

What Does it Look Like to Keep Us Safe, Alive, and Free?

*An Evaluation of
Saint Paul's Project PEACE*



Authorship & Acknowledgements

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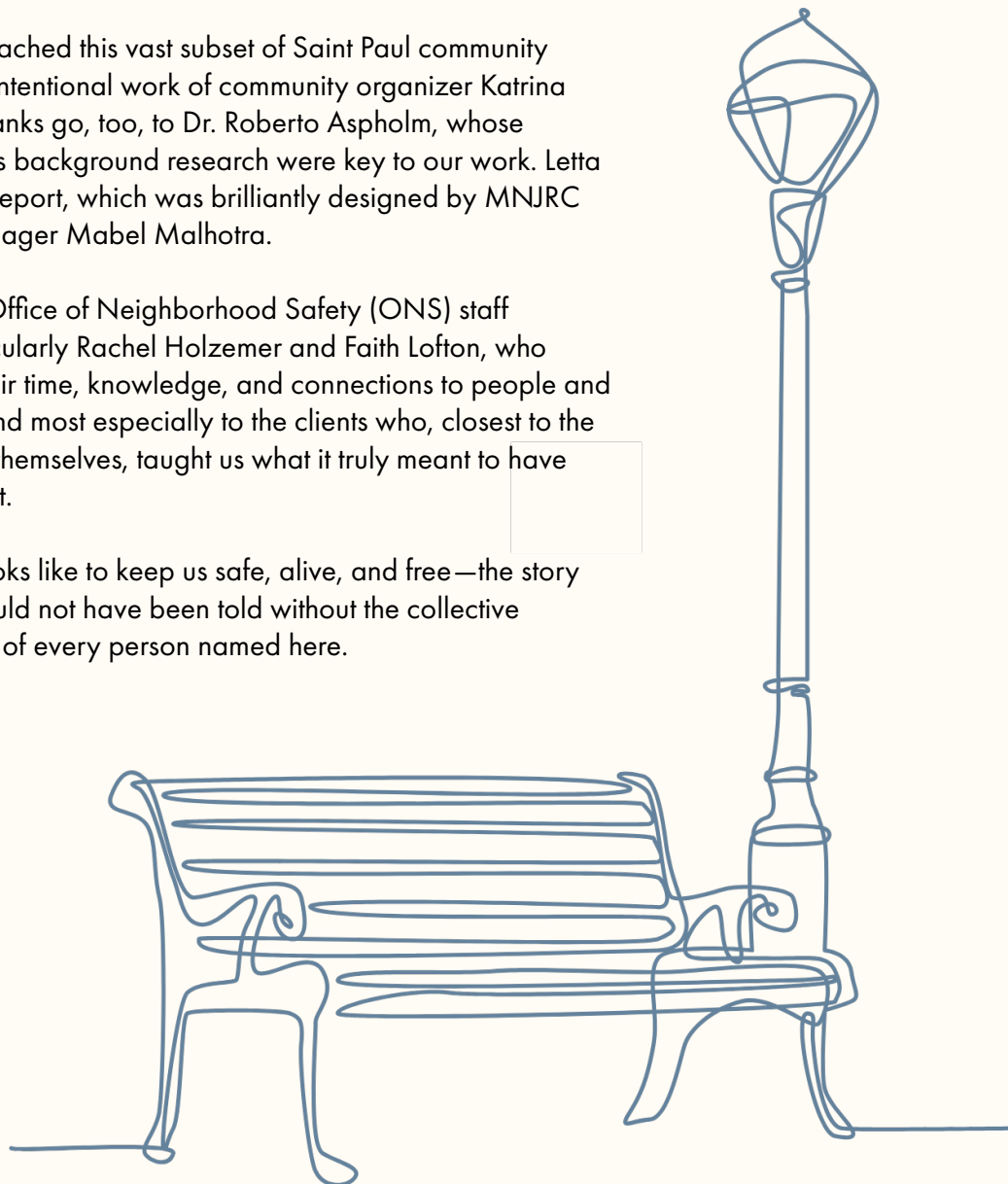
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The story of what it looks like to keep us safe, alive, and free—the story of Project PEACE—could not have been told without the collective commitment and care of every person named here.

This report is dedicated to the Saint Paul community.



Executive Summary

Over the last several years, levels of gun violence have been falling across the country. Yet gun violence remains a public health crisis that impacts communities unevenly across the United States. In Saint Paul, Minnesota, Black residents are 23 times more likely to die from gun homicide than white residents. And in 2024, the city's gun homicide rate exceeded the national city average.

For decades, the dominant response to this crisis had been reactive and punitive—more policing, more incarceration—and has failed to stop cycles of violence. Community violence interventions (CVIs) and group violence interventions (GVIs) are the two dominant frameworks for addressing gun violence that take a different approach. CVIs are rooted in community-based outreach and credible messenger models and GVIs are centered on focused deterrence in partnership with law enforcement. Efforts to examine the impacts of CVI and GVI approaches abound, but the science of violence prevention is far from settled.

In early 2022, the City of Saint Paul opened their Office of Neighborhood Safety (ONS) as part of the city's Community-First Public Safety Framework to take a different approach to gun violence. Later that summer, ONS launched **Project PEACE** (**P**revention/**I**ntervention, **E**nvironmental Design, **A**ccountability/**O**utreach, **C**ommunity Action, and **E**nforcement), designed as a hybrid GVI/CVI approach to address gun violence at its roots.

In 2024, ONS contracted with the Minnesota Justice Research Center (MNJRC) to conduct a developmental evaluation of Project PEACE. Our shared goal was to both define and explore the effectiveness of Project PEACE and its impact on gun- and group-violence-involved individuals, their families, and the wider Saint Paul community. Over the course of two years, our evaluation drew on 67 interviews with ONS staff, municipal and community partners, clients and their families, and national gun violence intervention and prevention experts; 20 observations of meetings, community events, and life coach-client sessions; 483 community survey responses; and Saint Paul Police Department data on gun violence from 2021 to 2024.

Key Findings

- 1. Project PEACE represents an ambitious approach—reflecting a mix of CVI and GVI principles—that has expanded and experienced growing pains while laying a promising foundation to address gun violence in Saint Paul.**
ONS launched with a small team facing an enormous mandate, often described by staff as “building the plane as we fly it.” Over four years, it has grown into a multi-tiered office with specialized roles, formalized intake processes, contracted community-based organization (CBO) partnerships, and structured referral pathways despite temporary funding that threatens to undermine what has been built. The program has not been without growing pains—model clarity, staffing, and scope creep have presented ongoing challenges—but the office has demonstrated a genuine capacity to learn and adapt.
- 2. The gun violence intervention and prevention ecosystem in Saint Paul is vast and shifting. ONS's Project PEACE fills a critical gap as a trusted bridge across partners to prevent, respond to, and address gun violence in ways**

no other entity can. Project PEACE staff partner informally and formally with entities across the public sector and in the community from the Ramsey County Attorney's Office to Saint Paul Parks and Recreation. However, we observed shifts over the two-year evaluation: A strong partnership with the Saint Paul Police Department changed to one that lacked coordination and leaned into competition, while relationships with CBOs began to deepen. Realizing the full potential of this ecosystem will require clearer role definition, a functioning GVI governing board, and partners who understand not just that Project PEACE exists, but what it actually does.

3. **Life coaches are the heart of Project PEACE—the most valuable asset and potentially the most vulnerable one.** PEACE's life coaches are credible messengers with lived experience in the communities they serve who bring a depth of cultural connection and community trust to the work. Many describe the work as personally healing as well as professionally meaningful. But the emotional weight coupled with the small team size create real sustainability risks.
4. **The clients of Project PEACE describe their life coaches as transforming their lives and creating ripple effects into their communities.** The clients of Project PEACE are predominantly young, Black, males. Across the board, clients expressed surprise that their life coaches showed up with urgency, consistency, and genuine care rather than judgment. Life coaches provide concrete wraparound support addressing basic needs like food and housing alongside longer-term goals around employment, education, and legal navigation. Clients credit this support with keeping them out of jail, off dangerous paths, and in some cases, alive. Critically, this impact ripples outward: working with a life coach has changed the way clients show up for their families and communities—and many go on to encourage others in their networks to connect with Project PEACE.
5. **Project PEACE staff are operating at the right time, with the right people, in the right space.** Gun violence decreased in Saint Paul from 2022 to 2024, during the time ONS was building out Project PEACE. This trend mirrors shifts across the country, both in cities with and without CVI initiatives. Data shows who bears the burden of gun violence in Saint Paul: Black residents and young adults aged 18–22 are overrepresented among both those arrested and victimized, mapping directly onto Project PEACE's target population. Neighborhood-level hot spot analyses point to meaningful local reductions in non-fatal shootings in areas where Project PEACE staff work. Community survey data tells a consistent story: safety matters deeply to nearly all respondents. However, fewer actually feel safe in their neighborhoods and most identify gun violence as a significant problem in Saint Paul. Yet once respondents learned about Project PEACE, strong majorities express support for the model and report feeling safer because of it.

Recommendations

Based on our findings, we offer five recommendations to support Project PEACE's path to sustainability.

1. **Clarify the model.** PEACE is an ambitious acronym covering a vast set of tasks. ONS should get clear on its core framework—and specifically what components of CVI and GVI models they need—and resist pressure to operate as a general social services agency. Clarity internally will also improve communication and expectations with partners.
2. **Prioritize and strengthen key partnerships.** ONS should identify a tiered set of partners—distinguishing core collaborators from peripheral ones—with scoped roles and mutual accountability within each. Whether Project PEACE maintains its hybrid GVI/CVI approach or shifts emphasis, the partnership strategy needs to follow. A functioning GVI governing board would help provide the shared governance and accountability this ecosystem needs.
3. **Support and invest in life coaches.** Life coaches are doing transformative work and carrying a heavy load. ONS will likely need to hire more life coaches and/or protect their time for client work while prioritizing well-being and professional development. Life coach sustainability is program sustainability.
4. **Strengthen data collection and impact storytelling.** ONS has made progress in formalizing its data practices but more is critically needed. We recommend consistent documentation of the life coaching processes, network-level tracking of violence in Saint Paul, and a commitment to clear storytelling that can communicate impact to funders, partners, and the public.
5. **Focus on stable and sustained funding.** Project PEACE has operated primarily on temporary funding sources. All core staff positions should transition to the general fund, while a mixed funding portfolio—including philanthropic and private sources—could support innovative pilots. ONS should also consider hiring a dedicated grant writer and pursuing policy solutions at the city and state levels to reduce budgetary constraints.

Saint Paul needs Project PEACE and the data suggest Project PEACE is delivering. Project PEACE life coaches are keeping people safe, alive, and free—and the clients, families, and community members we spoke with made clear that this work matters. The program is young, still building its infrastructure, and navigating a challenging political and funding environment. But the foundation is there. With model clarity, sustained investment in life coaches, stronger partnerships, better data, and stable funding, Project PEACE has the potential to become a durable, evidence-based pillar of public safety in Saint Paul.

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Chapter 1

Background and Methods

Chapter 1. Background and Methods

Background

Every day in the United States, 130 people are killed by gun violence—making it one of America's leading causes of preventable death (Everytown Research & Policy 2025). But gun violence does not impact communities equally. Black Americans are 12 times more likely to die from gun violence than white Americans (Black

children and adolescents are 6 times likelier to die in this way than their white peers). These are not abstract statistics. They represent a public health crisis concentrated in communities that have already faced generations of disinvestment and harm.

Every day in the United States,
130 people are **killed**
by gun violence.



The crisis is particularly stark in Minnesota, where Black people are 23 times more likely to die from gun homicide than white Minnesotans (Everytown Research & Policy 2025). Saint Paul reflects this pattern, with Black Saint Paul residents being 12.8 times more likely to die from gun homicide than white Saint Paul residents (Everytown Research & Policy 2025). Furthermore, in 2024, Saint Paul's gun homicide rate was 6.8 per 100,000 residents—higher than the national city average of 4.6 per 100,000 (for FBI-reporting cities with over 65,000 people, Everytown Research & Policy 2025).

For decades, the dominant U.S. response to gun violence in Black and Brown communities has been punitive and ineffective, often referred to as over-policing and underprotection, leading to mass incarceration. And violence persists. Communities have been forced to absorb unfathomable losses, and the traditional playbook has proven insufficient. **Cities like Saint Paul are asking an urgent question: How can we do better? How can we prevent gun violence?**

This report is about one effort to shift from gun violence punishment to prevention, from reaction to intervention, from symptoms to root causes. Project PEACE, a program within Saint Paul's Office of Neighborhood Safety (ONS), represents a different approach. It is a hybrid prevention effort addressing the causes, contexts, and consequences of urban gun violence.

From 2024 to 2026, the Minnesota Justice Research Center (MNJRC) evaluated Project PEACE. Our findings and recommendations are intended to help strengthen and sustain the crucial work of both Project PEACE and the ONS.

The National Gun Violence Prevention and Intervention Landscape

In 2020, the United States recorded a 30% increase in homicides, the single largest year-over-year jump in recorded history (Associated Press 2021). The causes of this increase were varied and

complex, from unprecedented disruptions to social institutions driven by the COVID-19 pandemic to growing public disaffection with police (and changes to policing practices) following the police killing of George Floyd in Minneapolis (Lopez 2021; Rosenfeld et al. 2021).

In summer 2021, the Biden administration announced a comprehensive strategy to address gun violence that included federal support for community violence intervention (CVI) programs. The administration encouraged local jurisdictions to use a portion of American Rescue Plan (ARPA) funding for CVI programming and convened a "CVI Collaborative" (CVIC) of 15 participating municipalities. One of those cities, Saint Paul, launched Project PEACE (White House 2021).

The Development of CVIs, GVIs, and the CGM. This section briefly traces the history of and research on CVI and group violence intervention (GVI) models, as well as the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention's Comprehensive Gang Model (CGM), which predates CVI and GVI, but can be understood as a hybrid of the two. We close by exploring recent scholarly recommendations regarding offices of community safety.



Community violence interventions (CVIs) are direct descendants of the Chicago Area Project, a grassroots delinquency prevention initiative launched in the 1930s and the streetwork outreach programs of the 1950s and 1960s. Notably, CVIs draw from a long history of Black and Brown community organizing in response to structural violence and community disinvestment (Costa et al. 2025). The protection and

intervention systems Black and Brown communities developed predate and inform the CVI framework. In many places, Black and Brown communities continue to lead CVI work, which the body of research does not always reflect. To fill this gap, [The Black and Brown Collective for Community Solutions to Gun Violence](#), a collective of multi-disciplinary researchers, is working to "improve the efficacy of research, policy, and practice that addresses safety and well-being in communities directly affected by violence." (Abaya et al. 2024). Part of their approach addresses the lack of CVI researchers who are representative of and accountable to Black and Brown communities most impacted by gun violence.

Over the past three decades, CVI efforts have been framed in several ways, including as public health models, violence interruption initiatives, hospital-based violence intervention programs (HVIPs), and credible messenger programs.

Contemporary CVIs are generally offshoots of a model developed by Cure Violence Global in the mid-1990s. Formerly known as CeaseFire and Cure Violence, the Cure Violence Global model holds that violence operates similarly to infectious diseases. Its spread must be stopped through (1) the interruption of potentially violent incidents, (2) cognitive and behavioral modification for those most at risk, and (3) broader changes in community norms around violence. Integral to this model is the use of individuals with prior involvement in gangs/groups or violent behavior—often called credible messengers—to work directly with intervention targets (Cure Violence n.d.).

Indeed, many CVI programs are defined by their use of credible messengers with lived experience, but what does that mean? Recent scholarship suggests that defining “lived experience” should capture a range of backgrounds, including direct or indirect experiences with various systems, backgrounds, identities, and personal challenges (New York City Criminal Justice Agency). As it relates to CVI, this would suggest that credible messengers’ relevant experience extends beyond prior involvement in gangs/groups or violence behavior. Indeed, in a recent article, CVI practitioners and researchers Kathryn Bocanegra and Nathan Aguilar (2024, 374) use the terms “peer support workers” and “experiential wisdom” in their description of CVI programs, which they define as:

[C]ivilian-led, locally oriented efforts that center around street intervention work, which involves proactive community engagement of individuals at high risk of violent victimization or perpetration. CVI professionals are peer support workers who use their experiential wisdom to mediate violent conflict and prevent victimization through engaging high-risk individuals in social services. (Bocanegra and Aguilar 2024).

Since its pilot in Chicago in 2000, the Cure Violence Global model has been implemented in dozens of U.S. cities and nearly 20 countries across the globe (Cure Violence Global n.d.).¹ Other models have also emerged, including Roca in Massachusetts, Chicago CRED, and READI Chicago. Unlike CVG, these models do not involve direct violence interruption or conflict mediation. They do, however, share an emphasis on ongoing street outreach to high-risk individuals, cognitive-behavioral mental health services, and life skills and employment support (Chicago CRED 2025; READI Chicago 2023; Roca n.d.).

A separate but related CVI approach is the hospital-based violence intervention programs (HVIPs) model. HVIPs partner with hospitals to connect individuals and their families being treated for violence-related injuries to resources, with the primary goal of reducing the potential for retaliatory violence (Ziminski et al. 2025).

Group violence interventions (GVIs) also emerged in the mid-1990s. They grew out of the Boston Gun Project (also known as Operation Ceasefire), a youth gang violence prevention effort that appeared to dramatically reduce youth homicides in Boston within just a few years. The core of GVI or “focused deterrence” work involves (1) the creation of a working group of local, state, and federal police; (2) identification of groups of young men involved in collective lethal violence; (3) communication of a deterrence message focused specifically on gun violence at



¹ This reflects only interventions officially sanctioned or recognized by CVG and should not be taken as representing the full scope of CVIs nationwide or globally.

"forum" events; (4) swift and severe sanctions for all members of any group that fails to heed the deterrence message; and (5) the use of those sanctions as a warning to other groups in order to reinforce subsequent deterrence messages (Kennedy et al. 2001). Critically, GVI models invert the collectivist group dynamics that typically promote violence (for example, seeking vengeance in response to the victimization of a group member), turning them instead toward violence prevention by discouraging violence as a means of protecting group members from prosecution (Braga and Kennedy 2020).

In 2001, the Department of Justice launched Project Safe Neighborhoods (PSN), a GVI initiative that supports and coordinates focused deterrence efforts across nearly 100 federal jurisdictions (U.S. Department of Justice 2024). GVI also has an institutional home in the National Network for Safe Communities (NNSC) at John Jay College of Criminal Justice, City University of New York. Like PSN, the NNSC partners with "city governments, police agencies, and community representatives" to implement GVI; according to its website, the NNSC has worked or is currently working with more than 60 global partner cities. One of these cities is Oakland, California. The Oakland Ceasefire strategy focuses on those at highest risk of gun violence and aims to reduce group-related shootings and homicides, decrease the recidivism and incarceration rates of participating individuals, and strengthen police-community relations (Braga et al. 2019). The group utilizes direct communication via call-ins and custom notifications from police to communicate a clear message of care and concern and signal the legal and personal consequences of violence; individualized life coaching support—with frequent check ins—and services for "clients," in partnership with community-based direct service organizations, to support behavior change; and a partnership with the Oakland Police Department, including weekly "shooting reviews" (Braga et al. 2019; NIJ 2020). Saint Paul is also an NNSC partner.

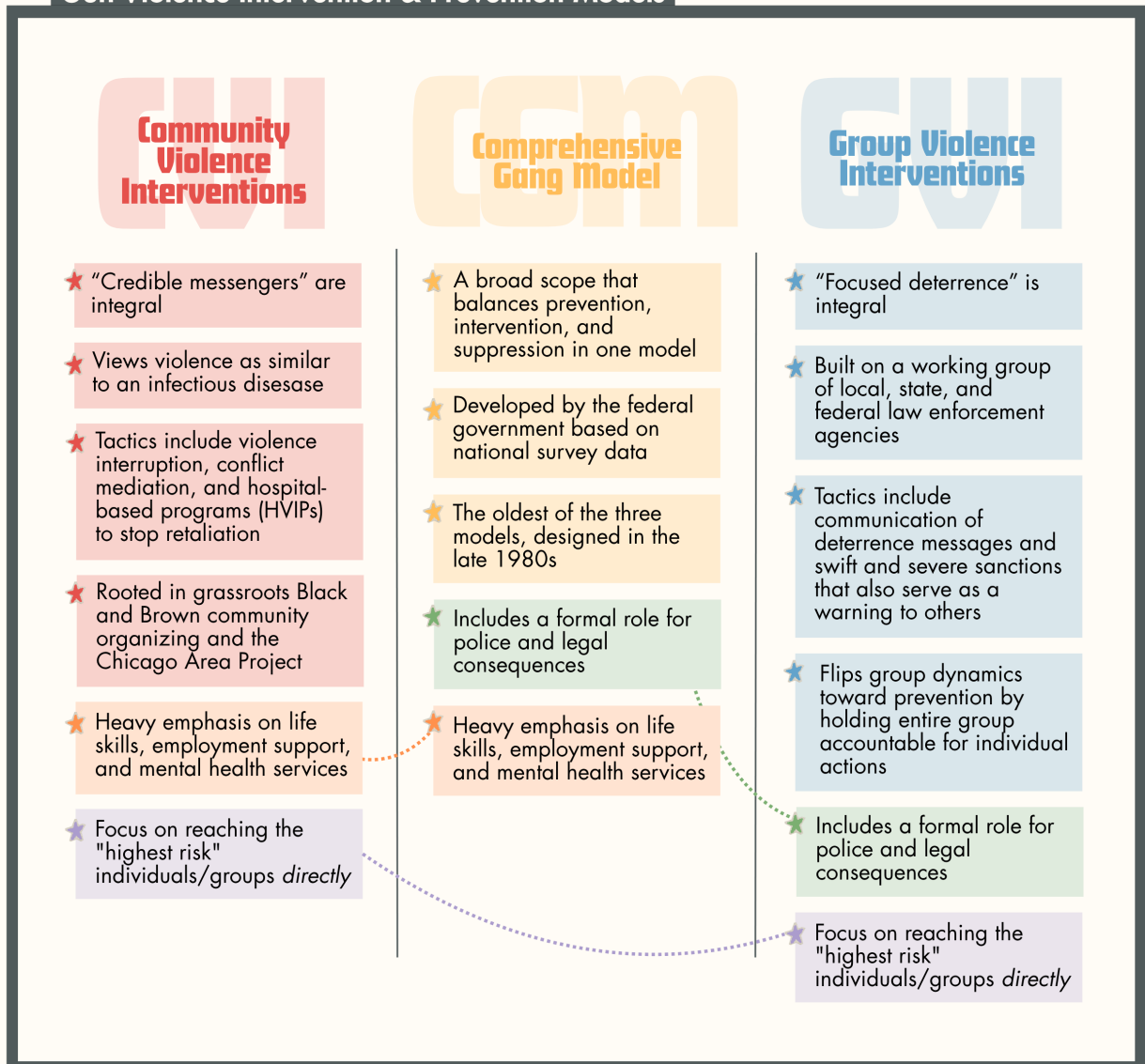


Before the CVI and GVI models emerged, in the late 1980s, the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) conducted a national gang survey to identify promising interventions across the country and synthesize their common elements into an integrated model (Office of Juvenile

Justice and Delinquency Prevention 2008). The result was OJJDP's **Comprehensive Gang Model (CGM)**, which integrates prevention, intervention, and suppression efforts (Spergel 1995).² In recent years, cities across the country have developed locally tailored initiatives that blend elements of CVI and GVI, in many ways mirroring the CGM's integrated approach; Project PEACE is one such example.

² The prevention, intervention, and suppression efforts cut across five key components: community mobilization, opportunities provision, social intervention, suppression, and organizational change and development. These elements roughly correspond to the primary, secondary, and tertiary intervention tiers used in public health.

Gun Violence Intervention & Prevention Models



City and county offices. In many cities and counties, violence prevention models are housed within Offices of Violence Prevention (OVP) or Offices of Neighborhood Safety (ONS). A recent report from the Vera Institute of Justice examines the national landscape and identifies key conditions for effective and sustainable offices. These include robust community and government engagement in the planning process, a clearly defined mission and theory of change, sufficient executive authority, and adequate staffing and funding. The Vera Institute's report also documents the challenges that many offices face, particularly around political instability, underfunding relative to law enforcement budgets, and the difficulty of demonstrating impact on short timelines (Tan de Bibiana et al. 2023).

Evaluations of CVIs, GVIs, and CGM. There is considerable overlap in the outcomes CVIs, GVIs, and the CGM use to measure program effectiveness. Across all three approaches, the most studied outcomes are: (1) community or citywide levels of homicides, shootings, and other violent crime; (2) individual-level violent victimization; and (3) individual-level criminal offending, typically broken down by offense type. Some CVI and CGM evaluations employ a broader set of measures,

reporting on conflict mediations and interruptions of potentially violent incidents, participant self-reports on attitudes toward gun use and other violent behavior, participant cognitive and behavioral health, and community perceptions of the intervention. One recent GVI study examines the short-term effects of deterrence forums on participants' perceptions of procedural justice, perceived risks of continued offending, adherence to community behavioral norms, and motivation to stay out of prison (Trinkner 2019).

Evaluations of CVIs, GVIs, and the CGM point to uneven success. About half the time, these efforts reduce aggregate levels of violence and individual offending and victimization, though even statistically significant effects are not always substantial.³ GVIs fare somewhat better than CVIs and the CGM in terms of demonstrated effectiveness. Longitudinal studies of these interventions are scarce; those that do exist tend to find only limited long-term effects. These findings complicate the routine claims of universal and dramatic success made by program champions and even some independent evaluators.

Still, evaluations show these interventions demonstrate more consistent effectiveness than traditional policing strategies commonly believed to reduce violent crime. Recognizing this range of results is essential for setting realistic expectations about what these interventions can achieve. As some of the longest-standing champions of focused deterrence have acknowledged:

It is problematic... [to] falsely raise citizen expectations of large violence crime reductions and dramatic changes in the quality of residential life in neighborhood[s] suffering from persistent drug and violent crime problems (Braga et al. 2018).

