

2023 Violence Prevention Symposium



**Youth  
Strategic Planning  
Report-Out**

# Introduction

Over the course of two days in July 2023, teens from the Greater Pittsburgh Region came together at the University of Pittsburgh's Petersen Event Center to participate in the 2023 Teen Violence Prevention Symposium entitled, "Out of Chaos - A Positive and Affirming Response to Gun Violence."

The purpose of the "Out of Chaos" Symposium was to meet the challenges of reducing gun violence in Allegheny County by connecting with, listening to, and soliciting ideas from teens.

To ensure that this work was successful, a coalition of about 20 like-minded youth-serving agencies and stakeholders also formed a loosely knit ecosystem to contribute information, plan strategies, share resources, and support a network of passionate and determined community leaders who uphold violence prevention as the center of their work with youth. This ecosystem served in many ways to unite the region with organizations who share similar values, commitment and passion.



**THANK YOU!**

THE 2023 TEEN VIOLENCE PREVENTION SYMPOSIUM

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# Background and Prior Work

The strategic initiatives of the “Out of Chaos” Symposium were informed by a Strategic Planning Retreat with Pittsburgh teens in November 2022. At that time, teens gathered to answer two questions: “Why is there gun violence in our community?” and “What big ideas can we put into place to reduce and eliminate gun violence in our community?” Through a series of human-centered design strategic planning sessions, teens answered each of the two questions.

## Why is there gun violence in our community?

- Neighborhood conflicts
- Lack of training in conflict mediation
- Limited number of social opportunities for teens
- Overall cultural influences
- Poverty and lack of resources
- Unresolved trauma
- Barriers to sustainable employment



# Background and Prior Work

## What big ideas can we put into place to reduce or eliminate gun violence in our community?

- #1** Provide safe spaces for social activities after school.
- #2** Create programs for teens to build skills in mentoring, conflict mediation, listening and empathy.
- #3** Provide opportunities for teens to learn overall life coping skills.
- #4** Provide opportunities for multi-generational groups to come together to strengthen communities and break down barriers.
- #5** Create opportunities to connect people to helpful programs, such as a high-quality grief rehabilitation program.
- #6** Initiate through existing channels a gun buy-back program targeted to teens.
- #7** Create opportunities for collaboration with the police departments.
- #8** Generate opportunities for local business owners to network with the community and strengthen opportunities for teens to understand and develop their employment skills.

These eight Big Ideas were then used as a basis at the July 2023 Out of Chaos Symposium to generate more specific action plans through strategic planning sessions.

# Strategic Planning Overview

On Day 1 of the July 2023 Out of Chaos Symposium, approximately 350 teens from the greater Pittsburgh region gathered at the Petersen Event Center to discuss current events in the city and hear presentations from Mayor Ed Gainey, Representative Jay Costa, Dean Valerie Kinloch from the University of Pittsburgh School of Education, and Executive Director Michael Pennington from the Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency. Teens also gathered in small, high-interest groups for interactive breakout sessions on topics such as “Charting Your Course,” “Challenges You Face When Overcoming Trauma,” and “Courage and Confidence.”

Alongside the teen breakout sessions, the 2023 Out of Chaos Symposium convened adults from various Pittsburgh service organizations to engage in conversations, strategic planning, and resource sharing. This powerful group, the “Pro Team,” amplified their voices through this shared thought process.

On Day 2 of the Out of Chaos Symposium, approximately 80 teens from the Greater Pittsburgh Region returned to the Petersen Event Center for a human-centered design strategic planning session designed to develop Action Plans for the eight Big Ideas which were generated in November 2022. These teens were chosen for their experience, willingness to share ideas, collaboration skills, and their ability to represent the Pittsburgh region. Several teens had also attended the November 2022 Summit and were familiar with the prior work and generative ideas.



# Strategic Planning Overview

The teens were then divided into four groups of about 20 teens each, and each group rotated into a strategic planning session. Within the session, teens listened to the background work from November 2022, absorbed the Big Ideas which were generated by their peers, and self-selected an action plan group.



- Strategic Planning Session A developed action plans for Ideas #1 and #2
- Strategic Planning Session B developed action plans for Ideas #3 and #4
- Strategic Planning Session C developed action plans for Ideas #5 and #6
- Strategic Planning Session D developed action plans for Ideas #7 and #8

