

THE FUTURE OF PUBLIC SAFETY

Exploring the Power & Possibility of Newark's Reimagined Public Safety Ecosystem



This report is the product of a collaboration that centers community participatory research as well as storytelling from a wide range of community members to create a qualitative assessment of Newark's thriving but still evolving public safety ecosystem.

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MESSAGE FROM MAYOR RAS J. BARAKA

DEAR READERS,

Since taking office in 2014, reimagining public safety has been a top priority of my administration. Growing up in Newark, I understand the important role community engagement plays in our city's public safety. Having a city where law enforcement and community-based outreach and community policing organizations work together has allowed Newark's crime rate to be the lowest it has been in decades. Newark's crime was down 70% in 2020 when compared to the year 2000. I am proud of the progress our city has made, and I recognize that we still have more work to do to ensure the continued safety of our city.

Across the country, we have witnessed an increase in community distrust in law enforcement and the policing practices of some of these agencies. The increase in community distrust is why reports such as this one are important. It is crucial for us to reevaluate public safety and examine what its future looks like in today's society. Public safety can no longer be looked at through a punitive lens, it must also be looked at through a social lens. This viewpoint will allow us to address the needs of the ever-changing community. We must be innovative as we put the public back in public safety. Innovative police reform is needed to ensure that public safety is not merely reactionary but proactive in ensuring the safety of our city.

In an effort to reimagine how we achieve public safety in Newark, my administration established the Brick City Peace Collective, which provides guidance to practitioners and policymakers who seek to improve communities and effectiveness through a multi-stakeholder network. Also, the Newark Community Street Team, which includes some members who are ex-offenders, intervenes and prevents violence by brokering nonviolent resolutions to address community conflicts. Lastly, in 2020 my administration established the Mayor's Office of Violence Prevention and Trauma Recovery. The Office of Violence Prevention manages and coordinates all city anti-violence policy initiatives and programs. In Newark, we understand that community engagement is a critical role in ensuring that our city remains

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safe for all, and the Office of Violence Prevention helps to bridge the gap between law enforcement and our community.

The commonality between these organizations is their focus on community engagement and preventative measures to address the future of public safety. I hope this report will allow readers to understand that public engagement in public safety allows those involved to take ownership of the community's safety concerns. Through this ownership, Newarkers see the integral role they play in limiting and addressing violence in our city.

I am proud that Newark's efforts are being recognized and studied so that other communities can begin to implement programs similar to what we have here.



*Sincerely,
Mayor Ras J. Baraka*



City Hall, Newark

The city paid tribute to George Floyd with a statue.

Credit: Mona Cadena

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

NEWARK — A BLUEPRINT FOR SAFETY AND HEALING

There was a time not so long ago when Newark, like many other cities, was plagued with extraordinary violence, deep-seated poverty, and ailing social systems.

To look at Newark today is to see a city in resurgence, lifted by its proud, resilient people. At the heart of this evolution is a fierce hunger for safety — a safety defined by thriving neighborhoods and not just the absence of violence. Leaders across the nation, and the media, have noticed the trajectory, but the stories about Newark are almost always about one or two aspects of the work. In fact, what has happened in Newark — especially over the last eight years — is much more significant.

This report describes Newark's community-based ecosystem of public safety, identifying and engaging with

key components of its systems of support. In particular, we document how Newarkers have leveraged the power and possibility of their experience and connections, as well as those of the community at large, to break local cycles of trauma and violence through healing and reconciliation.

An ecosystem, by definition, is a complex arrangement of interdependent parts. It is also constantly evolving, changing, reacting to different conditions. That certainly feels true in the case of Newark.

An ecosystem does not just appear. Distinct roots find fertile ground. In Newark's case, a deep love of community drove residents to become activists and plant some of the first roots, like the Newark Anti-Violence Coalition (p. 32) and The HUBB (p. 44).

Mayor Ras J. Baraka brought leadership, a vision for the role healing could play, and a will to invest in the vision by instilling power in the people. And the people embraced that power, exemplified in the way the **Newark Community Street Team (NCST)** paved the path to the city's historic **Office of Violence Prevention and Trauma Recovery**. NCST organized community members, leaders, and organizations, including Equal Justice USA, to pressure city council to move \$12 million of the public safety budget to establish the agency.

We represent just two of the many organizations that share a mission to center community in the pursuit of true public safety. Each organization is advancing an element of the ecosystem that makes people safe, fosters healing, and prevents violence. The solutions to the inherent causes of violence aren't new; they have existed for years and they work.

Before the pandemic undermined the nation's social support systems, Newark had reached a historic low in murders with a 51% decrease since 2015. The city also has experienced a dramatic decline in most other forms of serious crime and violence — while avoiding the more pronounced bounce back seen around much of the country (p 18). But we are excited and driven to be in partnership with all the organizations and initiatives in this report, as well as the Newark Police Division, to strive for greater heights of public safety.

This report happened because of our shared commitment to and responsibility for community-based public safety. Between January and March of 2022, our collective group — led by researchers committed to the vision of this ecosystem — talked to community members involved in landmark campaigns and activism, nonprofit leaders, grassroots organizers, city government officials, police officers, and representatives of academic institutions. The researchers

also observed several instances of collective deliberation on public safety issues including the South Ward Public Safety Roundtable and the Newark Public Safety Collaborative. We supplemented these efforts with a group workshop in which we co-hosted a dozen community members and organizers to articulate more fully the ecosystem's strategies.

We hope this report makes it clear that Newark's public safety ecosystem is not a finished project. We think it is special — and that it could represent something of a blueprint for other cities invested in their communities and open to the idea that community members best understand the solutions to violence that threaten their collective well-being.

We firmly believe that this ecosystem, and others that develop, need attention and funding. There's no question that crime and violence have rebounded in this pandemic environment. It is frustrating to see so many leaders call for measures — primarily more police and punishment — that don't deliver safety, especially to Black and Brown communities.

But there is hope. Leaders at all levels of government are making historic investments in the strategies at the core of this community-based public safety ecosystem. They are a fraction of the amount we spend on traditional approaches to crime and violence, and there is far too much ground that lacks the roots. But there is a clear momentum. We must build on it to make community-led violence intervention more accessible and sustainable.

And we must carry on the work in Newark's ecosystem, which can grow stronger and encompass more of the community's needs. As much as this document might be a blueprint, it is also a promise to keep tending the roots of healing and repair so that Newark's ecosystem continues to grow and thrive.



Jamila Hodge
Equal Justice USA



Aqeela Sherrills
Newark Community
Street Team

Community-Based
Public Safety
Collaborative

SNAPSHOT: NEWARK'S ECOSYSTEM TODAY

SOCIAL AND CULTURAL

Collective Community Identity

Newark's residents demonstrate a fierce connection to their city. While its history is painful, Newarkers again and again identify that history as a galvanizing force inside their many paths for civic engagement. See p. 28.

Deep Love of Community

When Newark gathers, whether in protest, at a public safety roundtable, or at any of the multitude of cultural events, its people — across generations — sound off on their bond with and commitment to their city. See p. 28..

Spirit of Innovation

Newarkers have long looked within their community for solutions. This report is filled with stories from grassroots leaders who saw a need and created the vehicle that would address that need. See p. 32.

Open Channels of Communications

City officials and law enforcement leaders have engaged with community in an open, active, and sustained way to understand and act on the most pressing needs. This is best exemplified by the public safety roundtables operating in multiple wards. See p. 34.

Engagement of the Full Community

Grassroots leaders have been unflinching in putting the public in public safety. Their call has activated Newarkers across generations and led to a more comprehensive vision for what safety truly means in the community. See p. 37.

POLITICAL AND INSTITUTIONAL

Political Leadership, Vision, and Will

The 1967 uprisings mark a seminal moment in power building within the community and the strength is evident today, especially in the way Mayor Baraka leads while also empowering the community. See p. 38.

Policy Changes Responsive to Community

Official Newark leadership has validated its community engagement by enacting policies and procedures that address community needs articulated through activism and as a response to the 2016 federal consent decree. See p. 39.

NCST

High risk street intervention is just one of many ways NCST makes Newarkers safer.



COMMUNITY-LED STRATEGIES

High-Risk Street Intervention

Violence is a public health issue, and it will spread without a containment and prevention strategy. The Newark Community Street Team's credible messengers are a national model for the impact this work must have. See p. 41.

Bridge Building: Community and Police

Police cannot deliver public safety on their own. To collaborate with community, they need to reckon with the trauma police brutality and oppression inflict on the community and work to overcome it. See p. 42.

Healing-Centered Programs/Youth Development

Healing trauma to rebuild lives is essential to breaking the cycle of violence and harm. Newark was one of the first cities to make the healing of trauma a foundation of the way it addresses violence. See p. 44.

Community-Led Coordinating Body

The diversification of approaches to public safety requires vigorous community leadership and participation. The roundtable format has proven to be an exceptional channel for receiving and acting on the community's needs. See p. 44.

SYSTEMS-LED STRATEGIES

Coordinating Body/Budgetary Support

The many elements of an ecosystem require planning and alignment at a high level. Mayor Baraka established that capacity with a historic investment in the city's first Office of Violence Prevention and Trauma Recovery. See p. 46.

City and State Grant Programs

Community-led public safety initiatives are under-resourced almost universally, despite their positive impact. New Jersey and Newark are leading the way financially in recognizing the power of community-based violence prevention. See p. 47.

INTRODUCTION

SHARED BEGINNINGS

*“I am Newark and Newark is me, all right?
I am my people, and my people are me.”*

— Tyreek Rolon, organizer

Tyreek Rolon is one of Newark’s sons. His sense of belonging transcends the usual awareness of people and places that only locals can navigate with ease and confidence. Tyreek was a key part of his community long before he had a chance to explore his broader ambitions of leadership and advocacy. Tyreek’s story of early struggle and awakening has a great deal in common with the narratives of other Black organizers and families across the country: people hurting, making mistakes, and ultimately getting arrested and sent to prison because of these mistakes. Tyreek came to realize that his role in the neighborhood was meant to be so much more than a collection of wrong turns and missed chances. Before he made a mistake that sent him to prison, he earned a sports scholarship and a university degree. While in prison, he felt that he was treated differently because of his academic credentials. He was considered “redeemable.” So, he wondered, “Why can’t everybody be seen the same?”

Tyreek’s lament echoes the sobering statistics that highlight the role of the criminal legal system in producing and amplifying racial inequality: **Across the U.S., African-American males are six times more likely to be incarcerated than white males, and 2.5 times more likely than Latinos.** Patterns for women are similar.¹ In New Jersey, Black residents are more than three times as likely as white residents to be

charged with marijuana possession despite similar rates of consumption.²

After his incarceration, Tyreek began a journey to make Newark a redemptive space for everyone. And he has delivered plenty on that promise, although, as he is quick to note, the job is far from done. Tyreek is now a project manager for Newark’s sanitation services, and he serves as an academic counselor and advisor in Northern State Prison with the Rutgers NJ-STEP program.

Tyreek’s story is also the story of Newark, of all of its daughters and sons, sisters and brothers, walking and working together to awaken their collective soul, their common cause.

Local community mobilizations are nothing new, and the legacy of the 1960s uprisings is both a source of pride and a challenge to preconceived notions of purpose and process. Nowadays people in Newark are asking crucial questions about the future of the city: Where is the “public” in public safety? How can we prevent crime and violence beyond policing? How can we stay safe from crime while also being safe from the police? The texture of Newark’s culture of empowerment and resistance to injustice has built resilient communities that blend memory with fresh ideas and new

compromises. Newark's spirit is more colorful than the burgundy shades of its bricks.

This report describes Newark's community-based ecosystem of public safety, identifying and engaging with key components of its systems of support. In particular, we document how Newarkers have leveraged the power and possibility of their personal stories and connections, as well as those of the community at large, to break local cycles of trauma and violence from a perspective of healing and reconciliation.

Newark offers the country an innovative landscape showing that a community-based approach to public safety is not only possible, but also proven. To tell this story requires acknowledging the relative effectiveness and limitations of past practice and documenting lessons learned as well as milestones that prompted the city to emerge as a model for community-based violence prevention.

To ground this perspective, we draw on 30 semi-structured interviews conducted between January and March of 2022. We engaged a plurality of local actors, including community members involved in landmark campaigns and activism, nonprofit leaders, grassroots organizers, city government officials, police officers, and representatives of academic institutions.