The science of violence prevention is far from settled. But as Andrew Papachristos (2025) argues, this is not unique to community violence prevention and should not preclude investment in such efforts:

We're holding these programs to an impossible standard. Consider that, at least according to one estimate, less than 14 percent of 'all drug development programs eventually lead to approval,' yet we don't defund entire hospital systems when a new drug fails. And failed policing initiatives rarely lead to budget cuts. Why, then, do we demand perfection from CVI programs? (Papachristos 2025).

As we evaluate Project PEACE, tempered by the scholarly literature on the science of violence prevention, we do so with an eye to finding areas of progress—those positive changes that point toward loftier possibilities.

Project PEACE: A Brief Overview

The Saint Paul Office of Neighborhood Safety (ONS), launched in February 2022, leads the City's Community-First Public Safety (CFPS) Framework. The CFPS Framework "seeks to transcend crime response to build a compelling violence reduction strategy for Saint Paul which is informed

³ For example, a 10% decline in homicides may be statistically significant while having little to no effect on people's lived experiences or perceptions of safety.

by deep public engagement, research, tracking and analysis of real time data, and cross sector collaboration of stakeholders" (City of Saint Paul n.d.) That is, the CFPS Framework brings together data, community resources, and public safety systems to create safer spaces and help end cycles of violence.

ONS began implementing its violent crime intervention and prevention program **Project PEACE** (**P**revention/Intervention, **E**nvironmental Design, **A**ccountability/Outreach, **C**ommunity Action, and **E**nforcement) in the summer of 2022. According to ONS, Project PEACE is a CVI and GVI strategy that connects gun- and group-violence-involved individuals with evidence-based community-led programming and wraparound support.

The overarching goals of Project PEACE's comprehensive approach to violence prevention include: targeted community and family engagement through outreach and situational de-escalation, community-integrated intensive support services, and systems change work, strengthening collaborations and partnerships. In short, Project PEACE aims to increase public safety in Saint Paul through gun violence intervention and prevention.

Project PEACE staff engage with the individuals at highest risk of gun violence and connect them to resources to meet their specific needs. Project PEACE partners closely with social service providers and other city entities to provide this immediate support and to shift the broader public safety response toward a more community-centered and preventative approach.

Project PEACE was designed with ambitious goals and a huge scope, but what materialized? Project PEACE leaders brought the MNJRC on as an evaluation partner to explore that question as the program enters its fifth year of operations.



Methodology

MNJRC's Evaluation

From the start, the Project PEACE leadership team knew they wanted an evaluation partner involved in their early development. ONS leaders believed that building out the office, the violence prevention framework, and the programmatic components of PEACE in conjunction with an evaluation partner would sharpen their learning along the way. The team at ONS sought funding and launched an RFP for evaluation services in the fall of 2023. After a competitive process, ONS contracted with the Minnesota Justice Research Center in February 2024.



The Minnesota Justice Research Center (MNJRC) is a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization dedicated to driving **meaningful change to Minnesota's criminal legal system** through rigorous and community-centered research, education, and policy development.

The MNJRC centers our work around exploring values like humane and fair treatment for all, safety, wellbeing, and trust. Our analyses provide our community and its policymakers with the information and tools needed to create a criminal legal system that truly delivers justice.

In alignment with ONS, we employed a comprehensive, coordinated, data-driven methodology for this in-depth look at Project PEACE. Our partnership and evaluation research throughout this work was designed to respond to community needs and to the critical direct service and programmatic work happening here in Minnesota.

As we began to evaluate Project PEACE, we found it was often hard to distinguish its efforts from the broader efforts of ONS. Because the boundaries of Project PEACE and other related projects were unclear, we note that this evaluation primarily—but not exclusively—explores Project PEACE within the ONS ecosystem.

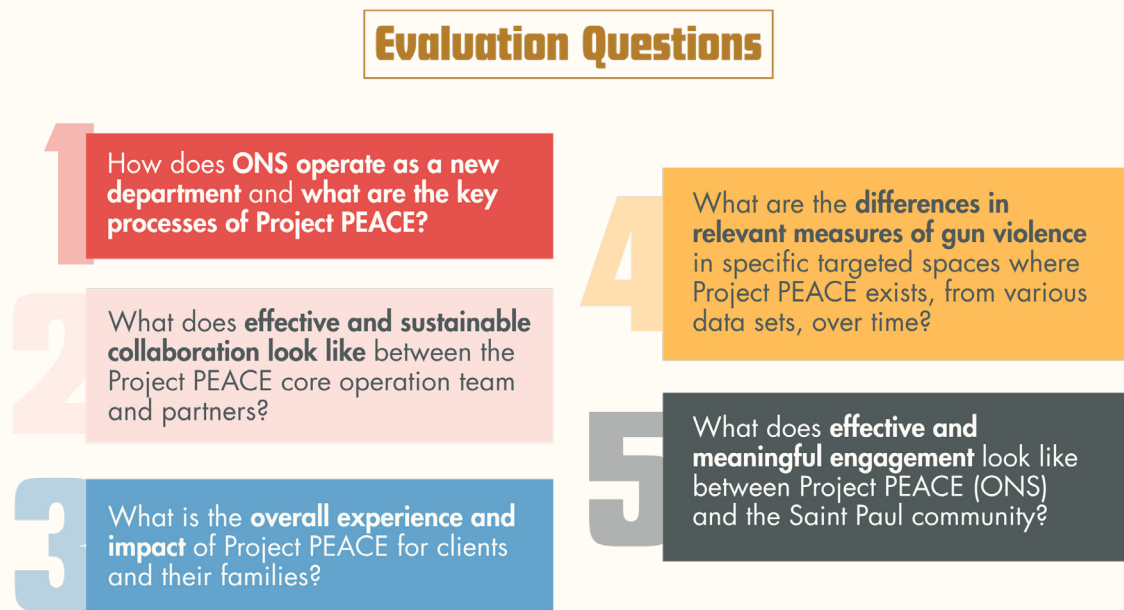
Because ONS is in the early stages of its work and because both gun violence and city government are complex and evolving, MNJRC has produced what is known as a developmental evaluation. A developmental evaluation is a specific evaluative approach that aligns with the organic and iterative nature of violence prevention and intervention response work. **Developmental evaluation “supports innovation development to guide adaptation to emergent and dynamic realities in complex environments” (Patton 2010).** For developmental evaluations to be successful, evaluators must be an integral part of capturing real-time learning.

Developmental evaluations are messy and relational. As a result, our staff spent the first year of our two-year evaluation period establishing a deep, collaborative connection with the ONS staff, leadership, and operations.

Together we developed our research goal: to support ONS in defining and exploring the effectiveness of Project PEACE and its impact on gun- and group-violence-involved individuals, their families, and the wider Saint Paul community.

Evaluation Questions. Understanding the historical and national context of violence prevention models, we endeavored to focus locally on measures of success that mattered to key stakeholders. ONS and MNJRC hosted a consensus-building workshop for ONS staff and partners (people who played a direct or tangential role in Project PEACE's implementation) at the start of our evaluation period in spring 2024. We set out to identify five main research questions as prompted by two reflective queries: **What does success look like for Project PEACE? How is the world different after we have done our work?**

Though our research questions shifted slightly over the evaluation period as we learned more about the internal structures, organizational strengths, and growth areas of the team at ONS and Project PEACE, the resulting questions largely focus on gun violence measures, ways to explore safety, organizational collaboration, community engagement, and client experience. Thus, we set out to explore:



This comprehensive framework guided our evaluation work so that we could best capture Project PEACE's operations and effectiveness on the measures of interest to ONS staff and partners.

Data Collection. MNJRC's researchers collected qualitative data through formal and informal interviews, direct observations, and a community survey. We analyzed internal ONS documents and administrative data provided by the Saint Paul Police Department. And our research team spent considerable time meeting with and collaborating with ONS staff to monitor program shifts and changes throughout the developmental evaluation process.

Interviews. We conducted 67 interviews pursuant to this evaluation, including 50 formal interviews and 17 semi-structured interviews. Our formal interviews consisted of ONS staff (22), partners of ONS (13), clients and families of Project PEACE (9), and Saint Paul community members (6). Our semi-structured interviews consisted of ONS partners (13) and national gun violence intervention leaders (4).

We conducted two rounds of interviews with ONS staff to hear directly from the individuals implementing Project PEACE about their experiences and perspectives and examine shifts over time.

The community interviews included partners from public, governmental, community, and private organizations (such as Saint Paul Public Schools, the Saint Paul Police Department, and Regions Hospital), and city leadership from the Mayor's Office, City Attorney's Office, and City Council. Our nine participants who were current and former Project PEACE clients and family members were drawn from a pool of approximately 30 and included minors with parental consent. Our six Saint Paul community member interviews were drawn from our wider sample of survey respondents. And our informal interviews with gun violence intervention experts included representatives from Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, Stockton, California, Albuquerque, New Mexico, and Portland, Oregon.

All interviews were conducted over Zoom or in-person. They were recorded with participant consent, then transcribed and anonymized for analysis.



Community survey. We developed a community survey to explore our fifth research question: **What does effective and meaningful engagement look like between Project PEACE (ONS) and the Saint Paul community?** The brief online survey, which averaged four minutes to complete, ran from June to November 2025. Uniquely, we hired a community organizer to lead this outreach effort, which included leading team trainings and developing our outreach strategy. We received 483 survey responses, prioritizing (but not restricting) responses from Saint Paul residents so that we would gather information from people who live, work, or spend time regular time in Saint Paul.

Our community organizer, research team members, and MNJRC leaders attended a variety of community events where we tabled and talked to people about Project PEACE and the survey. We emphasized relationship-building with community members at these events, and we increased accessibility by offering the survey in English and Spanish. On another occasion, our team held an outreach day during which team members spent an afternoon stationed at laundromats across Saint Paul's Frogtown, East Side, and West Side neighborhoods, engaging with community members and collecting additional survey responses. To encourage participation, we held a drawing for a \$50 gift card for each set of 50 responses we received.



MNJRC conducting community outreach during the summer of 2025

20 meetings
observed

-  Saint Paul Project Manager Meetings
-  NNSC Advisory Meetings
-  Custom Coordination/Secondary Shoot Reviews
-  NSCC Advisory Group Meeting
-  Life Coach-Client Sessions
-  GVI Community Asset Mapping Meeting
-  Safe Summer Nights Events

Observations. We conducted a series of observations to explore how Project PEACE staff work with other entities, in community, and with clients. We observed 20 meetings across a range of settings, including Saint Paul Project Manager Meetings and advisory meetings with the NNSC, Custom Coordination/Secondary Shoot Reviews, a GVI community asset mapping meeting, a Neighborhood Safety Community Council Advisory Group meeting, Safe Summer Nights Events, and life coach-client sessions. For life coach-client meetings, we met at the ONS office, at schools, at libraries, and over Zoom; we obtained consent from each client prior to observing and from guardians for 16- and 17-year-old clients. As when we observed meetings, we did not record details of clients' experiences, but noted the interaction between and topics discussed by Project PEACE life coaches and clients.

Saint Paul Police Department data. In addition to our qualitative data collection efforts, the MNJRC team connected with the Saint Paul Police Department to acquire data related to incidences of shots fired and fatal and non-fatal shootings in the city from January 2016 to December 2024. We drew primarily on incident, arrestee, and victim-level data to gain detail about shootings, including demographic data that further illuminated the nature of the impacts of gun violence in Saint Paul.



ONS internal documents. Throughout the evaluation period, we analyzed ONS's internal organizational documents to better understand the context of their work as well as their established priorities, policies, and procedures. These documents include workplans with strategic goals, organizational charts, job descriptions, logic models, a theory of change document, policies and procedures related to workflow, budget documents, a list of community-based partners, and reports. ONS granted us access to an internal sharepoint for document retrieval.

Data Analysis. To make meaning of all the data collection approaches described above, we conducted both qualitative and quantitative data analysis.

The interview data was transcribed, anonymized, and analyzed using a mix of inductive and deductive thematic coding. For inductive coding, we created categories (or codes) that emerged from a close reading of the data (e.g., "misconceptions of ONS" was a theme that arose from several different data sources). For deductive coding, we created codes based on our research questions, assigning sections of the qualitative data sources using predetermined categories to analyze themes (e.g., to address our third research question, we created a "client impact" code). Sections of the data were double-coded by different researchers to achieve inter-coder reliability.

We triangulated the themes that emerged from the interview data with our other sources of qualitative data. For instance, we used our observations to bolster patterns that we identified in the interviews. Thus, if a theme of "trust" emerged from the life coach and participant interviews, we then explored the observation data from the life coach-client sessions for any thematic alignment. We also reviewed such data for any newly emerging or contradictory themes.

Once all data was coded, the research team drafted memos to describe and summarize the main takeaways for each code and for codes that connected to broader themes.

Our quantitative data analysis drew on data collected from the Saint Paul Police Department and the results of our community survey. The summary statistics we generated from SPPD data allowed us to explore gun violence trends in Saint Paul, while the summary statistics we generated from the data collected in the community survey allowed us to explore community perspectives of gun violence in Saint Paul.

In order to ensure survey data came from real respondents, not bots, we applied a series of exclusion criteria to flag survey responses for removal. Responses receiving two or more flags were removed from the final dataset. Flagged criteria included: zip codes outside of Minnesota, IP addresses outside of Minnesota, invalid email addresses, nonsense responses, and failed “honey pot” or attention-check questions. Survey responses were monitored weekly. Nearing the end of survey collection, we examined the geographic distribution of responses and the concentration of responses by zip code; to ensure city-wide feedback, we directed additional outreach to any zip codes with few or no responses.

Limitations. Because ONS’s work—including its policies and procedures, data management system, and staff makeup—was evolving during the evaluation period, we performed a developmental evaluation. This is to say, we could not evaluate ONS and its program outcomes in the way we would study a stable, developed city department. One result is that some of our findings are effectively time-stamped; as changes were made along the way, some of our early findings “expired” and our research questions shifted.

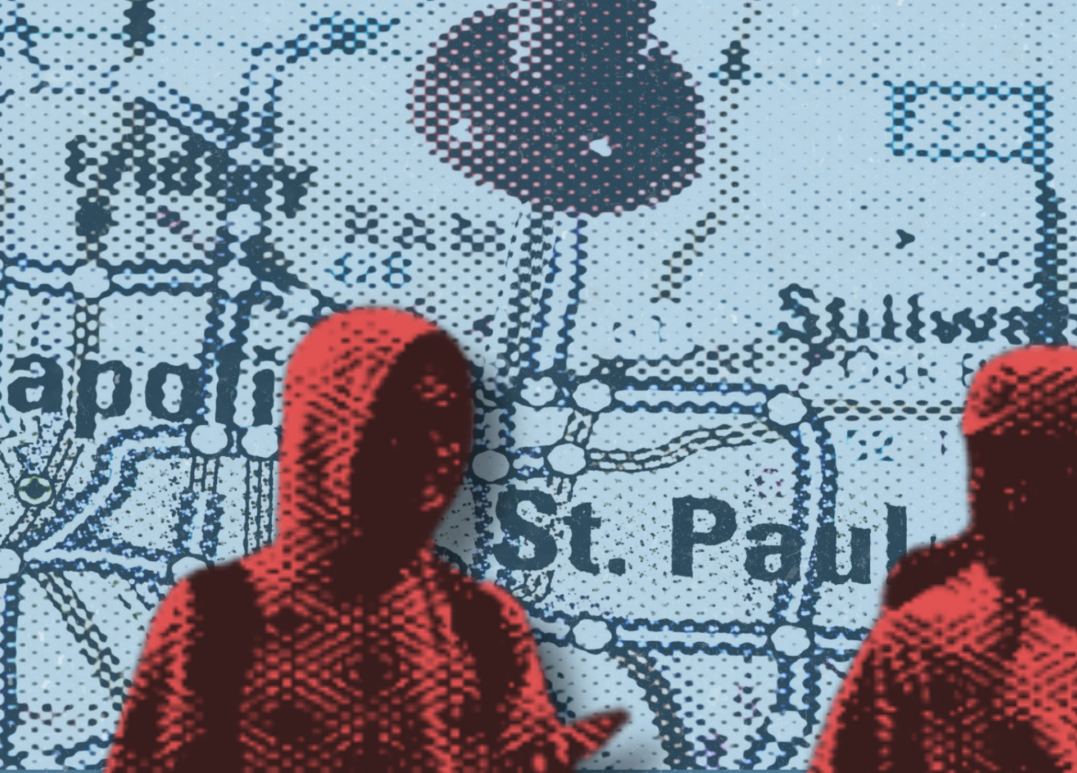
Such changes are both common and expected in developmental evaluations. Early on, for instance, we understood that measuring safety and public space use was important for ONS and its partners. However, the scope and length of our study and our research team’s capacity limited our ability to meet this request substantively. While avenues of inquiry shifted, we believe our findings have nonetheless laid the groundwork for future evaluations of questions including safety and public space use.

Additionally, because Project PEACE staff work with real people navigating complex and ever-changing circumstances, its work is inherently relational and unpredictable. We had to pivot observations and interviews regularly, and connecting with clients was a challenge. For this, we relied on the trusting relationships life coaches built with clients, and therefore honored life coaches’ decisions to not reach out to clients on occasion. Staff interviews were complicated by ONS staff turnover throughout the evaluation period. We interviewed some staff only once and others twice, over time; it was difficult to capture consistent perspectives across the full evaluation period.

Prior to early 2025, ONS did not have a reliable system for documenting the details of their work with clients, including client demographics or contact information, meaning we could not include any clients prior to 2025 in our dataset.

A final set of limitations relates to our community survey. Despite considerable effort to clean and assess responses, we understand that bot activity may have skewed findings. Further, our survey was originally launched in English, with a Spanish translation coming later; this may have limited early participation among Spanish-speaking community members. The survey was not translated into Hmong or Somali, languages with many speakers in Saint Paul (nor was its written format accessible for the spoken nature of those languages). Lastly, because our interviews were conducted with survey respondents—that is, we only spoke with people already interested in and able to follow up on the study—residual selection bias may affect results.

These limitations, which provide context for MNJRC’s evaluation, suggest areas for future work and do not negate what we have learned to this point. The following findings offer insight into ONS’s growth, Project PEACE’s work, and its impact on clients and the broader Saint Paul community.



Chapter 2

Evaluation Findings

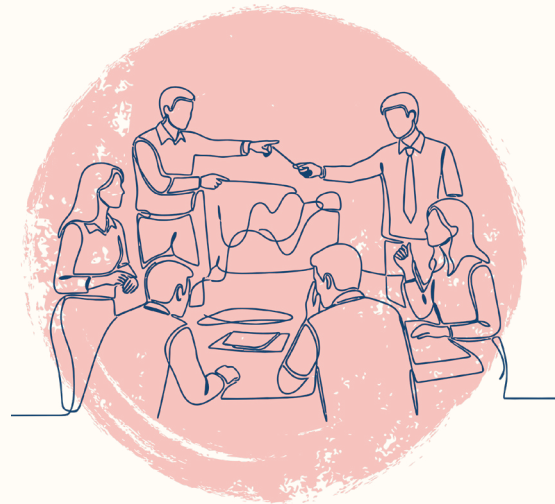
Chapter 2. Evaluation Findings

The Office of Neighborhood Safety launched Project PEACE nearly four years ago, and enough time has passed that we can examine what has been built, what is working, and where the team needs to go from here. Chapter 2 presents the findings of MNJRC's developmental evaluation, drawing on the data collection we describe above. We organize these findings around the core elements of Project PEACE: the origins and structure of ONS itself; the ecosystem of partners that surround and sustain the gun violence prevention work; the life coaches who deliver services on the ground every day; the clients and families whose lives have been changed by the life coaches and the team at ONS; and the perspectives and impact on the broader Saint Paul community. Taken together, these findings paint a picture of a young, ambitious and promising approach to reducing gun violence in Saint Paul that is still in the process of realizing its potential.

A New Kind of Public Safety Office: Origins, Frameworks, and Growing Pains

"We're building the plane as we're flying it."
—Project PEACE Leadership

The Office of Neighborhood Safety and its Project PEACE launched in 2022 following the recommendations of a [Community First Public Safety Commission](#) convened by Saint Paul Mayor Melvin Carter in late 2020. The effort brought \$1.5 million in investments aimed at improving community connectivity and enhancing the capacity of public safety systems in Saint Paul through a Community-First Public Safety framework.



City leaders, including the Mayor, formally recognized the failure of existing approaches and committed to reducing gun violence. In interviews with MNJRC researchers, police officials acknowledged that criminal apprehension alone cannot change mindsets or lifestyles and that prosecution-centered strategies had not produced the desired reductions in violence. ONS partners identified several needs, including improvements in non-fatal shooting investigations and the development of programs specifically designed to end gun violence rather than simply respond to it punitively.

Interviewees in this study highlighted gaps in public safety initiatives, including immediate, trauma-informed responses to violent incidents. Indeed, prior to Project PEACE, there were no structured city-run mechanisms to rapidly connect victims or high-risk individuals to services such as relocation assistance, funeral support, or food access. To be sure, organizations such as Ramsey County's Healing Streets provided important support in the early 2020s, but partners noted how

Project PEACE expanded and strengthened the accessibility of these resources, increasing their visibility and reach within impacted communities. System partners further emphasized that ONS brought needed collaboration across city and community-based agencies and shared awareness regarding who was at highest risk of gun violence.

Community trust and culturally responsive engagement from local government were also identified by interviewees as significant gaps prior to ONS and Project PEACE. Historically, there were few city-employed credible messengers embedded within communities who could build relationships with people at risk. One interviewee noted that in the past:

[T]here was some reluctance to employ people with criminal records in this work, because we just we don't do that, you know? ...[N]ormally [we] would do a background check. If you've got a felony on your record, you're not going to work for the city.

This is a common CVI challenge in cities across the country (Austria and Peterson 2017). Still, outside of city structures and for many decades, local community leaders have mentored and supported young people in response to violence in Saint Paul (these include, to name just two, [Melvin Giles](#) and [Russ Balenger](#)).

ONS and Project PEACE were created as a conduit between systems and community members, leveraging staff who understand the community and can build trust more effectively than traditional institutions. Additionally, despite widespread recognition of the dire state of youth gun violence, community member interviewees noted a lack of youth-led groups and youth-driven initiatives in Saint Paul. While progress has been made in the youth-led space (see [World Youth Connect](#), for example), the ONS partners we spoke with acknowledged that fully integrated wraparound services remain under development. They indicate an ongoing need for deeper, formalized, and comprehensive support systems.

ONS and Project PEACE were created as a **conduit between systems and community members**, leveraging staff who understand the community and can build trust more effectively than traditional institutions.

This context and funds through the American Rescue Plan (ARPA) created momentum for a prevention-focused model that could complement traditional public safety approaches to reducing gun violence in Saint Paul. ONS was launched in early 2022 as a city department initially housed under the City Attorney's office. Staff at the City Attorney's office noted in early interviews that the goal was to support ONS to eventually become its own department, operating with autonomy and receiving funding for administration and hiring on par with other city departments.

ONS began as a very small office of four very busy people attending to administrative tasks while providing direct service to individuals and responding to community needs in Saint Paul. This dual role emerged from both necessity and strategic intent. Because the need for the rapid response function of ONS was so urgent, the team jumped directly into providing services, building the office structures and protocols as they went. We repeatedly heard the metaphor "building the plane as we fly it."

Interviews reveal that ONS was “no ordinary plane,” though. Staff maintained that Project PEACE was not simply a program but “an approach, a facilitator, a gap-bridger, and a support system,” with the ambitious goals of increasing community safety and decreasing gun violence in Saint Paul. A small office with a monumental task, ONS got right to work, connecting young people directly impacted by gun violence with intensive mentorship, responding to families in crisis, and trying to build a foundation for community safety, dignity, healing, and growth.

Project PEACE was established as a core programmatic feature of ONS. It was intended to help create conditions in which “residents feel safe enough to sleep at night or go out to the local park with their kids without fear of violence.” Central to this mission was the belief that individuals at risk of gun violence should be approached with care, support, and an acknowledgement of circumstances that might create the conditions for violence. This was a major departure from the city’s traditional, punitive, and response-driven engagement with gun violence. One partner interviewee said they tried to:

Central to this mission was the belief that individuals at risk of gun violence should be approached with **care, support, and an acknowledgement** of circumstances that might create the conditions for violence.

[N]ot just look at the individual and their crime and just focusing on apprehension but focus on more of the intervention and prevention and looking at the individual’s life as a whole as to what can we do to change their patterns.

ONS has evolved tremendously, from a **team of just four people** showing up at hospitals and responding to shootings to a **multi-tiered frontline organization** with specialized roles and infrastructure.

When individuals were identified through police contact, partners explained, the primary response was prosecution rather than prevention or support. If someone was caught with a firearm or implicated in violence, the response often involved arrest and incarceration, with limited investment in addressing underlying risk factors. This traditional approach had failed to prevent retaliatory and cyclical gun violence in Saint Paul. It did not get to the root of gun violence, so key to its prevention. That’s the role Project PEACE stepped into.

I mean, it used to be that you get picked up with a gun, you go to jail and go to prison for a hell of a long time. That doesn’t work very well.

—Partner

ONS has evolved tremendously, from a team of just four people showing up at hospitals and responding to shootings to a multi-tiered frontline office with specialized roles and infrastructure. This evolution happened at the same time MJCRC was pursuing its evaluation, and so we were able to capture real-time developments and challenges related to staffing, capacity, and external pressures affecting ONS’s continued growth and success.

Identifying and innovating gun violence prevention frameworks to guide Project PEACE's approach was central to ONS's organizational growth.

Foundational Gun Violence Prevention Frameworks

As we embarked on this evaluation, we sought to understand how ONS and Project PEACE fit within and distinguished themselves from established gun violence intervention models across the country today. These models include Group Violence Intervention (GVI), Community Violence Intervention (CVI), and the Comprehensive Gang Model (CGM). Each model is expansive and complex, leading our team to ask: **What do gun violence intervention models look like in practice for ONS?**

Project PEACE's foundation and adaptation of established models was built on a network of support. Early on, leaders traveled to Oakland, California, and Richmond, Virginia, to study and get trained on GVI and CVI models. Oakland's GVI approach aligned most closely with the ONS model, in that it was relatively collaborative with police. Some partners, including Saint Paul Police Department, even traveled with ONS to GVI trainings and conferences. ONS also partnered closely with the NNSC at John Jay College, where a team provided consistent technical assistance and support in developing Project PEACE in Saint Paul.