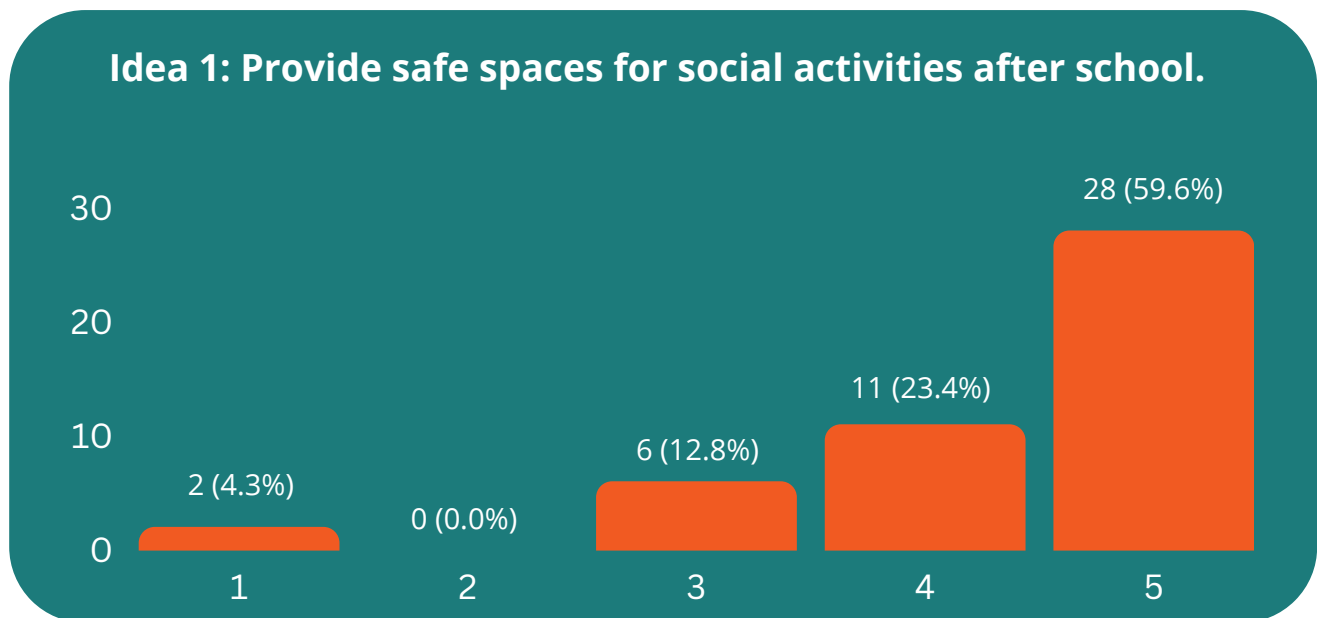
In addition, several teens in each session met together to generate ideas for social events which would appeal to teens across the Greater Pittsburgh Region.

Towards the end of each of the four sessions, teens presented their ideas to their session peers and received feedback on their work. After the rotations were completed, the teens went downstairs to enjoy lunch together, and the strategic planning facilitator transcribed the teens' thinking into a PowerPoint presentation.

# Data-Driven Results

After lunch, the strategic planning facilitator presented the eight Big Ideas and Action Plans to the larger group. Teens were asked to scan a QR code on their phones and then voted on the potential importance and impact of each of the eight Big Ideas and Action Plans on a 1-5 Likert Scale. Approximately 47 teens participated in the presentation and voting.

The following chart represents a sample of the data collected for each action plan:



For each Big Idea and Action Plan, the number of responses rated as a 4 or 5 were converted into a percentage, then added together as a Total Percentage. The eight Big Ideas and Action Plans were then ranked from high to low, based upon the Total Percentage. As an example from the data represented above, the number of responses of a 4 (23.4%) and 5 (59.6%) were added together for a Total Percentage of 83%.

# Idea Ranking

Based on the Total Percentage, teens ranked the eight Big Ideas and Action Plans by importance and impact:

<i>Ranking</i>	<i>Big Idea</i>	<i>Impact Percentage</i>
1 <sup>st</sup>	Create a Job Fair to connect teens to minority business owners.	86%
2 <sup>nd</sup>	Provide safe spaces for teens to engage in social activities after school.	83%
3 <sup>rd</sup>	Create programs for teens to build skills in conflict mediation.	73.9%
4 <sup>th</sup>	Provide opportunities for teens to learn overall coping skills.	70.3%
5 <sup>th</sup>	Create opportunities to connect people to helpful programs such as a high-quality grief rehabilitation program.	68.1%
6 <sup>th</sup>	Provide opportunities for multi-generational groups to come together to strengthen communities and break down barriers.	63.9%
7 <sup>th</sup>	Initiate through existing channels a gun buy-back program targeted to teens.	53.2%
8 <sup>th</sup>	Create opportunities for collaboration with the police departments.	46.8%





# Big Idea and Action Plan Notes

This section describes the teens' thinking in more detail and sets a direction which teens believe would be most important and most impactful to reduce and eliminate gun violence in the Greater Pittsburgh Region.

1<sup>st</sup>

Create a Job Fair to connect teens to minority business owners.

