the lack of stable funding for violence reduction work. Each organization identified this challenge as the foremost obstacle impeding their ability to maintain, expand, and innovate services dedicated to those directly affected by and involved in gun violence. One organization emphasized that many community-based organizations either compete for the same grants or discover grant opportunities close to submission deadlines, when they cannot develop a competitive proposal. Interviewees also noted instances where only larger entities secure funding, rather than funders investing in collaborative efforts where smaller and emerging organizations can thrive.

Interviewees also highlighted the deep need for further collaboration and coordination not only among local and county government agencies but also across community-based organizations and with community members. Often, multiple community-based agencies will unknowingly serve the same people, which can cause dysfunction and miscommunication. Further, when agencies cannot or do not work closely with the communities they serve, there can be a significant disconnect between community needs and the resources made available to them. Although all of the interviewed organization leaders mentioned having well-developed working relationships with one another, they also noted a need for more dedicated staff not only for cross-organizational coordination but for engaging the community. This call for community connection and synchronized action reflects a collective understanding that a community-wide approach is essential in addressing the complex challenges associated with reducing violence.

Other challenges noted by one or more interviewees included:

- Insufficient availability of resources for addressing grief and trauma;
- A lack of staff who share the backgrounds and experiences of those directly affected by violence;
- Distrust between funders and community-based organizations, including disconnects between large funders and those who work on the ground, leading to misdirected or insufficient funding;
- Concerns about groups receiving funding without sufficient training or capacity building to deliver on funding objectives;
- A need for training and technical assistance so that organizations are fully equipped to effectively work in the violence reduction space; and
- A need for a broader systems perspective and more shared responsibility in decision-making processes, to elevate the needs and perspectives of smaller community-based organizations and community members.



# Recommendations

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

Knoxville has only a few organizations that are specifically 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 recommend the following steps:

- Develop and implement a clear strategy to streamline efforts for engaging those at the highest risk for gun violence.
- As a part of this strategy, create partnerships and 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 more services focused on the primary age groups involved in violence (those who are ages 18–34).

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

There are a few organizations that are already doing remarkable violence reduction work within the city, though only one organization has 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 that organizations holistically understand Knoxville'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.

### 3. Clarify 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 in such a directory:

- Service Type
  - Violence prevention
  - Violence intervention
  - Reentry support
  - 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
  - Reentry specific
  - Homeless specific
  - Other specific populations

# CONCLUSION

There are a few programs and organizations that already provide important violence reduction services in Knoxville. There is also room for growth and improvement. Leadership within the City of Knoxville should focus 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.

# ORGANIZATION PROFILES<sup>19</sup>

In the broader Knoxville metropolitan area, there are a total of 91 organizations dedicated to youth development. These organizations collectively support 1,077 employees, generate an annual revenue exceeding \$45 million, and possess assets totaling \$109 million.<sup>20</sup> This further highlights the disparity in the Knoxville service landscape; there is an abundance of organizations catering to youth, and there is a notable shortage of organizations specifically addressing the needs of high-risk adults involved in gun violence. Many community-based organizations in Knoxville, Tennessee provide services that could be described as community transformation. A smaller number of organizations work in violence prevention, primarily with youth, and even fewer organizations work in violence intervention. Only a handful of organizations specifically provide services to those at the highest risk of gun violence. The organizations listed below align closely with NICJR's violence reduction framework.



# Violence Reduction

## Violence Prevention

### SEED KNOX

**Address:** 1617 Dandridge Avenue, Knoxville, TN 37915

**Organizational Overview:** Established in 2009 in response to escalating community worries about gun violence, limited youth opportunities, and the increasing burden of unaffordable utility and housing expenses, SEED utilizes a Pathway Out Of Poverty framework to provide participants with the tools needed to live a healthy and productive life. Specifically, SEED offers young adults avenues to escape poverty by delivering career readiness training, providing environmental education, and fostering community engagement. SEED also serves as a liaison between the government, community organizations, and community members that may otherwise be disconnected from those resources. The organization's core values include sustainability, community, equity, and personal development.