ONS describes Project PEACE as being grounded in both GVI and CVI. Specifically, the team notes that when it comes to gun violence, they emphasize targeted, relationship-based intervention and prevention rather than broad legal enforcement. Their approach is intentionally flexible and individualized, built on the premise that there is no one-size-fits-all solution.

Custom notifications, a second key strategy drawn from national GVI models, involve **reviewing police referrals of "high-risk" individuals** and conducting **direct outreach at individuals' homes** to interrupt potential immediate violence and offer wraparound supports and connections to services.

In Project PEACE's adaptation, GVI principles are driven by building relationships with those at highest risk of gun violence. Custom notifications, a second key strategy drawn from national GVI models, involve reviewing police referrals of "high-risk" individuals and conducting direct outreach at individuals' homes to interrupt potential immediate violence and offer wraparound supports and connections to services. These notifications are "custom" in that each engagement is tailored to the individual's circumstances, addressing their family history, group involvement, and experience with the criminal legal system (Kennedy and Friedrich 2014). Custom notifications have historically been conducted

alongside police and are among the most effective engagement GVI strategies (Kennedy and Friedrich 2014). **ONS launched Project PEACE by relying on custom notifications as a key client source.**

CVI principles are reflected in Project PEACE's life coaching model, community outreach, and work to create broader changes in community norms around violence. In their role as credible messengers, Project PEACE staff seek to understand the specific family dynamics, social networks, and risk factors that increase an individual's likelihood of involvement in gun violence. They tailor services to directly address expressed needs, deliberately avoiding offering generic supports that do not meaningfully reduce risk. For instance, this aim motivates Project PEACE's place-based work with Saint Paul Parks and Recreation, wherein program staff support Parks and Rec staff in preventing potentially violent situations across community spaces. CVI principles also include Hospital-Based Intervention Programs (HVIPs), a model Project PEACE drew on frequently in their early work as they connected individuals receiving medical care for gun violence-related injuries to resources and life-coaching services.

Our interview data with life coaches and outreach specialists emphasized that the training staff received on GVI and CVI principles before they took on a full caseload gave them a strong foundation for their work. Learning through a combination observation, training videos, and well supported client interactions allowed staff to begin to conceptualize the frameworks and approach their mission with clarity and confidence.

Implementing GVI and CVI frameworks comes with its own complex set of politics and expectations. Staff members felt their work was inherently political, in that they were a new office shaped by funding, leadership, and the pressure to produce visible outcomes. These factors have, at times, pushed Project PEACE staff to operate beyond their GVI and CVI scope, blurring organizational boundaries. This is compounded by the fact that as a city department, staff are beholden to election outcomes that create leadership changes across ONS, the Mayor's Office, and partner departments.

We observed that when Project PEACE's adaptation of these frameworks were not fully understood or defined for those outside ONS, it created unrealistic expectations. Put differently, we often observed misalignment between what GVI and CVI models are designed to do and what partners expect ONS to do. In practice, this has looked like partners defaulting to Project PEACE as a broad, general community resource rather than a GVI and CVI initiative. Staff described being asked by partners to do things outside of their scope, like hang cameras at community sites, notify families of the death of a loved one, respond to non-gun violence issues, and, in one case, manage a property for 29 days following a fire. Notably, a lot of these responsibilities fall within the responsibilities of other agencies. Partners turn to Project PEACE staff with these non-related projects because they trust the staff ONS and because there seemed to be a sometimes limited understanding of Project PEACE's framework and resources. Staff indicated that when Project PEACE staff absorb this work, often out of a sense of obligation or pressure, it risks becoming a catch-all social services agency.

We often observed **misalignment** between what GVI and CVI models are designed to do and what partners expect ONS to do.

Overall, ONS's current model for Project PEACE centers prevention, individualized engagement, cross-system collaboration, and data-informed targeting to reduce violence while minimizing unnecessary exposure to the criminal legal system. ONS draws from various frameworks, including GVI and CVI strategies such as custom notifications and violence interruption, thus resembling CGM principles. Implementing these frameworks comes with politics and expectations that have at times pushed Project PEACE to operate beyond their intended scope and organizational capacity. Project PEACE's distinctiveness lies not only in its adaptation of GVI and CVI frameworks, but in its design, which requires interdependence via collaborative partnerships across Saint Paul.

When staff are able to focus on their core mission, adapting and scoping GVI, CVI, and CGM approaches, they help create a more balanced and effective response to gun violence in Saint Paul. But turning this integrated approach into action required trial and error—and funding.

The Funding Landscape

"We've had to think so much about our funding that sometimes it's been hard to think about the work. And I have said that, where I'm like, we need to get out of a space where we're not constantly thinking about our funding and that that is the forefront thought in our minds versus 'What do we do to continue to improve this work?'"

—ONS Leader



Project PEACE is a relatively new approach to community safety in Saint Paul. It is growing rapidly in size and reach. We knew it was key to learn how ONS's and Project PEACE's staff and operations have been funded and whether that funding structure is sustainable for the growing office.

Currently, Project PEACE is funded through a blend of city general funds, state and federal dollars, competitive awards, and a special fund of American Rescue Plan (ARPA) dollars that ONS has defederalized. Outside of city general funds, this means **ONS has relied on mostly temporary funding sources since its launch**. Further, like many government and non-profit entities standing up new models or approaches to public safety, ONS is vulnerable to what staff consistently described as a 2026 "funding cliff." This precarious financial foundation creates a series of problems. We found that leadership spends considerable time grappling with funding questions, grant writing, and fundraising rather than program innovation and service provision.

At the organizational level, ONS's blended budget streams support different components of its operations. City general funds cover some staff⁴ positions and some client support. A "special fund" covers other staff pay,⁵ along with overhead costs and technology. A \$1.4 million-dollar public safety investment from the 2023 Minnesota State Budget funds four Outreach Specialists. ONS also previously received city opioid funds and money from a Department of Public Safety Community Crime Intervention Prevention Grant, both of which have since lapsed.

⁴ Including the Director, Deputy Director, Project PEACE Program Manager, Management Assistant, NSCC Manager, GVI Coordinator, and a Life Coach

⁵ Three life coaches, the Outreach Supervisor, the Lead Life Coach, the CBO Liaison, and the office's Data Analyst

Each of these funding streams carries uncertainty. The special fund must be spent by the end of 2026 (what staff say is a self-imposed timeline set at the City Council's request) or remaining dollars will be forfeited. The state public safety aid, which staff originally projected would last through mid-2028, will likely run out by the end of 2027 as staff costs previously covered by expiring sources are absorbed.

"In all justice systems there are insufficient resources available for folks that are at the greatest level of need. So, I imagine ONS, their budget is not enough to help all of the people who are at risk of gun violence or engaging in gun violence."

—ONS Partner

In 2026, staff created a dedicated budget to track program-specific costs and client support—the work of Project PEACE. Leaders expect to spend **less than \$50,000** on these efforts by year's end, indicating what other studies have found: the programmatic costs of an approach like Project PEACE are relatively limited. The largest and most precarious budget lines are staff compensation and overhead. One might say GVI and CVI efforts are cheap, if only you did not need people and places to do the work.

There are both value and limits to ONS's flexible funding. The defederalized ARPA funds were essential to ONS's development. These funds' flexibility allowed the office to expand, test new approaches, begin to build out data and contract infrastructure, and develop an organizational model that is working for staff. That said, leaders recognize that stable public dollars alone cannot sustain the kind of innovation ONS needs. Minnesota law prohibits the use of government funds for certain tools, like rides and gift cards, that are central to life coaches' work. Nor can public funding support exploratory efforts, like a guaranteed-income pilot for Project PEACE clients (this direct approach has shown promising results in some cities' violence prevention offices; Bhatt et al 2014).

We can't even get to that space if we are not able to have that margin and to have some security in our budget to say, 'We can try something new,' or 'We can change things.'

—ONS staff member

We heard many ONS leaders and staff worry over the need for more funding. ONS staff, in particular, need a mixed funding portfolio: stable general fund dollars as the foundation, supplemented by philanthropic and private funds for innovation.

The funding environment compounds these internal challenges. The current federal administration has shifted grant priorities away from CVI and toward traditional policing, closing off some funding streams entirely. At the city level, budget decisions affecting ONS are sometimes made without consultation, forcing reactive, short-term adjustments and limiting strategic planning. Competition for overlapping funding sources—including with partner organizations that share ONS's mission—creates tension that can undermine collaboration.

[If] we had the funding that we just could do everything at our capacity that we wanted to do, [it] would benefit us a lot more because we want to do so much. But we can't do so much because of the funding.... [W]e would need more staff.

We would need more and more resources. We would need more funding to help make this plane fly smoothly.

–ONS Leader

Overall, ONS has demonstrated resourcefulness and perseverance in sustaining funding over the past four years of development, but long-term stability and future flexibility will depend on securing more predictable, multi-year funding that aligns with the long-term nature of violence prevention work. Ultimately, the ability to staff and sustain the organizational structure holding the work at ONS remains at risk.

Organizational Structure

“One of the things that’s important to me is that this won’t be a person-dependent program or office. So, when I leave the space, which I will do, that this office continues to be just as successful without me being here.”

–ONS Leader

The structure of ONS has continuously shifted since the beginning of this evaluation. As noted above, the office began with a staff of four, each contributing to at least some administrative or programmatic components. At the conclusion of the evaluation, ONS is an office with 23 staff positions (some of which ONS is actively working to fill); it prioritizes staffing structure and building out specific roles, while remaining in flux.

ONS began as a small office housed within the City Attorney’s Office and, as of 2026, has grown into a standalone city office with multiple programs, including Project PEACE. This is not an insignificant shift from an office working to establish credibility and support to one with the resources and personnel to operate independently.

In the table below, we briefly describe the key ONS staff roles and their functions, based on our interviews and observations. See Appendix C for more detail.

High-level, ONS leaders work together to support strategic planning, program implementation, and personnel support. Project PEACE Staff includes life coaches, outreach staff, and a community-based organization (CBO) liaison. Life coaches work directly with referred individuals and families impacted by gun violence, providing individualized services as mentors and resource connectors. They also document and build an understanding of the gun violence ecosystem. Outreach specialists focus on community engagement, partnership development, and warm handoffs to life coaches. The newly established (2025) CBO liaison position initiates and manages relationships between ONS and CBOs throughout Saint Paul.



Title	Description (observed)	Primary Responsibilities (observed)	Change Over Time
<u>Director</u>	Organizational leader, moving fluidly between strategic planning, partnerships and direct service for immediate needs	• Direct service • Strategic planning • Partnerships	Shift from direct service provision → structural leadership Founding Director left in fall of 2025, new Director began January 2026
<u>Deputy Director</u>	Organizational leader, moving between administrative operations and strategy, including funding and data management	• Strategic planning • Operations • Implementation • Partnerships	Shift from strategic planning and budget management → structural leadership, following founding director departure
<u>Neighborhood Safety Community Council (NSCC) Manager</u>	Organizational leader bringing community voice to ONS, moving between communications, programming, and community advisory group	• Advisory group • Communications • Prevention programming (Goals Not Guns) • CBO contracts	Shifted towards communication and Goals Not Guns programming toward the end of the evaluation period Vacant as of May 2026
<u>Project PEACE Program Manager</u>	Organizational leader, moving between implementing Project PEACE's day-to-day operations, direct service, and team supervision	• Project PEACE operations • Supervision • Partnerships	Shifted from direct client services → Project PEACE oversight, staff development, and collaboration
<u>Life Coaches (5 in 2026)</u>	Provide direct services to individuals and families who have been impacted by gun violence	• Direct Service • Client Engagement & Support • Custom Notifications • Outreach	Hiring more life coaches became an increasing priority during evaluation – with hiring their first two life coaches in Spring 2024 and five by Spring 2026
<u>Outreach Team (2 in 2026)</u>	Lead community engagement and visibility efforts for Project PEACE	• Community Engagement • Community Visibility • CBO Partnerships	No outreach program at the start of evaluation → Growing the team by the end
<u>Community Based Organization (CBO) Liaison</u>	Create and manage relationships between ONS and CBOs throughout Saint Paul	• CBO Partnerships • CBO Contracts • Consultation	Role did not exist at start of evaluation and hired in summer 2025

In sum, Saint Paul's ONS launched in early 2022 to fill gaps in gun violence prevention that traditional public safety approaches had left unaddressed—including trauma-informed rapid response, cross-agency collaboration, and prevention before punishment. The office grew from a small team doing a little bit of everything to an office with specialized roles across leadership, life coaching, outreach, and CBO liaison functions. Through the ONS's evolution, staff focused on attempting to translate GVI and CVI framework components into practice. Scope creep has emerged as a persistent challenge: because Project PEACE staff have developed trust, and because their framework is not always well understood by partners, they are frequently pulled into work outside their intended mission. This, coupled with the financial precarity, suggests this powerful city-run effort is ready to focus on internal stability.

Building an Ecosystem: Partners, Friction, and Promise

The ONS's gun violence prevention work is built on and sustained by partnerships within and beyond the city, what we might think of as the "gun violence prevention ecosystem." ONS is newly situated within this ecosystem and holds a unique role. This section outlines Project PEACE's partners in preventing and responding to gun violence, what their partnerships look like in practice, the depth of what they have made possible, and where challenges remain.

Saint Paul's Gun Violence Intervention and Prevention Ecosystem

A recent Vera Institute of Justice report that examines the national landscape of Offices of Violence Prevention and Neighborhood Safety highlights the coordinating function of OVPs/ONSs as central to their value: bringing together government agencies, community-based organizations, and data partners under a shared violence prevention strategy. In the report, Saint Paul's ONS is twice featured as a promising practice example—first for its 47-member community planning commission and its partnership with the Citizens League and the Harvard Kennedy School Government Performance Lab (both of which happened prior to this evaluation), and second for its Neighborhood Safety Community Council, which centers people with lived experience of gun violence in grant-making decisions (more on that below).

Considering the critical nature of this coordinating function, we set out to better understand the gun violence prevention ecosystem in Saint Paul, which we defined as the community organizations, government agencies, and individuals collectively working to address public safety and support individuals and families impacted by gun violence. In this section, we explore this ecosystem in relation to ONS—delineating partners with direct, working collaborations with the team at Project PEACE from those who are connected more informally—to better understand how the ecosystem currently works to address gun violence.

Project PEACE's formal and informal partnerships span multiple sectors, including other areas of city government, police, and the criminal legal system; public health and health care systems; community-based organizations; and schools. At its inception, Project PEACE organized its partners into four categories: community voice partners (like the 21 Days of Peace), justice partners (like the

Saint Paul Police Department and the City Attorney's Office), support and outreach partners (like the Saint Paul Public Schools), and systems partners (like the Saint Paul Mayor's Office). See Figure 1. Our interviews captured perspectives from each category; we connected with clients and their families, police, city social service agencies, and technical assistance partners to name a few.

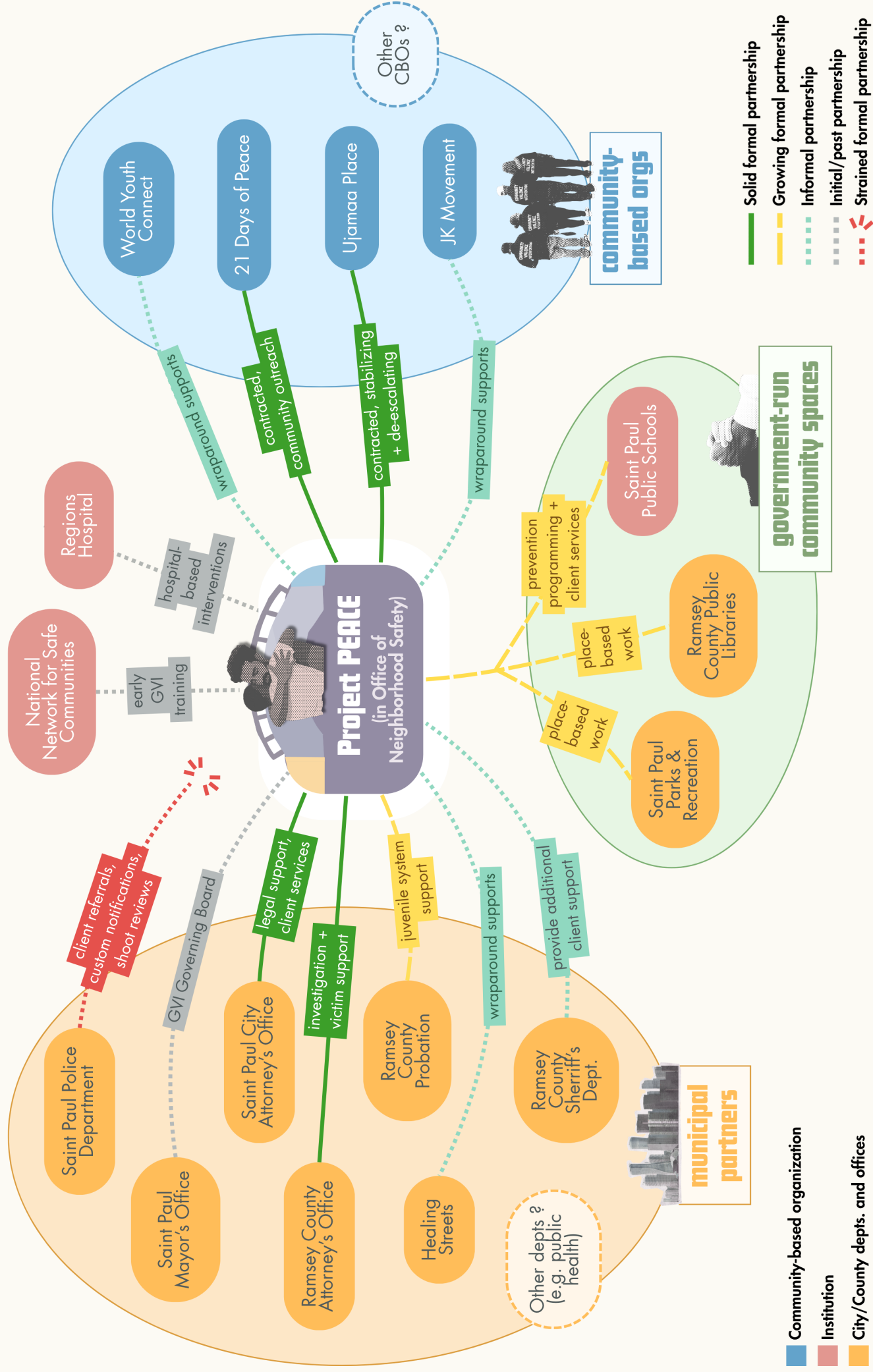


Figure 1

The figure above shows how ONS defines their gun violence ecosystem. Our interview and observations, or what we heard and saw, shape what we think of as the **functioning ecosystem**.

In practice, our data revealed a shifting ecosystem with ebbing and flowing partnerships. Some partnerships, like that with the Saint Paul Police Department (SPPD), were strong at the outset but have since broken down. Others, like that with Saint Paul's Department of Parks and Recreation, are developing and strengthening as Project PEACE's work develops and strengthens. Next, we delve into the nature of Project PEACE's various partnerships, the goals of such partnerships, and how such partnerships play out in practice.

The Saint Paul Gun Violence Prevention & Intervention Ecosystem



The effectiveness of the broader ecosystem, we found, is shaped largely by who is at the table and how they chose to show up in the collaborative process.



Keeping Saint Paul “Safe, Alive, and Free”

During our interviews with ONS staff and partners, we asked them to reflect on their work with one another. We wanted to know who was at the table and what collaboration looked like in practice. We also attended a variety of meetings to observe how Project PEACE staff and partners navigated their collaborations and shared work in real time.

We learned that cooperation across this ecosystem is both formal and informal, taking shape through structured contracts and relationships alike. We witnessed some collaborations growing stronger over time and others becoming strained. The effectiveness of the broader ecosystem, we found, is shaped largely by who is at the table and how they chose to show up in the collaborative process.

When we began this evaluation in early 2024, partners had set up connection points through multiple mechanisms, including shoot review meetings (in which SPPD and partners review recent shooting incidents and consider how best to support individuals involved); meetings of a GVI governing board in which City of Saint Paul leaders bring a range of partners together to develop solutions and create formal GVI policy; advising calls with the NNSC at John Jay College; legal and structural support meetings with the Saint Paul City Attorney’s Office; and contract-based interactions with organizations like Ujamaa Place, a Saint Paul CBO that provides holistic, culturally responsive support for young African-American men.

As of spring 2026, Project PEACE no longer partners with the NNSC, the GVI governing board had only met a handful of times, and the SPPD shoot review meetings have been paused, mirroring a larger shift in collaboration between ONS staff and SPPD that unfolded over the course of the evaluation period.

Informally, much of the day-to-day work happens through exchanging information and consistent communication (texts and phone calls), discussing referred individuals and connecting them to resources, and navigating real-time responses to incidents. For example, life coaches frequently communicate via text with probation officers and staff at Saint Paul Public Schools as they work to support clients. One partner noted that ONS's caution around sharing youth data is both legally mandated and intentional, so such informal communication is thoughtful and limited. Both education and law enforcement systems maintain boundaries around youth data as a protective measure, defaulting instead to secure platforms or in-person conversations when more detailed and sensitive information must be exchanged.

Training and Organizational Development. Before Project PEACE can carry out their gun violence prevention and response work, they must work with partners who provide training and foundational organizational support. These relationships have changed as Project PEACE matured. The Saint Paul City Attorney's Office was a foundational partner in shaping ONS's early design and approach. In the beginning and through the bulk of our evaluation, ONS operated out of the City Attorney's Office, which provided both legal counsel and core infrastructure support. This included reviewing ONS contracts and grants with community agencies to ensure legal compliance but extended to supporting PEACE's clients, helping them navigate issues such as landlord-tenant disputes and breaking leases, which are common needs for victims of and witnesses to gun violence.

The Saint Paul Mayor's Office was a key partner in launching ONS in 2022, following a recommendation to improve public safety in Saint Paul. As part of this work, the Mayor's Office established the GVI governing board—bringing together leaders from various offices such as SPPD, ONS, and other city and CBO partners doing GVI work. The board was created to foster collaboration, shared structure and expectations, and develop formal policy to GVI work among city leadership.

The NNSC at John Jay College provided regular, contracted technical assistance during ONS's early development, centered on helping ONS and other players, like SPPD, in the gun violence ecosystem in Saint Paul. This included adapting the GVI model, including custom notifications, to Saint Paul's specific context and community needs. NNSC hosted advisory meetings, hands-on training, and community asset mapping sessions.

During advisory meetings, Project PEACE staff and SPPD discussed how custom notifications were working in Saint Paul. NNSC facilitated hands-on learning through what they called a "GVI University," a multi-day, in-depth training that brought together representatives from agencies across the city to learn about GVI, public safety, and what implementation looks like specifically in Saint Paul.

Finally, NNSC invited these representatives to participate in community asset mapping. Staff from ONS, Ramsey County's Healing Streets, and Ujamaa Place worked together to identify partnerships that could strengthen GVI implementation and serve as a positive violence intervention and prevention resource. Potential partnerships identified via community asset mapping spanned CBOs and city entities, some of which ONS established as formal partners toward the end of our evaluation.

The Ramsey County Sheriff's Office serves as an informal partner for ONS. ONS can refer victims/witnesses of gun violence to the Sheriff's office for cash assistance for things like relocation costs, medical bills, hotel stays, or other short- and long-term housing needs. The partnership runs both ways: the Sheriff's office reaches out to ONS during gun crime investigations and for victim/witness wraparound supports.

Preventing Gun Violence. Project PEACE's role among partners is unique in that it serves as both a preventative presence and an emergency and post-incident response.

Before an incident ever occurs, Project PEACE works alongside partners to build a sense of safety in the community. Specifically, the strongest collaborations aimed at gun violence prevention we found were between Project PEACE staff and Saint Paul Parks and Recreation.

Project PEACE's role among partners is unique in that it serves as both **a preventative presence** and **an emergency and post-incident response.**

Community presence. Project PEACE team members work with Saint Paul Parks and Recreation and Saint Paul Public Library to send staff to parks, recreation centers, libraries, community pools, and other public spaces during peak times. Project PEACE staff serve as additional and alternative support by posting up, engaging with youth, and maintaining a trusted, visible presence. Saint Paul Parks and Recreation calls upon Project PEACE staff when they anticipate needing extra support in areas where there are concerns about potential violence. For example, Parks and Recreation staff anticipated a "pool takeover" organized by youth over the summer and called on ONS to be present as support staff, helping to ensure everyone stayed safe.

ONS also consistently attended Safe Summer Nights, a monthly community event co-hosted by Saint Paul Parks and Recreation and SPPD to help bridge the gap between residents and SPPD. During these events at rotating Parks and Recreation centers, SPPD and other city agencies set up tables to share about their work. Attendees receive a free dinner and have informal chats with police officers. Safe Summer Nights events allowed ONS to build awareness and visibility in neighborhoods across Saint Paul.

Additionally, ONS's Neighborhood Safety Community Council (NSCC) represents another community-connected arm of ONS's broader gun violence prevention work. The NSCC creates space for community voice and drives prevention-focused engagement through several mechanisms: a gun violence prevention curriculum called Goals Not Guns implemented across Saint Paul schools, a community council of residents from Saint Paul's seven wards that help shape ONS's priorities, and identifying potential contracts with CBOs that support Project PEACE's client work.

Direct support. When it comes to CBOs and local businesses, Project PEACE has both formal contracts and informal partnerships. For example, ONS contracts with Ujamaa Place, with Project PEACE staff working alongside with Ujamaa's Community Ambassadors Program to engage in place-based work by maintaining a visible, partnered presence in areas identified as higher risk for violence, helping stabilize and de-escalate potential threats before they occur. ONS also has a formal contract with 21 Days of Peace to do this same community outreach across Saint Paul, in

areas identified by both SPPD and ONS as violence hot spots. 21 Days of Peace also serves as a key referral partner for Project PEACE clients.

The team at ONS also works with a range of CBOs when staff need to connect both Project PEACE clients and community members from their outreach efforts to direct resources. This includes after-school and community-based programs like the Jimmy Lee Recreation Center, the JK Movement, and World Youth Connect; employment opportunities through Hired; and direct services addressing basic needs, such as housing and food through Union Gospel Mission and Catholic Charities. Project PEACE staff even work with businesses like Blaze Credit Union to help clients open bank accounts, a pressing need identified by community members.