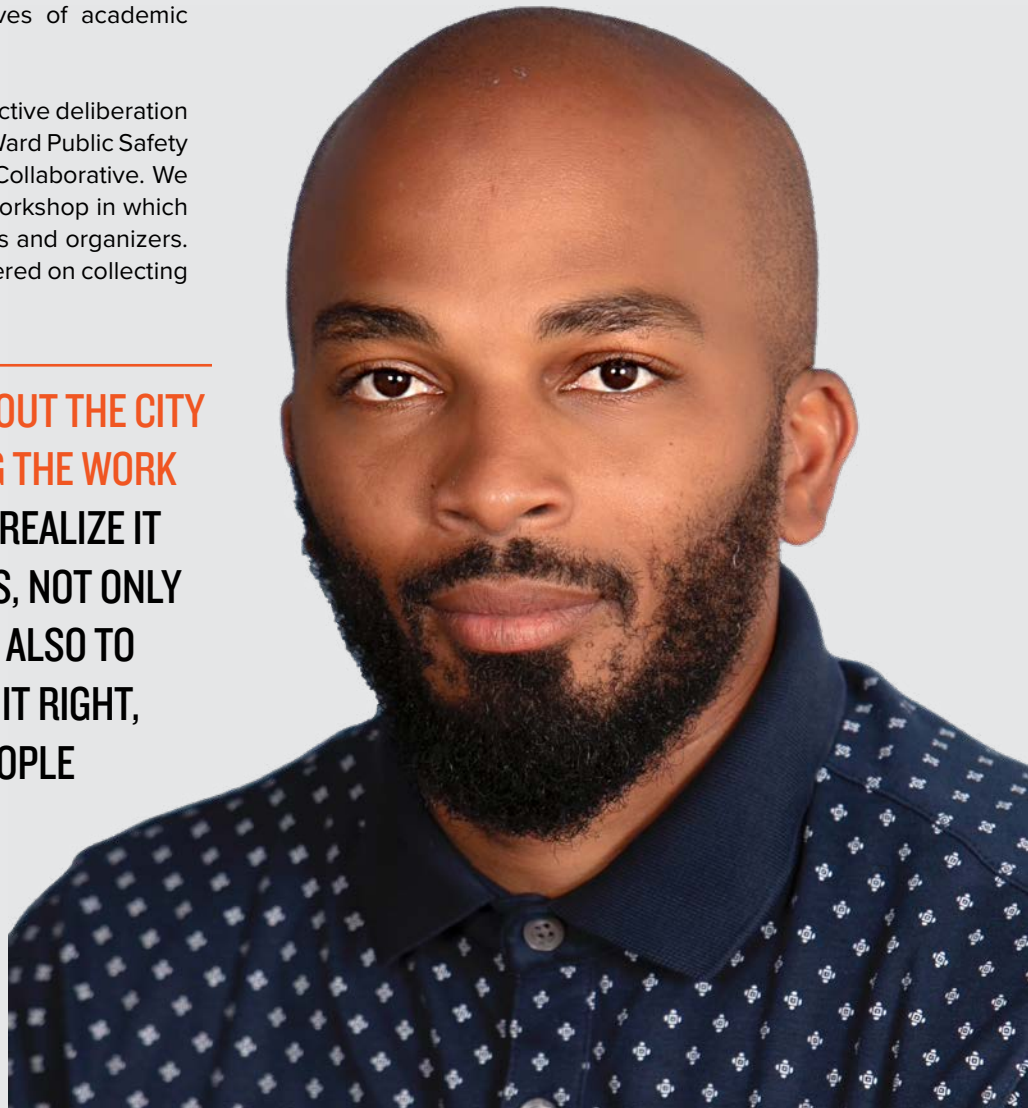
We also observed several instances of collective deliberation on public safety issues including the South Ward Public Safety Roundtable and the Newark Public Safety Collaborative. We supplemented these efforts with a group workshop in which we co-hosted a dozen community members and organizers. Unlike more conventional approaches centered on collecting

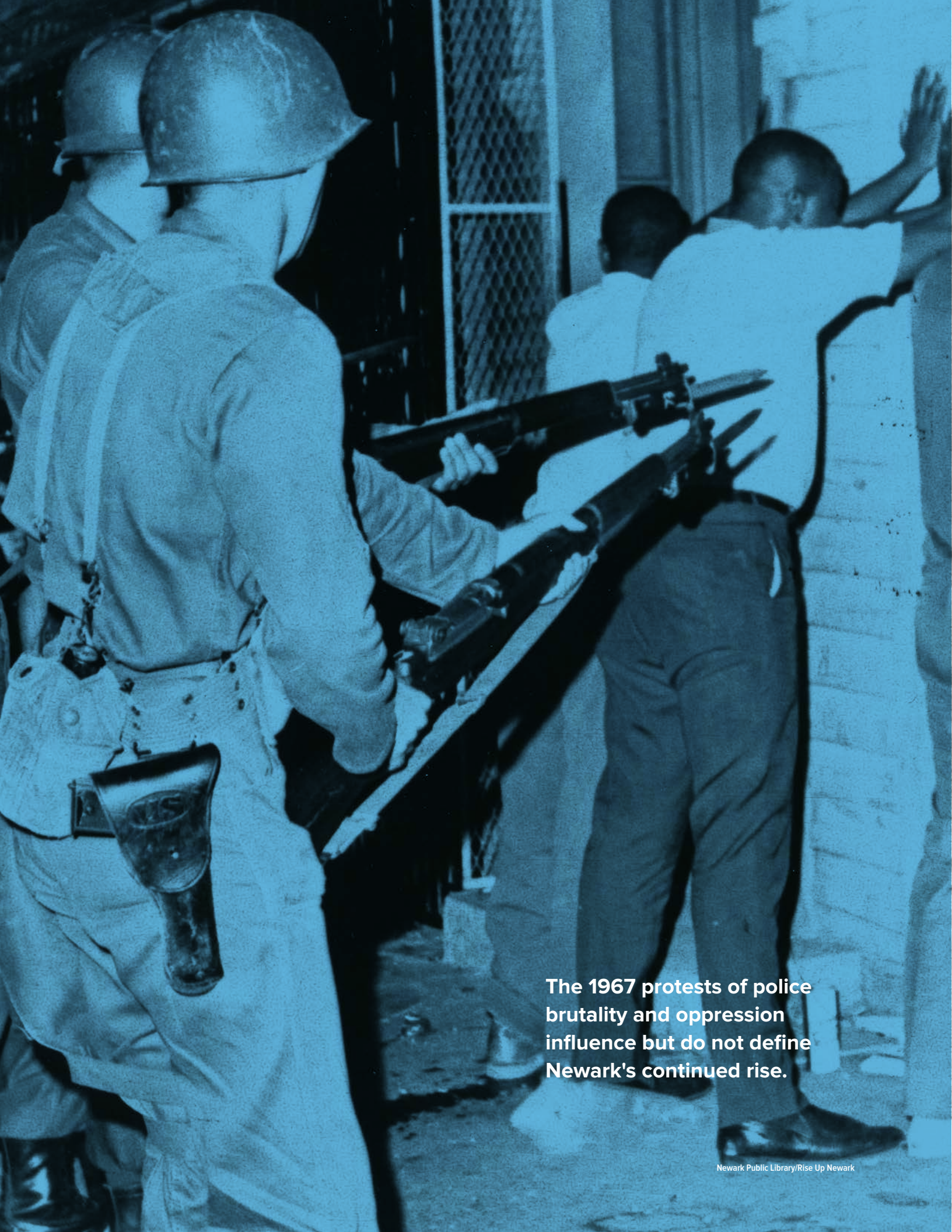
data and confirming a set of propositions via a "focus group," we conceived this space more as a way to celebrate local knowledge and to articulate the various strategies of resistance that people and organizations in Newark have been carrying out for a long time. This perspective draws on grounded strategies for storytelling and leadership training emerging from African and Latin American diasporas — many of which are inspired in the South African struggle for liberation.

With this framework in mind, we sought to recreate an open, multi-generational space centered in both remembrance and action: This involved the sharing of memories of trauma and resilience as well as other moments of local triumph or pride contextualized in the time and space of the city of Newark. These reflections anchored broader reflections about the importance of re-centering public safety from the ground up.

We also draw on published peer-reviewed research and other studies produced by nonprofit organizations and government institutions, as well as publicly available data from the city of Newark, the Newark Police Division (NPD), and the U.S. Bureau of the Census, among others.

"ONE OF THE THINGS I LOVE ABOUT THE CITY IS MY PEOPLE. I'VE BEEN DOING THE WORK MY WHOLE LIFE. I JUST DIDN'T REALIZE IT UNTIL I BEGAN TO HAVE ACCESS, NOT ONLY TO ADEQUATE EDUCATION, BUT ALSO TO BE MATURE AND UNDERSTAND IT RIGHT, AND THEN REALIZING WHAT PEOPLE WHO LOOK LIKE ME HAVE BEEN THROUGH." — *Tyreek Rolon*





The 1967 protests of police brutality and oppression influence but do not define Newark's continued rise.

True: Newark is a city harmed by both neglect and abuse. Broken windows shattered all types of community-based bonds even before they were considered the cornerstone of new policing tactics in the 1990s. Experts argued that if police targeted small-time “quality of life” violations — loitering, graffiti — they would prevent big-time crimes like robbery or murder.³ But this and other related law enforcement models of order-maintenance not only did not reduce crime⁴, but more critically, they failed to engage residents in a meaningful conversation about the collective nature of safety (a “co-production” model). Instead, they demanded individual compliance, cooperation, and cooptation.

This approach has proven to be insufficient. **Jami Hodge**, a former federal prosecutor who now leads Equal Justice USA (EJUSA), puts it clearly:

“When it comes to crime, we have always prioritized punishment over prevention. We continually invest in policing where the priority is to investigate and arrest so that the system can punish, rather than investing in solutions that address the drivers of crime — poverty, mental illness, and substance use disorder. This obsession with punishment, which primarily targets and harms Black and Brown communities, has to be addressed while we build up the infrastructure and resources for the solutions that actually prevent harm.”

Some years back, Jami sensed a growing frustration after noticing systematic patterns of harm that were produced and amplified by institutions in charge of delivering safety and justice. She said, “As a former prosecutor I saw too many cases where the system failed to even acknowledge the underlying cause of the crime. Instead the only response was to punish the person, making it even harder for them to get a job or access resources, often creating a vicious cycle of harm and system involvement.” Like in many of the stories we collected for this report, Jami’s personal reflections led to a professional breakthrough and, eventually, to a renewed commitment to systems change. That led her to EJUSA, a national organization building alternative approaches to violence that heal rather than harm.

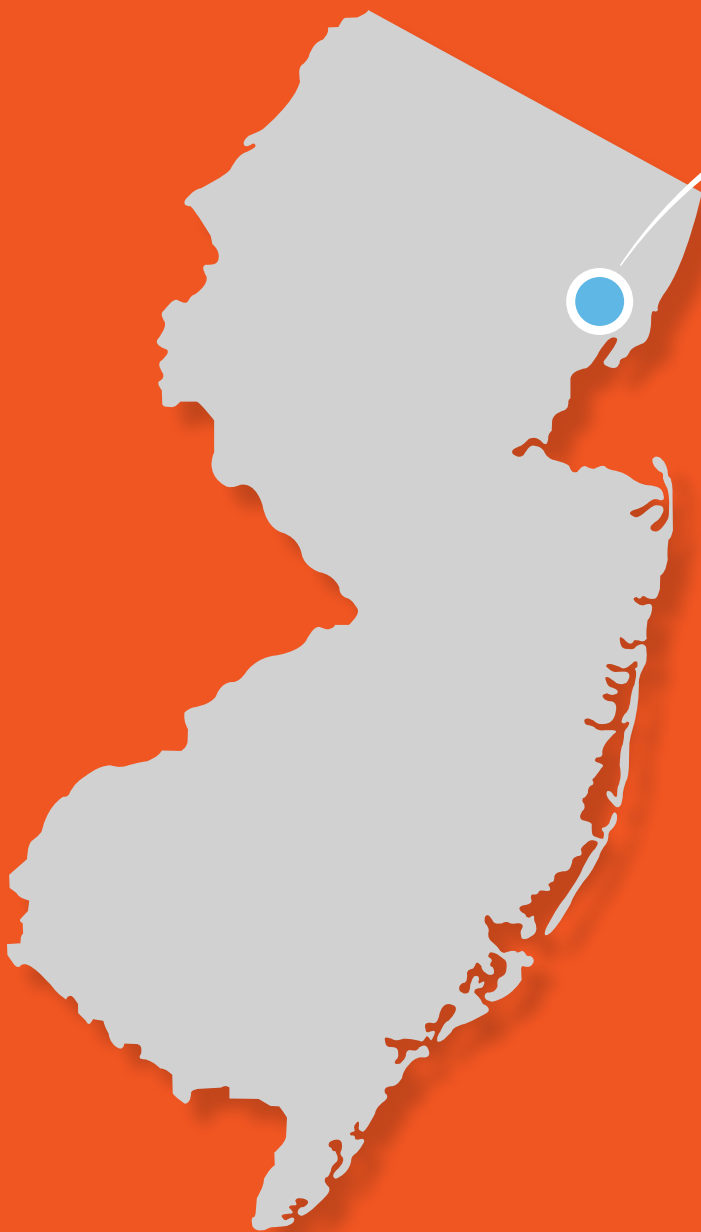
In its own way, the city of Newark has gone through a similar transformation. The arc of reported crimes going up and down — from 90 homicides in 2010 to as high as 112 in 2013 and as low as 51 in 2019 — and other forms of violence, including police violence⁵, has galvanized local community efforts to reclaim a leadership role for residents and advocates.

“WHEN IT COMES TO CRIME, WE HAVE ALWAYS PRIORITIZED PUNISHMENT OVER PREVENTION. WE CONTINUALLY INVEST IN POLICING WHERE THE PRIORITY IS TO INVESTIGATE AND ARREST SO THAT THE SYSTEM CAN PUNISH, RATHER THAN INVESTING IN SOLUTIONS THAT ADDRESS THE DRIVERS OF CRIME — POVERTY, MENTAL ILLNESS, AND SUBSTANCE USE DISORDER.

THIS OBSESSION WITH PUNISHMENT, WHICH PRIMARILY TARGETS AND HARMS BLACK AND BROWN COMMUNITIES, HAS TO BE ADDRESSED WHILE WE BUILD UP THE INFRASTRUCTURE AND RESOURCES FOR THE SOLUTIONS THAT ACTUALLY PREVENT HARM.” — Jami Hodge

But amid this kinetic energy, it is crucial to acknowledge that the people of Newark have experienced a trauma that is chronic and historic.⁶ A sense of collective abandonment haunted the city after the depopulation — “white flight” — that began in the late 1950s and accelerated in the 1960s. Another signpost: the unquestionable moment of collective grief in the summer of 1967, when white police officers stopped a Black taxi driver, John Smith, allegedly for tailgating and speeding. They beat and then arrested Mr. Smith in a familiar picture of bias and arbitrariness. People living in Hayes Homes observed the scene from across the street. The news spread quickly, awakening an enraged city that was already coping with a host of structural issues: racism, unemployment, discrimination, political disenfranchisement and voter suppression, deteriorated housing, poor health conditions, and precarious schooling conditions.⁷

Newark, as walked by its people, is a healing city.



311,549

2020 Census Population

\$39,445

Median household income

\$229 M

Public Safety Budget, 2020-21
(includes OVP)

WHO ARE NEWARKERS

49.5%

Black or African American

36.7%

Hispanic or Latino

49.5%

people age 5+ speak
language other than
English at home

24.4%

under age 18



1967

Newark community rises up after an incident of police brutality. Six days of protest left 26 dead and many more injured after oppressive police tactics

1970

Kenneth Gibson elected Mayor

1986

Sharpe James elected Mayor

2002

Amistad Bill (A1301) became law, a call on New Jersey schools to incorporate African American history into the curriculum

2006

Essex County Antiviolence Coalition established

Cory Booker elected Mayor

2009

Newark Anti-Violence Coalition established

2011

Newark Community Solutions established

2014

Ras J. Baraka elected Mayor

Civil Rights Division of the Department of Justice and U.S. Attorney's Office for the District of NJ release report on the investigation of the Newark Police Div.