### **Program/Services:**

- **Career Readiness Training:** SEED's career readiness recruitment efforts focus on young adults, primarily in the 18–24 age range, enrolling them in an eight-week program designed to impart essential life skills, job-related expertise, and placement skills.
- **Community Engagement and Green Construction Bootcamp:** This four-week on-the-job training equips young adults for potential employment opportunities within SEED's community engagement or green construction departments.

**Population Served:** Youth and adults

**City Area Served:** Knoxville, Tennessee

**Annual Revenue:** \$472,000

**Website:** <https://www.seedknox.org/aboutus>

## **Drums Up, Guns Down**

**Address:** Unknown

**Organizational Overview:** Drums Up, Guns Down is a youth African drumming program that was created in response to gun violence in Knoxville. Drumming has historically been used as a tool to deal with traumatic experiences and is engrained in the City of Knoxville's cultural DNA.

### **Program/Services:**

- Youth African Drumming Program: In this four-week summer program, youth study, experience, and perform traditional West African drum rhythms. They also learn related history and culture, and they are provided a drum to take home. After the completion of the program, which is offered during the month of June, students are rewarded with their own drum kit, a mobile app, and year-round support from either the instructor or program mentors.

**Population Served:** Youth ages 5–18

**City Area Served:** Knoxville, Tennessee

**Annual Revenue:** Not Available

**Website:** <https://www.drumsupgunsdown.com/>

## Violence Intervention

### Turn Up Knox

**Address:** 7031 Middlebrook Pike, Suite #121, Knoxville, TN 37909

**Organizational Overview:** Turn Up Knox is a community-informed violence intervention program that was founded in July 2022. It serves as a catalyst for gun violence reduction efforts in Knoxville and supports, equips, and empowers members of the Knoxville community to lead safe and healthy lives

**Program/Services:** Turn Up Knox's work is organized around violence intervention as a short-term strategy for violence reduction, violence prevention as a medium-term strategy, and community transformation as a long-term strategy. Their work includes providing wrap-around services for high-risk youth, hosting community outreach and public awareness events, and offering familial support (housing and mental health referrals, etc.) to system-involved adults as well as impacted youth. Turn Up Knox also hosts restorative events throughout the community and utilizes street outreach and violence interrupters on the ground.

**Population Served:** Young adults ages 18–38

**City Area Served:** Knoxville, Tennessee

**Annual Revenue:** Not Available

**Website:** <https://turnupknox.org/>

## **Community Mediation Center**

**Address:** Old Courthouse, Suite 305, 300 Main Street, Knoxville, TN 37902

**Organizational Overview:** The Community Mediation Center is a nonprofit that provides mediation services so people can resolve and manage their conflicts amicably, inexpensively, and rapidly. These services are provided regardless of ability to pay. The Center also offers mediation training and conducts workshops aimed at equipping advocates, community-based organization leaders, and community participants with effective de-escalation practices. Additionally, the Center contributes to the community's well-being by providing parenting education classes and actively engages the community through various events, such as foundational mediation resource workshops and mediation training sessions, fostering a culture of peace and understanding throughout the year.

### **Program/Services:**

- **Court-Based Mediation:** Community Mediation Center serves as a neutral third party that fosters communication between parties involved in court cases.
- **Non-Court Based Mediation:** Community Mediation Center offers mediation for schools, adult protective service cases, neighborhoods, and disputes or communication problems within and between organizations.
- **Training:** The Center offers a range of court-approved mediation trainings for civil and family mediation, with a focus on volunteer commitment, skills development, and opportunities for observation of real mediation sessions while also extending training to conflict management and resolution skills for the Department of Mental Health and Developmental Disabilities.

**Population Served:** Youth and adults

**City Area Served:** Knoxville, Tennessee

**Annual Revenue:** \$293,000

**Website:** <https://2mediate.org/about/>

## Community Transformation

### Community Defense of East Tennessee

**Address:** P.O. Box 1742, Knoxville, Tennessee 37915

**Organizational Overview:** Community Defense of East Tennessee (CDET) is a grassroots organization committed to ending mass incarceration and dismantling systemic racism in Eastern Tennessee and beyond. Through education, advocacy, and community empowerment, CDET seeks to challenge the profit-driven injustices of the current criminal justice system, advocating for restorative justice practices that prioritize healing and transformation. By fostering collaboration locally and nationally, CDET aims to amplify its impact and create a society where equity, solidarity, and dignity are foundational principles.