Having established connections across a range of organizations allows Project PEACE staff to coordinate wraparound services, knowing no single entity can address all needs alone. This is key, given that research tells us that gun violence is rooted in deeper structural problems, such as unemployment, unmet basic needs, and chronic underinvestment in communities (Heller 2014). Recognizing that community-based organizations are well positioned to address these very problems, Project PEACE released a request for proposals to formally contract with four CBOs in early 2026.

Responding to Gun Violence. After an incident, Project PEACE's collaborative work centers on making sure individuals are safe and connected to resources.

ONS's early work with the Saint Paul Police Department aimed both to prevent and respond to gun violence. Beginning in 2022, Project PEACE staff collaborated with the SPPD's ASPIRE Unit to reach individuals at highest risk of gun violence before—and when needed, after—an incident happened.

During custom notifications, Project PEACE staff introduce services to individuals and families at risk of or impacted by violence, making this one of the most visible examples of SPPD and PEACE collaboration. Staff described their collaboration as “really powerful”, being able to provide:

[A]dditional support to look at the whole individual—what those wraparound supports might mean for you—and how can we get you out of that and keep you safe, alive, and free.

Project PEACE staff leave their contact information and then attempt to connect again with the individual shortly after the custom notification, but this time without police.

At a systems level, ONS and other partners in the gun violence intervention ecosystem all participated in regular secondary shoot review meetings led by SPPD. This meeting follows the primary shoot review meetings also led by SPPD. Both meetings review shooting incidents from the previous two weeks, with the key difference being the partners at the table and the discussion's level of detail. Primary shoot review meetings are generally attended by justice partners who discuss confidential and sensitive information about ongoing investigations related to an incident. Secondary shoot review meetings bring a broader set of partners to the table to collaborate a response based on each partner's expertise, and the discussion focuses more on community context rather than police detail. For ONS, participation in secondary shoot review meetings typically meant facilitating these conversations and connecting with individuals to offer services and resources. Together, partners at the secondary shoot review meetings also identified information

to help prevent the next shooting incident: assessing high-risk individuals' needs, determining who will receive a custom notification (described above), and assigning follow-up tasks to partners with existing contacts.

Project PEACE staff also works with Regions Hospital to support individuals and families in the aftermath of gun violence. In one example, ONS worked with Ramsey County's Healing Streets to support a young person who was shot while on public transit and needed a safe place to go after being discharged from the hospital. Healing Streets called the team at ONS, described the situation, and together they helped the young person get to a hotel. This kind of on-the-ground, immediate support—working with families right out of the hospital—was central to how ONS supported individuals after an incident. However, this kind of engagement became less frequent as Project PEACE developed its own model and approach to its work, and because Healing Streets already had a formal contract to effect HVIPs with Regions Hospital.



Another function of Project PEACE staff is to support individuals navigating both the aftermath of gun violence and the criminal legal system. Through a newer partnership with Ramsey County Juvenile Probation, Project PEACE staff receive referrals to connect youth already involved in the legal system due to gun violence with life coaching services. Most Project PEACE clients we interviewed had a probation officer and were actively going through the court process. For staff, this meant their work included preparing clients for hearings, attending court, and continuing to support their broader life goals as clients navigated the legal system. Relatedly, Project PEACE staff work in partnership with the Ramsey County Attorney's Office (RCAO) to provide wraparound supports for victims and witnesses involved in a gun crime investigation.

Project PEACE staff show up not only for individuals directly impacted by gun violence, but for the city partners and organizations it works alongside. In addition to their prevention work with public spaces, Project PEACE staff offer support after incidents of gun violence in the community. For example, after a gun violence incident at a library, Saint Paul Public Library staff called on Project PEACE staff to be present to offer a sense of safety to community members and to support the staff who had witnessed the violence in the aftermath. ONS staff facilitated a debrief, listened to community concerns, and connected people to resources.

Focusing on direct client support and referrals, Project PEACE staff work with Saint Paul Public School (SPPS) to support clients who attend SPPS by connecting with social workers, guidance counselors, and other staff on their behalf. Because most Project PEACE clients are still in high school, it has been crucial to meet with them and collaborate with school staff during the school day. Project PEACE staff partner with SPPS to prevent gun violence through connections to individual students. SPPS staff identify students at risk of violence—whether a student brings a gun to school or is found to have complex, unmet basic needs—and works with Project PEACE staff to

support and intervene. Project PEACE also has a partnership with Journeys Secondary School, a specialized public school within the district, where Project PEACE staff frequently connect clients to resources that will help them pursue their educational goals.

Collaboration in Progress: Stronger Together, But Not Without Friction

As described above, partnerships are central to Project PEACE's approach to gun violence intervention and prevention in Saint Paul. ONS staff and leaders consistently named collaboration with partners as one of the most rewarding aspects of their work, and partners across sectors described ONS as essential to the future of public safety in the city. At the same time, building and sustaining this ecosystem has come with difficulties. Inconsistent communication and cooperation, role confusion, and competition over credit and resources have created friction that limits the ability to achieve sustained reductions in gun violence. This section explores both the depth of what these partnerships have made possible and the challenges that remain in realizing their full potential.

ONS is relatively new to the gun violence ecosystem in Saint Paul, yet partners consistently describe its presence as necessary to meeting their shared goals. ONS has filled a gap in intervention and prevention through its work with Project PEACE.

Project PEACE staff, for their part, fill a gap at the individual level, providing tailored support to clients impacted by gun violence. One partner cited this as a prime component in a successful anti-gun violence strategy: "you can't paint with a broad brush around" this work, they began, continuing, "there needs to be specifics, especially when we're talking about community work and how it looks for support in the community."

ONS is, in multiple ways, shifting how Saint Paul addresses gun violence. Justice partners noted that ONS's presence has contributed to a shift from sheer apprehension toward prevention and intervention. The shared goal among partners is to keep everyone in Saint Paul "safe, alive, and free" by reducing gun violence and fostering a sense of community safety. Partners emphasized that this "work is so important that it's beyond one person's entity." Indeed, many see ONS as central to a broader paradigm shift in how this ecosystem navigates public safety. Partners credit it as a bridge between police, schools, hospitals, community organizations, and agencies across Saint Paul. Specifically, ONS represents a new bridge to community that city and county police did not previously offer. Partners noted a "different level of trust" when Project PEACE staff accompanied clients in court. Both ONS's relationships and its access to resources contribute

Many see ONS as **central to a broader paradigm shift** in how this ecosystem navigates public safety.

to its effectiveness in this regard. For example, one partner shared that the City Attorney's Office's Victim Advocacy Services Department requires an active criminal charge for victims to qualify for service provision, while Project PEACE's low-barrier model can serve individuals involved in or impacted by gun violence. These partnerships have effectively expanded access to support across systems.

Even so, partners who broadly understand ONS's role in the gun violence ecosystem remain uncertain about the specifics of Project PEACE, how they support clients once they are connected, and how outcomes are tracked beyond referral counts. As one partner put it:

...we don't always know what the Office of Neighborhood Safety is doing with victims or with perpetrators of crime or gun violence.... It's easy to know what the police department is doing, because they arrest people, they write reports. And then in [the city attorney's] office, [they] prosecute cases. So, [they] charge people with crimes and then get a certain outcome. It's all on paper. But what ONS does is a little more complex, behind-the-scenes.



What partners don't see is the **invisible and often grueling nature** of the work: sitting with victims and families at the hospital until two in the morning, navigating the slow, nonlinear process of trauma and behavioral change.

Partners acknowledge the complexity of measuring the behind-the-scenes prevention work but still want a clear picture of what ONS does and the impact it has.

ONS leaders and staff expressed similar frustrations, explaining that despite some documentation, reports, and regular collaboration, city partners do not know what ONS does. Staff report that partners underestimate the complexity of what they do—perceiving it as straightforward and easy work that anybody can do. What partners don't see is the invisible and often grueling nature of the work: sitting with victims and families at the hospital until two in the morning, navigating the slow, nonlinear process of trauma and behavioral change.

This situation led us to ask: **How can ONS better communicate their complex work with partners?**

Across these partnerships, ONS shows up in multiple ways and at every stage of gun violence, with a wide range of resources. As one partner shared:

ONS is nice because they corral things... they provide a conduit of people who know the community better and can gain trust better. And that's a barrier [for my group].

Partners turn to ONS as the connective tissue between resources and support and those people at risk of or already impacted by gun violence, describing ONS as the "nucleus or center that just brings people together," transforming what once felt like a fragmented GVI and CVI effort into something coordinated and city-backed. Another partner described the gun violence ecosystem "as a huge potluck," where:

...we lean and count on each other and each bring something to the table. ...Everybody brings a dish and everyone eats, right? I feel like ONS is kind of like that office that brings several dishes.

Together, these reflections point to a broader hope among partners that their collaborative work will build an “institutional legacy.” Having, over time, begun to learn and witness how Project PEACE staff wrap support around individuals impacted by gun violence, partners hope to integrate this prevention mindset into the DNA of departments across Saint Paul and Ramsey County.

“We lean and count on each other and each bring something to the table... Everybody brings a dish and everyone eats, right? I feel like ONS is kind of like that office that brings several dishes.”



Again, ONS staff and leaders consistently named collaboration with partners as one of the key aspects of their work. As one life coach stated, “We wouldn’t be able to function or sustain if we didn’t have any collaborations or partnerships.” Interviews and observations revealed the emergence of responsive, reciprocal, and trust-based relationships. Many partners attribute the success of their relationships with ONS to the responsiveness of Project PEACE staff, saying “when you call ONS, they answer” and “without a shadow of a doubt, they will be there for us.” Deepening ecosystem connections resulted in more client access and better service delivery over the course of evaluation. It is little wonder that Project PEACE staff identified developing collaborations as a priority.

Notably, ONS staff and partners maintain that this ecosystem has contributed to gun violence prevention success in Saint Paul. One ONS leader, for instance, attributes the documented reduction in homicide in Saint Paul to the city finally coming together collectively, with life coaches’ work and Project PEACE playing a key role alongside SPPD and other partners. A partner noted:

Those kids are alive because of what ONS has done and what we all have done as a[n] ecosystem around the city of Saint Paul and Ramsey County.

The evolution of a collaborative approach to gun violence specifically and broader dynamics affecting the city of Saint Paul make it hard to find conclusive evidence that Project PEACE efforts are directly responsible for reduced gun violence and/or reduced crime. However, the belief among ecosystem partners in the power of Project PEACE’s work is a critical finding about its value.

Partnership with Police. ONS appears to act as a potential nucleus in the ecosystem, but one relationship stood out as different: the partnership with the Saint Paul Police Department. Project PEACE staff described their collaboration with police as “very special,” noting that the partnership between police and credible messengers through custom notifications represents something new to Saint Paul’s gun violence work. (One past study examined a “GVI-like initiative” in Saint Paul in 2016 that brought together SPPD’s Gang Unit and the local Mexican Consulate to focus on Latino gangs [Densley and Jones 2016]).

This partnership is really the crux of the GVI strategy. It relies on both police intelligence about gun violence and credible wraparound support that only an office like ONS is positioned to provide.

Though promising, research demonstrates previous challenges between credible messengers and police due to challenges around trust, role clarity, coordination, and information sharing (Richardson et al. 2025, Skogan et al. 2009). Some police departments have previously stated that it's "part of their culture" to not share intelligence with "outsiders," and making matters worse, police distrust and stigma toward people with previous criminal-legal system involvement can stymie engagement and collaboration between police and credible messengers (Skogan et al. 2009).

Even so, staff named the custom notifications process as an example of shifts in the police department's understanding of the value of support in addition to punishment. One ONS staff member described:

[Y]ou have an officer that might do a search warrant, talk to a parent, and then we [ONS and police] show up the next day and the parents are like, 'When you said you were going to come back, we didn't believe you, we thought that was just lip service.' And officers are genuinely seeing like the impact of what they've done and how they can bring support to kind of remedy some of those things as well.

Staff also emphasized that without police collaboration, there would be significant gaps in understanding what they are "walking into" in high-risk situations. SPPD is the primary agency with comprehensive information on shootings and plays a key role in identifying high-risk individuals. Frequent communication with SPPD, including the relay of timely intel about shootings, enabled Project PEACE staff to do this work effectively. For example, a police officer described a traffic stop involving four young people and the discovery of a firearm in the vehicle. When one mother arrived on scene, visibly upset, an officer took the time to speak with her and learned that she and her child were homeless and living out of a hotel. The next day, SPPD contacted Project PEACE and coordinated so that staff would meet the family in person. Project PEACE staff connected them to housing resources. ***This kind of need-based response did not exist before Project PEACE.***

Partners at Regions Hospital and the Saint Paul City Attorney's Office offered that they had observed a shift in the mindset of police regarding gun violence. Some partners described officers responding to non-fatal shootings much faster than they had in the past. Now:

[T]hey [police] treat all shootings the same: fatal, non-fatal, get right out there and try to figure out what happened. It used to be that with non-fatal shootings they would get around to it three, four, or five days later. By that time, it was cold, nobody would talk about it.

SPPD officers are now making reports at the hospital and connecting with victims, suspects, and their families in a timely manner. Much of this work is connected to a non-fatal shooting initiative that began in December 2023 (Krauss 2026). Another partner stressed why this urgency from police matters to the community saying, "Like if you get shot and you go to the hospital and the cops aren't there to take a report with you, it'd be a little disconcerting. What the hell?" Partners credit ONS's influence and approach for driving this shift in police practice alongside the commitment by law enforcement and county funding.

Observations and interviews made clear that Project PEACE's partnership with SPPD can be a double-edged sword. While it allows some residents to experience police in a different, service-oriented way, it leads others to approach Project PEACE with skepticism because of its association with police. We heard from several clients that their initial reaction was wariness, as they assumed PEACE staff were integrated into SPPD.

The most significant challenge cited by staff was the strain of the relationship with police and the tension between their offices' sometimes differing approaches to this gun violence work. Staff described the relationship with SPPD as "hit or miss" in 2024, while in 2023 SPPD described the partnership as "great" and "exactly what our community needs." We observed consistent collaboration with some engaged officers, particularly from the ASPIRE Unit, but broader inconsistencies in communication and referrals between police and Project PEACE staff over time. While secondary shoot review meetings painted an overall picture of genuine collaboration and value across partners, this momentum appeared to fade over the course of the evaluation. One partner raised questions about the meetings' efficacy and use of time, given information-sharing barriers. For example, given the sensitive nature of these conversations, meetings must be in-person rather than on Zoom, complicating access for a lot of CBOs. This, combined with worsening relationships with SPPD and a desire to involve a wider range of community-based partners, has led to the pause in these meetings.

ONS and the SPPD worked to develop a shared process around custom notifications and referrals as described earlier, but by fall 2025, SPPD had disengaged entirely. ONS leadership reported five months with no client referrals from SPPD. Project PEACE staff expressed concern about reduced communication and referrals, prompting efforts to re-establish the relationship. As one ONS staff member put it: "That's our biggest struggle, having [SPPD] as a partner. Because it was a very beneficial partner. And we must have a very understanding relationship, but they choose not to."



Several factors likely contributed to this breakdown. First, ONS staff noted that the collaborative success with police has been person-dependent. ONS and SPPD staffing shifted over the course of the evaluation. According to one partner, SPPD has rotated personnel through the ASPIRE Unit and other ONS-adjacent roles without providing sufficient education on the GVI/CVI model, resulting in a loss of institutional knowledge. One ASPIRE Unit officer acknowledged that communication challenges with ONS resulted from staffing and capacity constraints, while maintaining that the two agencies generally worked well together.

Our study found that the shift in approach or operational frameworks described above—the apparent shift from a sole punishment focus to a mindset shaped around supports and life coaching—was also person-dependent. Put simply, some police officers were not on board with the Project PEACE model.

Finally, ONS staff described a challenging flipside of the positive shift in approach and frameworks: SPPD's overall growing comfort with the model led to police adopting and attempting to replicate elements of ONS's approach independently. SPPD themselves named: "Now we are changing and we're starting to focus on more of an intervention-prevention type of strategy, hoping that it changes someone's lifestyle rather than just locking them up and thinking that's going to solve it—because obviously it doesn't." On its face, this may seem like a measure of success. However, interviews with ONS staff uncovered some concern. One staff member explained:

I think people got comfortable because of success and so then they were like 'Let's try doing that, too.' And I think that's where we're seeing the attitude in the police department like, 'Oh, if ONS can do that, why can't we do it, too?' So I think we're seeing like just a little bit of a backslide and deterioration of the like strict model that we had and the relationships that we had.

Staff described the importance of embarking on violence intervention and prevention work while holding a position of community trust and maintaining strong relationships. Most police officers, ONS staff noted, do not occupy that same position. ONS staffers also described the training and skill-building that goes into their life-coaching work, training that police did not have. To them, police and other partners are "stepping into our lane, which prevents us from being able to be fully functional."

In addition to concerns about scope creep, we observed competition for credit across the gun violence prevention ecosystem. When it comes to claiming success in terms of reductions in gun violence, many agencies and institutions have stepped forward. For example, SPPD and the RAO have claimed credit for Saint Paul's non-fatal clearance rates and reductions in violence, while other partners attribute these reductions largely to ONS's behind-the-scenes work. Neither has clear causal evidence. According to an ONS staff member, others in the ecosystem, like police and healthcare providers, are "not accustomed to people challenging them because they feel like they have this infinite knowledge of things that the everyday person doesn't know." They have been hesitant to trust ONS's expertise when supporting individuals affected by gun violence: "We've always felt like we had to justify ourselves, our impact, and we're not seen or heard by anybody else."

One structural piece with the potential to address many of these concerns is the GVI governing board through the City of Saint Paul. The original intended role of the Mayor's Office was to convene key leaders and partners doing GVI work to the same table. Many partners named the GVI governing board as a necessary component of the GVI model, as it would provide legitimacy and accountability to ONS and their partners. However, we did not observe it functioning as intended over the course of the evaluation. Our team observed infrequent meetings - it was supposed to meet quarterly and instead we were told it met three or four times total since 2022 with the last meeting in July 2025 - with ONS largely taking the lead on setting agendas and convening partners. Towards the end of our evaluation, there were efforts by ONS to reconvene the board and re-launch the space for coordination.

Partnerships with Community-Based Organizations. Observations of the collaboration with CBOs made clear that these organizations were pivotal to ONS's client work, characterized by genuine cooperation that deepened as Project PEACE matured. Several partners from CBOs described the reciprocal nature of their with ONS, discussing instances of teamwork and mutual care. One partner stated, "In five-plus short years, I know that ONS and Healing Streets have made huge strides that haven't existed for 40 years." Another partner went further explaining:

[W]orking with ONS is nothing short of a blessing, nothing short of a miracle, nothing short of true definition of what partnerships are supposed to look like between community organizations, between the counties, and between police. We have that trifecta, and we have it by leaps and bounds. And that wouldn't look that way without ONS.

In their prevention work, both ONS staff and partners reported growing success in efforts with city entities like Parks and Recreation and Saint Paul Public Schools (SPPS). Life coaches and Parks and Recreation staff pointed to the Como Pool Takeover prevention as an example of partnership success. One Parks and Rec staff member summed up that, compared to when you called the police, "When you call ONS, you feel better." This community presence is meaningful for both partners and Project PEACE staff themselves. One life coach shared that a favorite part of this work has been walking into a Saint Paul school and being recognized by staff and students as someone from ONS. While not rigorously evaluated, when ONS's NSCC brought the Goals Not Guns pilot program into SPPS charter schools, staff reported positive response from students and school personnel. SPPS partners in this ecosystem reported feeling like they had the backing of the city in supporting students impacted by or at risk of gun violence through ONS's partnership. They described Project PEACE's work as crucial not only to gun violence intervention and prevention, but to their own efficacy.

Observations of the NSCC collaboration showed that this partnership appeared most helpful during ONS's early stages of GVI implementation, but became less impactful as Project PEACE matured. This may be a function of Project PEACE's own developmental timeline. For example, we observed a shift in meeting structure over time, moving away from discussion focused on Project PEACE's GVI strategy to the provision of an informal support space for Project PEACE's manager in coordinating the approach as a whole.

In sum, partnerships across the gun violence ecosystem, including police, CBOs, and city entities are central to Project PEACE's GVI approach. Because this model is still relatively new—both

nationally and in Saint Paul—gaining credibility with partners has been an ongoing challenge. There have been notable strides in collaboration and collective impact, yet these partnerships have challenges to overcome if they are to do increasingly effective work Saint Paul. Concerns about partners taking over ONS's work rather than adopting its frameworks have complicated shared efforts and threatened the integrity of ONS's role in the gun violence ecosystem. These issues played out in real time, as trust and collaboration between police and ONS, for example, shifted noticeably during our evaluation. The shift perhaps most desired by ONS, however, is one involving necessary shifts in mindset and frameworks, but not roles and practices, that will move the ecosystem toward positive outcomes. This would better serve individuals impacted by gun violence as well as those, like Project PEACE life coaches, who work alongside them.

"It's Not Just a Job": The Life Coaches of Project PEACE

At the heart of Project PEACE is a team of life coaches who show up for Saint Paul residents touched by gun violence not as outsiders, but as people who know these communities from the inside. Through life coaching, Project PEACE staff provide tailored wraparound services to individuals and families directly affected by gun violence. Individuals are connected to Project PEACE through multiple avenues, most commonly through referrals from the SPPD. Once connected, referred individuals become clients and are paired with a Project PEACE life coach. The provision of wraparound support services is a key component of CVI models but it is the people who make it work.



The Power of Credible Messengers

It's so healing. This is my heart. We are community.

—Project PEACE Life Coaches

Staff at ONS described the ways in which their deep connections to the work not only make the day-to-day work of Project PEACE possible, but also contribute to structural, community-wide, and individual healing—including their own. A key component of CVI is the use of credible messengers with lived experience, including direct or indirect experience with various systems, backgrounds, and challenges (New York City Criminal Justice Agency, n.d.). Project PEACE staff bring this credible messenger model to life.

For many life coaches, lived experience means having grown up in and living in the very communities that Project PEACE serves, some shaped by violence and disproportionate criminal legal contact. Lived experience is both what equips them to support clients and what makes the work personally healing. This aligns with what the research tells us about the reciprocal nature of credible messengers (Roman et al. 2026).

Credibility is rooted in who they are and where they come from, like their racial identity, community roots, and their professional and personal experience. As one staff member said about the “who” behind ONS: “How are you going to be an organization helping communities, people, certain problems and challenges of the system and societal problems if you’ve never even been touched by it?”

How are you going to be an organization helping communities, people, certain problems and challenges of the system and societal problems if you've **never even been touched by it?**

Numerous life coaches brought up the importance of ONS being a majority Black and Brown office, especially within city government. One life coach described the importance of racial identity as key to **“bridging the gap between community and policing.”** By “working with families that look like me, in the Black and Brown community, who I can relate to,” shared identity made it possible to “plant the seeds to a new beginning of community.” And a leader emphasized that:

[When] clients see us, they can relate. They know who we might be. When you have somebody that may look like you or come from some of the same backgrounds, you feel a bit more comfortable and at ease with even communicating and talking about certain things. I think sometimes folks don't understand how far that goes with people. Sometimes, in certain spaces, we're able to very quickly get more information than police might be able to. Utilizing that to the best of its ability. I think that is working well with us right now. We're able to show up in a lot of different spaces. We're able to do a lot because we are all from the community.

Shared lived experience provided a basis for trust that staff said makes life coaching possible and motivates them to keep showing up. One life coach reflected that their own difficult past gave them the drive and insight to be an inspiration for their clients—for people enduring problems they understand from the inside out.

Professional experiences also emerged as a key dimension of credibility. Some came to ONS from well-established CBOs like Ujamaa Place in Saint Paul or Beacons in Minneapolis. One leader commented that their own previous work in the police department eased the organizations' connections to law enforcement. The “social capital, social currency,” or the connection to resources and organizations that each staff member brought to ONS, were crucial to Project PEACE's work and partnerships.

And their partners agreed. One partner explained that ONS occupies a unique position because “they have the ability to build those relationships and help people have their basic needs met that

police can't and Ramsey County Attorney's Office can't. So, they can build those relationships, they can build that trust." To another, ONS is "a conduit of people who know the community better and can gain trust better... because I can't connect as well to the clientele culturally."

Impact on Life Coaches: Credibility as Reciprocal

The credibility that life coaches bring to Project PEACE is lived, relational, and rooted in the experiences that connect them to the clients and communities they serve. We observed that staff credibility goes beyond community impact: many expressed how the work has transformed their own lives for the better.

Several life coaches highlighted the reciprocal nature of their work, that guiding clients to have hope and keep working step by step helped them persevere, too. One life coach stated that it's been "so beneficial to me as a person... Me, as a coach, not only is... saving lives for others, it's saving my life." Knowing they are making a difference by teaching life skills, coping skills, and emotional skills to clients who use those skills every day brings life coaches a deep sense of purpose.

For staff who have navigated the same systems as their clients, supporting them becomes another source of healing. One staff member described:

Every day I come to the office is nothing but love, nothing but peace, nothing but time, and nothing but collaboration. Understand what I'm saying? These are the same things that was stripped from my community as a Black man. I was supposed to get it [at] home, and I got it here [with Project PEACE]. It's something that I am forever grateful for.



My work in [the] Saint Paul community helps shape Minnesota, the state of Minnesota in general. So, just me as a coach, not only is [it] benefiting and supporting and edifying and building and encouraging and saving lives for others, **it's saving my life...** [T]he work is more important [than] Saint Paul... to really let people know that safe, being safe, being supported, being cared for, and being acknowledged is how life should be.
—Project PEACE Life Coach

This healing extended to the systemic level through changing public safety structures. Another Project PEACE staff member stated that working in the "non-traditional public safety realm" (in CVI/GVI) allowed them to right the wrongs that they had previously experienced working in a traditional police setting. They found it healing that with Project PEACE, they are "coloring... outside of the lines" and pushing for change in a system that has been around for over 100 years.