Newark Community Street Team established

2015

West Ward Victims Outreach Services and Crime Reduction Initiative established

2016

The Public Safety Round Table established

EJUSA launched Trauma to Trust

Federal consent decree officially implemented

2017

Shani Baraka Women's Resource Center established

University Hospital violence intervention program established

2019

Brick City Peace Collective established

2020

National uprisings after the murder of George Floyd

No police shootings in Newark

Governor Murphy signed S3309 to establish the Violence Intervention Program (NJVIP) to fund violence intervention efforts

2021

Office of Violence Prevention and Trauma Recovery established

AG Bruck announces \$10 million for NJVIP fund included in 2022 state budget

That summer, people took to the streets to air their grievances. They marched against police mistreatment and to denounce a separate-and-unequal regime that kept them trapped and isolated from each other and from the golden years of American prosperity. They reacted to political power structures that excluded them, denouncing economic disadvantage, educational precarity, and the absence of government action.

The police response was brutal: During six days of protests, 26 people were killed, and many community members were injured, most of them Black. Some historical and media portrayals of this episode describe crossfire and police destruction of social hubs in the Black community.

However, what some called a rageful summer⁸, others, like poet Jasmine Mans, consider a moment that triggered Newark's *ravishing*.⁹ This frame, unlike others depicting acts of rebellion, is one way the artists and people of Newark reclaim the strength of their ancestors' struggle. The heart of the community stayed put, organized, and built a story of resilience transmitted by artists, advocates, and grassroots organizations.

Newark, as walked by its people, is a healing city.

A different kind of chapter bookends Newark's recent history. Amid the heartbreak and uproar following the murder of George Floyd at the hands of a Minneapolis Police Department officer, the voice and ideas of the ravishing city gained renewed visibility. In the summer of 2020, Newark's outrage did not unfold in fire or blood. Instead, Newark Mayor Ras J. Baraka united with longtime activist Larry Hamm and led about 12,000 people on a march to give an outlet to the community's outrage over police violence and abuse.

The sorrow of the new and the old killings did not turn into destructive anger like in 1967. Instead, residents, choked with emotion but full of power and possibility, came together in multigenerational and collective mourning. Their main march was "escorted" by the NPD, not contained, suppressed, or sabotaged. Mayor Baraka joined the people's pace at the front.¹⁰ Even though traces of rage seemed to emerge when some demonstrators attempted to attack the same police precinct where detainees of the 1967 protests were kept, officers did not intervene, and community residents and organizers took it upon themselves to de-escalate. This moment led to other peaceful demonstrations across the city.¹¹

What happened between 1967 and 2020? How did change unfold? What does this seemingly local story say more generally about communities and violence?

This report documents the tale of a particular city marked by exchanges among communities, and between communities and government, that have grown despite forces within and beyond that tried to make it impossible. Far from being hampered by a violent past, these ongoing conversations are galvanized by prior efforts signaling ravishing resistance and organizational strength. This is the tale of Newark, a city that is still learning about its past, still hurting, but able to open a dialogue and share a story of hard work and innovation to reimagine public safety. Here, we share some encouraging lessons for those tempted but undecided to re-center the people in the pursuit of true public safety.

This report documents the tale of a city where the community has leveraged a past marked by trauma and exclusion to galvanize a new push to center local concerns and resources in ongoing debates about crime, safety, and urban development. As this report shows, many of these efforts have been taking place outside of government for years. However, in the past seven years, there has been an opening for more honest, fluid conversations involving city officials and community.

Far from being hampered by a violent past, these ongoing conversations take inspiration from that experience, signaling a ravishing resistance and organizational strength. This is the tale of Newark, a city still learning from the past, still hurting, but able to scale up its collective dialogue and action. While this process has unfolded differently across areas and problems, public safety remains a cornerstone in most of these conversations, underscoring aspirations of inclusion, peace, and sustainability.

In this document we describe how these aspirations were built from the ground up and how a community-driven ecosystem for public safety has amplified their reach and significance. By telling this story we want to honor the work done. We also aspire to push activists and city leaders across the country to recast a vision of themselves and of their communities that is honest and inclusive, but above all, one that centers community in the framing and operationalization of public safety.



DIMENSIONS OF TRAUMA

“I’m tapping into my own divine feminine energy of understanding that I am a natural nurturer which adds significant value when addressing violence and trauma in my community. Bringing this healing into this work is a huge component to my method in preventing violent conflict and providing trauma-informed care. This is impacting my work with the Brick City Peace Collective and helping to build stronger collaboration between our community and law enforcement.” — Dawn Haynes, organizer

The history of Newark would not be the same without local leaders and communities working to confront violence and inequality. Most forms of official, reported violence have declined since the 1960s, including homicide and aggravated assault. Yet the local landscape is still challenging, the source of countless stories of resilience and transformation. Perseverance and innovation weave the people to their neighborhoods and to the fate of the city.

In this way, the story of Brick City Peace Collective (BCPC) is central to illustrating how local organizing efforts can be linked with city initiatives across various policy domains. BCPC is an initiative of Mayor Baraka focused on de-escalating conflicts before they turn violent by mobilizing resources across government and community. BCPC also strengthens local

leadership and organizations, and coordinates advocacy in various policy domains.

In our interview with **Dawn Haynes**, manager at BCPC and president of the Newark Board of Education, she shared with us the host of specific problems confronted by the impoverished areas of the city and how these related to crime and harm in her community. She framed these and other current challenges as a reflection of a still-painful past:

“How do you talk someone into peace when the system has failed them and there is distrust in those that are supposed to police them? Right? How do you help organize people that have been traumatized in that way?”

In her personal and professional capacity, Dawn's experience and transformative thinking suggest a clear roadmap: The pathway to overcoming violence starts by understanding how people are "stuck with trauma" and addressing the forms of repetitive harm that create individual and collective suffering.

Make no mistake: The trauma that Dawn describes is everywhere, especially in Black and Brown communities that have been over-policed, over-incarcerated, and subjected to all manners of violence and abuse. Individual trauma is the result of experiences of heightened fear, violence, loss, neglect, and more structural challenges, such as poverty and discrimination.¹² Trauma may actually release chemicals in our bodies that can rewire the brain. This type of stress is very toxic.¹³

Many of these experiences are multigenerational. Trauma is passed down through social, community-level, and familial narratives of the past. It impacts an individual's understanding of their own victimization. Complex trauma is the

result of multiple sources of traumatic experiences that accumulate over time. Unhealed trauma can be a major obstacle to a person's — and a community's — well-being.

THE SHAPES OF HARM

Interpersonal trauma

Violence is personal. The World Health Organization defines it as the use of intentional physical force and/or power (as threat or actual) against oneself, another person, or against a group or community. A violent action may result in injury, death, psychological impact, deprivation, maldevelopment; overall, in any form of harm.¹⁴

This framework has helped local as well as national governments throughout the world to address violence as a public health issue: Violence erodes physical as well as mental health, and it adds pressure to service providers as well as community members and organizations

**VIOLENCE HARMS
ENTIRE COMMUNITIES
ENMESHED IN CYCLES
OF PAIN, BLAME, AND
SHAME...THE TRAUMA
RESULTING FROM
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INVISIBLE.**



Dawn Haynes

Manager at BCPC and president
of the Newark Board of Education

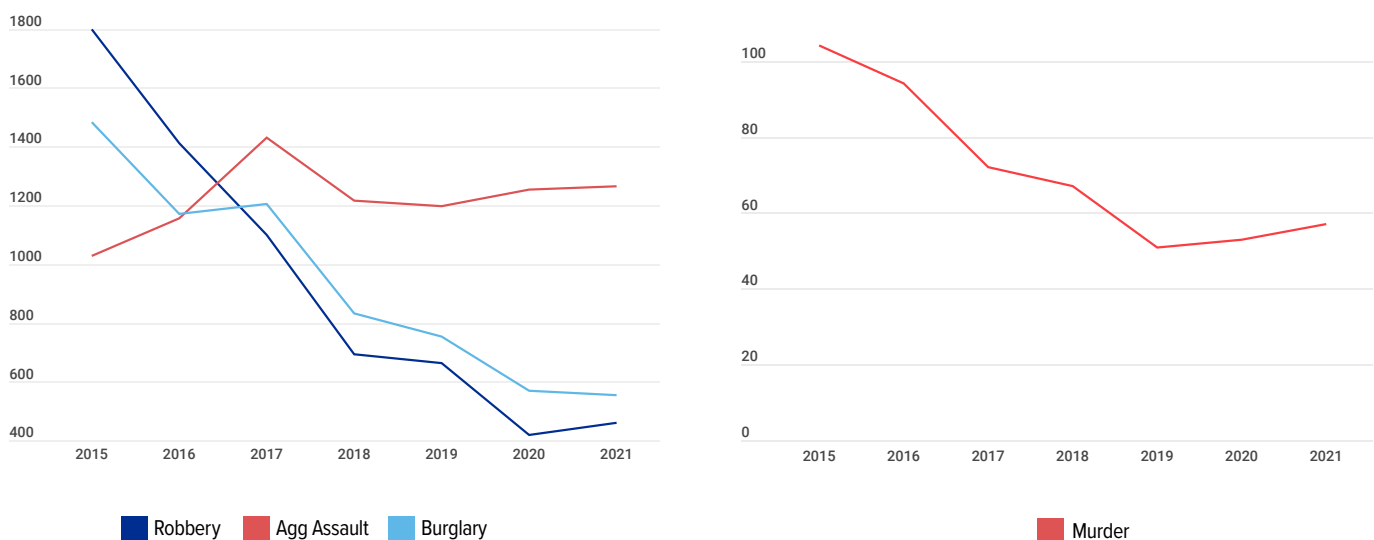
that promote social support. More importantly, violence harms entire communities enmeshed in cycles of pain, blame, and shame. While public health models vary, most interventions agree that public action and investment should be oriented toward identifying, managing, and preventing harm.

The trauma resulting from violence can be long-lasting yet invisible. In Newark, however, residents and organizers know that dimensions of interpersonal violence are tied to structural issues. As Dawn puts it, every violent action brings a personal burden of harm suffered and done to others. If individuals do not have the resources to begin a process of healing and address their trauma, their actions will contribute to the continuation of cycles of harm. If this is not acknowledged, violent actions will continue unabated.

Variations of community violence have been a major obstacle to the well-being of Newark residents. Interpersonal violence and other forms of trauma at the community level confirm the need to recognize its varying dimensions, legacy, and opportunity for action. And while aggregate figures tell only part of the story, that story guides official discourse and grounds many policies (see Figure 1):

- During 2021, 57 lives were lost to homicide, up from 53 registered in 2020.¹⁵
- Recorded homicides have decreased by more than 50 percent since 1990. This trend accelerated in the mid 2010s: In 2019, for instance, the city recorded 51 fatalities, down from 94 in 2016 and 72 in 2017.
- Relative to the past three years, NPD records show that other major crimes like robbery and burglary decreased in the same manner as homicides. However, other crimes such as aggravated assault have gone up during the same period.
- In 2021, 294 people were directly impacted by non-fatal shootings across 221 incidents. The NPD reported 391 arrests in 2021 for offenses involving guns, leading to the recovery of 543 guns – 10 percent more than in 2020.
- During 2020, the members of the Domestic Violence Unit of the Essex County prosecutor's office processed

FIGURE 1. NUMBER OF REPORTED CRIMES BY NPD, 2015-2021



3,221 domestic violence cases.¹⁶ In 2020, the Child Abuse Unit received 804 referrals for investigation. These numbers reflect an increase in the workload of the DV unit relative to earlier years (2019: DV 2,847; 2018: 2,704). In the case of Child Abuse referrals, however, we notice the opposite trend, with referrals going down, not up (2019: 1,177; 2018: 1,128) We argue that this situation reflects, at least in part, the economic strains affecting households associated with job loss and other similar hardships experienced during the pandemic.

- In 2021, 405 reports of domestic violence incidents recorded as aggravated assaults were registered in Newark.¹⁷

As shown in Figure 1, over the past six years, Newark experienced a dramatic decline in most forms of serious crime and violence. This trend is part of a broader downward trend in recorded offenses and victimization rates observed in many cities in the United States since the early- to mid-1990s. And while in the past couple of years, during the pandemic, the prevalence of some crimes has gone up across the country, these increases are less pronounced in Newark than in many other cities.

It is relevant to notice that aggravated assault cases did not show as steep of a decrease as other serious crimes (Fig 1). This could be reflective of intra-family conflicts and other types of violent incidents involving acquaintances that may be less likely to be identified/prevented through interventions that tend to focus on street-level dynamics.

Institutional trauma

Interpersonal and community manifestations of violence must be examined alongside an assessment of the NPD responses to these forms of harm. In recent years, these responses have attracted heightened scrutiny. As noted by organizers, a critical pathway that elevated the local conversation about crime and crime control was the early work by the ACLU-NJ that culminated in the launching of a formal investigation by the U.S. Department of Justice to examine patterns of police abusive behavior.¹⁸

The ACLU-NJ filed a formal petition in 2010, detailing over 400 allegations of NPD misconduct, violence, and civil rights violations. In 2011, DOJ investigators began to

compile information on NPD patterns of practice and related procedures. This work provided the evidence for a DOJ “findings” letter released in 2014. In this document, the Justice Department found that practices such as stop and frisk violated constitutional provisions, that recorded uses of force were excessive, and that there were “deficiencies in the NPD’s systems that are designed to prevent and detect misconduct.”¹⁹ Critically, these issues disproportionately affected Black residents as targets of illegal stops, theft, corruption, and harassment at the hands of the NPD.

The report, along with sustained demand for change and transparency coming from a broad coalition of community organization, resulted in the signing of a federal consent decree²⁰ that established a series of explicit mechanisms for oversight, transparency, and accountability. Further considerations about this reforms process are included in the section of this report titled Policy Change Responsive to Community (p. 39).