**Program/Services:** Community Defense of East Tennessee has a number of initiatives related to ending juvenile life sentences. In 2020, the organization saved their community a total of 223 years of incarceration. In 2020, Community Defense of East Tennessee worked alongside community members and the public defender's office to reduce the jail population by 40%.

Community Defense of East Tennessee has also collaborated with other community organizations for back to school supply drives and book discussions related to a number of criminal justice issues.

**Population Served:** Youth, young adults, and adults

**City Area Served:** Knoxville, Tennessee

**Annual Revenue:** Not available

**Website:** <https://www.cdetchip.org/>

## **The Restoration House of East Tennessee**

**Address:** 2205 Village Place Way, Knoxville, TN, 37923

**Organizational Overview:** The Restoration House of East Tennessee is a faith-based group serving low-income single mothers and their children. Through transitional housing, ally teams, family advocacy, and youth development, the organization works to provide healing and stability.

### **Program/Services:**

- **Supportive Transitional Housing:** The Restoration House owns and operates The Village, which is a restorative community for single-parent families. Women living in The Village contribute 30% of their income toward housing and must be working or in school within six months of starting of the program.
- **Ally Teams:** These mentorship groups gather five to seven people within the same age group for partnership focused on emotional and spiritual support as well as increased social capital.
- **Family Advocacy:** Staff work with each family to develop an action plan that leverages their strengths to complete educational, career, parenting, and personal growth goals.
- **Youth Development:** Staff from the Emerald Youth Foundation collaborate with Restoration House to provide on-site youth development services.

**Population Served:** Youth, adults, women, and men

**City Area Served:** Knoxville, Tennessee

**Annual Revenue:** \$1,042,341

**Website:** <https://therestorationhouse.net/>

## **United Way of Greater Knoxville**

**Address:** 1301 Hannah Avenue, Knoxville, TN 37921

**Organizational Overview:** United Way of Greater Knoxville unites people and resources to strengthen communities while also tackling systemic issues.

### **Program/Services:**

- **Community School:** Community Schools are public schools that provide services to help students, educators, families and neighborhoods thrive. Community Schools are located within the most marginalized areas of Knox County.
- **Bright Start Tennessee and Bright Steps:** United Way of Greater Knoxville is a member of the Bright Start Tennessee Network, which is powered by Tennesseans for Quality Early Education. Bright Start was introduced to bring together a statewide network of community partners dedicated to accelerating early learning outcomes and closing achievement and opportunity gaps for Tennessee children, with the Bright Steps Action Plan serving as a roadmap for the work.
- **East Tennessee Collaborative:** The East Tennessee Collaborative helps families establish economic independence. Program participants partner with a mentor for up to two years to set goals and make a plan to achieve them, earn financial incentives and receive support, and also access skills and opportunities to increase their income and financial wellbeing.
- **Food System Initiative:** The United Way Greater Knoxville works alongside food system stakeholders, community residents, policy makers, nonprofit leaders, and community-based organizations to create a more just and equitable local food system.

**Population Served:** Children, youth, young adults, adults

**City Area Served:** Knoxville, Tennessee

**Annual Revenue:** \$11,081,611

**Website:** <https://uwgk.org/>

## **YWCA Knoxville and the Tennessee Valley**

**Address:** 420 West Clinch Avenue, Knoxville, TN 37902

**Organizational Overview:** The mission of YWCA Knoxville and the Tennessee Valley is to eliminate racism; empower women; and promote peace, justice, freedom, and dignity for all. YWCA is a safe haven for women and their families, where women are known to come when facing a crisis. Among other services, the organization supports survivors of rape and domestic violence, helping them with housing as they transition to permanent living situations.