This experience of reciprocity and mutual aid is partly due to the team itself, one of ONS's strongest assets. Despite coming from different walks of life, staff reported that the team gels exceptionally well and all share a common goal, which makes it easier to do this difficult work. Many told us that their team was their favorite part of their job, that there is genuine care throughout the team. They described a positive, healthy, collaborative work environment where everyone understands and

is committed to the mission and does not let personal feelings get in the way of the work. When someone hits a standstill with a client or confronts a resource challenge, others step in to help. Everyone brings their own connections and knowledge to the table, strengthening the whole team. Staff even described leaning on one another to process the emotional weight of this work, creating a safe and supportive environment.

Leadership has played a significant role in developing this office and team culture. Life coaches highlighted the open-door policy of their supervisor, whose knowledge and experience with Project PEACE supports their day-to-day work. Having supervisors who genuinely check in, prioritize staff wellbeing and self-care, and offer flexible hours makes a difference for staff and contributes to staff retention (so important to the maintenance of institutional knowledge). As one staff member put it, **the team is successful because “they are taken care of.”** Their families are prioritized, and the job offers a competitive, livable wage with room for growth. It is also clear that leaders take in feedback from staff. For example, in fall 2024, one staff noted the need for mental health and grief training; when we followed up with staff member interviews in the fall of 2025, a staff member referenced having received this training, during which “we learned a lot about emotional capacity, emotional bandwidth, reach, and we learned a lot about CBT, cognitive behavioral therapy.”

The people behind Project PEACE are important to the work. Staff bring a blend of identities, experience, and necessary connections. They have the unique experience and positionality to do their difficult jobs effectively. But that same deep connection means the work touches them personally. To many, this work is “not just a job”—it’s an opportunity to support others and themselves in the process. This is a strength and a challenge.

Staff Sustainability Considerations

The flipside of doing impactful, community-facing work is the mental and emotional toll of the work on limited staff of people with personal connections to violence and deep commitments to their clients.

Project PEACE staff walk into people’s lives during their most difficult moments—they meet families who have just lost a child to gun violence or whose loved one is on life support following gunshot wounds, communities in grief, and individuals involved in retaliatory violence—and they are expected to be present, professional, and effective. Staff underscored that the emotional weight of this work is real. “It weighs on you,” started one life coach:

[A]nd self-care is really important in this line of work, to be able to pour back into yourself because you hear a lot of the horror that goes on in day-to-day lives of individuals and families, and it can take its toll on you.

Some staff wished they had been better prepared for what they would see and feel in their frontline work. Some reported having not known what to expect or how best to support family members who had just lost a loved one. However, many life coaches reflected that no amount of training or education could fully prepare them for these moments, they had to learn through direct experience.

The mental toll is compounded by staff’s personal connection to the work. Those who grew up

Many life coaches reflected that **no amount of training** or education could fully prepare them for these moments, they had to learn through **direct experience**.

in Saint Paul and are personally connected to the community are effective credible messengers but the lines between professional and personal can be hard to walk. **One staff member described being at a work event when they learned that there had been a shooting, and the victim was a relative.**

In that moment, she had to act, work, and grieve the loss of a loved one simultaneously. Other staff named the more immediate reality that the nature of their work requires them to be physically present in the community, oftentimes in areas at high risk for violence. The possibility of being in the wrong place at the wrong time is always there.

Individual-level pressures are complicated by structural ones, including limited personnel. Interviews and observations revealed hiring staff as a significant internal obstacle to ONS's ability to adequately address gun violence in Saint Paul. Staff describe the still small team size as a challenge, as they are often pulled in many directions at once—responding to shootings at hospitals while simultaneously managing active caseloads and handling administrative work. The sustainability of this work depends not only on caring for the people doing it but ensuring there are enough of them to do the work well.

Thus, the mental toll of being a credible messenger coupled with the limited number of staff pose meaningful sustainability challenges. If sustainability is not adequately addressed, it is Project PEACE clients who will feel it the most.

Staff describe the still small team size as a challenge, as they are often pulled in **many directions at once**—responding to shootings at hospitals while simultaneously managing active caseloads and handling administrative work.

What Life Coaching Means to the Clients of Project PEACE

Project PEACE exists because of the people it serves. Project PEACE clients are Saint Paul residents who are deeply impacted by gun violence. Most of them are young people, predominantly Black and male. We examined who Project PEACE clients are, how they connect with Project PEACE, and what the connection has meant for their lives—their wellbeing, their futures, and the people around them.

Who Are Project PEACE Clients?

Prior to early 2025, Project PEACE client eligibility was informal, broad, and inconsistently applied. This created internal tension and scope challenges. As a newly established office with pressure

to demonstrate results, Project PEACE staff were defining eligibility criteria as they went, and they frequently served individuals who fell outside of the shifting eligibility criteria at any given time. Before Project PEACE leaders and staff ultimately created and executed a policy around eligibility criteria, clients typically included anyone 12 years or older with some connection to a gun.

In spring 2025, as part of the developmental nature of the evaluation, MNJRC research team members facilitated two consensus-building workshops with ONS staff to establish formalized, “on paper” criteria related to Project PEACE client eligibility. Establishing these criteria gave ONS and Project PEACE staff a clearer set of parameters for their work, while also honoring some flexibility around these boundaries. ONS established consensus that Project PEACE life coaches should prioritize individuals and families of individuals who are: 14-25 years old, Saint Paul residents, group-involved, at risk of or impacted by gun violence, involved in incidents that occurred in Saint Paul, and facing verified threats of imminent danger.

Project PEACE staff use a risk-based approach when working with clients, and meeting more criteria indicates higher priority for services. Many individuals connected to Project PEACE staff through a referring agency like the Saint Paul Police Department already fit several criteria.

ONS leadership estimates that since Project PEACE launched in 2022, they have served **75-100 clients**. We cannot confirm this number, as formal documentation practices and their case management system were not implemented until January 2025. We do know that, from January 2025 to March 2026, Project PEACE staff worked with **32 individuals**.

Demographically, the majority (72%) of Project PEACE clients are Black/African American, non-Hispanic, and male, ranging in age from 11 to 51, although the majority are between the ages of 15-19. See Figure 2 for a further demographic breakdown. Notably, since the office began to systematically collect data, PEACE staff have not served any Latinx clients (interesting, considering the city’s only prior experiment with GVI work was with Latino gangs, (Densley and Jones 2016)).

Project PEACE Client Demographics from January 2025 - March 2026, N=32

Race		Age	
Black/African-American	71.9% (n=23)	10-14 Year-olds	16.1% (n=5)
Asian	12.5% (n=4)	15-19 Year-olds	54.8% (n=17)
Two or More Races	6.3% (n=2)	20-24 Year-olds	3.2% (n=1)
American Indian/Alaska Native	3.1% (n=1)	Ages 25+	25.8% (n=8)
White	3.1% (n=1)	Unknown	3.1% (n=1)
Unknown	3.1% (n=1)		
Ethnicity		Gender	
Non-Hispanic	87.5% (n=28)	Cis-Gender Male	71.9% (n=23)
Hmong	3.1% (n=1)	Cis-Gender Female	25% (n=8)
Unknown	9.4% (n=3)	Unknown	3.1% (n=1)

Figure 2

How Clients Get Connected to Project PEACE

For the first year or so of operation, from mid-2022 through 2023, Project PEACE staff did not have any established formal documentation process for onboarding clients either. Over the course of the evaluation, from early 2024 to 2026, the staff at ONS gradually formalized the process.

For individuals directly impacted by gun violence, referrals are typically placed after a gun-related incident and, in 2024, primarily came from the SPPD's ASPIRE Unit. Once the SPPD sends a referral, Project PEACE staff initiate initial contact through custom notifications and direct outreach. In 2025, Project PEACE reported 131 referrals. Interviewees explain that not all referrals receive follow up, either because the individual does not fit eligibility criteria or because the client chooses not to engage.

Different from traditional GVI call-ins where officers relay a strong deterrence message, life coaches explain during a custom notification that the individual is on their radar and that they want to provide services and resources to support them, with the goal of preventing future violence. One Project PEACE staff member describes this as:

One of my favorite things to do... [I] t's just really a powerful time for me, for us to kind of see police in a totally different light and capacity working in outreach and kind of being able to touch people and, like, really, like, ask, like, 'What's going on?' ...And it's just a really powerful moment for us.

Life coaches leave their contact information and then attempt to connect again with the individual shortly after, but this time without police.

"'You're not in trouble, you're not under arrest, but I brought you some services.' ...I step up as a life coach and say, 'Hey, I'm from the Office of Neighborhood Safety. I am not the police, but I'm here to offer you some resources or services or whatever it is that you need that'll help you to get further in life... help you to reach your goals.'" — Project PEACE Life Coach

Regarding individuals not directly impacted by gun violence, Project PEACE's city and community partners identify individuals they believe could benefit from Project PEACE's services—whether because they brought a gun to school or they were sending photos of a gun in group text messages—and refer them to Project PEACE staff. For much of Project PEACE's early existence, referrals came informally through personal connections in other city departments, including police, and went directly to various leaders in ONS, often via phone calls or text messages. As one life coach remembered, "[referrals are] coming from all angles... we need to have a process for how we're getting people, making sure we can assess: do they fit our criteria?"

Some referred individuals never receive a custom notification. Instead, the lead life coach reaches out and explains Project PEACE to them. If that person expresses interest in receiving services, the lead life coach does a warm handoff to the new client's life coach.

As ONS has grown and built out its outreach team, Project PEACE has additionally begun connecting with clients through outreach specialists. Outreach specialists may serve as an

individual's first point of contact because of their community presence and developing partnerships with Saint Paul Parks and Recreation. Outreach workers described moving slowly with relationship-building and meeting individuals where they are but noted they will initiate a warm hand off to life coaches for clients with greater or more complex needs for longer-term, more intensive support. Project PEACE has been able to extend its community reach in Saint Paul with the new outreach team while reserving life coach capacity for those who need it the most.

By fall 2025, ONS leaders were in the process of creating formal referral channels for SPPS and Ramsey County Juvenile Probation, in addition to SPPD, representing a shift in how Project PEACE staff began to work with other entities to support the Saint Paul community.

To support its growth, in 2025 ONS's leaders formalized intake and data management processes using Apricot, a case management system that enables Project PEACE staff to track referrals, assess client eligibility, and ensure timely contact. After implementation, staff described Apricot as central to their workflow. New referrals now enter Apricot directly, and, within Project PEACE's 24-hour target, the lead life coach and the program manager review will review and assign individuals to the appropriate life coach based on client need and team capacity. One leader specified that "Apricot has been huge... Our intake and our assessments that we do in Apricot, being able to track all of that is just so necessary." This shift toward systemic data management reflects Project PEACE's expanding capacity.

Connection to clients, whether through custom notifications, partner referrals, or outreach, is an inextricable from Project PEACE's approach to gun violence prevention and intervention. Clients shared that they deeply valued being "found" by Project PEACE, rather than having to seek help during a crisis. Clients described the proactive outreach as different from other systems they had navigated:

I normally was like, they [services and resources] are there, but you have to reach out and you have to find these things and you have to look for the resources, but [ONS staff] found me.... [T]hey reached out and they found me. ...I liked that a lot, that they seeked me.

Both clients and staff described the association with police as a **barrier to trust and engagement** that can take significant time and effort to overcome. Sometimes it is **never fully resolved**.

One of the most persistent challenges in connecting with clients is the association clients have with ONS staff and the police—again this double-edged sword. This was true for clients who received custom notifications, in particular. As one life coach explained, "In the beginning, [clients] can be very hesitant with the information that they provide or are willing to share until they open up and really get to know that we are separate from [police]." For these clients, their very first contact with a life coach was when police knocked on their door. Both clients and staff described the association with police as a barrier to trust and engagement that can take significant time and effort to overcome. Sometimes it is never fully resolved.

Multiple life coaches echoed this, telling us they spend much of their early engagement simply establishing that they are not the police, before any substantive life coaching work can begin. “If they think we the police, you know, that’s, that’s for me, I seen that being a barrier,” shared a life coach. “I have to spend all this time trying to prove that I’m not the police before the work even gets started.” Life coaches stressed that they prioritize building relationships with their new clients and remind them multiple times that they are a separate entity from the police in order to develop trust and open communication. Still, some referred individuals—like a client whose younger brother (also a client) balked at connecting with a life coach because he believed they were police trying to get information—ultimately never engage with Project PEACE because of this association.

Since its launch, Project PEACE leaders and staff have gradually formalized their client eligibility criteria, data management system, and referral processes. After being referred, many clients shared that they valued being reached out to by Project PEACE staff through custom notifications, while others remained hesitant to engage because of their association of Project PEACE and the police. Clients who decided to engage with Project PEACE were quickly connected with life coaches who then began to provide intensive services and supports.

“(Life coaching) is more than just giving gift cards, it’s more than just providing a bus card. It’s literally like, ‘How are you today? Did you go to school? Have you eaten?’ Those things all affect a child.”

—ONS Staff



Working with a Life Coach

Assessing Needs, Providing Extensive Support.

After getting connected to Project PEACE, clients are assigned a life coach. A life coach is much like a case manager who provides close and consistent support. Life coaches do not place blame on clients for the gun-related incidents that brought them to Project PEACE. Life coaches reiterated that for many, an environment of gun violence is all they have ever known. **Instead, they focus on working with their clients toward making different choices and providing supports and resources for a different way of life.**



Life coaches begin by assessing clients' unique needs across areas such as food, shelter, employment, education, transportation, mental health counseling, and medical support. They extend this assessment to clients' broader family systems. Thus, for example, one life coach described working with a client whose immediate goal was full-time employment, but who was also unsheltered and food insecure; the life coach prioritized getting these basic needs met first, because, as we heard one life coach say in a meeting we observed, "it's hard to hear about healing if your stomach's growling." From there, life coaches support clients in creating goals, such as gaining that full-time employment, and concrete plans to achieve them, which often necessitates various wraparound services along the way.

Project PEACE staff provide an extensive range of wraparound services to clients. Clients reported that life coaches have helped them obtain IDs, enroll in driver's education, apply for car insurance (to "roll legal"), build financial literacy, make medical appointments, prepare for court hearings, create resumes, apply for jobs, practice interview questions, visit apprenticeship programs, apply to housing assistance programs, and secure bus cards, gas cards, or rides to interviews and appointments. Life coaches also support clients in getting school supplies, arranging in-school visits, finding tutors, pursuing their GEDs, and navigating re-entry. Families cited additional support around connecting with teachers and school counselors, accessing county programs, relocating to safe places (and paying hotel fees), obtaining lost wages and transportation funds, accessing grief and funeral services, facilitating mediation, and making medical and dental appointments.

Beyond direct and vast support, life coaches help clients build life skills. We observed life coaches helping clients develop self-advocacy when speaking with hiring managers and supervisors. In one session, when a client expressed frustration about not being where he wanted to be financially, his life coach reminded him that life is a journey and that "fast money and risk isn't worth it." As another life coach noted, this work is never doing work for clients; life coaches sit down with clients and families to work toward goals together, doing the work with clients to build their self-efficacy. Life coaches help clients navigate shifting social circles as they move away from peers involved in gun violence, too. We observed one life coach role-playing with a client how to explain to new friends that he is on probation and cannot be around people carrying guns.

Life coaches also work to connect clients to therapists, while directly addressing mental health stigma in the Black community. In one session, a life coach spoke openly about trauma, normalized



Oh, really, really **supporting people and helping people reach their small and long-term goals.** That's really so rewarding, to see someone set out a goal and to see the progress and the process of that goal come into fruition. It's just an awesome feeling to do that, to see a family's mood from a crisis, and having victory over that crisis and moving into a space where they're moving independently, self-sufficiently, and living their best life. And so, it's just so awesome just to see that.
–Project PEACE Life Coach

seeking support, and shared his own journey to accepting therapy.

Life coaches shared that watching clients open up, get excited about their goals, and take concrete steps toward achieving them makes them feel that they are making a difference in Saint Paul. Life coaches described taking joy in seeing clients commit to change and overcome barriers to accomplish their goals.

As we heard about the work of life coaches—who clients often described as a big brother, father figure, mentor, or example of another way of life—certain qualities consistently captured the “how” of life coaching. The “secret sauce” of an

effective life coach includes consistent check-ins, non-judgmental listening, and following through on concrete resources and support tailored to each client’s needs, all from a place of genuine care.

Meeting Clients Where They Are. Life coaches help clients set goals and work toward them at the client’s own pace, based on individual wants and needs. Life coaches are intentional about meeting clients where they are—physically, relationally, and communicatively. They meet clients wherever is most convenient for the client, whether at home, school, the ONS office, or out in their neighborhood. Life coaches work as a team, collaborating with one another to brainstorm wraparound supports for specific client circumstances, with the ONS office manager supporting logistics so they can take an individual approach. They check in regularly with clients through phone calls, text messages, and in-person meetings. We observed some of these meetings firsthand in the ONS office, at a Saint Paul Public Library, at clients’ schools, and at a hotel where a family had been relocated. We observed one meeting conducted via video call, as the client was in a juvenile correctional facility.



Clients drive the conversation;
 life coaches follow their lead
 and move at their pace.

They meet each person exactly where they are on their journey. Life coaches adapt their communication style and approach accordingly – code-switching, using simpler language when appropriate, and recognizing that each client brings a different culture, background, mindset, and experience with violence. Clients drive the conversation; life coaches follow their lead and move at their pace.

Building Trust Through Consistency and Follow-Through.

Life coaches prioritize connection before goal-setting. They typically begin by clarifying the core of who they are: "We're not city. We're not police... I'm just a life coach... I'm just here to, you know, try to connect with your child to make sure that they stay safe, alive, and free." From there, they reach out daily or every other day by text, phone, or in-person—sending encouraging morning texts, checking in with clients' families, and responding quickly when needed. Clients reported that this consistency made them "feel like I had somebody there for me."



They don't have support from someone. A lot of them is telling me, 'Man... I just met you, Coach. **It's just been so great to have somebody who supports me**, who's in my corner, who believes in me, and who gives me hope and that I can get through stuff.' And so, a lot of them don't have that.

—Project PEACE Life Coach

When a life coach hasn't heard from a client in a while, they will go out into the community and "pop up on" them to reestablish contact. We observed life coaches and clients frequently greeting each other with a hug, signs of the relationships that have been built. For many clients, their life coach is the one person in their corner, and they feel they can talk to their life coach about anything. Clients describe life coaches as easy to talk to and to be open and honest with. They repeatedly shared that their life coaches are trustworthy and present. One client shook their head:

[J]ust knowing [my life coach] is there, 'cause, as a man, sometimes I feel like I don't have nobody to lean on or like nobody to just talk to about my problems. And without a doubt, I don't question that. I feel like [my life coach] is there while I was going through something. I could even just call him up and talk for a sec, you know, from literally helping get my life together [to] raising my daughter, he's there....

Clients consistently emphasized that life coaches follow through on what they say they will do, a quality that stands out because it is rare in the systems many clients have previously navigated. Clients describe life coach support as "neverending," and in most cases life coaches go above and beyond to help clients and families access safety and resources.

A clear testament to the trust built through life coaching is what clients said they would do long after their time with Project PEACE ends if they need support: reach out to their former life coach. Life coaches gradually reduce contact as clients become more self-sufficient, but, according to one life coach, they are willing to remain available beyond a client's formal involvement in Project PEACE as, for example, a last phone call before a bad decision. This speaks to the depth and durability of the relationships life coaches build with clients.

Resourcefulness and Patience. Life coaches are deeply supportive and highly resourceful. They don't just point clients toward resources—they walk through every step with them, hold entities accountable for delivering promised services, and help clients handle systems they may never have encountered before. One family member said of a life coach: "What they did was the impossible. They made it possible... maybe I would call them 'magicians.'"



When I think of [life coach], I think it's just what I need. Let's see, textbook, if that makes sense. If I need something, you go to the textbook, try and look through it. [Life coach] is right there.

He can help me get through whatever."

—Project PEACE Client

Life coaches are resourceful in addressing clients' needs through various services and supports, pointing to their deep roots in the community as key in doing so. However, life coaches shared that an obstacle to effective client work is navigating some community resources. They noted that there are not enough resources or partnerships to adequately support clients and that lacking direct connections to services makes the process discouraging, particularly for clients facing urgent needs. Additionally, warm handoffs to other services do not always hold, sometimes putting Project PEACE staff and leaders in

the position of having to "strong[arm] them into actually doing what they say they're doing because you're watching," according to an ONS leader. One life coach expressed that the handoffs actually need to be "hot handoffs," made directly to the service to ensure connection.

Life coaches maintain patience and a non-judgmental posture even when clients take steps backward, knowing that change happens on the client's timeline, not theirs. This means they remain patient and persistent in reaching out even after months of silence, remain encouraging when clients have to re-start progress, and remain supportive no matter the consequences of their clients' choices. As one life coach put it:

[I]t scares me, because I don't want them to fall into the system and stay there. So that's kind of the difficult part... just seeing that it could possibly go a different route than what we're, what we're working so hard for. It's just, it's, it's kind of scary. They're real young too... You don't want to see them locked up. You don't want to see them hurt. You don't want to see them hurting other people.... I think that's the most difficult part for me.

One life coach expressed that the handoffs actually need to be "**hot handoffs**," made directly to the service to ensure connection.

But even when clients make choices that set them back, life coaches can find it rewarding to watch them reflect, take ownership, and keep moving forward. One client said his life coach "gives me that push I need to keep going."

Above all, life coaches genuinely care about and show compassion for their clients. They put their hearts into this work, and clients feel it. Life coaches are deeply invested in seeing clients succeed and are truly trying to help them build better lives. Clients consistently reported that their life coaches care and that they are just there for them no matter what.

Across Project PEACE's client work—from the initial referral to the long-term relationships built by life coaches—we see a gun-violence intervention approach that is personal and persistent. Life coaches meet clients and families at their worst moments, walk alongside them through change, and are willing to remain in their corner long after the formal life coaching work is done. Project PEACE leaders and staff have demonstrated a model of client engagement rooted in consistency, trust, and genuine investment in clients' futures. And this is what clients told us too.

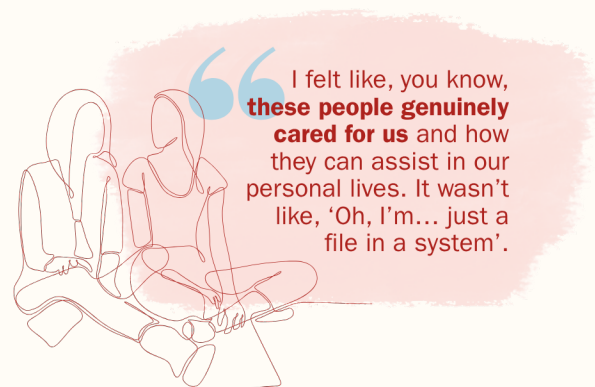
What Project PEACE Clients Say

During our interviews with clients and family members, we asked them to reflect on what working with Project PEACE and ONS has meant to them. Across these conversations, and in interviews with life coaches, three themes surfaced again and again: a sense of surprise and gratitude, transforming life trajectory, and a ripple effect.

Sense of Surprise and Gratitude. Many clients initially met life coaches with a sense of skepticism, distrust, and uncertainty fueled by past encounters with police and disappointment from other programs and systems. Their positive experiences caught them off-guard. One life coach described many clients' initial reaction as "a disbelief that we're actually going to do something... and gratitude that someone cares." One client confirmed, "I didn't think we were going to get help or I didn't think we're going to hear from anyone," while another described their initial hesitation and expanded, "But after I started going, [my life coach] started actually trying to help me better my life, and I actually enjoyed going there and I look forward to going to meet with them every week."

What surprised clients and their families wasn't just that help arrived but how it arrived—with urgency, presence, and care. One client commented that their life coach:

[C]ared enough to follow up with me and find out how they can help. I felt like they had a sense of urgency. You know, they treated me as if I wasn't just some client. I felt like, you know, these people genuinely cared for us and how they can assist in our personal lives. It wasn't like, 'Oh, I'm... just a file in a system'.



A staff member described meeting a mother at her motel during a custom notification. The woman cried, "I've never seen this done before, and I didn't even think that this was possible. I don't know what I would have done if you didn't come here today and talk to us... [T]his is what we've been

waiting for years." Clients describe this kind of advocacy as practically life-saving: "I couldn't have done this alone... I couldn't have done it without [Project PEACE]."

Overwhelmingly, clients and their families expressed deep gratitude for the support they received from, and their overall experiences with, PEACE life coaches. Calling it "a blessing," a client told us, "I really am just so thankful and words can't explain it." Another client closed their interview with:

I just want to say thank you to everyone involved in my case and just being there to support people like myself that go through these unfortunate situations and don't know where to turn.... [T]hank you for everything and caring about us and actually trying and going above and beyond for us.

This combination of surprise and gratitude is how many clients described Project PEACE staff showing up in ways no one else had.

Another said that Project PEACE staff showing up has "changed a lot in my life. It made me not stress, not have to cry. And so, they took that away from me. They took that monkey off my back." One client said she sleeps better at night since "they [Project PEACE] make me feel a sense of comfort." She continued, "I know that I can call them and talk to them about anything that's going on...it's nice to have that resource, one that I didn't have previously." With Project PEACE's help breaking her lease and relocating her family, she shared what that certainty has brought her:

I [didn't] open my blinds at all because I don't want anyone to think we're home, but because of them [Project PEACE staff] I don't have to live like that anymore.... [B]ecause of them [Project PEACE staff], I can get out of the blinds.

Transforming Life Trajectories. When clients reflected on how things might have turned out differently without Project PEACE life coaches, their responses were stark. Several clients described paths that would have led to violence, incarceration, and even death. One client intoned, "the path I was going down—I'd probably be dead or in jail." Another reflected:

[J]ust [Life Coach] being there to lean on, you know, me meeting up with him every week, that just gives me that, that, that drive to keep going... [T]here's been plenty of times where I could have went out and did something that could have landed me in jail or even worse, lost my life or something. But instead, I went to the meeting with [life coach] and we talked it [out] and, you know, he helped me get my mind back on track. So, I think just meeting up with him every week and, and being there, prevents me.

One life coach put it simply: when a client says "Hey, I appreciate you. You saved my life"—that's the mission.