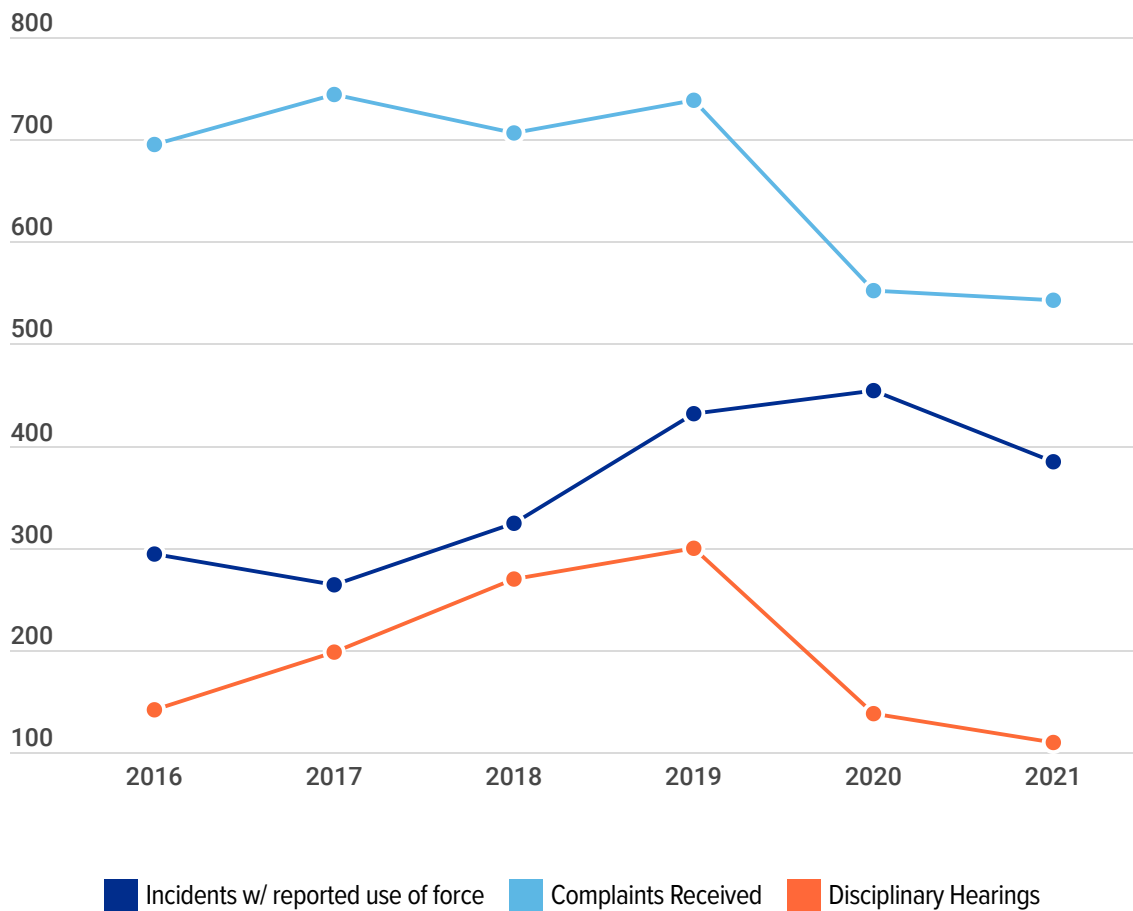
Several reports tracking the implementation of NPD reforms tied to the consent decree show some critical wins, including the signing of new policies around stops, new training initiatives, and new systems to record and adjudicate allegations of misconduct. According to a recent news report quoting Newark Public Safety Director Brian O’Hara “Police brutality lawsuits and taxpayer-funded settlements are down 90% in the most recent four-year period when compared to the four years prior to the consent decree.”²¹

A recent study analyzed trends in stops or field inquiries recorded by NPD in light of the initial findings that triggered the consent decree. The study concludes that after the decree was implemented, NPD improved the quality of data collection and promoted key policies linked to institutional accountability. However, the geographic concentration of reported stops and connected arrests of Black and Latinx individuals did not change as much before and during the oversight period. The report suggests that a culture change within the NPD is in the making but that it requires a longer time frame to manifest.²²

There are other, more visible signs of progress:

- In 2020, there were no police-involved shootings, down from an average of about four per year in the 2000s. On January 1, 2021, however, the death of Carl Dorsey quashed the possibility of a continued record of zero deaths by fatal use of force by NPD.²³
- In 2021, NPD reported 384 incidents involving allegations of excessive use of force linked to 924 police officers. In these incidents, 48 civilians were injured, and 175 were treated at a hospital. 25 officers also required hospital attention.²⁴ These numbers are down from 2019 and 2020.
- Since 2018, there has been a decrease in the number of complaints received and hearings opened against NPD officers, from 369 to 234 in 2021.
- The number of community walks continues to increase over time (215 in 2021, up from 89 in 2020).²⁵ These are spaces where community leaders and activists — sometimes joined by law enforcement — meet with neighbors to address complaints and concerns while promoting specific efforts to prevent crime from happening. For instance, advising neighbors to refrain from leaving their vehicles running and unattended to decrease auto theft patterns.²⁶

FIGURE 2. TRENDS IN USE OF FORCE/DISCIPLINE BY THE NPD, 2016-2021



- Most people linked to reports of suspicious action in 2021 were Black (319) — a pattern that has not changed much since 2016. Most of the reasons cited by police officers²⁷ when reporting force include resisting to officer control, physical threats, and attacks.
- The transparency data fostered by consent decree show that during 2020, 270 external complaints against police officers were received. The number decreased in 2021 to 215 filed complaints of this type. During both years, 33 cases were administratively closed. 152 exonerations were declared, and 352 complaints were sustained.²⁸ The number of internal complaints follows a more inconsistent pattern going down from 380 to 281 between 2019 and 2020 and then up again in 2021 (309). Figure 2 below shows the evolution in other benchmarks in use of force/discipline as reported by the NPD.

Structural trauma

For Newarkers, structural violence is another key dimension to include in the landscape of collective trauma. This form of violence relates to economic and social disadvantages experienced by communities of color and their lack of access to resources. And for this, much more than police accountability is needed: Economic structures are nearly impossible to navigate for some and very slippery for most.

As **Zayid Muhammad**, longtime activist and current EJUSA strategist for Newark, puts it, “Economic and social institutions are not at all friendly to Black and Brown communities.” Drawing on his experience as gun violence survivor, he expands on how the local brand of exclusion is marked by racial inequality and how this needs to be corrected:

“Just after I got shot I was told, ‘Why don’t you go to see if you can get some help with your rent since you got knocked out of work and are in a bad spot.’ So I went back to the hospital, to this entity that is supposed to be able to help you, to see about this. I’m on crutches and barely walking, and the the attitude, the bureaucratic attitude that I got was as if I was a criminal, you know. It was really an angering and humiliating kind of experience. And even after I put in the paperwork, I didn’t get any help. And it was during those years, shortly after, that I learned about this anti-Black and Brown bias at victims compensation, and that many folks who apply for that support will almost automatically get denied just because those folks managing those resources didn’t think our community deserved them.”

– Zayid Muhammad

“...I’M ON CRUTCHES AND BARELY WALKING, AND THE ATTITUDE, THE BUREAUCRATIC ATTITUDE THAT I GOT WAS AS IF I WAS A CRIMINAL, YOU KNOW. IT WAS REALLY AN ANGERING AND HUMILIATING KIND OF EXPERIENCE. AND EVEN AFTER I PUT IN THE PAPERWORK, I DIDN’T GET ANY HELP.

...I LEARNED ABOUT THIS ANTI-BLACK AND BROWN BIAS AT VICTIMS COMPENSATION, AND THAT MANY FOLKS WHO APPLY FOR THAT SUPPORT WILL ALMOST AUTOMATICALLY GET DENIED JUST BECAUSE THOSE FOLKS MANAGING THOSE RESOURCES DIDN’T THINK OUR COMMUNITY DESERVED THEM.” — Zayid Muhammad

The kind of bias Zayid points to creates detrimental structures through which communities of color experience the intersections of power, privilege, and unequal access in realms ranging from housing to education, to health, safety, and recreation. The racial dimensions of these factors remain embedded in relevant trends in U.S. census data. As the 2020 data shows, 75% of Newarkers have a high school degree, an increase of almost 10% since 2010. However, access to higher education has stagnated at about 15% over that same period. This signals a persistent lack of access to advanced education — one of several structural problems referenced by Zayid.



Solomon Middleton Williams

is the Deputy Director for Newark
Community Street Team.



“TO GIVE YOU SOME INSIGHT ABOUT THE NEIGHBORHOOD I LIVE IN: PREDOMINANTLY POOR BLACK SINGLE MOMS, GRANDMOTHERS WHO HAD YOUNG MEN IN THEIR HOMES WHO ARE IN TROUBLE WITH THE JUVENILE JUSTICE SYSTEM AND/OR THE ADULT PRISON SYSTEM. AGAIN, WE CAN LOOK AT THAT AND WE CAN SAY, ‘HEY! THAT WAS A RESULT OF OVER-ARREST AND OVER-INCARCERATION.’ THAT REALLY HAS DIVIDED FAMILIES.

— *Solomon Middleton Williams*

In a related sense, property ownership is another aspect that relates to structures of equality and inequality. The rate of owner-occupied houses in Newark is 22%, a proportion that is low for the state. The percentage of residents living in poverty is much higher, at 28%. In fact, in 2020, the median household income in Newark was \$35,199, a relevant decrease in comparison to 2010, when it was \$40,235. The current U.S. national median household income calculated in 2020 is \$67,521.²⁹

These divisions become more challenging when seeing the racial divide. In New Jersey specifically, the median household wealth of white families is \$352,000, compared with \$6,100 for Black families.³⁰ This is a great paradox, as this is one of the country’s highest income states, yet one in five households has incomes of less than \$35,000.³¹

Solomon Middleton Williams runs development strategies at the Newark Community Street Team, a leading organization in the city’s public safety ecosystem that, among other things, uses a public health approach to violence by resolving disputes toward peaceful outcomes. He thinks

the local numbers on income and wealth should be better considering the privileged location of the city in the region, its infrastructure, and the possibilities that these offer to provide community members with employment and a higher standard of living. Solomon, born and raised in Newark, recalled his upbringing marked by the lack of options for the most vulnerable:

“To give you some insight about the neighborhood I live in: predominantly poor Black single moms, grandmothers who had young men in their homes who are in trouble with the juvenile justice system and/or the adult prison system. Again, we can look at that and we can say, ‘Hey! That was a result of over-arrest and over-incarceration.’ That really has divided families.

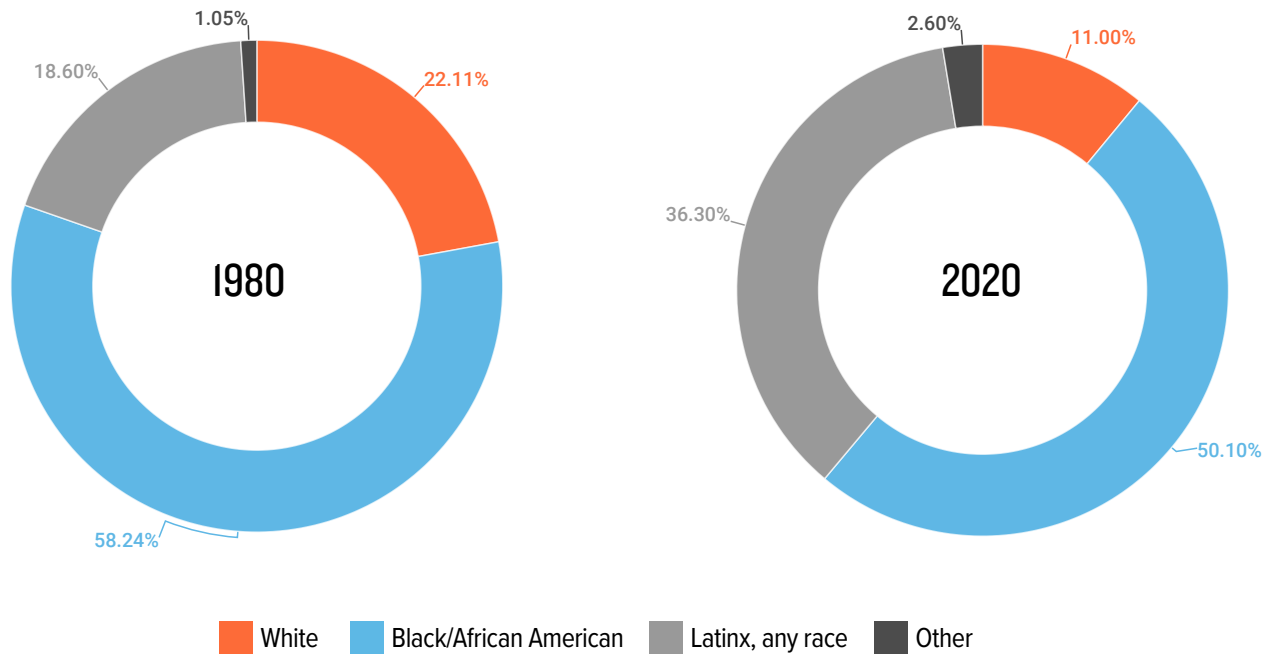
I think about what was possible, Frelinghuysen Avenue itself, lined with factories. Right across the street from where the Seth Boyden houses used to be is the Newark Airport, one of the biggest airports in the country, the NY/NJ Port Authority, the third biggest shipping port in America. This screams generational opportunities that will lead to generational wealth. But there were almost zero employment opportunities for people who lived there.”

— *Solomon Middleton Williams*

The testimonies of structural abandonment and diminished or nonexistent opportunities are relatable, but so are emerging narratives of hope. Despite the shared vulnerabilities, potential and dynamic forces are driving the city. The same census data speak to the remarkable progress in other dimensions of the development of the city. For example, the number of people living in Newark grew after three decades of stagnation, reaching 311,549 in 2020.³² Half of Newark’s population is African American—a pattern that has not changed in the last five decades. Simultaneously, there is a remarkable increase in the proportion of Latinx residents, from 26% in 1980 to 36% in 2020. Currently, about 32% of Newark’s population come from other countries, and 48% speak a language other than English at home.³³ These numbers demonstrate the growing diversity of a city still reinventing itself amid the forms of harm that have slowed its growth.

In Newark, the public safety space shaped by long-term community activism is taking on new forms: On the one hand, the heightened scrutiny of the NPD from the consent decree created a path for the institutionalization of practices linked

FIGURE 3. NEWARK'S TOTAL POPULATION BY RACE/ETHNICITY, 1980-2020



to transparency, integrity, and the re-centering of community relations in a revised model of law enforcement. On the other hand, the creation of an ecosystem of local organizations and government offices has strengthened tasks of coordination and communication. Based on this common language, a new model of violence reduction has begun to take shape in the form of initiatives such as Trauma to Trust and the Office for Violence Prevention within the city government, as well as platforms for communication and accountability, including the Public Safety Roundtable.

This document tells the story of this model in theory and practice, as well the challenges and opportunities for the future of the ecosystem.