### **Program/Services:**

- **Jenny Boyd Keys of Hope Women’s Program:** This program's goal is to provide affordable housing in a safe environment with supportive services that promote self-sufficiency without regard to race, ethnicity, national origin, religion, sexual orientation, or disability.
- **GameChangers Program:** This gender-based violence prevention program for middle school boys in East Tennessee uses a group mentoring structure to teach boys about domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault, stalking, bystander intervention skills, and how they can help prevent violence against women and girls.
- **Victim Advocacy Program:** This program is the only community-based, non-shelter victim advocacy program in Knox County. It is also the only program with advocates in both criminal and civil courts and the only program with bilingual advocates. The YWCA Victim Advocacy Program has an onsite partner at the Knoxville Family Justice Center. The program also has advocates stationed at the Family Justice Center in court and in the community.
- **Justice for Families Program:** Funded by the Office on Violence, this program offers supervised visitation and safe exchange services for families who have experienced violence within their relationships in and around Anderson County.
- **Freedom Inside Program:** This program offers counseling and crisis intervention to incarcerated women who have been victims of abuse. Services include pre-and post-release individual and group counseling, case management, housing, and referrals to assistance.
- **Mobility Mentor Program:** The mobility mentor program provides support, knowledge, and resources needed to help families move from dependency to self sufficiency in an 18–35 month time frame.

**Population Served:** Children, youth, young adults, adults

**City Area Served:** Knoxville, Tennessee

**Annual Revenue:** \$4,168,484

**Website:** <https://ywcaknox.com/>

# Youth Development

## **Big Brothers Big Sisters of East Tennessee (BBBS-ETN)**

**Address:** 1100 Marion Street, Suite #100, Knoxville, TN 37921

**Organizational Overview:** Big Brothers Big Sisters of East Tennessee is an organization dedicated to fostering mentorship relationships between volunteers, known as Bigs, and youth, referred to as Littles, ages 6–18. BBBS-ETN is committed to inclusivity and diversity, carefully matching individuals based on shared interests and personalities. Through its community-based and site-based programs, BBBS-ETN provides training, resources, and ongoing support to ensure the success of mentorship matches.

### **Program/Services:**

- **Big Futures:** This program empowers high school-aged youth by providing essential life skills through in-person event sessions sponsored by Big Brothers Big Sisters. Held on weeknight evenings throughout the program year, these sessions cover topics such as financial management, SMART goal setting, post-secondary program options, resume writing, interviewing techniques, and organizational skills.
- **STEM Mentoring:** This program provides Littles with Bigs who have careers in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics.
- **Bigs In Blue:** In this program, police officers and Littles develop one-on-one relationships with each other, allowing them to have dialogue and dispel stereotypes and preconceived notions.
- **High School Bigs:** This program pairs high school students with Littles for on-site programming.

**Population Served:** Youth

**City Area Served:** Knoxville, Tennessee

**Annual Revenue:** \$1,803,102

**Website:** <https://tennesseebig.org/>

## **Emerald Youth Foundation**

**Address:** 1014 Heiskell Avenue, Knoxville, TN 37921

**Organizational Overview:** The Emerald Youth Foundation is a faith-based organization dedicated to cultivating youth to become leaders who help renew their communities. Utilizing a neighborhood ministry model, the Foundation partners with churches and other organizations in specific urban communities to provide youth with development in the areas of faith, learning, and health. The Emerald Youth Foundation has served more than 25,000 youth, with a focus on “troubled youth.”

### **Program/Services:**

- **Urban Youth Ministry:** The Foundation’s JustLead afterschool program for elementary and middle school students includes tutoring, homework help, health/fitness/nutrition instruction, field trips, and service learning opportunities.
- **Calling and Career Ministry:** This program provides support to high school students as they transition into their post-secondary life, including access to technology, tutoring, workshops to support academic improvement and professional development, and assistance with college and financial aid applications.

**Population Served:** Youth

**City Area Served:** Knoxville, Tennessee

**Annual Revenue:** \$5,485,195

**Website:** <https://www.emeraldyouth.org/>

## **KnoxWorx**

**Address:** The Regas Building, 318 North Gay Street, Suite 210, Knoxville, TN 37917

**Organizational Overview:** KnoxWorx provides young adults with training, individualized case management, mentoring, and employment development in vocational paths such as welding, CNA, culinary, construction, customer service, and manufacturing.