Project PEACE is helping save lives and change trajectories, and it happens in a few key ways. The practical support Project PEACE provides, such as jobs, insurance, education, housing, and food, address urgent needs that clients found near impossible to meet before connecting with Project PEACE services. These wraparound supports have broken down barriers clients face as a direct result of gun violence (physical and financial insecurity) and acted as off-ramps so that they didn't

resort to violence to meet their needs. One client stated that before their life coach helped them get a job, they were “trying to get money other ways,” while many others said that accessing the resources they needed would be much harder, or impossible, without their life coach. What might feel or be complex or overwhelming to navigate alone, Project PEACE makes easy. One client reflected: “most processes I’ve gone through in my entire life have been complex and they [Project PEACE] made it very straightforward.”

In addition to practical support, Project PEACE staff provide deep socio-emotional support that has shifted how clients think about themselves, their choices, and their futures. One client marveled: “I feel like [my life coach] has helped me have a whole different mindset about certain things.” We heard that clients changed their views on gun violence after working with their life coach—one called the shift “huge” and another said “the guns need to be put down for everybody.”

Another said that by providing supports “[my life coach] changed my life for real.” A family member of a client captured this from the outside: “I wish that I had, you know, a support team like you when I was growing up because, if I did, my life would be so different right now. My life would be totally different right now.”

Project PEACE staff describe the process of changing trajectories as slow and intentional:

We always tell them [clients] it's not microwave food. We slow-cook, we roasting over here. Like, it's not microwave food... you gotta let it simmer and you gotta build it up, you know, put the right ingredients in. The right ingredients is going to taste delicious.

Ripple Effect. The impact of Project PEACE's work doesn't stop at the individual. Clients told our team that it moved outward into families, friends, and the broader Saint Paul community. Working with Project PEACE staff changed how clients showed up for the people around them. One client said: “I come around more and spend more time with my family instead of just decked off in my room, shutting out my feelings.” Another reflected:

I really cut off all the negative people in my life. I started focusing more on my actual priorities instead of just goofing off instead of going to hang out... meeting new people that are actually building me up instead of bringing me down.

Every client we interviewed said they would feel comfortable and confident in reaching back out to Project PEACE and their life coach again if they needed support. Many were already recommending Project PEACE to their friends and family. One client noted: “[my life coach] helped me out, helped my family, and I’m pretty sure [they] could help you out, too.” This is where the strength of Project PEACE partnerships comes in as well. By having deep relationships with partners in the gun violence ecosystem, Project PEACE can seamlessly connect clients and their families to the right resources when asked.

Staff named that giving back had also become a goal for many of their clients. They wanted to go to their communities not only to talk about the change, but to show it: “They call their little homies and not only preach to them and say ‘I got my driver’s license, look, I’m rolling, I’m working. I’m making money doing something else besides something illegal.’ And they can see the change.”

Another client explained how he wants Project PEACE staff to interact with his little brother. As one staff member noted, “these kids just want the help and resources... they need that little help and that push.” Project PEACE is that push for their clients who can then turn around and be that push for their networks and communities. One staff shared that ONS/Project PEACE is becoming “an extensive household name” for their clients, reflecting the trust clients have built with their life coaches and the word they carry back into their communities.

Thus, Project PEACE’s work is having a ripple effect, as one life coach described. It “doesn’t just start with them—it extends to their family. We’re not just helping one person, but we helping households. We keeping households safe.” Another staff member asserted “your client isn’t just a young person, it’s their entire family system... it’s not just assessing the client, it’s assessing the whole family.” In fact, many clients described their relationship with their life coach as familial. One client said: “I would call him my life coach, but I feel like our relationship is more like a brother type, but I also do look at him like a father figure.” Project PEACE staff felt it, too, with one saying: “I’ve almost become like an extended family member for some people.”

Project PEACE’s work is reaching people at their most vulnerable and meeting them where they are at with consistency, care, and a surprising support that is changing life trajectories, as clients attest. Life coaches meet clients in their worst moments. They text every morning. They pop up when a client goes quiet. They walk through every step of accessing services—IDs, jobs, insurance, housing, medical care, court preparation—rather than pointing toward a resource and moving on. Clients made it clear that the impact is real, it is meaningful, and they are carrying it with them into their own communities.



The Numbers and the Neighbors: Gun Violence Trends and Community Experience

Project PEACE exists to make Saint Paul safer by addressing the roots of gun violence. Measuring its impact requires looking beyond any single data point and employing careful analysis. This section outlines findings about Project PEACE's potential impact on the Saint Paul community. We first drew on SPPD and national data to see how the city's measures of gun violence compared to other municipalities in the United States. We then weave that data together with our community survey and what we heard directly from Project PEACE staff, clients/families, partners, and community members.

Note that evaluating the effectiveness of gun violence intervention and prevention efforts, like Project PEACE, requires nuance. The most common national measure of program effectiveness is citywide levels of gun violence, including both non-fatal shootings and homicides (Trinkner 2019). These numbers are important, yet relying on this indicator alone sets a challenging standard for proving program effectiveness because the variables that affect gun violence are vast. Isolating the impact of an evolving and organic approach to addressing gun violence (like Project PEACE) on non-fatal shootings, for instance, would require significant change over time, estimation, or counterfactual comparison data.

This evaluation thus explores trends in SPPD gun violence data alongside other measures, including perspectives on gun violence and safety from Project PEACE staff, clients, partners, and community members, and process data from life coach prevention work. This mix of quantitative and qualitative metrics helps us paint a fuller picture of what gun violence looks like in Saint Paul, how the community experiences it, and where Project PEACE fits in.

Examining Gun Violence Trends in Saint Paul

We began by analyzing SPPD data on gun violence from 2021 ("pre-Project PEACE" but post-COVID) through 2024 (the latest available data). Specifically, we examined shots fired, non-fatal shootings, and fatal shootings. The data on shots fired come from police reports combining a mix of 911 calls and proactive policing rather than from technologies (like ShotSpotter) that use acoustic sensors to detect and locate gunshot sounds (see Figure 3).

These data show an increase in shots fired from 2021 to 2022, followed by a precipitous decrease in 2023 and 2024. This is a broad and imperfect proxy measure for gun violence, however, as gunshots do not necessarily result in human injury. But they help us see high-level patterns: Saint Paul's gun use has dropped over the past several years.

Next, to dig into gun violence, we analyzed SPPD data on non-fatal shootings over the same period (see Figure 4). Unlike shots fired, non-fatal shooting data represent incidents when someone was struck by gun fire. It is a better measure of gun violence, though, crucially, it does not include data on self-inflicted gunshot wounds. While some public health researchers do include self-inflicted gunshot wounds and firearm suicides as measures of gun violence, criminal justice researchers often do not. This is largely due to the frameworks that criminal justice researchers use (see, Cook and Ludwig 2003 for example) and the available criminal justice datasets (e.g., NIBRS

and other data used by the federal Bureau of Justice Statistics). As with shots fired, we see an increase in non-fatal shootings from 2021 to 2022 followed by a decline in 2023 and 2024.

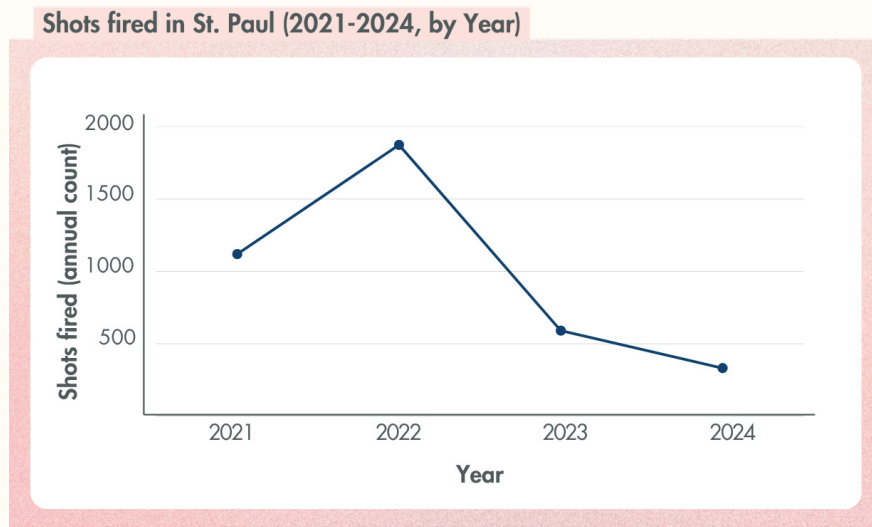


Figure 3

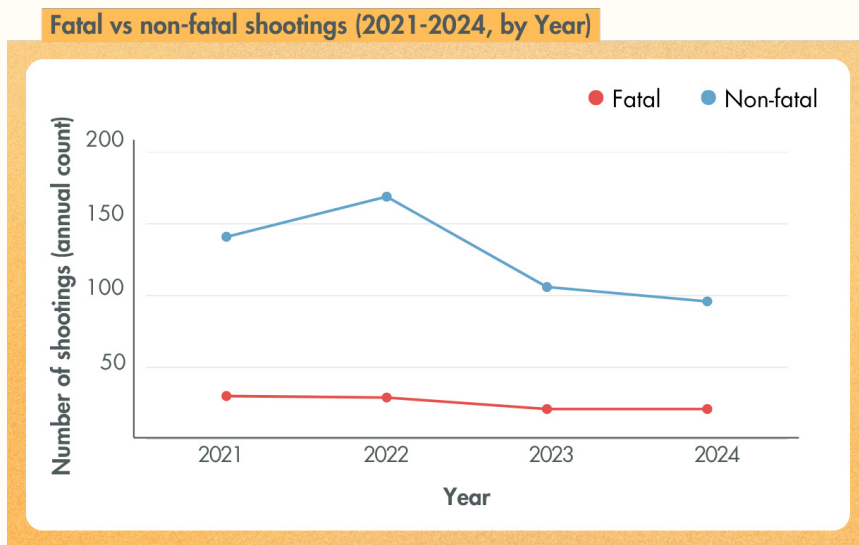


Figure 4

Finally, we examined data on gun homicides in Saint Paul (see also Figure 4), capturing those incidents in which gun violence is fatal. Similar to shots fired and non-fatal shootings, fatal shootings peaked in 2022, dropped 2023, then remained steady in 2024.

Taken together, the city-wide measures of gun violence show declines during the period when ONS and Project PEACE were building out their services and approach. Though public-facing documents claim otherwise, we don't have causal evidence that Project PEACE's work led to the drop in gun violence (see, Ermon 2023 for example). Still, the patterns suggest a net-positive impact. We note that some argue that programs like Project PEACE's represent "soft-on-crime" approaches and lead to increases in violence; we certainly do not see that in the data.

In addition to annual figures, we analyzed some basic demographics of gun violence arrestees and victims along with location data for incidents of gun violence. Using both helps us to understand who is most impacted by gun violence in Saint Paul. Figure 5 shows a breakdown of shooting arrestees by race over time and Figure 6 shows a breakdown of shooting victims by race over time. In both figures, we see that Black individuals represent the largest number of both those arrested and those victimized by gun violence in Saint Paul; this demographic breakdown fits neatly with the client base of Project PEACE. Additionally, Project PEACE staff and community members emphasized in interviews that individuals involved in gun violence tend to both cause harm and be victims of harm.

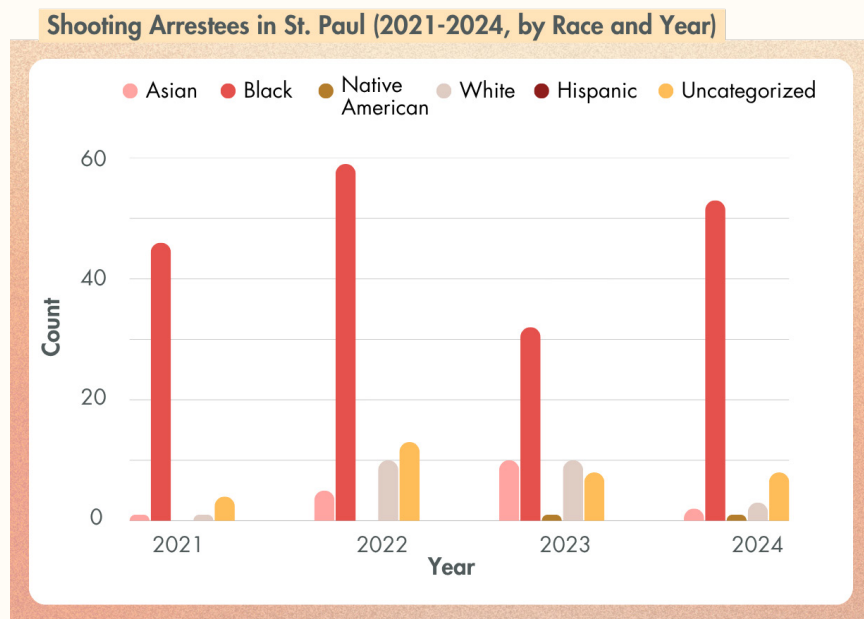


Figure 5

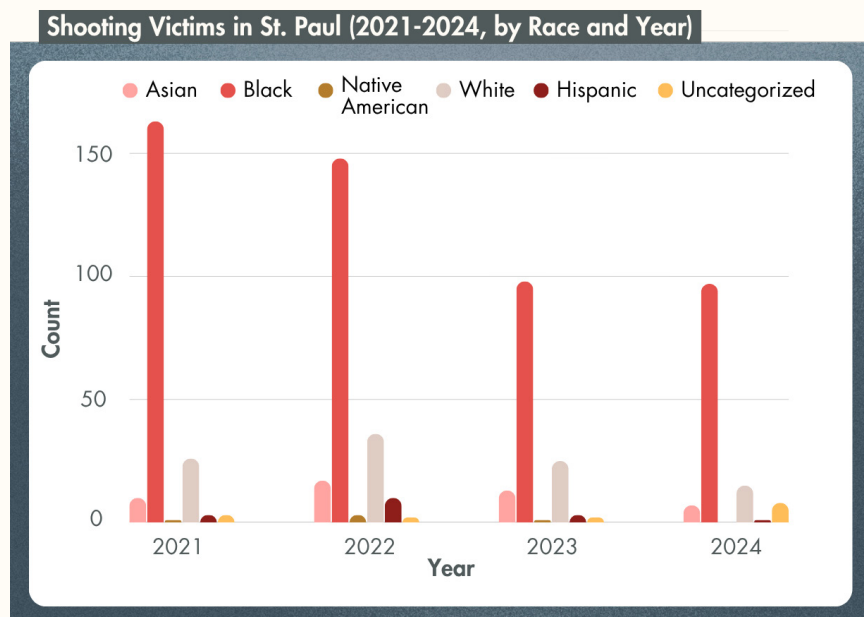


Figure 6

Next, we plot arrest and victim data according to age. In Figure 7 we see that young adults aged 18-22 were arrested at much higher numbers than any of the other age groups in the focal period, with a peak in 2022. The ages of victims of gun violence have been more variable, though again we observe a drop in victimization (see Figure 8) for the key 18-22 demographic frequently served by Project PEACE.

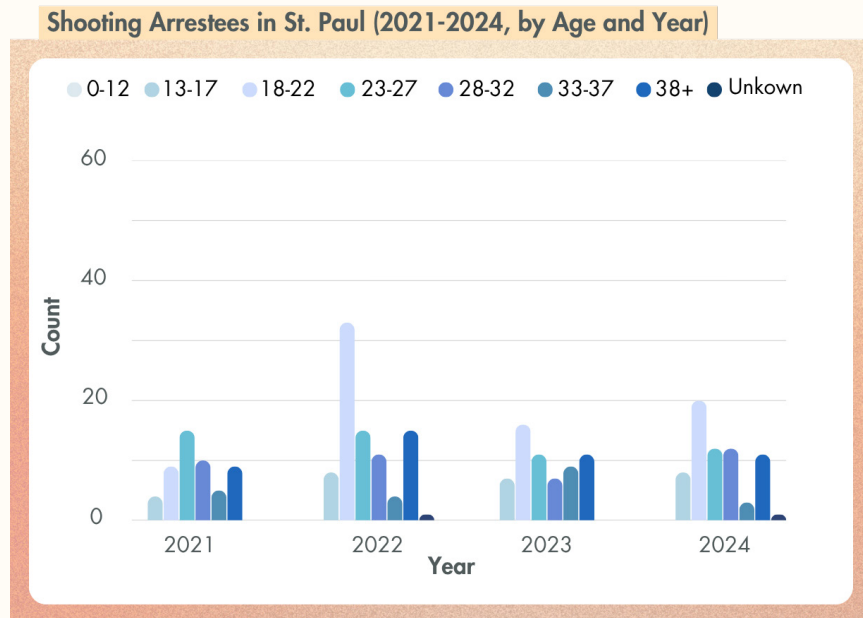


Figure 7

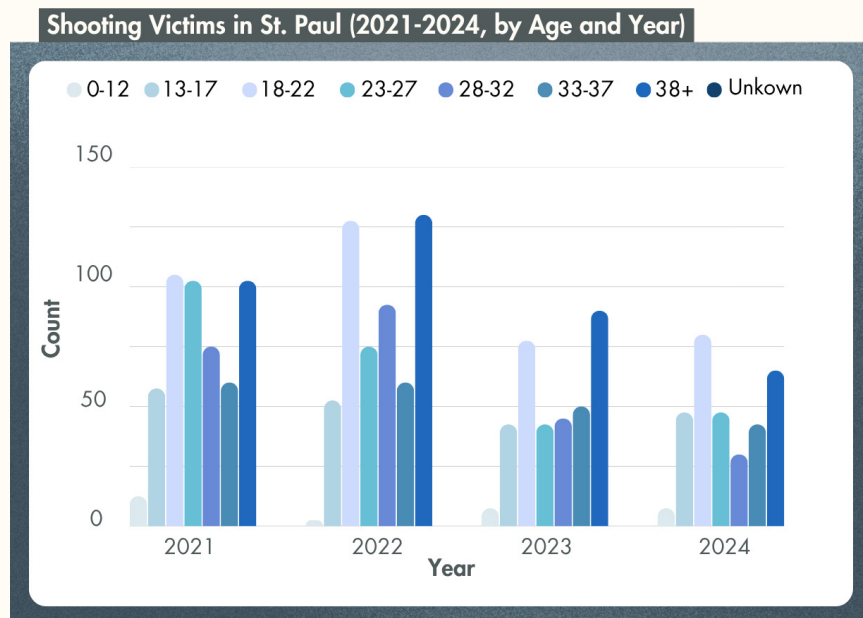


Figure 8

What does this data tell us about the gun violence prevention work in Saint Paul, specifically about the Project PEACE? The trends presented here demonstrate the potential impact of an effort like Project PEACE, which launched around the peak of gun violence in 2022 and focuses primarily on connecting with Black youth and young adults.

To better isolate the impact of Project PEACE, we zoomed out to examine gun violence trends across 14 other U.S. cities that participated in the Community Violence Intervention Collaborative (CVIC). Was there something special or unique about Saint Paul, or did violence intervention efforts across the country show similar patterns? Using data from Everytown Research (excluding suicides, Everytown for Gun Safety Support Fund 2025), Figure 9 shows rates of gun homicides proportional to city population size from 2021 to 2024.

Like Saint Paul, cities implementing violence intervention efforts from 2021 to 2024 experienced downward trends in gun violence; some cities saw spikes in 2022 and others in 2023 (again, see Figure 9), but many saw reductions in 2023 and 2024. One might hypothesize a close tie between CVI efforts and these drops in gun violence.

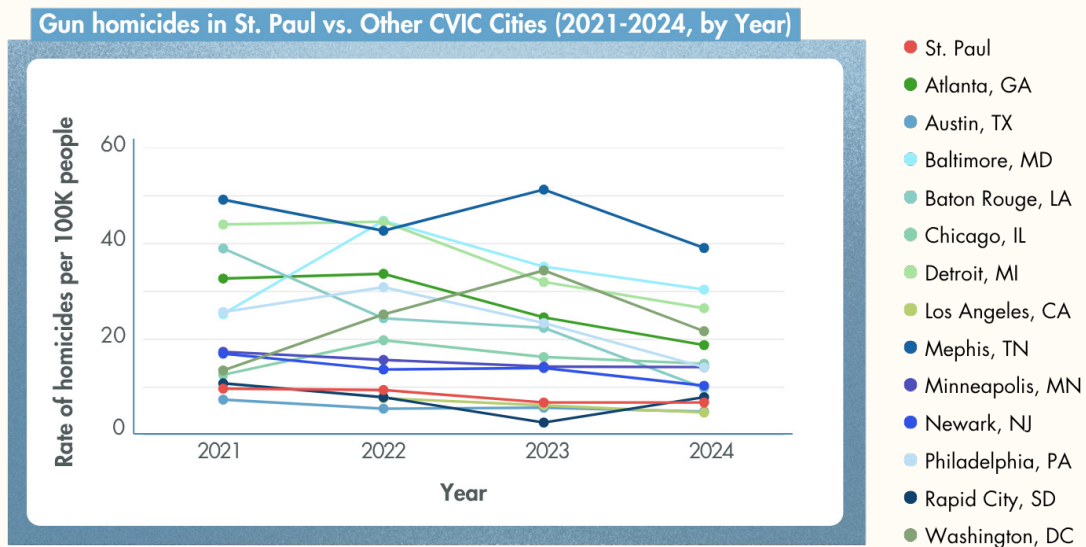


Figure 9

However, when we examine 15 non-CVIC cities with similar population sizes and urban characteristics, we also observe the same downward trend in gun homicides (see Figure 10, which includes Saint Paul for reference). Put differently, gun violence dropped in many U.S. cities, including those that did not launch violence intervention programs in the focal period.

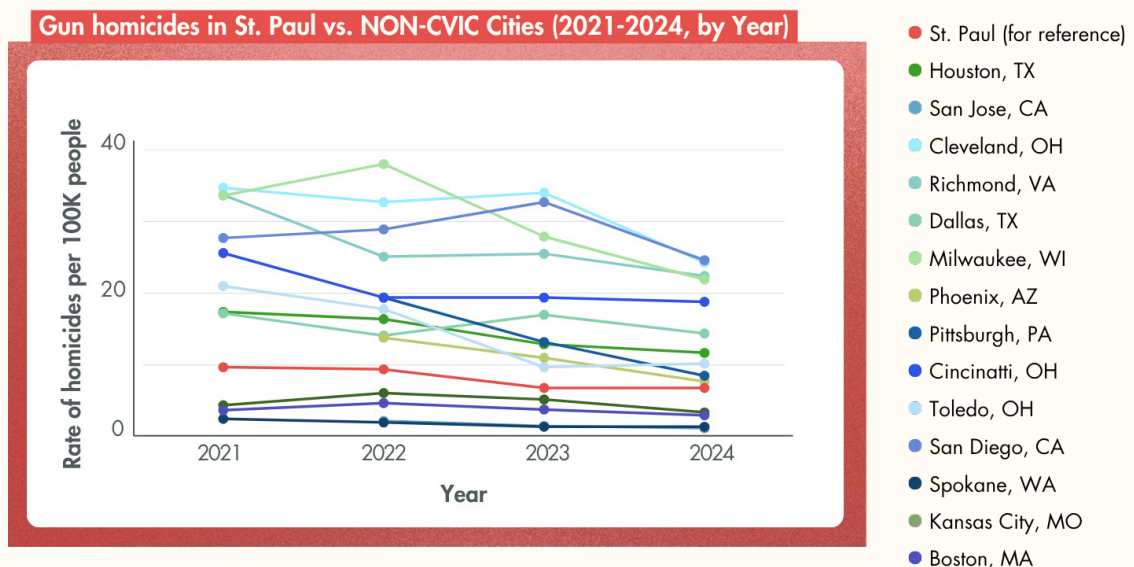


Figure 10

So, do violence intervention approaches like Project PEACE reduce gun violence? We cannot say yes definitively. But again, these drops do not undermine the continued efforts of efforts like Project PEACE: gun violence did not increase in cities with such programs.

With no clear causal intervention effect at the city level, we dug more deeply into geographic Saint Paul data to capture potential local effects of Project PEACE. To explore the possible impact of Project PEACE on gun violence in targeted areas of Saint Paul, we examined neighborhood-level non-fatal and fatal shooting data.

We began by mapping the geo-coded incidents of gun violence (both non-fatal and fatal) onto a map of Saint Paul. What emerges over the course of three years from 2022 to 2024 is a picture of shifting gun violence across time and space in various clusters (see Figures 11-13). For example, several hyper-local areas in Saint Paul saw major reductions in non-fatal shootings from 2022 to 2024. Non-fatal shootings dropped from 4 to 0 in the University Ave / Aurora corridor in Frogtown, holding at 0 in 2024. On the maps we circle two clusters of gun violence (both non-fatal and fatal) that saw large decreases over time from 2022 to 2024: between Como Ave. and Rice St. and in the southern part of the Payne-Phalen neighborhood along Case Ave. and Jessie St.