MORE THAN
100
 PUBLIC SAFETY
 ROUNDTABLES
 SINCE
2016

MURAL:
 "Magnitude and Bond," a mural by A Womb in Violet with artists Layqa Nuna Yawar
 and Kelly Prevard for Four Corners Public Arts. Halsey St, Downtown Newark.

A WOMAN OF VIOLET
CLAYD HUNTER
CHIEF OF POLICE
2019

COME CELEBRATE WITH ME

THAT EVERYDAY SOMETHING HAS TRIED TO KILL ME

AND HAS FAILED.

SKYLINE PLAZA CORP.
180-1ST WILSON ST.
HOURS:
MON-SAT 9AM-7PM
SUNDAY 10AM-5PM
RATES
UP TO 1-HR PER DAY \$7
UP TO 2-HR \$8
UP TO 3-HR \$11
OVER 3-HR PER DAY \$13
SUNDAY 10AM-5PM \$9

NO
SECURITY NOTICE
THIS PROPERTY
IS PROTECTED BY
VIDEO SURVEILLANCE



THE FOUNDATIONS OF NEWARK'S PUBLIC SAFETY

“We’ve got to center Black and Brown people; the people who have experienced the most harm from broader systems built on white supremacy.”

- Will Simpson, EJUSA, Director Of Violence Reduction Initiatives

SOCIAL AND CULTURAL PILLARS

Newark has a rich history of community organizing and mobilization that precedes the promise of the current moment. Many times, this energy has taken the form of targeted responses channeling urgency and emotion—the uprisings of the 1960s, the teacher strikes of the 1970s. Other times, the effort to lift community actors and problems unfolded from broader foundations and longer-term struggles — the labor movements of the 1930s, the fight against segregation in schools through the 1950s, the organizing around toxic waste of the 1980s. While formal accounts of these various movements and moments have tended to focus on specific periods, sets of actors, or problems³⁴, Newarkers see a more fluid landscape full of connections evolving over time,

place, and people. In these accounts, there is awareness—even celebration—of the inherent differences in fights and individuals, but also remarkable convergence in the evolving definition of justice. **Will Simpson** frames it better:

“For folks who experienced violence in a very real, upfront, and personal way, it’s human nature to resort back to what you know or what you’ve been taught. I still think that’s the experience for a vast majority of Newarkers who have been impacted by violence. But what I think is different now is that there is a new culture; there’s new language to be able to reframe the idea of justice not being punishment. And actually, by justice

being a process, it heals everyone: both the person who has harmed and the person who has done the harm. Because we know the person who's done the harm at some point has been harmed, always." - Will Simpson

In this section, we document the form and logic of these efforts in community-building and frame them in the current context of what people on the ground have been describing as a community-centered public safety ecosystem for Newark. Based on our interviews and observations, we note that this model of collaboration is cemented in shared notions of interdependence and long-term purpose rather than bounded by a specific method, funding mechanism, or set of short-term interventions. Above all, we see bold, decentralized action and discourse arising from conversations that push back on the idea of crime and violence as standalone problems that can be addressed with "more" or "better" policing strategies. Instead, we see the city and the community interacting in the same playing field with honesty and vulnerability to acknowledge and correct past mistakes, but also with the courage to try new ways of

reclaiming the "public" in "public safety"—a frame that we heard consistently from local advocates, officials, and cops.

Embedded in these conversations is a sense of "positive dissent" that allows for various forms of conflict to emerge—for example, how and when to involve the police, how to carve out resources within and outside government, and how to mix and match strategies of reform operating at various levels. While we see differentiation among actors in this ecosystem across generations of activists and types of community engagement, their strategies of action and discourse share a common set of lessons learned from history and a common frame to identify partners and uplift their grievances and demands. Moreover, while there is already a collection of remarkable milestones associated with the Newark public safety ecosystem—from the hiring of social workers to work alongside the NPD to the creation of the Office of Violence Prevention and Trauma Recovery—we believe that this nascent ecosystem will sustain these and other achievements in the long term via coordinated action, trust, and solidarity.

"FOR FOLKS WHO EXPERIENCED VIOLENCE IN A VERY REAL, UPFRONT, AND PERSONAL WAY, IT'S HUMAN NATURE TO RESORT BACK TO WHAT YOU KNOW OR WHAT YOU'VE BEEN TAUGHT. I STILL THINK THAT'S THE EXPERIENCE FOR A VAST MAJORITY OF NEWARKERS WHO HAVE BEEN IMPACTED BY VIOLENCE. BUT WHAT I THINK IS DIFFERENT NOW IS THAT THERE IS A NEW CULTURE; THERE'S NEW LANGUAGE TO BE ABLE TO REFRAME THE IDEA OF JUSTICE NOT BEING PUNISHMENT."

– Will Simpson



A Collective Community Identity

People in Newark do not shy away from talking about their past. But unlike many outsider accounts, there is more pride than judgment in the city's long and diverse history of mobilization and civic engagement featuring student groups, unions, grassroots organizations, and other collectives of artists and activists. People recount these journeys of empowerment, of their leaders, and of the victories and struggles of their movements neither accidentally nor to imply the present moment does not hold similar power and possibility. Quite the opposite: The act of building a collective memory is intentional, encouraging, and forward-looking. Yes, some of it has to do with the need to avoid repeating past mistakes.

Take **Deborah Smith Gregory**, lifelong educator and member of the NAACP in Newark. In our one-on-one interview, she recalled with ease previous attempts to overcome local violence. She made sure to stop midway through these stories to acknowledge the various racial dimensions to the struggle and the need to keep them front and center when considering potential responses:

"The notion of criminal justice reform has been swirling around my understanding of Newark since prior to the rebellion of '67, and then right after. In '68, there was a big groundswell of people advocating that things had to change. So the change came differently than the reform. How the change came was that there were more African Americans who were brought on to the police force. Those African Americans brought to the police force tended to come from the community, and as a result they had a whole different mindset of what policing was for them. They were the coaches for the Little League, and they did a lot of community-based organizing of, 'Don't be afraid of the police,' and 'We are the community.' They even formed a benevolent organization called the Bronze Shields, where they worked to make sure that the community understood that the police were part of the community, especially after everything that had just happened in '67. But it still was a predominantly white police force."

- Deborah Smith Gregory

Ineterconnectedness — A Deep Love of Community

But there is more: During our group conversation, Ms. Gregory shared with others in the room old clippings from the New Jersey Prospectus, a now-defunct monthly news

magazine. On a 1991 cover, a story was adeptly entitled "The importance of history." "History matters, and people don't know it nowadays," said Ms. Gregory when reflecting on her time as editor of the newspaper.

And then there was **Marcus**, a tall young man also in the room who talked about how he had just graduated from high school after returning from prison. Marcus spoke about his diploma with pride and reflected on his short but intense journey from the public housing to his time incarcerated and then back to his community.

Sakinah Cotton, operations manager at the Newark Street Academy, was quick to add her two cents: "Marcus is being too modest. He is an incredible young man. He not only got a diploma and turned his life around, he also turned an entire organization around. He changed us at the Newark Street Academy. I'm so impressed, and we owe so much to this young man."

Everyone agreed. Marcus tried to stay quiet, away from the limelight, but he felt the need to say something. "Alright, I know I want to keep studying, I want to keep helping others. Maybe law school one day. I will be mayor of Newark one day."

Ms. Gregory replied, looking at Marcus, "You will do great things, I'm sure. That's why it's so important for all of us to be here together, to know about what has been done, what we did well, and what we lacked."

Next, **Sharon Redding** took the floor. Everyone told us, including Ms. Redding herself, that she was one of Newark's most beloved grandmothers. After paying respect to both Marcus and Ms. Gregory, she said, "I've also got me some history to share with the group." She reached for her bag and showed the group a flyer describing a day of healing for victims of and those lost to gun violence, sponsored by the Newark Community Street Team back in 2017. "The meeting was at a big old theater...or was it a church?" she said, later remembering it was at Belmont Runyon School. "Look, I even took notes on the other side of the flyer."

"I was there too, Miss Sharon!" said **Will Simpson**, who was also in the room.

These shared connections showcase how acts of resistance have linked Black and Brown lives over time, across places and generations. For many of the people we interviewed, local identities have often been built on the notion of confrontation, difference, and division; this self-identification based on a

Trauma to Trust

Newark residents explore the trauma they have experienced because of policing.





Sakinah Cotton

Operations Manager at the
Newark Street Academy.
Pictured with her oldest son,
a NJ State Corrections officer.

specific, oppositional “other” has weakened the broader community. Weaving or rekindling these connections takes love, honesty, and intentionality. For the Newark leaders we spoke to, this is not an impossible endeavor, as the outreach needed involves not just neighbors, but “brothers” and “sisters” in webs of intergenerational kinship and friendship that extend beyond a specific neighborhood or type of diaspora. Sakinah, from the Newark Street Academy, flexed her muscle memory when talking about surviving, caring, and resisting. Her role as mother, sister, and educator was fortified by her experience as a police officer and by her unconditional love for Newark.

“No matter if me and you don’t agree, and you’re from a different side of Newark, of different wards or a different culture. This town ... it’s just something about Newark! We love Newark. It’s our roots, it’s our everything. It’s like you can’t have this. You can’t touch this. And so, we would never, never allow anyone from the outside to come and damage something. Even if we damaged it. We’re going to try to correct it. And that, I think, is what makes it different. Because even the ones that have made poor choices or, such as, the gang members back in the day that created the gang wars in our city. Today, we live in atonement. Now they’re the ones that are out boots to the ground, teaching the young folks to stop the violence and the shooting. Let’s all come together. Newark is the melting pot. We are building off hope! We are Brick City! No matter what, if I disagree with my brother or my sister, this city is still ours.”

— Sakinah Cotton

Sakinah shared with us a poignant story, beginning in childhood. She told of her struggle from being a child of a drug addict, homeless and in foster care in high school. At age 19, Sakinah adopted her sister and her sister’s best friend.

She spent over 16 years in the NPD — the career she dreamed of since elementary school — as a community resource officer, a “real true blue with heart.” Sakinah lost it all due to personal circumstances that led her to lose her career as a detective. She described accounts of her femininity and her Blackness as a police officer in a white male-dominant field that left her vulnerable and voiceless at times. She felt she couldn’t push back and didn’t have anyone to stand with her on occasions.

“... EVEN THE ONES THAT HAVE MADE POOR CHOICES ... NOW THEY’RE THE ONES THAT ARE OUT BOOTS TO THE GROUND, TEACHING THE YOUNG FOLKS TO STOP THE VIOLENCE AND THE SHOOTING. LET’S ALL COME TOGETHER. NEWARK IS THE MELTING POT. WE ARE BUILDING OFF HOPE! WE ARE BRICK CITY! NO MATTER WHAT, IF I DISAGREE WITH MY BROTHER OR MY SISTER, THIS CITY IS STILL OURS.”

— Sakinah Cotton

This situation caused her tremendous stress. At 34, she had a stroke. “No one was there for me,” she said. “The police administration was different back then and there was no real trauma support...because of the color of my skin, I could have had a different outcome. But I survived, and for my kids, and eventually made it back to Newark.”

Now, 15 years after her dismissal from NPD, she talks to and teaches hundreds of Newark youth about “accountability, community engagement, love for one another and knowledge of self.”

“I encourage our Black and Brown children to become police officers but for the right reasons,” said Sakinah. “And go to school!”

Unlike some of the experiences of the past, however, the work and ties of newer activists are not merely grounded on aesthetic or emotional grounds: “Now I actually get paid for what I do,” said **Dawn Haynes**, speaking of her role with Brick City Peace Collective. About her links to local community organizations, she used words denoting both affection and respect: Leaders and volunteers in these organizations are “partners” and “allies.” “They got us,” she said, referring to the role of the community in the protests triggered by George Floyd’s murder. For Dawn, however, this meant more than city agencies getting on-site support in the middle of a tense

situation. In her words we sensed a deeper type of connection that is not project-bound, time-bound, or specific in terms of subjects and objects. This is due, in part, to the rich set of overlapping connections that link activists to one another and to their organizations through campaigns and advocacy, but also, and more critically, due to a growing sense of trust that fosters collaboration, mentoring, and belonging.

A similar sense of warmth in the context of capacity-building is evoked in **Al-Tariq Best's** story about the consolidation of his work in the community, when half-jokingly he said, "We did not get any money for The HUBB for the first 10 or 12 years of work. And then the first grant we ever got was for something like \$7,000." Today, The HUBB has an annual budget of more than \$1 million.

In these and other conversations, we often heard "we" more than "I," with the all-necessary background on specific people and initiatives tilted toward stories blending personal triumph (and sometimes, personal tragedy) that intersected in endless loops with stories of collective action and resiliency.

A range of local efforts grounded in these various narratives has sought to (re)build a common vocabulary and collective identity to integrate various groups of Newarkers, some new and some old.

In some cases, these conversations have bypassed city-defined institutions and boundaries that, in the form of wards, precincts, or agencies, have modeled community problems to serve their own interests. At the grassroots level, these traditional frameworks received uneven attention—at times adopted for instrumental reasons or accepted as the only pathway for change, at others welcomed with tacit suspicion and skepticism, given their origin, language, and excessive formality.

Spirit of Innovation

In the past decade, local organizers have increasingly resisted, subverted, and reshaped these official models of change. The organizers not only lived the problems of violence and trauma and the aftermath of the so-called solutions imposed day in and day out—mass incarceration, surveillance, and exclusion—but saw an opening for broader projects of redemption, as noted by Tyreek when describing his time in prison as a turning point.

Various founding members of the Newark Anti-Violence Coalition made similar points in our conversations with them: As a group, they made sure to denounce local killings, but

also — and more critically — they worked out a series of peace agreements to prevent future conflicts from escalating into new spirals of death and trauma. And it worked, to the point that over time, the coalition's ambitions evolved to target other structural forces contributing to tensions at the neighborhood level: housing, policing, schools.

In other cases, local mobilizations of Newarkers evolved organically from corner groups and Sunday barbecues to broader, more ambitious political conversations centered on the importance of community dialogue, inclusion, and control. This happened to Al-Tariq Best, who recounted how his first block party turned into a safe space for all community members, "homies included," and that right then and there he realized that such type of space could encourage other types of conversations about empowerment.

The nascent public safety ecosystem growing in Newark has also benefited from the presence and support provided by groups with a national presence. The NAACP-Newark and EJUSA have redoubled their commitment to a new community-centered model of public safety through the strengthening of local agendas of reform and of the individuals and organizations pushing to leverage change.