**Program/Services:** When a young adult enrolls in KnoxWorx, the organization first conducts an assessment to understand their current soft skills and the areas where they need improvement to sustain employment. A case manager works with the young person to develop a plan focused on those growth areas, and they provide case management as the participant carries out the plan. KnoxWorx offers courses to assist young adults in obtaining certifications and credentials needed to secure employment. The organization also connects participants with employers who are hiring in the area.

**Population Served:** Youth and young adults

**City Area Served:** Knoxville, Tennessee

**Annual Revenue:** Not available

**Website:** <https://knoxworx.klf.org/>

## **Knoxville Inner City Kids Outreach (KICKO)**

**Address:** 1022 Elm Street, Knoxville, TN 37921

**Organizational Overview:** KICKO is a faith-based organization whose mission is to transform Knoxville's inner city by equipping and empowering children to realize their potential through child and youth development programming, parenting and foster care support, and mobilizing community chaplains to respond to traumatic events.

### **Program/Services:**

- Raising Highly Capable Kids: In 2018, KICKO piloted a citywide initiative to encourage other youth-serving organizations to provide more family support utilizing Resilient Kids's Raising Highly Capable Kids parent curriculum. This curriculum has proven to be a valuable tool for engaging parents and supporting families.
- Foster Care Support: KICKO provides care, connection, and community for teens, young adults, and adults who have experienced foster/adoptive care through its 29.11 initiative.

**Population Served:** Youth

**City Area Served:** Knoxville, Tennessee

**Annual Revenue:** \$587,000

**Website:** <https://www.kicko.org/>

## **My Daughter's Journey**

**Address:** PO Box 3127, Knoxville, TN 37927

**Organizational Overview:** My Daughter's Journey aims to leverage unlimited possibilities, resources, and networking to support single, pregnant, and parenting young women ages 10–24. My Daughter's Journey also provides a transitional living program that integrates life skills development, mentorship, and leadership initiatives as well as fosters academic success for the young girls served.

### **Program/Services:**

- Annual back-to-school events
- Toy drives
- Coat drives
- Food giveaways
- Group mentoring programs
- Advocacy services
- Gun trauma workshops (newly implemented)

**Population Served:** Girls ages 10–24

**City Area Served:** Knoxville, Tennessee

**Annual Revenue:** Not available

**Website:** [www.mydaughtersjourneyinc.org](http://www.mydaughtersjourneyinc.org)

## **Girl Talk, Inc.**

**Address:** First Century Bank Building, 625 Market Street, Suite 1301, Knoxville, TN 37902

**Organizational Overview:** Girl Talk is dedicated to empowering girls by providing them with the support and resources needed to thrive. The organization aims to reduce teen pregnancy rates and foster educational advancement, ultimately enabling young women to connect with their purpose and become confident leaders in their communities. Girl Talk creates safe spaces where girls can find hope, grace, and support while embracing their identity and fulfilling their potential.

### **Program/Services:**

- **Girl Talk 1:1 Mentoring:** Girls in sixth through twelfth grades across Knoxville are offered mentorship through the organization. The mentors offer hope, encouragement, and support, meeting with their mentees at least once a month for outings that nurture their relationship and provide a safe haven for the young girls.
- **School Site-Based Programs:** Girl Talk partners with the Knoxville Education Foundation, Knox County Schools, and Community Organizations to offer afterschool group mentoring for third to fifth grade girls. Over 10 weeks each semester, trained mentors guide girls through curriculum-based sessions, fostering confidence, teaching healthy coping skills, and creating a supportive peer network to navigate life's challenges and promote academic success.
- **Girl Talk LIFE Prep Academy:** This program offers a transformative 10-month experience for rising freshmen, sophomores, juniors, and seniors in Knox County, focusing on college, career, and life skills. With consecutive monthly sessions tailored to each grade level, participants develop sustainable study habits and organizational skills, as well as explore postsecondary education and career options. The program's structured approach guides students through each stage of high school, fostering academic success, personal growth, and readiness for the future. Open enrollment occurs annually from March 1 to May 31.
- **Events:** Girl Talk, Inc. also has a host of signature events, including an annual Girl Talk Retreat, Girl Talk Sleepover, College Tours, Career Tours, Girl Talk Fashion Show Gala, Desire to Inspire: The Girl Talk Experience, Cater to You, Mentor/Mentee Mingles, and Mentor Reconnect.