Throughout the human-centered strategic planning design process, teens expressed two major lines of thought in this Big Idea: how important it was for them to support minority-owned business in the Pittsburgh region, and a desire that they have to understand their own skills and abilities and to find employment which would be a career starter for them. Teens reflected on possible career paths such as a real estate agent, and were hopeful that connections could be made to enable them to engage in employment which was aligned with their career interests while still supporting minority-owned businesses in the Pittsburgh region.



# Big Idea and Action Plan Notes

2<sup>nd</sup>

Provide safe spaces for teens to engage in social activities after school.

Teens continued to emphasize how important it is to have safe spaces after school which would enable them to engage in social activities. They would like to see the following ideas implemented when designing safe spaces for social activities:

- Safe spaces need good rules, including respectful behavior, clear boundaries, no violence, no outside food or drinks, and opportunities to have fun.
- Safe spaces need good leaders who are understanding adults and who know how to handle teenagers patiently and without bias.
- Safe spaces need good programs such as athletics, trips, cooking classes, trades, and college exploration opportunities.
- Safe spaces need good mentoring programs run by adults who are patient, consistent, understanding, open to talking with teens, and mature.



# Big Idea and Action Plan Notes

3<sup>rd</sup>

Create programs for teens to build skills in conflict mediation.

Teens expressed an overwhelming need for programming which would enable them to build skills in conflict mediation. As they discussed this idea in more detail, teens decided that strong conflict mediation programs should include the following topics:

Anger  
Management

Mental Health

Conflict  
Resolution

Resources for  
adults to help  
with their own  
children

Opportunities for  
teens to get to  
know each other

Positive  
Thinking

Communication

How music lyrics  
can influence  
people

# Big Idea and Action Plan Notes

4<sup>th</sup>

Provide opportunities for teens to learn overall coping skills.

Regardless of background or age, students expressed a need for additional programming in overall coping skills. They identified increasing stress and anxiety in their lives, and how a thoughtful coping skills program would enable them to learn real-life skills that they could put into use. Teens used human-centered design strategies to identify several topics which should be incorporated into a Coping Skills workshop, which could be offered several times a year with modifications depending upon the teens' identified needs:

Identifying and reducing stress

Improving confidence and assurance

Developing healthy relationships

Setting and achieving positive goals

Identifying and coping with trauma

Developing self-motivation skills

# Big Idea and Action Plan Notes

5<sup>th</sup>

Create opportunities to connect people to a grief-counseling program.

Teens identified that oftentimes families and neighborhoods had experienced a trauma, but there did not seem to be a way to connect these families to therapeutic services which were accessible, affordable, and responsive. Teens were aware that sometimes social workers accompanied police officers on the scene or as follow-up liaisons to traumatic events. Teens wondered if it may be possible to create a resource that the social workers could use to help families in need. These resources, which could be a print brochure or a website, would need to contain the following information:

Positive messages of hope and support

The importance of talking through trauma and improving mental health

A list of grief regional counseling programs and what they offer

Locations and directions to grief counseling centers

Connections to websites and helpful hotline numbers



# Big Idea and Action Plan Notes

6<sup>th</sup>

Create collaborations between teens and community councils and parent groups so that they can help each other.

This idea of neighborhood collaboration was ranked highly after the November 2022 Summit by both the teens and the parallel adult strategic planning group; however, the ideas of collaborations fell slightly to a #6 Ranking.

Teens identified that they could clean up neighborhood trash, volunteer, or create a neighborhood garden, and that adults could assist through career mentoring and hosting social events.



# Big Idea and Action Plan Notes

7<sup>th</sup>

Initiate through existing channels a gun buy-back program targeted to teens.

Teens were aware that shortly after the November 2022 Summit, the City of Pittsburgh initiated a gun buy-back program targeted towards adults. This program included a way for an adult to transport a gun in a car which would be turned over to the authorities. Teens offered several ideas on how a gun buy-back program might work for youths, but also recognized that the planning for such an event should be in the hands of the police departments to ensure safety for everyone. Steps that should be taken into consideration included the following ideas:

1. Assemble a database of where guns are located either through anonymous reporting systems, incidents of gun violence, or examination of relevant data sets.
2. Market the teen gun buy-back program in those neighborhoods.
3. Provide a way for teens to work with the police department to turn in a gun.
4. Give kids money or items that they value in exchange for a gun.
5. Also accept ammunition and gun parts.



# Big Idea and Action Plan Notes

8<sup>th</sup>

Create opportunities for collaboration with the police departments.