Rather than co-opting local efforts, the role of these allies has facilitated action in different ways. For example, EJUSA brought Trauma to Trust into the ecosystem. This is a program that brings community members and police into a shared space to explore trauma, especially trauma created by policing. The program creates empathy, builds trust, and has developed a new vocabulary of inclusion and action. Community members have been able to use this shared experience to make connections with the police and supplement other efforts tied to the federal consent decree of the NPD.

The NAACP-Newark has long pushed for greater representation of African Americans in leadership roles across city and state institutions. Often, this has involved more than helping to build a stronger pool of potential candidates. At times, as noted by **Lynda Lloyd**, a former committee chair with the organization, "It was critical to rethink the job itself." There have been many other campaigns too — some associated with education, like in the case of the Amistad bill, and others more clearly linked to crime and justice, like in the case of the abolition of cash bail.

Taken together, we see evidence that these efforts have been effective at de-centering the role of the city government as host, advocate, and adjudicator of community voices

“ONE OF THE WORST THINGS YOU COULD DO IS MARGINALIZE A LOT OF PEOPLE AND MAKE THEM FEEL LIKE THEY AREN'T IMPORTANT.”

– Lt. Tremayne Phillips, Newark Police Division

and demands. And this is something that we did not just hear from advocates. **Lieutenant Tremayne Phillips**, who has been with the NPD since 2006, described his job as a mechanism that allowed him to “get out of poverty” – but that did not exclude him from the collective of local people who experienced trauma growing up. He considers himself a son of Newark, and in fact, his whole face lit up when he told us over Zoom about the importance of remaining part of, working alongside, and listening to the community as “a symbol of outmost respect.”

“I grew up on welfare,” he said. “I grew up with a single mom, you know. She did everything she could to provide for us, and one day she met a police officer and asked that police officer, ‘How do you take the police exam?’ Right? Like, ‘How do you fill out for it?’, you know? ‘How do you do it?’” Since that moment, he has been mindful to keep conversations flowing with neighbors and with strangers alike: “You walk the community, you meet people, you ask them how they’re doing.” And in the context of these exchanges, good things will happen:

So you'll have a group get together because you have people who go to multiple meetings, and they'll say, you know, 'We are this group; we want to have meetings and relations to this; we would love if an officer could attend'. And 99.9% of the time, we attend. We try to be there because...one of the worst things you could do is marginalize a lot of people and make them feel like they aren't important.”

– Lt. Tremayne Phillips



Lt. Tremayne Phillips

Newark Police Division



Robert Clark

Newark Opportunity Youth Network

But above all, we felt the power of the ecosystem when listening to everyday people from the community. For example, as part of the South Ward Public Safety Roundtable, members of the NCST and EJUSA have managed to sustain and grow a space for the past five years where neighbors can air questions about safety that reposition them not as beneficiaries (or “targets”) of specific policies, but as owners, guardians, and managers of their environment. In the section below, we trace these and other conversations that signal a robust network of relations and intentions and reflect on their power and possibility in terms of violence prevention.

Open Channels of Communication

In a recent convening of the Public Safety Roundtable organized over Zoom, the two lead co-facilitators opened with remarks for Martin Luther King, Jr. Day. These were quickly echoed by several of the more than 100 attendees, who reflected on his writings, his visit to Newark City Hall, and the importance of his legacy when pushing renewed demands for racial democracy and justice. Then, the meeting turned into a review of crime statistics by an NPD captain, and

an overview of new and ongoing programs. Some programs were bold, like the hiring of social workers to accompany officers in specific areas of the city. Questions ensued about the logistics of referrals, case-management strategies, and opportunities for further integration across city agencies, service providers, and community organizations.

The co-facilitators faded into the background, letting the conversation evolve in citizen input and audit. At some point, and after exhausting the specifics of this and other new initiatives, an older woman took the floor. Remember Miss Sharon Redding? She opened a new line of inquiry about the purpose and location of the NPD ShotSpotters: “What are they there for? Who pays for them? Why are there near my school?” she asked, with a hint of skepticism that briskly turned into suspicion.

Mayor Baraka joined the conversation and took on the question directly. “Hello, Miss Redding. Those are good questions – thank you. No, we do not pay for the ShotSpotters; they are given to us by the federal government. We do have to pay for maintenance, and that’s about \$300,000 a year

altogether. So not all of it is free. But they do help us. They enable first responders to get places faster.”

After he was done speaking, Mrs. Redding replied, undeterred: “But what about arrests? How many people are getting arrested because of these ShotSpotters? Can we do this in other ways? I’m not convinced they help.” She did not want to let it go.

“I do not have the figures here, but I promise you that we will get them ready for you in time for the next meeting,” replied the mayor.

Much has been said about the futility of most forms of police-community meetings that do not involve a paradigm shift in the structure of these conversations.³⁵ In Newark, however, such a process is well underway. Neither the city government nor the police is running the meetings of the Public Safety Roundtable, and while numbers matter, they are not deployed in a way that subordinates citizens to the expertise of researchers and officials. Lived experience matters. There is accountability. There is memory.

Two weeks after this meeting, and just as the mayor had promised, the figures on arrests tied to the ShotSpotters were reviewed and discussed. The co-facilitators checked on Miss Sharon, who later reported during the creation of this report that she is still waiting for definitive answers about how ShotSpotters will make the community safer. The rest of the meeting evolved in ways that were predictable in tone – some “positive dissent,” but above all, collaboration, accountability, and community-centered authority.

A second key issue for the community soon followed. The entry point was hiring crossing guards – community members wanted to create access to those jobs for formerly incarcerated people. As the discussion developed, participants identified additional city positions that can contribute to public safety but that formerly incarcerated people were barred from filling because of background checks.

A couple of weeks later, **State Senator Teresa Ruiz** joined the Zoom meetings and she committed to exploring and addressing the issue. Subsequently a policy committee of the roundtable met with the senator and began drafting a new amendment to the legislation which would remove some of the barriers noted. While the work is still ongoing, we note the community’s role in driving these conversations from a position of empathy and strength into real change.

In these and other exchanges we recorded via interviews and observation, we notice that engagement between and

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– *Robert Clark*

among community leaders was largely warm and cooperative rather than formal and competitive.

But yes, some tensions are inevitable. In a candid conversation with **Robert Clark** from the Newark Opportunity Youth Network, we asked about the challenge of building communication across organizations and campaigns.

“I think some part of the reason for that is, you know, the fact that the community is under-resourced. And has been under-resourced for many years. But we’re also in this place of pride and excitement for what we’ve accomplished and what’s possible. We have regained control of our schools, City Hall feels like it’s working for the community. We’ve created an environment for entrepreneurship. And Mayor Baraka has brought a vision for public safety, he’s leading on anti-violence work, and he’s addressing our lead pipe issue. There’s a lot of momentum, and it’s created a different view of Newark.”

At the same time, we want to make sure that the backbone of this work, the importance of collective impact work, isn’t lost. Collective impact work and direct services both need more funding. I think philanthropy, as well as the federal government, can do more to support that and articulate that both parts are needed and should be aligned. Because right now it feels more competitive than it needs to be. The funders need to communicate that this isn’t ‘either or,’ it’s ‘both and.’ We don’t need to fight. I hope that begins to change.”

– Robert Clark

At the same time, Clark was also hopeful about the evolving challenge of funding as an opportunity to work on new dimensions of equality and for cooperation to thrive. “I think that those things, they’re going to work themselves out,” he continued. “We’ll end up communicating and learning from each other and work it out. I’ve seen a lot in 20 years in Newark, and I’m really hopeful that all the activity that has happened over the last, say, 10 years is going to lead through some real breakthroughs in practice, communication, and philanthropy.”

There are other issues on the horizon: New efforts to support grassroots organizing efforts still favor an agenda formally controlled by the city, although the mission of the Office of Violence Prevention and Trauma Recovery(OVP) explicitly centers community voices to allocate funds and define priorities. There are groups that remain somewhat at the margins of the conversations we witnessed: the Latinx community in the West Ward, big businesses in the Central Ward, service providers with limited target areas or mandates. But most of these actors are embedded in interlocking strategies for community involvement, such as the Rutgers Newark-run Public Safety Collaborative. From a functional perspective, we did not notice significant gaps in the continuum of services typically associated with violence

and violence reduction, either because these interventions were already deployed by key groups in the ecosystem like the NCST, or because these initiatives were being formulated in the context of other structural changes, such as housing, education, health/mental health, or attention to more specific vulnerable populations.

Beyond specific collaborations already in place or in a planning phase, we observed that interactions involving community organizations and city officials were not overtly grounded in the type of adversarial or instrumental motivations seen elsewhere in the country. Instead, much of the time and effort of organizers through their individual work or deliberation has remained focused on building a citywide infrastructure for collaboration that capitalizes on their own unique strengths, expertise and lived experience, boosted by key allies. As noted by Mona Cadena, director of advocacy and campaigns at EJUSA when describing how their national-level work is geared toward the strengthening of local actors and priorities:

“We are not here to lead the work. We are here as partners, to create the conditions where we can continually move forward and take advantage of opportunities that come up.... We’re here to respond

Trauma to Trust

More than 600 community members and police officers have participated in Trauma to Trust.



to your community's needs and make sure that you get money because your work is actually really great."

- Mona Cadena

Engagement of Full Community

As part of this effort toward building a new model of collaboration, we see a remarkable push to reshape the "field" of public safety as one owned by actors in both city government and community—a sort of acid test of the notion of "co-production" used by **Aqeela Sherrills**. He co-created the Newark Community Street Team with Mayor Baraka and now leads the Community-Based Public Safety Collective, a national organization of professionals offering training and assistance in violence intervention strategies. Sherrills describe the logic of his personal and institutional involvement in the nascent Newark ecosystem:

"My belief is that you can't have public safety without the public. And that the public execution of George Floyd became a real inflection point in this country. I think, for the first time, maybe in the history of this country, there was a space created in the imagination of people to have a public safety system that didn't center law enforcement, but that really saw an ecosystem for safety that needed to be created with victims and survivors. With those who are most vulnerable in our respective communities."

- Aqeela Sherrills

This push is far more ambitious than the reform of the NPD associated with the consent decree as acknowledged by police commanders and activists. Critically, the Newarkers we spoke to have high expectations for process and outcomes of the evolving ecosystem. They see safety as essential to their city and to them. And they believe Newark citizens should guide priorities, strategies, and metrics for policy intervention and evaluation.

"The power of the violence that has taken place can be matched by an investment in goodwill and better services, again, for the most vulnerable among us all," said **Daamin Ali Durden**, executive director of the NCST. "So I think that's our secret sauce." While many of residents' grievances and demands are not new — racial disparities in violence, poverty, and other forms of exclusion — there are new instruments to effect change and to document harm away from a punishment model and closer to a paradigm centered in inclusivity, transparency, and racial equity.

"MY BELIEF IS THAT YOU CAN'T HAVE PUBLIC SAFETY WITHOUT THE PUBLIC. AND THAT THE PUBLIC EXECUTION OF GEORGE FLOYD BECAME A REAL INFLECTION POINT IN THIS COUNTRY. I THINK, FOR THE FIRST TIME, MAYBE IN THE HISTORY OF THIS COUNTRY, THERE WAS A SPACE CREATED IN THE IMAGINATION OF PEOPLE TO HAVE A PUBLIC SAFETY SYSTEM THAT DIDN'T CENTER LAW ENFORCEMENT, BUT THAT REALLY SAW AN ECOSYSTEM FOR SAFETY THAT NEEDED TO BE CREATED WITH VICTIMS AND SURVIVORS."

— Aqeela Sherrills

These ambitions were put to the test in the summer of 2020 in the aftermath of the public murder of George Floyd at the hands of the Minneapolis Police Department. In the hearts of many Newarkers, this event not only recalled their own experiences of harassment and race-based abuse, but also the history of rage and mobilization that engulfed the city in the late 1960s. As noted by **Chief Douglas** of the NPD, there was tension in the streets, and the calls for mobilization were clear, loud, and immediate. Yet city residents and organizations responded with a sense of ownership and protection of their city that signaled a commitment to peace and reflexivity.

NPD Chief Douglas has not forgotten the spirit he felt from his community in that moment. "They protected us!" he recalled. "That was the greatest feeling in the world, you know? That was our community. That was our relationship, the meetings paying dividends, because it could have easily been a riot. And I felt so good walking hand in hand with the citizens, going, 'No, that's my brother, you're not doing that to him!' And, you know? That's the difference."

POLITICAL AND INSTITUTIONAL DRIVERS

How did Newark's collective initiatives become an ecosystem? When did it start? Take the Newark peace agreement. This was a community-based organizing effort that involved a coalition of grassroots leaders and authorities demanding from local gangs that they stop the violence. These calls were loud, public, and persistent, shutting down traffic, hosting rallies, and asking for more accountability in the community and in government. This was neither a city-sanctioned policy nor a grant-funded program. It was not part of any nonprofit's agenda. Above all, as described by people on the ground, it was a political consensus and an organizing strategy of civil commitment to combat violence. Part of it involved the need for state institutions to support this process.

But this effort did not rely on notions of negative peace, which emphasize the complete absence of conflict. Violence prevention efforts in Newark have been based upon emotional openness and trauma awareness to inform fresh attitudes toward conflict management in a variety of interpersonal spheres.

The peace that Newarkers are building does not eliminate conflict but provides ways to acknowledge its roots while also creating mechanisms to reduce harm. Those building this public safety model have made racial equity a cornerstone. In other words, violence prevention efforts acknowledge the historic legacy of racism, its lasting impact on people's well-being, and segmented access to opportunities. In the face of such realities, this social pact has been framed by the community, supported by different spheres of governmental action, and continues reinventing measures to uphold a culture of participation, accountability, and redress.

Political Leadership, Vision, and Will

When Mayor Baraka was first elected to lead the city, in 2014, he brought to office a unique, powerful perspective that reimagined public safety by centering community. He recognized the healing and support the community would need to thrive. That perspective had its roots in his lived experience and deep-seated activism. While he stands out, he was part of a long legacy.