**Population Served:** Girls ages 6–18

**City Area Served:** Knoxville, Tennessee

**Annual Revenue:** \$838,959

**Website:** <https://girltalkinc.com/>

## **Shora Foundation**

**Address:** 2425 Martin Luther King, Jr. Avenue, Knoxville, TN 37915

**Organizational Overview:** The mission of the Shora Foundation is to provide safe spaces for East Knoxville children and youth through various initiatives and afterschool and summer learning programs. Through its work, the Foundation seeks to elevate education, enhance youth experiences, shift mindsets, empower generations, and increase opportunities.

### **Program/Services:**

- **Food Sustainability:** The Shora Foundation operates a community garden, ensuring a sustainable supply of nutritious food for its students, and concurrently offers weekly backpack meals to children facing food insecurity.
- **Mental Health Checks:** Within its youth programming, the Foundation conducts weekly mental health checks, facilitated by a therapist, to establish a secure place for conversations, actively assisting youth in processing and coping with environmental trauma.
- **Education Assistance:** The Foundation offers math activities and language courses that enhance youths' learning experience.
- **Social Justice:** The Shora Foundation provides youth with tools for self advocacy and advocating for others.

**Population Served:** Youth

**City Area Served:** Knoxville, Tennessee

**Annual Revenue:** \$400,196

**Website:** <https://www.shorafoundation.org/>

## **100 Black Men of Knoxville**

**Address:** 100 Black Men of Knoxville, PO Box 333, Knoxville, TN 37901

**Organizational Overview:** 100 Black Men of Knoxville aims to improve the lives of young black men through education, health and wellness services, economic development, and mentoring.

**Program/Services:** 100 Black Men of Knoxville provides mentorship to young black men in Knoxville, with a focus on supporting educational achievement, engaging youth in cultural activities, developing leadership and life skills, and fostering a commitment to community service. The organization also supports mentees' parents in their efforts to encourage academic excellence.

**Population Served:** Young males

**City Area Served:** Knoxville, Tennessee

**Annual Revenue:** \$585,000

**Website:** <https://www.100bmok.org/>

# Reentry Support

## **Knoxville Area Urban League**

**Address:** 1514 East Fifth Avenue, Knoxville, TN 37917

**Organizational Overview:** The Knoxville Area Urban League is a civil rights, economic development, and social service organization established in the 1960s, during the height of the Civil Rights movement, to promote equal employment opportunities for African Americans in Knoxville, Tennessee.

**Program/Services:** The Knoxville Area Urban League RISE Reentry Program offers pre- and post-release services, soft skills training, and employment services. The latter are provided through the RESPECT (Reentry Employment Services Program Employers Can Trust) initiative, which is designed to equip individuals involved in the justice system with the skills and support necessary for successful workforce reintegration.

**Population Served:** Adults

**City Area Served:** Knoxville, Tennessee

**Annual Revenue:** \$1,957,738

**Website:** <https://www.thekaul.org/rise-reentry-program-2/>

## **Community Organizations Networking Neighborhoods Encouraging Change Together (CONNECT) Ministries**

**Address:** 3615 Martin Luther King, Jr. Avenue, Knoxville, TN 37914

**Organizational Overview:** CONNECT Ministries serves as a Christ-centered, hands-on community information networking resource center. Established in 2006, the ministry originated as a facet of the community outreach initiative of the Greater Warner Tabernacle African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church. CONNECT provides in-house services, network referrals, dissemination of information, “gap” programming, community organization, resume and job readiness support, employment searches, and housing services. The organization focuses on the underserved, undereducated, underemployed, and underrepresented, including disadvantaged youth, the homeless, ex-offenders, and veterans.