Looking a layer deeper, we conducted further spatial analyses to explore these clusters of violence based on population size. Specifically, we conducted Getis-Ord G_i^* analyses (see research by Gao et al., 2025 for an example of this analytical strategy). This analytical strategy essentially calculates concentrations of gun violence or "hot spots" by examining the shooting incidents, adjusting for the population by census tract, and determining where the

2022 Spatial Distributions of Gun Violence: Incidents in Saint Paul

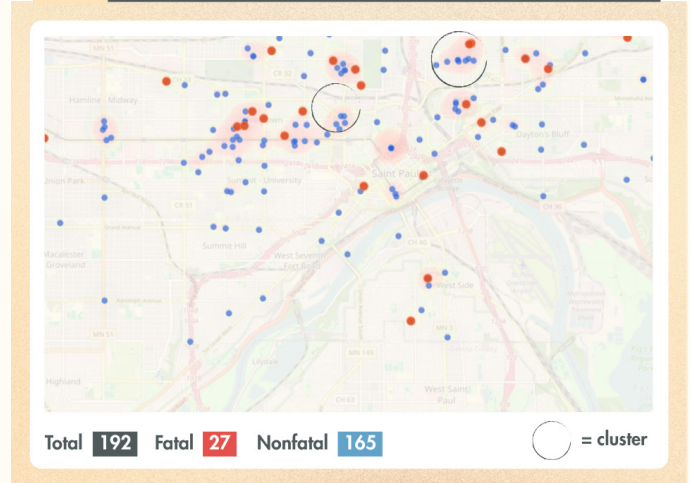


Figure 11

2023 Spatial Distributions of Gun Violence: Incidents in Saint Paul

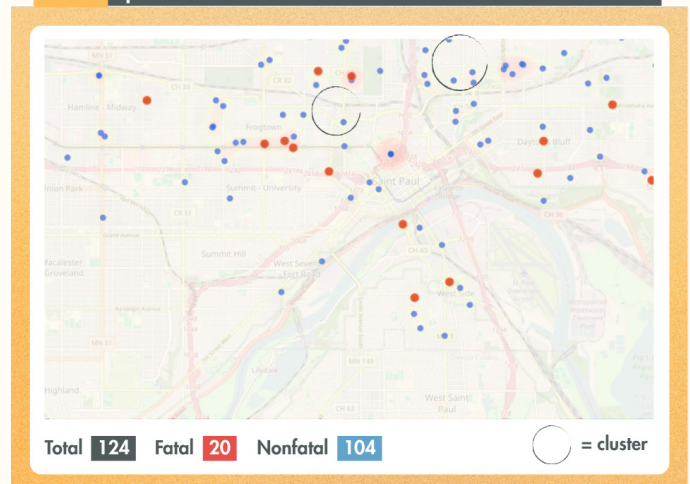


Figure 12

2024 Spatial Distributions of Gun Violence: Incidents in Saint Paul

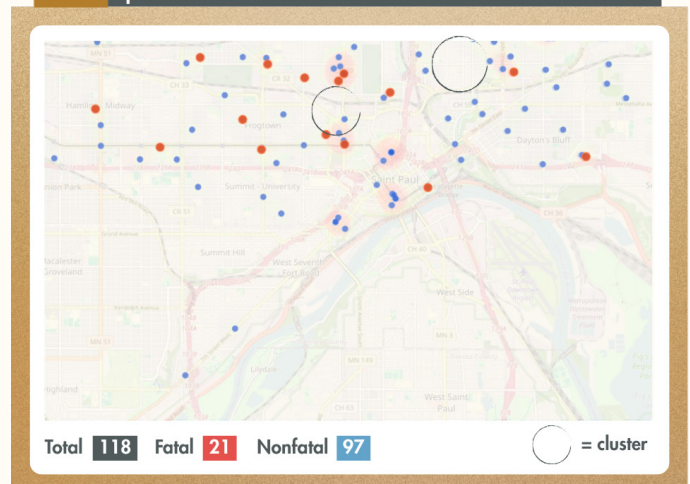


Figure 13

2022 Spatial Distributions of Gun Violence: Hot Spots in Saint Paul

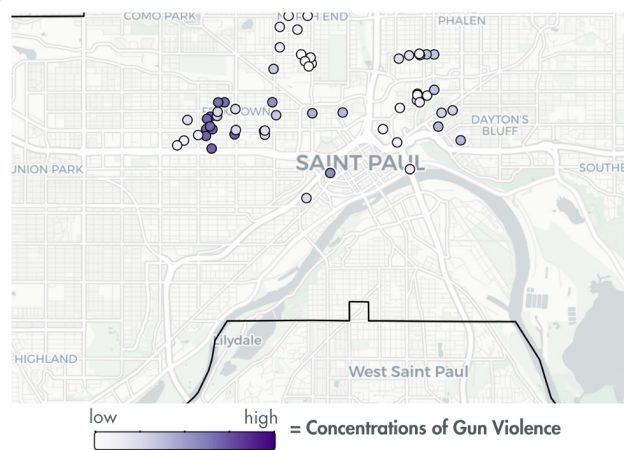


Figure 14

2023 Spatial Distributions of Gun Violence: Hot Spots in Saint Paul

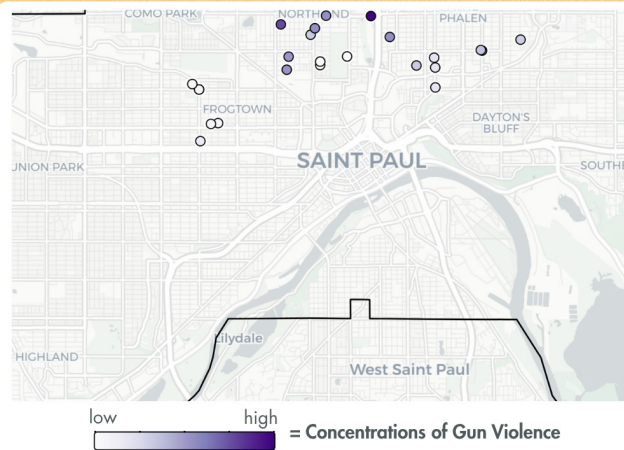


Figure 15

2024 Spatial Distributions of Gun Violence: Hot Spots in Saint Paul

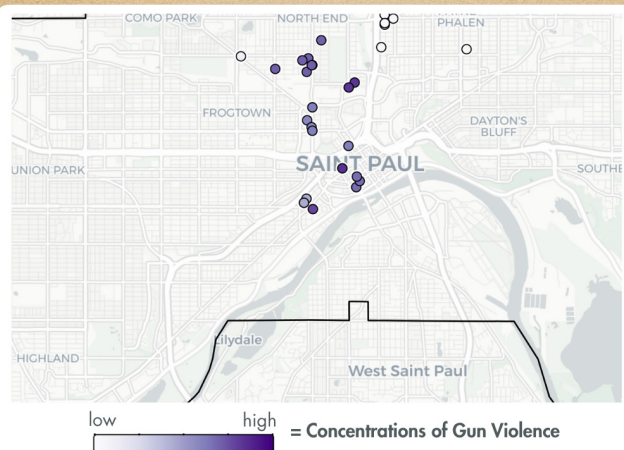


Figure 16

number of shootings are statistically significantly higher relative to other areas of the city (see Figures 14-16).

These maps also reveal important spatial distributions. Here too we see decreases in the hot spots near the Frogtown and Payne-Phalen neighborhoods but increases in concentrations relative to population size and amounts in the neighboring areas around the North End neighborhood and downtown.

In some of these hyper-local areas, we saw Project PEACE staff working—connecting with clients, or supporting Safe Summer Nights events (for example at the West Minnehaha Rec Center near Frogtown and the Dayton's Bluff Rec Center just south of Payne-Phalen).

Did PEACE life coaches connect with young people who stayed or spent time in these areas?

We have some evidence that points to yes. However, ONS did not start documenting rigorous location-based client data until early 2025, so we do not have direct client evidence of work in these areas. Future research may include individual detail and continuing trends over longer periods of time that would bolster a process impact case for Project PEACE.

In addition to providing hyper-local insights on impact, hot spot data can also help Project PEACE staff determine where to focus their efforts. For example, in the North End hot spot, we see four non-fatal shootings in 2022, none in 2023, and then a jump to 5 in 2024. With granular information like this, Project PEACE staff could intensify location-based efforts.

Addressing Community Safety Through Project PEACE

Project PEACE, and ONS more broadly, are clearly part of an ecosystem making inroads on reducing gun violence in Saint Paul. The data we have demonstrate a downward trend in shooting-related data. But beyond addressing levels of gun violence, we found that Project PEACE and ONS staff viewed the effectiveness of their work as addressing community safety.

PEACE staff wanted to better understand their role in Saint Paul community safety. **Had residents even heard of the Office of Neighborhood Safety? How might community members, beyond Project PEACE-targeted clients, be experiencing their work? If the office is impacting community safety at a higher level, what might that look like?**

To answer these questions, we surveyed Saint Paul community members, prioritizing our outreach to individuals who lived and worked in Saint Paul. We used our hot spot analyses described above to ensure some data collection occurred in those local areas most impacted by gun violence. Our final sample size of clean survey responses was 483, with a completion rate of 83%. This resulted in 398 fully completed surveys. Of those surveyed, 278 (70%) entered Saint Paul zip codes (see Figure 17).

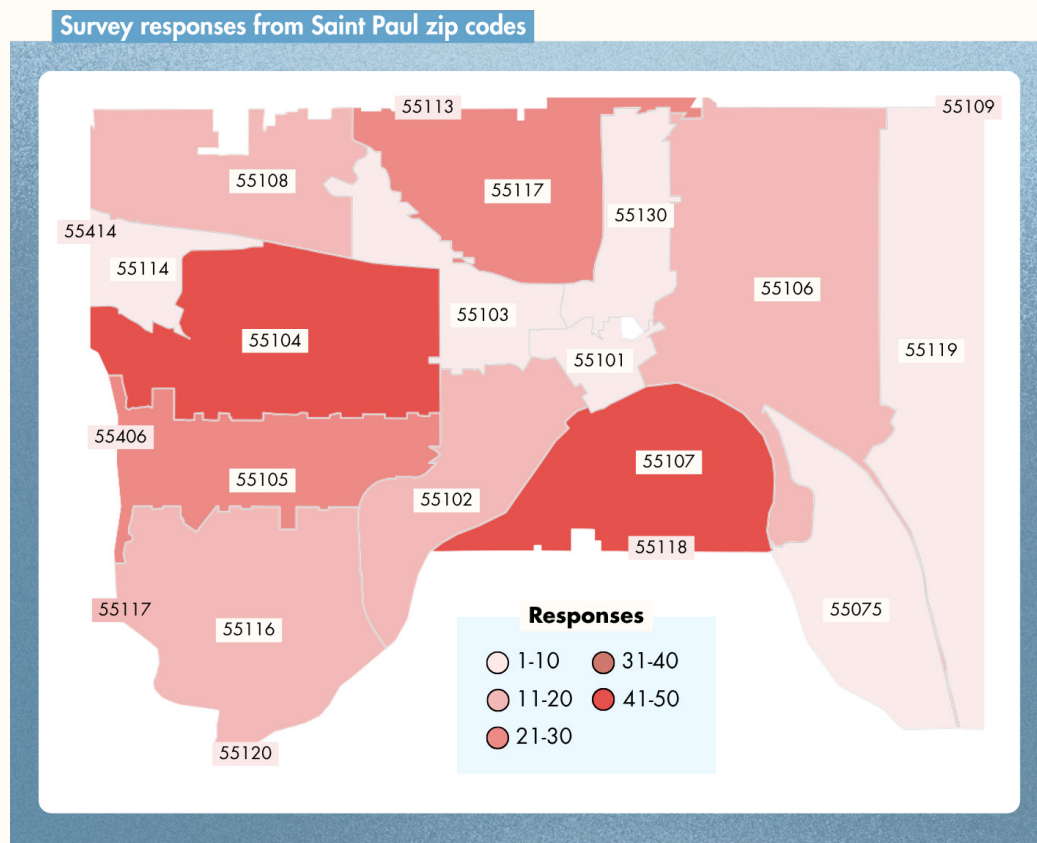
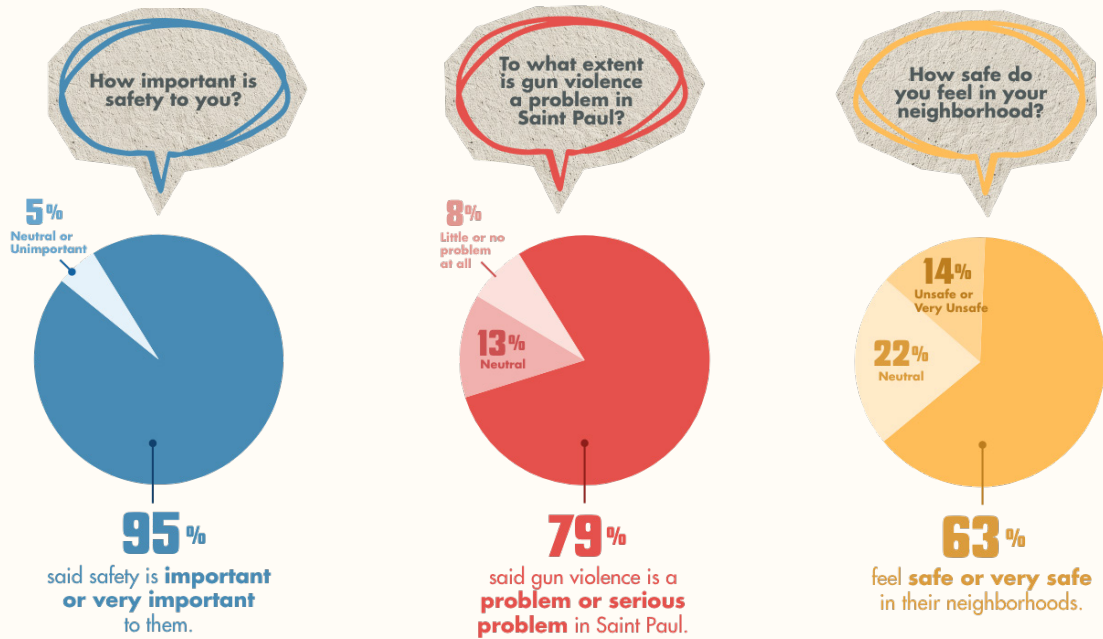


Figure 17

Safety was important or very important to nearly all survey respondents (95%). However, only 64% of respondents reported feeling safe or very safe in their neighborhood. In other words, safety matters for nearly everyone but feelings of safety are attained by a smaller majority. **The work of the Office of Neighborhood Safety is, in this regard, much needed.**



Because Project PEACE focuses on gun violence specifically, we explored gun violence in connection with safety. A strong majority, 79% of survey respondents, identified gun violence as a problem or serious problem in Saint Paul. **Most strikingly perhaps, 37% (n=180) of respondents cited personal experiences with gun violence as informing their views.** The data bear this out: those survey respondents who had personally experienced gun violence were nearly twice as likely (1.84x) to feel unsafe in their neighborhood compared those with no experience, and they are nearly twice as likely (1.76x) to call gun violence a serious problem. Both effects are statistically significant ($p < 0.001$) and medium-sized—meaningful but not deterministic. This means plenty of people without experience feel unsafe, and plenty with experience still feel safe. **Nonetheless, the impact of gun violence on feelings of safety in Saint Paul is tangible.**

Those survey respondents who had personally experienced gun violence were nearly

2x

as likely to feel unsafe in their neighborhood compared those with no experience

and they were nearly

2x

as likely to call gun violence a serious problem.

One client we interviewed noted that repeated exposure to gun violence has created a degree of desensitization among those directly impacted as well as their communities. In fact, our survey findings show that those with personal experience of gun violence actually don't mostly shift into "unsafe" when it comes to feelings of safety—they pile up in "neutral" when compared to those with no experience, providing some evidence for a desensitization effect (35% vs. 15% for those without experience).

This may indicate an erosion in the sense of safety, rather than acute fear. That is, some residents have lost a positive feeling of safety without necessarily feeling actively threatened. Along this line, multiple community members we interviewed stressed the concern that gun violence may feel like the “norm” for some in Saint Paul.

Taken together, this data demonstrates the potential value of Project PEACE staff efforts around community violence intervention and their work shifting community norms around violence. **How does ONS focus on shifting norms?** We saw some evidence of these efforts through staff descriptions of the NSCC and the Goals Not Guns campaigns, and we observed it in action during Safe Summer Nights events in the community. But further evaluation is necessary to explore the mechanisms and effectiveness of these initiatives and others.

When it comes to prior awareness of ONS and the work of Project PEACE, we found some familiarity with the former among a small majority of survey respondents (53%, n=398; 25% said “yes I know about it” and 28% said it “sounds familiar but I’m not sure”) and familiarity with the latter among a small minority of respondents (49%; 22.6% said “yes I know about it” and 26.6% said it “sounds familiar but I’m not sure”).

Staff understandably wondered what **kind** of community awareness was necessary for their work to be effective. As one staff member noted, some people say:

‘What are they [ONS] even doing? And I haven’t heard of anything that they have going on.’ And I was like, well, for my work, consider yourself as blessed and lucky that you haven’t had to come across us, because that means that you don’t have a loved one that’s directly involved in gun violence or has been affected by gun violence.

This viewpoint appeared in the survey data: 44% of PEACE-aware respondents said they had personal experience with gun violence compared to 32% of those who had never heard of PEACE (p=0.05). This indicates that PEACE staff are likely reaching those most affected (though the sample, n=90, is too small to draw firm conclusions).

Despite this awareness gap, respondents across the board reported strong support for the ONS/Project PEACE model once they learned more about it. After being presented with information about the effort, 85% were supportive or very supportive and 72% said they completely or somewhat trusted an approach like Project PEACE to address gun violence in Saint Paul. Qualitatively, this support looks like one respondent noting, “When I hear [Project PEACE], I think of change for the better,” and another that it is “a program to help the community be safer.”

Despite this awareness gap, respondents across the board reported **strong support** for the ONS/Project PEACE model once they learned more about it.

We also asked respondents explicitly whether Project PEACE directly or indirectly makes them feel safer. About 20% of respondents reported feeling much safer because of PEACE and another 44%

report feeling somewhat safer. This 64% of respondents is a diverse group: nearly half had never heard of PEACE prior to the survey. This safety effect was also distributed across the full range of those who reported a baseline sense of safety through to those who reported feeling unsafe.

While the bulk of the awareness of Project PEACE comes from those with personal experience with gun violence, a broader swath of people name a positive safety effect.

The intensity of response among those with personal experience suggests that perhaps **those closest to gun violence**, the constituency Project PEACE is designed to serve, are those who perceive the **highest increases in feelings of safety**.

It is notable that, when we dig into the 20% (a relatively small sample, $n=82$) of respondents who said PEACE makes them feel much safer, we see a higher percentage (though not statistically significantly higher) of those who have personally experienced gun violence (46% compared to 36% of respondents who haven't). The intensity of response among those with personal experience suggests that perhaps those closest to gun violence, the constituency Project PEACE is designed to serve, are those who perceive the highest increases in feelings of safety.

In sum, we see that gun violence in Saint Paul peaked in 2022, the same year Project PEACE launched, and has declined steadily since. However, similar

trends appeared in comparable cities without violence intervention programs, making causal claims impossible. What is clear is who bears the burden of the gun violence: Black residents and young adults are overrepresented among both those arrested and those victimized by gun violence. And these individuals map directly onto the population Project PEACE is designed to serve. Our neighborhood-level hot spot analyses point to meaningful local reductions, and community survey data shows broad support for the model and a tangible sense of increased safety among residents — particularly those closest to gun violence. The trends, the geography, and the community's own voice all point in the same direction: Project PEACE staff are operating at the right time, with the right people, in the right space.



Chapter 3

Recommendations and the Path to Sustainability

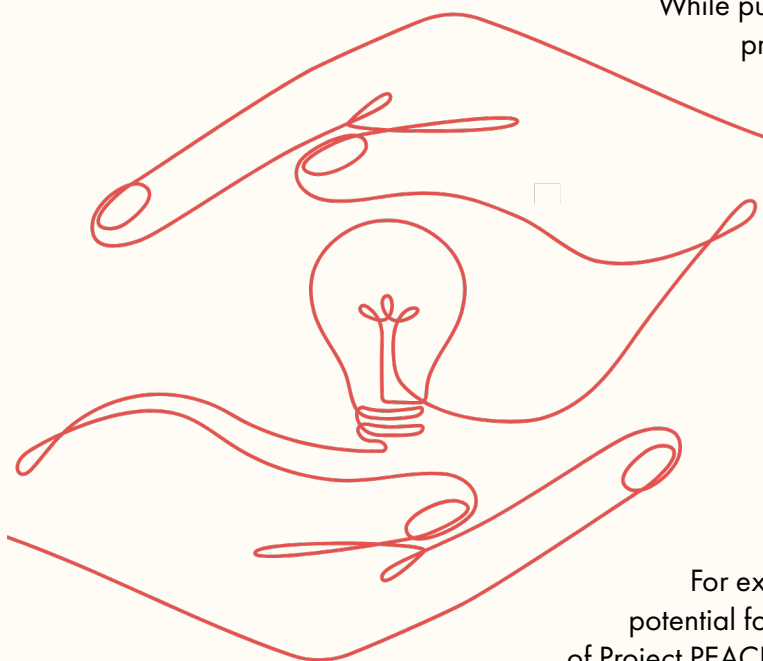
Chapter 3. Recommendations and the Path to Sustainability

We close our evaluation with a set of recommendations designed to support the ONS in identifying and progressing down a path to sustainability. Project PEACE is shaping up to be a powerful approach to address gun violence. We recommend the team at ONS consider clarifying their model, prioritizing and strengthening key partnerships, supporting and investing in life coaches, strengthening data collection and impact storytelling, and focusing on stable and sustained funding.

In addition to drawing from our evaluation findings, we asked ONS staff to dream about what the future of ONS could look like. Staff shared their visions, including what it would take to get there and potential threats to their goals and priorities. It quickly became clear that **sustained relationships are central to the work ahead**. These recommendations reflect what we learned and what we heard from staff as well.

1. Clarify the Model

PEACE stands for Prevention/Intervention, Environmental Design, Accountability/Outreach, Community Action, and Enforcement—a massive and robust set of tasks for a small team focused on addressing gun violence. The expansiveness of the original design of Project PEACE helped launch the effort as one designed to consider all the elements of gun violence. The team aimed to combine GVI and CVI frameworks. ONS sought to respond, adapt, and build a plane designed to roll, fly, and float. Now, four years into their efforts, we recommend the team clarify and scope their model so they can build intentionally.



While pulling from multiple frameworks to do prevention, intervention, environmental design, outreach, community action, and enforcement is comprehensive, each framework and its related tasks have overlapping and key distinctions. This suite of needs requires different staff, partners, and infrastructure to implement effectively. Taking them all on simultaneously impacts the ability of the team to do each task with capacity and fidelity.

For example, our findings show strong potential for impact and growing effectiveness of Project PEACE's prevention/intervention work, the place where most GVI and CVI models intersect. When law enforcement was a core partner for referrals and custom

notifications, for instance, we saw concrete examples of effective interventions with young people who caused harm through gun violence from credible and committed life coach staff. We also saw powerful prevention of future gun violence through sustained mentoring relationships and wraparound services to meet the needs of individuals and families.

As we describe in the findings above, this operates as a hybrid GVI/CVI approach. However, traditional GVI frameworks lean on focused deterrence and punishment-based legal consequences with law enforcement, while traditional CVI frameworks focus on healing and conflict mediation, separate from law enforcement. These distinctions require ONS to get really clear on what elements of each framework they are committed to (and able to provide) and where they diverge. Over our evaluation period, we saw a growing focus on outreach and prevention alongside an intentionality around distinguishing the Project PEACE staff from law enforcement. Yet there was also growing frustration over the fractured relationship with law enforcement. The ONS team needs to determine priorities for growth, because their hybrid approach requires both clarity and robust personnel.

Our findings suggest a continued hybrid GVI/CVI approach that repairs and strengthens communication and partnership structures with police for custom notifications and scopes the CVI work on client-based services (at least, to some degree). In the future, we believe the ONS can expand and address broader community norms around violence and safety (the findings show they are already making headway).

Moreover, we recommend that the team at ONS consider exploring the principles of the Comprehensive Gang Model (CGM) described in the beginning of this evaluation. CGM is an older violence prevention model that may yet offer insights and structures to strengthen the gun violence intervention and prevention ecosystem. And CGM calls for an integration of GVI and CVI. Cities doing this well are running GVI for immediate deterrence and deploying CVI infrastructure across a broader population. Together they span most of the continuum of gun-involved individuals and the wider community. CGM also offers implementation guidelines we describe below.

Clarifying and scoping the model will benefit ONS internally and support their ability to communicate the work externally to partners. Throughout our evaluation, partners expressed confusion about the scope of what Project PEACE does and their role in the gun violence and safety ecosystem more broadly. Scoping in and becoming clear on their focus internally will also allow Project PEACE to bring that same clarity to partners and stakeholders and improve collaboration.

2. Prioritize and Strengthen Key Partnerships

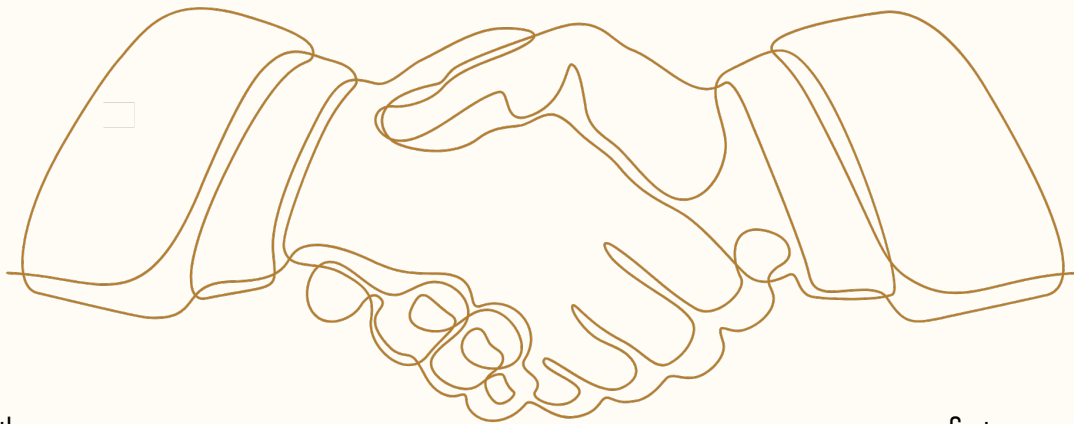
Relatedly, we recommend that Project PEACE staff strengthen their relationships with key players in the gun violence intervention and prevention ecosystem through clearly defined roles and sustained collaboration efforts. ONS needs to determine who is a **key** partner—those groups central to their work and needing to know everything—and keep that core intentionally limited. ONS staff should also identify additional, less-connected partners who can be tapped as needed. This kind of tiered partnership structure will allow Project PEACE staff to be more intentional and focused in engagement.

During the evaluation, Project PEACE partnered with a wide array of organizations, including city entities, CBOs, and technical partners. These partners played a foundational role in the early

development of ONS as an organization and in the growth of Project PEACE specifically. Toward the end of the evaluation, Project PEACE began formalizing contracts with other CBOs—a positive step in building out the CVI work. However, having a vast array of connections again requires scoping in the key partners and staffing the maintenance of those relationships and partnering structures. Without this clarity, Project PEACE risks spreading their relational capacity too thin. Too many partnerships can be just as problematic as too few. Our ecosystem map can serve as a launching point for this work.

Early on, Project PEACE had a dependency on referrals from police. This made their partnership with SPPD important to the organizational infrastructure. Over time, however, this relationship shifted, and staff expressed a desire to build more consistent and additional referral processes with a broader set of partners. Building a referral infrastructure that is prevention-focused is something Project PEACE stated as an organizational value and desire. ONS will need to determine how to do this while strengthening the partnerships already in place.