Newarkers are aware of their political struggles and conquests. They have been there fighting those themselves,

claiming those victories and growing as a community. Since the 1967 uprisings, some names rise up in the narratives: **Clifton Carter** and **Joyce Smith-Carter**; **Amiri and Amina Baraka**; or **Zayid Muhammad** and **Larry Hamm**, **Deborah Gregory**, and **Sharon Redding**. These names represent a series of lighthouses for multiple generations inspired by their community belonging and the creativity and passion they bring to their advocacy. As leading figures during the civil rights movement, as educators, as everlasting poets of the resistance, those names have inspired an interesting coexistence between political action and activism.

Alongside the names that inspire leadership, there are the names that inspire the search for justice. **Nashika Allen** is one of those names. Her death by gun violence in 2009 inspired peaceful street interventions hosted by a group of organizations and activists that came together as the Newark Anti-Violence Coalition (NAVC). They assembled five core demands, then staged protests advocating for those demands every Wednesday for 155 weeks straight, across the city at different traffic intersections.

This is perhaps one of the most relevant installments of people's organized efforts to demand comprehensive justice. In a way, the election of Black mayors since 1970 had been a step forward for the history of Newark. However, communities are aware that recovering from the legacies of historical trauma requires extra work, especially when policies centered in growth are challenged by the persistence of inequality and violence.

Bashir Akinyele, a founding member of NAVC, reads the demands from a flyer he stills holds in his personal file. They asked for:

1. The change of police director and restoration of the figure of police chief;
2. Meeting spaces between community organizers and the mayor to declare violence a public health concern;
3. More employment opportunities;
4. Reclamation of city control over public schools;
5. Admonition of street gangs to stop the violence.

The peaceful protests were a way to connect, hear out the ones that felt forgotten, and promote a message of collective hope anchored to specific possibilities of change. Bashir, eyes full of emotion, remembered those days with a trembling voice:

"We're taking back our community. This is our neighborhood; these are our neighborhoods. These are our people. These are our children, our youth, so we were taking it back, block by block, and we literally did that, all right? Lot of work because we went down. We went out in those blocks, you know? We went out there. Rain, snow, sunshine, the heat. We didn't care what the element was. We will go out to every single one (street meet)."

Many of the city's current leading voices participated in NAVC's 155 weeks of protest, including Mayor Ras Baraka, who was first elected to city council for the South Ward in 2002. His election in these representative roles is a symbol of a renewed style of leadership, anchored to social mobilization and fueled by the commitment to live to see Newark communities thrive and to create alternatives for those impacted by violence and disenfranchisement. Over time, political action and activism combined in a way that is not necessarily oppositional. A culture of accountability and belonging to grassroots mobilization is responsible for the dismantling actions taken in response to the five demands, which are also components of this model of violence reduction.

Policy Change Responsive to Community

The comprehensive transformation of the Newark Police Division is a key component to the reduction of forms of violence. In addition to investigating and accounting for incidents in which police officers were involved, the division must promote a healthier environment of trust and legitimacy.

The police reform process started with the continued appearance in the streets of the organized community and the combination of this dynamic with legal activism. The U.S. Attorney's Office of New Jersey, along with the Department of Justice's Civil Rights Division, launched an investigation in 2011, with robust community participation. **Larry Hamm** represented the People's Organization for Progress (POP), a local organizing and activist organization that works on a variety of justice-related issues. Hamm is a longtime activist and son of Newark with a clear memory of the process, working hand in hand with the ACLU of New Jersey to get it done.

"WE WANT TO MAKE PEOPLE SAFE, AND MAKING THEM SAFE DOES NOT MEAN LOCKING SOMEONE UP, BECAUSE IF YOU LOCK SOMEBODY UP FOR WHATEVER CRIME OR ISSUE THAT THEY HAVE, THOSE PEOPLE HAVE TO COME BACK RIGHT BACK TO THAT SAME NEIGHBORHOOD AND FACE THE SAME ISSUE THAT LED TO INCARCERATION."

– *Solomon Middleton Williams, organizer,
NCST Deputy Director*

"The ACLU had a very progressive executive director. Her name was Deborah Jacob, and she used to come and speak to POP. We had a good relationship. She said, 'Look, we're going to take these cases, wrap them up, we'll put a cover letter on them, and send them to the Justice Department.' And that's what she did. And the Justice Department responded. When they came in, they asked us to help organize hearings where the people could come out and talk about the brutality that they had experienced by the Newark Police. And the end result of that was the consent decree that was put up by Paul Fishman when he was the US attorney for New Jersey at that time. They had found basically four things: Yes, the Newark Police engaged in excessive force. Yes, they violated people's constitutional rights. Yes, they engaged in discriminatory policing practices and fourth, they were engaged in illegal activities."

The trust that local organizations had earned allowed victims of abusive police behavior to tell their stories, which became comprehensive evidence in the form of a 96-page petition that the ACLU filed in 2010, which spurred a full 2014 DOJ report.³⁶ This document propelled an agreement between the federal government and Newark's city government. The goal was to undertake structural changes within NPD, including the selection of an independent court-appointed monitor and incorporation of reforms in a judicially enforceable consent decree.³⁷



The New Jersey Institute for Social Justice (NJISJ)³⁸ is a policy and advocacy organization that focuses on transformation in economic, criminal justice, and democracy issues for communities of color. NJISJ serves on the Independent Monitoring Team (IMT) for the Newark police consent decree. Through its IMT work, NJISJ has led community engagement efforts to make sure that the Newark community has opportunities to give direct feedback on policies and new trainings that are being drafted as part of the reform process.

The consent decree reform, in part, seeks to promote a culture of transparency and restore relationships with the community. Now, the police force is pioneering the use of body cameras and promoting open data operations and responsibility to the people through specific spaces of interaction.

This ongoing reform is transforming the police and the city as well. The leadership of public safety directors has been relevant to own past mistakes and move forward in implementing the framework given by the consent decree and the monitor.

NPD Chief Lee Douglas looks back with pride as well as humility on the changes that have happened so far, now part of a policing culture that keeps reinventing itself. Police dynamics in Newark are grounded in strategic leadership, promotion of healthy standards of interaction with communities, and a broader understanding of the capacity to change inward and outward:

"The consent decree at the time gave us the framework, gave us the idea to look at some of our policies to redress them. We came up with other policies for the LGBTQ community. An actual policy on how to deal with the community. The use of force policy was revamped.

Of course the body cams. The school resource officer and the community resource officers in each precinct. So a lot of these ideas definitely worked."

..."When I look out over the organization as the head of the police division, I like where it's headed. I like the attitude of the officers. Their whole mindset... it's like every officer is a community resource officer. And I tried to instill that into officers. In the Sixth, I'm like, 'send me a picture some of the good stuff you did'. And it becomes like a challenge. 'Cap, I did this,' 'Chief, I did this,' you know? 'I did this.' It's the culture...it's different! And it's spreading out, and it's not a culture of oh, hey, these people want to do this. It's different, because I was here 26 years ago as a rookie. And I'm here as the chief and

I can tell you, just, the relationships are different. The culture is different. The way we look at the community is different. The way they look at us is different. And it's all built on the events and relationships that we're working on daily, and it's a work in progress, because obviously one event could turn around that. But we just want to keep moving in that right direction and I think we are."

— Chief Douglas

Police transformation is still a work in progress in Newark. The community has been actively trying to institutionalize a permanent civilian oversight board with subpoena power, and organizations continue to use the legal tools at their disposal to push for it. Oversight and accountability debates have been joined by political decisions aiming to redistribute budget allocations to community organizations, key players in a widened perspective of agency in public safety beyond law enforcement.

COMMUNITY-LED STRATEGIES

High Risk Street Intervention

When Mayor Ras Baraka took office in 2014, he brought with him the goal of establishing a community-based violence reduction organization. He recruited Aqeela Sherrills from California to launch the Newark Community Street Team (NCST). NCST draws upon an evidence-based, trauma-informed approach to violence reduction. The team's outreach workers come from within the community and bring a lived experience and credibility that make them exceptionally effective at de-escalating potentially violent situations.

NCST hires, trains and deploys its workers and interventionists in the South and West Wards of Newark to:

- provide casework to those at greatest risk of becoming a victim or a perpetrator of violence;
- engage in high-risk intervention, both mediating on-going disputes that may result in violence and preventing retaliation;
- offer safe passage to schools for students; and
- provide support to crime survivors who are overlooked by traditional victim services agencies.

Daamin Ali Durden was one of the Street Team's first hires. He started on the frontlines as an outreach worker and steadily rose through the organization to his role today as the executive director. In our interview, he said that NCST's work is "a relationship-based approach to preventing violence in our community, using a public health approach." In talking about the makeup of the team, he said, "We are our demographic." Many of his colleagues were once at a high risk of violence themselves. Today, they are professionals, thanks in large part to disciplined training.

"A lot of people think this is just community activism, as if we go outside and say, 'Stop the violence.' Our work goes much deeper. It's trainings, it's standard operating procedures, it's formulas that allow us to engage individuals and de-escalate situations....My mantra is we don't arrest people, we arrest situations."

Bridge Building: Community and Police

Lionel Latouche is a first generation Haitian American and program director of Trauma to Trust at EJUSA. This program brings community members and police officers together to explore trauma, especially that resulting from policing, to break down the barriers between those groups.

Lionel brings his own trauma to the work: Police killed his cousin several years ago. Lionel has walked his personal healing journey in his work as a trained psychotherapist, engaging in multiple efforts to improve relationships between members of the community harmed by traumatic experiences.

"We look at the root of policing in this country and see that it is really an extension of oppression that was faced by Black folks during slavery and post-slavery. We then get an understanding of how and why these communities have such a mistrust towards law enforcement. The goal of Trauma to Trust is to elevate the experience and personhood of those who have been harmed, especially those in marginalized communities. We provide them with the knowledge and the understanding of how trauma impacts your mind, body, soul, and emotions. And how that same trauma can be rooted from generations past and can actually be something that they carry in their body that needs to be flushed out." - Lionel Latouche

Trauma to Trust (T2T) is a key component of Newark's public safety ecosystem. It challenges a traditional mindset:

"THE GOAL OF TRAUMA TO TRUST IS TO ELEVATE THE EXPERIENCE AND PERSONHOOD OF THOSE WHO HAVE BEEN HARMED, ESPECIALLY THOSE IN MARGINALIZED COMMUNITIES.

WE PROVIDE THEM WITH THE KNOWLEDGE AND THE UNDERSTANDING OF HOW TRAUMA IMPACTS YOUR MIND, BODY, SOUL, AND EMOTIONS. AND HOW THAT SAME TRAUMA CAN BE ROOTED FROM GENERATIONS PAST AND CAN ACTUALLY BE SOMETHING THAT THEY CARRY IN THEIR BODY THAT NEEDS TO BE FLUSHED OUT."

– *Lionel Latouche*

Instead of people thinking what is wrong with me, there is acknowledgement of each person's experiences and an empathetic exploration about what happened to me. This turnaround is typical of the process for police officers and civil community members seeking to elevate their health and wellness to overcome historical trauma.

T2T spans 16 hours over two full days. A primary goal is to ensure that participants can start a healing journey, which is spurred from acknowledging the personal dimensions of trauma in one's own life. Community members realize that violent episodes and oppression are not and should not be normalized. Police officers explore the nature of their jobs, the risks they undertake every day, and the expectations they face.

A midterm goal is networking. Police officers finish T2T with new connections and resources for a better and more territorialized understanding of what happens in Newark. The list comes from the people they meet and the familiarity with their dynamics and the services they provide, which opens possibilities for relationship building, mediation, and local conflict solving strategies.

Lionel Latouche

Program Director, Trauma to Trust, EJUSA



In the long term, this program allows a transformation in the mechanisms of interaction between police officers and civilians, substantially reducing the number of complaints received by the police department, and promoting behaviors oriented to de-escalate and reduce violent responses while fostering empathy and understanding.

T2T is an awareness exercise, connecting individual experiences to historical processes, re-centering trauma and violence, but also resilience and agency. In doing so, human beings understand that harm is universal but looks and feels different to everyone. This deeper understanding allows for empathy and leads to increased safety. Safety concerns are redirected towards addressing levels of harm that individuals experience, the availability of resources to deal with such traumatic processes, and how community members can primarily hold and carry the safety of their communities, with police officers partnering with support and resources.

Healing-Centered Programs/Youth Development

When **Al-Tariq Best** participated in the first sessions of Trauma to Trust, he brought with him the scar of an interaction with police from his teens. Newark police officers pulled over the car that he and his friends were taking to a music studio. The officers turned the car inside out. Al-Tariq's emotions showed, and the next thing he knew, one officer had his gun pointed at his head.

As he shared this emotional story in Trauma to Trust, he got a new sense of just how deeply the trauma affected him. Then a police officer sat in front of him and publicly apologized for what NPD had put him through. In the space of a few hours, Al-Tariq understood what had been missing from The HUBB, the organization he had founded years earlier.

"We needed to put a deeper focus on the trauma that nearly every one of those boys and girls brings to our community empowerment center," he wrote in a 2020 opinion piece.³⁹ "Because trauma is everywhere in Newark. And it largely goes untreated. In a bold attempt to be the change I wanted to see, we repurposed the community empowerment center into what is now known as The HUBB Arts and Trauma Center."

In 2021, The HUBB started construction on the very first youth-focused trauma recovery center on the east coast. The summer of 2022, The HUBB's youth-focused trauma recovery center will add a new healing dimension to an organization already serving hundreds of youth annually with entertainment arts therapy, educational supports, and mentoring and empowerment supports.

The HUBB is not alone in treating trauma in Newark. NCST runs a trauma center as well, one that is open to all ages. It is designed to help victims of violent crime overcome barriers to accessing mental health treatment, health care, and legal resources in the acute aftermath of trauma. The center serves recent victims of violent crime, including survivors of physical assault, sexual assault, gunshot wounds, stabbings, domestic violence, and human trafficking.

Community-Led Coordinating Body

The diversification of public safety demands not only funding people's organizing processes but endorsing and sustaining participation platforms. Roundtables have been a key feature to determine the most suitable mechanisms to hear and respond to social demands. These spaces that started in person around 2016, localized in each ward, went virtual but have not stopped. An example is the South Ward Public Safety Roundtable that meets biweekly and gathers dozens of individuals who do not miss the chance to talk and to ask questions.