### **Program/Services:**

- **Urban Cowboy Restoration Program:** This collaborative partnership between government entities, nonprofit organizations, and faith-based organizations connects previously incarcerated people to services needed after their release. The program provides or connects participants to services such as spiritual support, food, housing, clothing, transportation, case management, mentoring, education, job readiness support, employment, health care, mental health care, legal services, and support groups.
- **Prince E. Gillenwaters Round Table:** This weekly roundtable serves as a venue for men about men with issues specific to those who are surviving the effects of incarceration.
- **Project Fresh Start:** This program serves at-risk youth and young adults ages 14–24 through education, employment and job readiness training, juvenile diversion service projects, assessments, and life skills coaching and mentoring.
- **Cities of Refuge Network:** This network of partnering organizations—including businesses, government agencies, churches, nonprofit organizations, and individuals that support the work of CONNECT Ministries—is dedicated to providing quality care to the citizens of Knoxville and Knox County.

**Population Served:** Adult males, veterans

**City Area Served:** Knoxville, Tennessee

**Annual Revenue:** Not Available

**Website:** <https://connectministries.net/community-re-entry/>

## **Hand Up For Women**

**Address:** PO Box 3216, Knoxville, TN 37927

**Organizational Overview:** Hand Up for Women is faith-based life management and career readiness ministry serving women in the Knox County area who suffer addiction, abuse, and poverty. Hand Up offers a variety of courses, one-on-one mentorship, and opportunities for socialization and celebration. The organization seeks to provide participants with knowledge and skills that will allow them to lead self-sufficient, safe, and healthy lives.

**Program/Services:** Over the course of a year, program participants attend a series of twice-weekly classes related to life management, career readiness, and spiritual development. Every participant is matched with a mentor, and they participate in group community service projects. In order to graduate, participants must maintain a minimum 90% class attendance and homework completion rate.

**Population Served:** Adult women

**City Area Served:** Knoxville, Tennessee

**Annual Revenue:** \$260,000

**Website:** <https://ahandupforwomen.org/>

## **Tennessee Reentry Collaborative (TREC)**

**Organizational Overview:** The Tennessee Reentry Collaborative, initiated by the Tennessee Department of Correction, focuses on facilitating the reintegration of parolees, probationers, and inmates into society by leveraging community resources. This coalition brings together state, local, and nonprofit agencies to comprehensively address individuals' reentry needs. Through fostering partnerships and collective efforts, TREC aims to provide effective solutions that support successful reintegration and decrease recidivism rates.

**Program/Services:** Over the course of a year, program participants attend a series of twice-weekly classes related to life management, career readiness, and spiritual development. Every participant is matched with a mentor, and they participate in group community service projects. To graduate, participants must maintain a minimum 90% class attendance and homework completion rate.

**Population Served:** Adults

**City Area Served:** State of Tennessee

**Annual Revenue:** Not available

**Website:** <https://www.tn.gov/correction/redirect---rehabilitation/tennessee-reentry-collaborative--trec-.html>

# ENDNOTES

1. [Knoxville Gun Violence Problem Analysis: - 2019 - 2021](#)
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid.
4. [US Census Bureau QuickFacts: Knoxville city, Tennessee](#)
5. [Gun Violence Archive](#)
6. [The VPA Approach](#)
7. [Community Safety - City of Knoxville](#)
8. Ibid.
9. Ibid.
10. [City of Knoxville Community-Based Violence Reduction Plan](#)
11. [Services - Community Mediation Center, Knoxville, TN](#)
12. Ibid.
13. Ibid.
14. [Turn Up Knox Annual Report](#)
15. [Program Overview | Drums Up, Guns Down](#)
16. Ibid.
17. Ibid.
18. Ibid.
19. Programs and services described in these profiles are those most relevant to violence reduction. Many organizations have additional offerings beyond these, which can be found on their websites.
20. [Knoxville Youth Development Organizations | Cause IQ](#)



# KNOXVILLE

## LANDSCAPE ANALYSIS

*GUN VIOLENCE REDUCTION PROGRAMS & INITIATIVES*

**NICJR**   
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May 2024