One way to do this is by establishing a clear sense of shared accountability and mutual expectations within each partnership, and prioritizing partners. This will help reduce the friction that can arise when scope creep occurs—something that was observed in the ONS/Project PEACE relationship with police over time. If the GVI approach remains a focus for Project PEACE, investing in and repairing the SPPD partnership is crucial. If CVI becomes a greater focus, expanding prevention-focused partnerships will be necessary as well. We recommend a balanced and thoughtful consideration of both.



As with our first recommendation, we recommend exploring the five-strategy continuum of the CGM to support this work; one of the key CGM strategies is the development and implementation of policies and procedures that result in the most effective use of available resources, within and across agencies, to better address gang problems (OJJDP). Organizational Change and Development refers to changes made to the agencies and institutions themselves—not just what they do, but how they're structured, coordinated, and resourced to respond to violence.

A classic CGM implementation would involve a steering committee or coordinating body that brings law enforcement, prosecutors, probation, schools, social services, and CBOs into a shared governance structure with unified goals and data sharing—not unlike the GVI governing board.

Taken together, a strong path forward will include clarity on partner roles and expectations, along

with a sustainability plan with key partners through formal contracts or deeper engagement. This, alongside an investment in creating a full-time role focused on GVI coordination, would aid in partner sustainability necessary for a sustainable violence intervention ecosystem.

3. Support and Invest in Life Coaches

MNJRC strongly recommends that ONS continues to support and invest in life coaches. The office began hiring life coaches in spring 2024, and as of early 2026, Project PEACE's team included five life coaches, one of whom served as the lead. Moving forward as ONS continues to grow around them, life coaches are central to Project PEACE and deserve both recognition and investment in building an effective program. We recommend continued investment in their well-being, their training, and their access to resources.

What makes life coaches uniquely critical is their role as credible messengers. Life coaches have lived experience, many of them growing up and still living in the very communities Project PEACE serves. This experience makes them effective mentors and connectors for clients. But the reciprocal impacts of their work is potentially just as important. Many life coaches shared that the work had transformed their own lives. Life coaching is not just a job, but an opportunity to support others and themselves in the process. However, this work is heavy and life coaches may experience burnout. ONS must be attentive to life coach sustainability.

Thus, supporting life coaches also means scoping their role so they can do this work sustainably and pick up some necessary additional tasks, like better and more rigorous documentation and data collection. Very likely, this will require hiring more life coaches, as our evaluation showed they are being asked to carry a significant load already. When life coaches are expected to conduct community outreach, maintain partnerships, provide one-on-one support to individuals with complex needs, and engage in place-based work simultaneously, it becomes a great deal to manage. Clarifying and scoping the Project PEACE model and creating structures for sustainable partnerships will provide the boundaries to scope the work of life coaches as well.



4. Strengthen Data Collection and Impact Storytelling

Connected to the importance of the organic and individualized work of life coaches, our fourth recommendation is for ONS to improve documentation, data collection, and impact analysis. The need for better process documentation has been pressing throughout this evaluation, and one that staff themselves have already recognized. And measuring the effectiveness of violence prevention approaches is a national challenge. But the first step in beginning to demonstrate impact is creating and maintaining strong documentation and data collection practices.

Better documentation and data collection is an achievable, relatively concrete goal. We recommend the team at ONS get clear on this goal and commit to improving documentation practices. Analysis of impact is the bigger challenge. Telling the story of the nuanced and complex work that life coaches do with individuals is difficult, and much of it cannot be captured neatly into quantitative data. Indeed, a lot of this work is storytelling. Partners, leaders, staff, and life coaches acknowledged the complexity of what happens behind the scenes at Project PEACE. That reality must be accounted for in the ways impact is measured and communicated. We recommend ONS build on the goal of better documentation with a commitment to clear and evidence-based storytelling. This evaluation shows clear evidence of life coaches changing life trajectories for clients from individual client progress and feedback. By committing to an individualized analysis of impact at the client-level and telling the stories of change, ONS can continue to better communicate the necessity of the work.

Moreover, Project PEACE leaders and staff need to commit to rigorously tracking their progress and success in alignment with how they do their work. That means not simply looking at rates of non-fatal shootings but actually exploring and documenting what's happening in the neighborhoods and on the blocks where they are working. Researchers have demonstrated that gun violence spreads through social networks and groups (see Papachristos, Wildeman, and Roberto 2014 for example), and many clients served by Project PEACE are connected to one another. Interviewees also identified a shift in the group dynamics of Saint Paul gun violence over the years, with traditional, centralized groups being replaced by smaller, more loosely organized groups. Thus, instead of seeking just to reduce city-wide shootings, Project PEACE leaders and staff (in partnership with police, who can provide historical data and intel) should consider how to document shifts in the networks of involved individuals and groups as outcome data for Project PEACE. Our hot spot analysis suggests this is possible and could be powerful. Project PEACE life coaches can better tell the story of the impact of their work both on individual clients and on their networks, and that can shape the story of a safer city.

Partners and staff alike stressed the importance of clearly articulating intended outcomes and strengthening measurement practices that ultimately inform funding decisions as well. As one ONS leader put it, "being able to tell the stories equates to sustainability, longevity, and funding of our

programming”—a sentiment that captures both the challenge and the stakes of getting this right. Building better internal data systems would not only help Project PEACE track and communicate their work, it would strengthen their partner relationships, directly improving collaboration in the ecosystem.

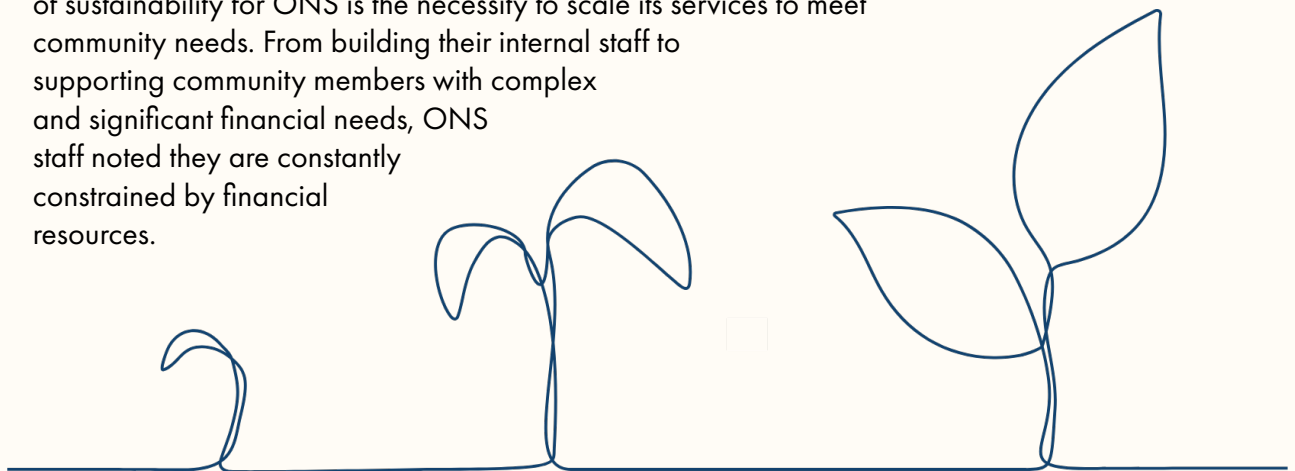
Documentation, data collection, and impact analysis are not bureaucratic add-ons to the work of Project PEACE - they are essential to its survival and growth. This requires a commitment to consistent and detailed documentation of the life coaching process to support individualized storytelling that captures what quantitative metrics cannot, alongside more rigorous tracking of network-level shifts that reflects how violence spreads (or, in the case of PEACE clients ideally, doesn't spread) in Saint Paul. These approaches are complementary and offer a path toward communicating impact in ways that honor the complexity of the work, are compelling to funders and partners, and are grounded in evidence.

5. Focus on Stable and Sustained Funding

This leads us to our fifth recommendation—one that was heard loud and clear from staff throughout the evaluation, and one that all prior recommendations ultimately depend on: We recommend a focus on stable and sustained funding.

Funds came up in every conversation with staff. ONS needs to function as an entity that does not have to grapple with funding uncertainty, whether that means having the financial resources and autonomy to hire more staff, expand their services, or directly support clients through stipends or assistance with basic needs.

Yet, like many government and non-profit entities standing up new models or approaches to public safety, ONS faces financial precarity. The office was launched and has been operating with temporary funding sources, rather than stable general fund dollars. One big inhibitor of sustainability for ONS is the necessity to scale its services to meet community needs. From building their internal staff to supporting community members with complex and significant financial needs, ONS staff noted they are constantly constrained by financial resources.



Systemic barriers regarding current police structures, political climate, and competitive funding environments heavily impact funding and sustainability. The federal political climate has become actively hostile toward efforts like Project PEACE, with grant priorities shifting away from community violence intervention and toward traditional policing. This has put ONS's work and approach in juxtaposition, and at times perceived competition, with the police department.

The path forward may require a restructuring of ONS's funding model. ONS leaders agree that all staff positions must transition to the general fund to provide organizational stability. However, leaders also recognize the strategic value of maintaining a mixed funding portfolio: while general fund dollars provide the essential foundation, flexible philanthropic and private funding enables the kind of innovative pilot projects (like guaranteed income pilots for program participants) that contribute to the growing body of knowledge around this work and cannot be supported through restricted public dollars. Because ONS has few strong philanthropic relationships, we recommend considering hiring a dedicated grant writer to free up current staff and contractor time and draw in additional support.

Leadership named some past workarounds and creative ideas for the future. For example, in order to move past restrictions placed on American Rescue Plan (ARPA) funds, one staff member described how the city defederalized ARPA funds into a more flexible special fund. Current connections to a national network of violence prevention offices also provide peer learning with respect to sustainability strategies. Future possibilities, like creating a dedicated revenue stream through mechanisms like an "ATF tax" on alcohol, tobacco, and firearms sales, might provide permanent, flexible funding for violence prevention work.

Additionally, ONS may need policy solutions on the city and state levels to eliminate certain legal and bureaucratic constraints around how ONS can spend money. At the city level, the team at ONS needs to be consulted by city partners prior to budget decisions that could affect them as an office. Partners further indicated that moving toward a multi-year city budgeting structure, similar to the state's two-year cycle, would better support stability and planning.

ONS calls for strong investment in their work, the GVI and CVI approaches that a growing body of evidence shows works for reducing violence. As one ONS leader said: "What we're asking for is having the right resources to do some things that we've been asked to do."

Conclusion

In 2022, the Saint Paul Office of Neighborhood Safety (ONS) launched its office and began implementing Project PEACE, which they described as a violent crime intervention and prevention program mixing both community violence intervention (CVI) and individualized gun and group violence intervention (GVI) strategies. Throughout this evaluation, we heard from and observed the lived experiences and perspectives of Project PEACE clients and their families, Project PEACE leaders and staff, city and county partners, CBOs, and community members. These voices coalesced into a picture of a violence prevention and intervention approach with real promise to reduce gun violence in Saint Paul.

Project PEACE began as an enormous effort of just a few individuals answering every call of gun violence. Today it is becoming a cohesive group of committed staff, building off widely used national models for gun violence. But, like the research on GVI, CVI, and CGM more widely, this evaluation of Project PEACE paints a nuanced picture of what success looks like and feels like—and how tenuous it may be. This work will require sustained and stable funding if it is to develop and continue to be evaluated. **Project PEACE does not and cannot exist in a vacuum.** Despite being relatively new, Project PEACE and ONS are a necessary presence in a violence prevention

ecosystem that needs better alignment, role definition, and commitment to collaboration.

The impact of life coaches on clients is clear and deeply moving. In interviews, clients described life coaches as helping transform entire life trajectories, in some cases, saving lives. Through individualized and wraparound supports, life coaches have shifted how clients think about themselves, their choices, and their futures. This cognitive and behavioral shift is not incidental. As the CVI framework suggests, changing behaviors among those at highest risk is how the spread of gun violence is stopped. Life coaches are working directly with gun-involved individuals, connecting them to resources tailored to their specific needs, and interrupting the cycle of violence at its source. Deeply resourceful and motivated mentors and supporters, they are the heart of this work. They are credible for their clients and, perhaps most importantly, committed to them, dogged but patient in their pursuit to offer meaningful support and resources. They are keeping people "safe, alive, and free."



Appendices

Appendix A.

Additional Background Information on Violence Prevention Evaluations

This section details the evaluation evidence for community violence interventions, group violence interventions, and the Comprehensive Gang Model.

Cure Violence Global's website and related materials paint a uniformly positive picture of intervention results. The organization's report, *The Evidence of Effectiveness*, best summarizes this stance, claiming that "the approach's efficacy has been demonstrated through independently funded and independently conducted multi-year, multi-site, mixed methods scientific evaluations that show 40–70% reductions in shootings and killings in the hardest hit communities in the U.S. and Latin America" (Cure Violence Global 2021, 4). Evaluation reports, however, tell a decidedly more mixed story, documenting community sites where declines in violence cannot be attributed to the intervention, sites with no declines in violence at all, and sites where violence actually increased (Aspholm 2020; Butts et al. 2015; Hureau et al. 2023). Indeed, the "Summary of Independent Evaluations on Cure Violence" table appearing just two pages after that claim shows that only half of the presented findings on reduced shootings and killings (10 out of 20) meet the 40% threshold (Cure Violence Global 2021). None of the null or negative results from any of the specific intervention evaluations are included in the report.

Other CVI models, such as Roca, Chicago CRED, and READI Chicago, focus on individual-level outcomes rather than community-level trends. Evaluations of these interventions consistently report reductions in arrests and incarceration among program participants but find no corresponding reductions in shootings or homicide victimization (Bhatt et al. 2024; Hickman et al. 2024; Rossa et al. 2023).

As with CVIs, particularly those associated with Cure Violence Global, the predominant narrative around GVIs is one of unambiguous success. Again, the empirical track record is more nuanced. A 2018 systematic review (Braga et al. 2018) found that focused deterrence strategies—particularly group violence interventions—effectively reduced crime, though studies with more rigorous research designs showed smaller effects, raising questions about the reliability of findings from weaker evaluations. A systematic review of Project Safe Neighborhoods evaluations found that it "had a statistically significant, intended impact on exactly half of evaluated outcomes" across 21 studies (Shelfer et al. 2023, 51), though the authors caution that "many of these effects are small and may not persist in the long-term" (Shelfer et al. 2023, 55). Indeed, the only longitudinal study of PSN to date, conducted in Chicago, found that initially positive program effects waned over time and that expanding intervention into new areas did not produce reductions in violent crime (Grunwald and Papachristos 2017).

Evaluations of the CGM have likewise produced mixed results. The initial CGM intervention in Chicago saw some success in reducing individual-level offending among participants (Spergel 2007). Evaluations of the five initial CGM demonstration sites produced mixed findings across sites and measures (Spergel et al. 2006).

Evaluations of CVIs, GVIs, and the CGM show that these interventions have reduced aggregate violent crime and individual-level victimization and offending in some instances and failed to do so in others, with effect sizes varying considerably across studies. It should be noted that GVIs, and to a lesser extent CVIs and the CGM, demonstrate more consistent success than other police approaches commonly believed to reduce violent crime (Braga et al. 2015; Gill et al. 2014).

In conclusion, the emergence of CVIs, GVIs, and the OJJDP's CGM should be understood against the backdrop of historically high violent crime rates in the late 1980s and early 1990s. These interventions have gained renewed interest in recent years as communities and public officials have sought public safety alternatives to traditional policing in the wake of high-profile incidents of police violence.

Appendix B.

Additional Methodological Details

As mentioned on page 15, we interviewed ONS staff, partners, and clients, community members, and other cities doing similar work. What follows is some additional information on how we conducted these interviews.

The first round of staff interviews took place in fall 2024 and the second in fall 2025. All staff interviews were conducted over Zoom and participants provided consent to be recorded prior to each interview. Recordings were subsequently transcribed and anonymized for analysis.

With ONS's partners, we started with several informal interviews and then followed up with formal interviews. These partners were identified by ONS, and they represented public, governmental, community, and private organizations, including Saint Paul Public Schools, the National Network for Safe Communities at John Jay College, the Ramsey County Sheriff's Office, the Saint Paul Police Department, the Ramsey County Attorney's Office, the Saint Paul City Attorney's Office, Healing Streets, and Regions Hospital. We also interviewed individuals representing city leadership and hailing from the Mayor's Office, the City Attorney's Office, and the City Council. In Fall 2024, we conducted informal interviews with partners following the Project PEACE kickoff event to gain a better understanding of each partner's work and their collaboration with ONS. We then followed up with formal interviews to explore their groups' collaborative roles with ONS and their place within the gun violence intervention and prevention ecosystem. All partner interviews were conducted over Zoom and participants provided consent to be recorded prior to each interview. Recordings were subsequently transcribed and anonymized for analysis.

We formally interviewed partners from the following organizations: Ramsey County Sheriff's Office (Justice Partner), Saint Paul Police Department (Justice Partner), Saint Paul Public Schools (Support and Outreach Partners), Healing Streets (Support and Outreach Partners), Regions Hospital (Support and Outreach Partners), Ujamaa Place (Support and Outreach Partners), Ramsey County Attorney's Office (Systems Partners), Saint Paul City Attorney's Office (Systems Partners), Saint Paul Mayor's Office (Systems Partners), and the National Network for Safe Communities at John Jay College (Systems Partners).

Critically, we wanted to hear directly from clients and families who had received services from Project PEACE to understand how Project PEACE operates in practice. Client experiences are central to understanding how this approach is working for the community it intends to serve.

Project PEACE staff provided contact information of both former and current clients for interviews, attentive to client stability and capacity to participate. They estimated an accessible universe of approximately 30 individuals who might be willing to participate in interviews, cautioning that many early clients had been “one and done” and had minimal ongoing engagement with the program. Project PEACE staff provided contact information for 15 past and current clients and family members, and we were ultimately able to connect with and interview 9. As many clients are under the age of 18, we interviewed 16- and 17-year-olds with written consent from their parents or guardians. All client participants received a gift card upon completing the interview. Most client interviews were conducted over Zoom, with some in-person, and participants provided consent to be recorded prior to each interview. Recordings were subsequently transcribed and anonymized for analysis.

We conducted informal interviews with Saint Paul community members. Forty-four respondents to our community survey expressed interest in sharing more about their thoughts on gun violence in Saint Paul. We reached out to all 44 respondents and followed up multiple times via phone and email; 6 ultimately agreed to participate in an interview. During these interviews, we asked community members about their connection to the Twin Cities, their sense of neighborhood safety, and their thoughts on gun violence and gun violence intervention and prevention in Saint Paul. All community member interviews were conducted over Zoom and participants provided consent to be recorded prior to each interview. Recordings were subsequently transcribed and anonymized for analysis.

Finally, we conducted informal interviews with individuals working in similar city-run group and gun violence intervention and prevention programs and community violence intervention programs across the country. We reached out to people in seven cities and connected with four: Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, Stockton, California, Albuquerque, New Mexico, and Portland, Oregon.

Appendix C.

Additional Information on Organizational Structure and Roles

The leadership and staff roles within the Office of Neighborhood Safety and Project PEACE have shifted over time, as discussed on page x. Here is some additional information on how we saw these various roles evolve.

Director (leadership). The Director of ONS, particularly in ONS's early days, operates simultaneously as a direct service provider and an organizational leader. It is the Director's responsibility to make sure people understand what Project PEACE is and to get collaborators to gather around Project PEACE. When shootings in Saint Paul occur, the Director often receives calls and immediately engages, which might look like meeting families at hospitals, coordinating with police, walking people through what to expect after an incident, or supporting people through trauma. The Director has been responding to crises while simultaneously and in collaboration with the ONS team developing the policies and procedures necessary to effectively respond to these same crises. Part of this role, as ONS continued to expand, included educating and

creating job descriptions with HR, since these roles did not yet exist within the city's infrastructure. The Director's role has also been to collaborate across key partners, including the mayor, police chief, and fire chief, to place this gun violence intervention and prevention work in the city's safety ecosystem. The Director reports moving fluidly between strategic planning and immediate needs, one moment discussing funding opportunities for ONS and the next coordinating with funeral homes. The founding Director left ONS in October 2025 and the current director began in January 2026.

NSCC Manager (leadership). The Neighborhood Safety Community Council (NSCC) Manager is a primarily administrative role serving as the bridge between the community voice and ONS's public safety efforts. While the NSCC manager works closely with Project PEACE staff, this position sits organizationally outside of the project. The NSCC Manager facilitates a permanent advisory group of 15 residents from Saint Paul's seven wards. The NSCC weighs in on what they think ONS should be doing, which organizations ONS should partner with, and discuss public safety concerns and offer recommendations on community safety strategies. The NSCC Manager plays a key role in ensuring that community voice remains centered and within ONS's broader work. Additionally, the NSCC Manager creates agendas for the community council, works closely with the CBO Liaison to give funding back to the community by way of CBOs' services, manages grant contracts, produces the ONS podcast, regularly communicates with community members and council members, and attends community meetings to remain aware of resident concerns and updates. This role centers on the office's preventive work, bringing data about hot spots to the council and collectively deciding what programs to implement with the goal of preventing community violence. The NSCC Manager and council members also developed and began implementing the Goals Not Guns campaign, a DARE-like curriculum for middle and high schoolers covering violence prevention, conflict resolution, mental health, self-esteem, and goal setting. The MNJRC research team observed this position evolving in real time, alternating focus between podcast production and Goals Not Guns implementation depending on organizational priorities. By the end of our evaluation period, the position was vacant. This has likely affected ONS's capacity to effectively prioritize their prevention-focused work.

Deputy Director (leadership). The Deputy Director handles much of the administrative operations and strategy for ONS. This role manages the implementation plan through facilitating strategic planning, tracking the strategic plan, and updating the strategic plan annually. Another focus is on untangling ONS's budget, piecing together multiple funding streams, tracking invoicing and contracting, and ensuring expenses are attributed to the right accounts. The Deputy Director tracks ONS's and NSCC's contracts and ensures all information is documented clearly. The Deputy Director is also responsible for supporting the contracted grant writer and answering budget questions from the City Council. Other responsibilities include implementing and managing the Apricot data management system, writing all policy and procedure documentation for the office, navigating new referral processes with Saint Paul Public Schools and Ramsey County Juvenile Probation, and supporting HR work around role creation and hiring.

Project PEACE Program Manager (leadership). The Project PEACE Program Manager oversees the overall strategy of violence prevention and intervention within the city of Saint Paul, working with the public safety ecosystem and the community to think about public safety differently. This person drives Project PEACE's day-to-day operations and internal workflows, including regular check-ins with the team for supervision and support, while also sitting at the center of external coordination. This position connects regularly with city partners, like police, libraries, parks and rec, schools, and the Ramsey County Attorney's Office, to strategically collaborate and deepen partnerships to continue to grow this body of work. Daily work varies dramatically depending on what's happening in Saint Paul. When shootings occur, the Project PEACE Program Manager receives texts and coordinates with police to determine response. Another responsibility of this role is conducting custom notifications within the GVI framework. During a custom notification, they partner with the SPPD's ASPIRE unit to visit homes of individuals involved in violence, delivering a "we see you" message and offering wraparound supports to involved individuals and their families. This role used to include more direct client services but has shifted to now managing incoming client referrals, overseeing the team's responses, developing Project PEACE staff, and collaborating with partners.

Life Coaches (staff). Life coaches work directly with referred individuals and families. Primary responsibilities include meeting clients where they are—literally and figuratively—to begin building a trusting relationship, creating client-centered goals, and connecting clients to wraparound resources such as housing, mental health, education, employment, and basic needs. Life coaches are there to help individuals and families navigate gun-related incidents and achieve goals to change the trajectories of their lives. Daily work varies dramatically based on client needs. Life coaches report starting their mornings by sending check-in texts to their clients, then doing individual in-person sessions with clients, making phone calls, following up on goals set in previous sessions, researching resources, meeting clients to provide support whether in court or at school, or responding to emergent incidents in Saint Paul. Life coaches document everything in Apricot—every phone call, referral, Uber ride for a job interview. They also participate in regular team consultation meetings to seek support on specific clients or provide ideas to their fellow life coaches. A critical component of this role is custom notifications. Life coaches accompany the SPPD ASPIRE unit with the hopes of connecting with individuals and working with them to provide the aforementioned support. Life coaches also attend shoot review meetings with SPPD, schools, probation, and attorneys to coordinate on cases and community trends. As needed, life coaches occasionally join outreach specialists in community spaces.

Outreach Team (staff). Outreach Specialists work on both the CVI and GVI side, with their specific focus depending on the event, circumstances, or client needs at hand. Their responsibilities center on community engagement, being the soft touch that initiates relationships and provides community members with supportive resources before potentially handing clients to life coaches for deeper, longer-term work. Like life coaches, outreach specialists meet clients where they are comfortable. They conduct extensive research on other CBOs, connect with city assets and partners, maintain an

updated database of resources for client support, spend time in hot spots in the community, and identify individuals showing early risk signs of being involved in gun violence. Outreach specialists attend Safe Summer Nights and other community events, career fairs with life coaches to make direct job connections, and youth events where tensions might run high. They are often effective by just being present in the community and ready to engage.

Community-Based Organization (CBO) Liaison (staff). The CBO Liaison creates and manages relationships between ONS and CBOs throughout Saint Paul. The CBO Liaison is an internal resource for life coaches, consulting on potential partnerships and resources that would benefit clients and bridging any issues in the referral process to get clients connected with CBOs. ONS has contracted partnerships with some CBOs, for which the CBO Liaison manages the administrative side, like identifying organizations to contract with, writing contracts and scopes of work, executing them, and monitoring contracts throughout the year. Recent work has included releasing a solicitation for proposals and identifying four CBOs to contract with in 2026. This position will provide technical assistance to these CBOs by working with analysts to build simple, effective tracking tools that meet both organizational needs and ONS impact requirements, walking organizations through the contracting process, providing education around insurance, and, for smaller startups, helping them find grant opportunities and write effective proposals.

Appendix D.

Details on Interview Protocols

For more details on our interview protocols with ONS staff, partners, and clients and their families, reach out to our Research Director: katie@mnjrc.org

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