Although this idea was ranked 8th in terms of importance and impact, teens who were engaged in this strategic planning session could see the value of ongoing conversations between a Teen Council and the police department to share ideas and strengthen communication. In thinking through the process, teens generated the following ideas which could be ongoing items on a shared agenda:

- Characteristics and traits of teenagers.
- How can we have better communication between teenagers and the police?
- What is going on in our community, both from the police perspective and the teens' perspectives?
- How do police de-escalate situations?
- How can we stop violence without additional violence?
- What can the community do to help the police?
- How can the police better understand the neighborhoods?
- What is the role of the police in keeping everyone safe?





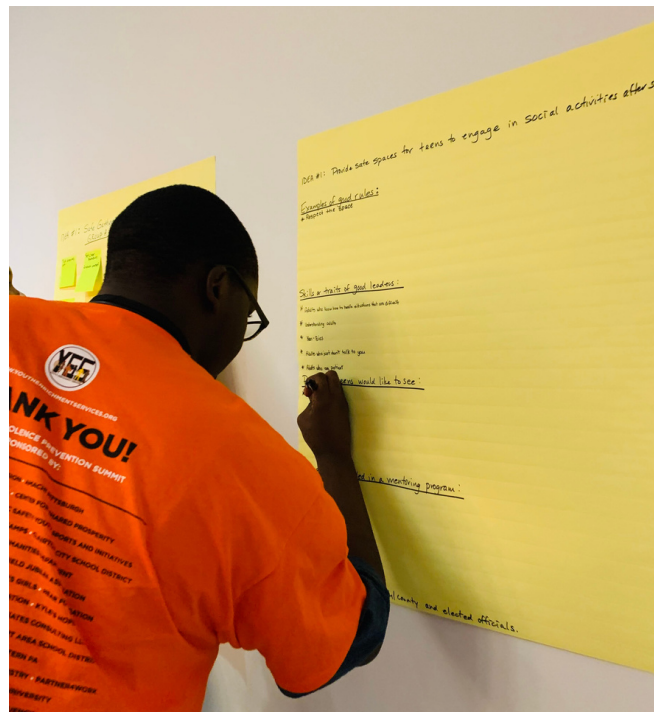
# Looking Forward

As teens engaged in the strategic planning sessions, they were excited, hopeful, and insightful as to the impact and importance that these 8 Big Ideas and Action Plans could have on the Greater Pittsburgh Region to reduce and eliminate gun violence.

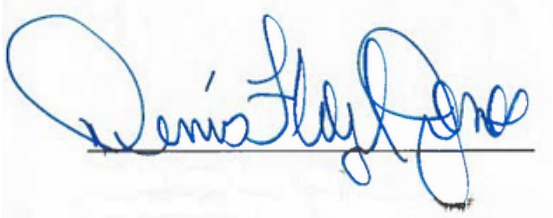
This energy will undoubtedly fuel the agencies who have pledged their cooperative partnership and commitment. Their expertise and collaboration will be essential to address the continuing challenge of reducing gun violence and its traumatic impact on youths and their families.

The teens involved in this strategic planning process also recognized that these plans represented multi-faceted and complex approaches and would require a strong collaboration with invested organizations who are already connected to the communities.

Overall, these plans represent the teens' best thinking, and in addition to reducing and eliminating gun violence, these plans provide avenues to help teens launch their careers, develop strong and healthy relationships, strengthen their ties to the communities, and live in a safer, more connected world.



# Respectfully submitted,



Dr. Dennis Floyd Jones, Executive Director  
*Youth Enrichment Services*



Rebecca Cunningham, Ed.D.  
Strategic Planner and Consultant



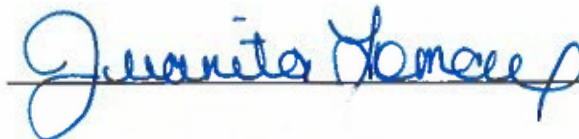
Mayor Ed Gainey  
*City of Pittsburgh*



Quinten Boose, Director of Violence Reduction,  
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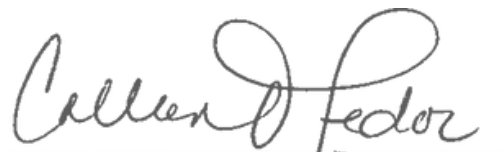
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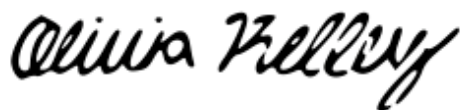


Dr. Staci Ford  
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Rev. Cornell Jones, Director of Street Outreach,  
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Dr. Deanna Sinex, Director of Research and  
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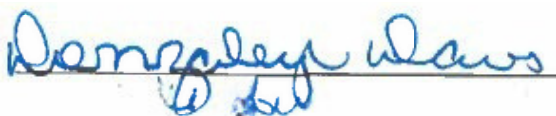
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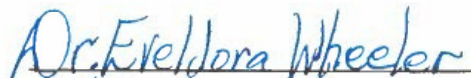
Sylvia Cummings, Customer Success Lead  
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