There is always a mediator in these spaces. Equal Justice USA and the Newark Community Street Team have led the meetings, mediating parts, facilitating the agendas, collecting key issues, and communicating concerns to specific actors to specific gatherings and discussing key matters. As noted in the previous chapter, representatives of city and state institutions attend these meetings to respond to people's inquiries directly, from the mayor himself to the state attorney general. The South Ward meetings are filled with loving remarks, fearless questions, and overall, a culture of accountability inherited from years of demanding these spaces. Other facilitators host similar dynamics, such as the Newark Public Safety Collaborative at Rutgers University, which promotes a culture of plural exchange, socializing problems, and thinking about those from a data-informed perspective alongside multiple allies in both the public and private sectors.

Participation provides community with a space for accountability and direct interaction with law enforcement, with another key benefit: connection. In these roundtables, key police officers deliver the information of weekly events and crime trends, street by street. Data informs the problems and the needs. Yet these are spaces that also feel personal, because for Newarkers, debates on crime and equality are personal. The connection comes in a human form: Sometimes heated exchanges allow subsequent moments of admiration. Inquiring remarks and authentic questioning turn into acknowledgment and recognition. In the end, even

amid those heated discussions, there is one component that is particular to Newark current leaders: belonging. They are all Newarkers. As such, they all share trauma, as much as their healing journeys, as part of their identities. They feel that these spaces nurture their relationship to the city as it changes, increasing the sense of reciprocity and the perception that police officers, and city government representatives in general, are also community members who have experienced pain and are also eager to reimagine justice.

Framing problems in these spheres of togetherness elicits a spirit of cooperative building. Connection humanizes violence prevention as people engage directly and in real time around key conversations that frame safety. Their own frustrations and expectations are socialized, and responses are collected from actors involved in decision-making processes. Community members do not feel restrained by fictitious promises, because these conversations have been taking place alongside real change in the city. Finally, these spaces have also stimulated older, more experienced leaders to share what they know. Younger community members observe, learn, and interact from those learnings. Admiration, innovation, and persistence abound in these spaces, promoting trust and legitimacy.

“A LOT OF PEOPLE THINK THIS IS JUST COMMUNITY ACTIVISM, AS IF WE GO OUTSIDE AND SAY, ‘STOP THE VIOLENCE.’ OUR WORK GOES MUCH DEEPER. IT’S TRAININGS, IT’S STANDARD OPERATING PROCEDURES, IT’S FORMULAS THAT ALLOW US TO ENGAGE INDIVIDUALS AND DE-ESCALATE SITUATIONS....MY MANTRA IS WE DON’T ARREST PEOPLE, WE ARREST SITUATIONS.”

- Daamin Ali Durden, Executive Director, NCST

Al-Tariq Best

The HUBB opened the first youth trauma recovery center on the east coast.



SYSTEMS-LED STRATEGIES

Coordinating Body/Budgetary Support

Institutional stability is essential to promote sustainability to a reimagined conception of public safety. Mayor Baraka created the Office of Violence Prevention and Trauma Recovery (OVP) in June 2020 with a public ordinance, allocating to it 5% of the public safety budget (about \$12 million). OVP's mission is to address root causes of violence and crime and to steer resources to deal with the resulting trauma of victimization. Collaborative efforts on the ground helped give shape to this strategy. Key leaders, including Aqeela Sherrills, Will Simpson, and Zayid Muhammad, built community support and legitimacy to push the initiative forward and helped convince the mayor of its importance.

OVP also promotes networks between community organizations active in conflict mediation, as it recognizes their longstanding violence interruption initiatives and their potential to become actors entitled to public budget allocation. The New Jersey Institute for Social Justice has highlighted the importance of community organizations in transforming public safety:

"There is a real need to also make meaningful investments in community-based public safety systems that are not just about law enforcement. To invest in communities, to allow them to keep themselves safe without the need for intervention at all, because that does seem to be what's missing in the public safety conversation, right? We spend so much money on the back end on pure law enforcement to address issues that really aren't about crime, not at the heart." - Brooke Lewis, formerly associate counsel, NJISJ

The OVP diversifies city intervention in violent situations, with a component of trauma recovery and a space for workforce skills development. Every program is built with the understanding that violence is a public health concern, and public safety is a collective effort.

Lakeesha Eure is the director of OVP and one of Newark's most compassionate, assertive, and loving pillars. As a social worker from Newark, and an experienced violence interrupter, she embodies the stamina that produces resiliency. The Brick City has also taken many loved ones from her. But Director

Eure's words communicate her passion and consciousness of seeking and embodying change. She reflects on the complexities of transitioning from her own role as community organizer in street mobilizations to her roles in government institutions. "We struggle," she says.

"That's the thing in Black and Brown communities, especially those of us who are changemakers. So I have to make sure I'm grounded all the time, and make sure I know the mission for my office as a clearinghouse to be able to give funding back to the community."

There is a strong sense of responsibility associated with this position, and although it is not easy work, it is not burdensome. The truth is that she has excelled at setting up institutional strategies that are new and connected to people's demands. Newark's Office for Violence Prevention is a sanctuary for the expectations of thousands of citizens investing their energy to decentralize public safety.

As one of the resources to support healing processes and diversify the interventions to violence, the OVP is gradually ensuring an active presence of social workers alongside police officers (with a ratio of one to every 10). It is facilitating the communities' mediation efforts, creating more spaces to diversify access to economic opportunities and to formalize organized action. The aim is for the public to see healing as a structural possibility, accessible to everyone in the city. Preventing violence, in this sense, implies acknowledging those who have survived it and the physical and mental scars it leaves. Newark's offices for public health and public safety – which includes OVP – are next door to one another, promoting a message and practice of relatability and accessibility of institutions to and for the communities.

A special note about the place in which the OVP is located: It used to be the Fourth Police Precinct (currently the First), where many of the protestors in the history of the city have been detained, including in the 1967 rebellion. There is a powerful symbolism about reclaiming a territory and remaking it in service of those persecuted, collectively transforming its use and meaning. This space is also part of the broader anti-violence purpose; currently a museum is being created there, chronicling local activism in the city and some of the positive police transformations, framing the past, the present, and the vision for the city.⁴⁰

City/State Grant Programs

For any of this work to have an impact — but especially community-led strategies — we must ensure that it receives robust funding. Cities and states need to play a major role in that.

In 2018, local leaders and organizations formed a statewide community-based violence intervention and prevention coalition to advocate for the creation of the New Jersey Violence Intervention and Prevention (NJVIP) fund. In 2019, the state legislature created the NJVIP fund but didn't actually fund it. The statewide coalition responded successfully when it helped secure a \$10 million investment in NJVIP fund in two successive budgets: 2021-22 and 2022-23.

"I think those efforts are irrefutable proof that New Jersey is serious about building safety and preventing violence," said Will Simpson of EJUSA. "New Jersey's budget affirms that the most powerful achievements in public safety occur when the community is empowered and police aren't the single point of contact for safety."

This active community coalition continues to collaborate, share best practices, and work to sustain fiscal investments in programs across the state.

A portrait of Lakeesha Eure, a Black woman with long, dark dreadlocks, smiling. She is wearing a red top and a silver necklace. The background is a blurred outdoor scene with greenery and a building.

Lakeesha Eure

Director of OVP

THE FUTURE OF THE ECOSYSTEM

This public safety ecosystem exists, it is strong, it's having an impact every day on the lives of Newarkers. But it must be nurtured and constantly assessed. With that in mind we have identified key elements and factors that will determine the ecosystem's possibility.

Mapping Actors and Resources

Our interviews with Newark activists highlight key characteristics of the local ecosystem that show the importance of collective identity and a shared language to frame action and mobilization.

We asked Aqeela Sherrills to reflect on Newark relative to his time and work in Los Angeles. "In Newark, there's a real culture, there's real community that's there, despite the dysfunctionality of it, despite the levels of violence that exist in the neighborhood," he said. "It's very much a tight-knit community."

We interviewed **Richard Cammarieri**, the son of Italian immigrants who was born and raised in a working class, primarily African American Central Ward neighborhood. A poet and longstanding activist who built a lifelong career from community organizing and neighborhood-based public policy advocacy, Richard helped set up Newark Community Solutions, among many other endeavors.

He embraced the network of his fellow activists, established lasting connections, especially with Mayor Baraka's parents, Amina and Amiri Baraka, and "learned from all, but especially in the conversations and work of the Barakas, that humanism was at the core of personal, social and political growth."

These and other accounts we collected showcase the versatility and resiliency of the ecosystem — and the actors driving it forward — in terms of strategies for intervention and deliberation, from the Public Safety Roundtable and the Trauma to Trust training to the protests of the summer of 2020. In this section, we supplement these perspectives with a more schematic view of the relationships among actors in the ecosystem represented as a social network of exchanges, growth, and learning. For this purpose, we asked participants in the group activity that we co-hosted in early March 2022 to complete a form seeking to capture interactions between their organizations and other organizations in the ecosystem. Overall, we listed a total of 23 organizations based on the input received from one-on-one interviews and published materials.

We represented the structure of the ecosystem across various types of relationships. For example, we asked participants in the group activity whether they "knew" each of the organizations identified ahead of time (in all cases most people said yes), and the extent to which they felt that their own institution was aligned with these potential partners



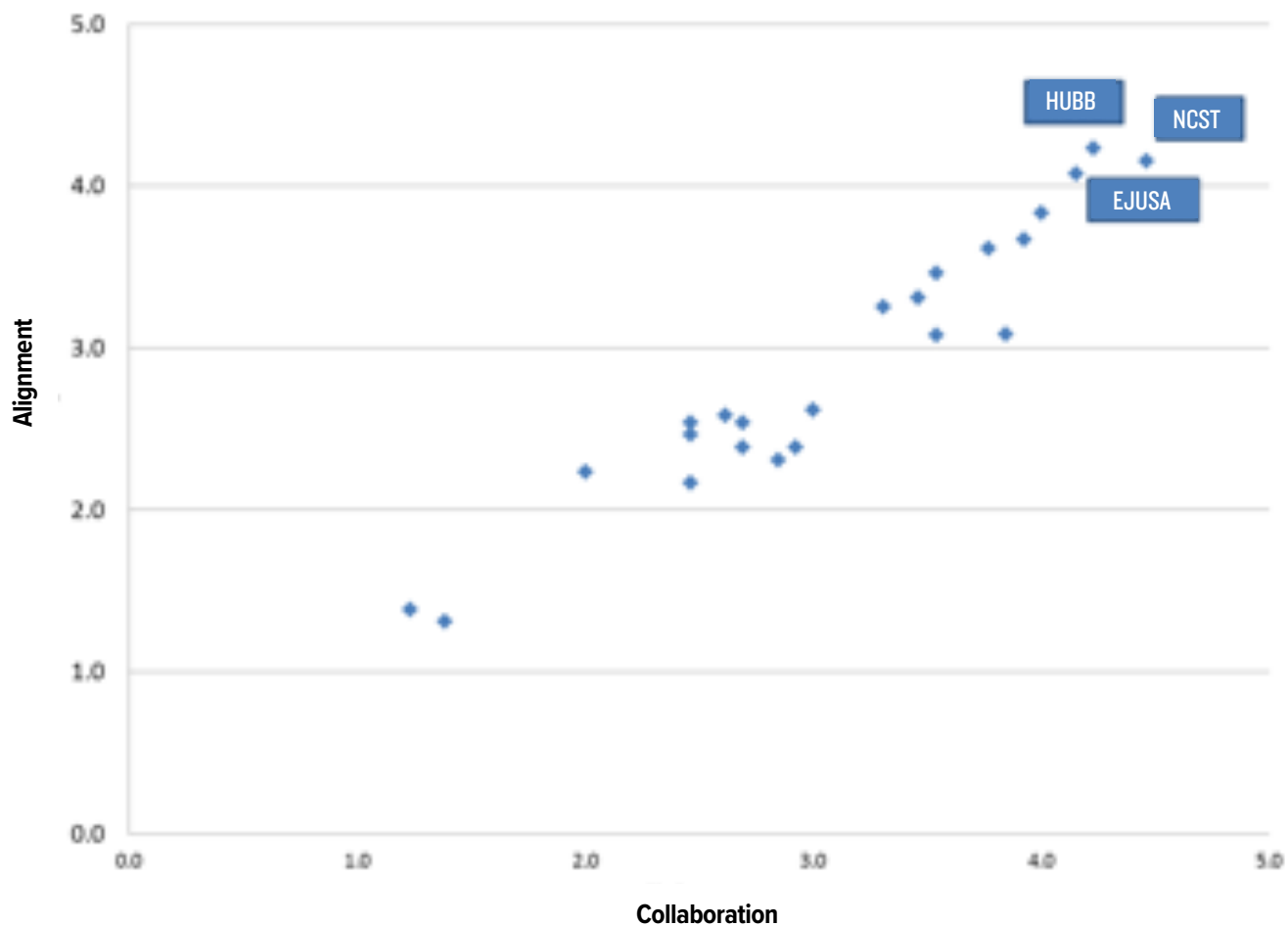
Opportunity Youth Network

Adrien developed IT skills to
obtain his Black Seal license.

(from 1=not closely aligned to 5=very closely aligned). We also ranged organizations along similar domains of collaboration (from 1=no interaction to 5=a great deal of interaction) and likely support (from 1=no likely support to 5=very likely support). The input received by participants confirms that the organizations in the ecosystem are perceived to be closely aligned with each other with somewhat lower average scores for indicators of actual collaboration (3.1 vs. 2.9 in scales of 1-5). Moreover, most agencies are seen by participants as

potential recipients of support by their own organizations (3.3 in a scale of 1-5). However, some organizations were seen as more central to the ecosystem than others: For example, across the three dimensions explored above, NCST, EJUSA, and The HUBB received the highest scores from participants. Moreover, we find consistency across dimensions with ratings for a given organization in a given domain tracking ratings in another domain as shown in the figure below.

FIGURE 4. RATINGS OF ALIGNMENT AND COLLABORATION FOR ORGANIZATIONS IN NEWARK'S ECOSYSTEM OF HEALING (23 ORGANIZATIONS)



We attribute this variation to differences in terms of the roles played by the different organizations in the development of the ecosystem. For example, both EJUSA and NSCT co-host the Public Safety Roundtable, and as such, their visibility may be more pronounced than in other cases. It is also the case that the specialized scope tied to some organizations such as University Hospital may limit perceptions related to their role as a potential/actual partner in broader coalitions. In other instances, certain organizations may be positioned in the periphery of this particular ecosystem due to more prominent roles in other collective instances of deliberation on similar topics. That is the case of LISC and Rutgers-Newark in the specific context of the Newark Public Safety Collaborative.

In the last section of the survey, we asked participants about their general perceptions of the agencies in the ecosystem, rather than in terms of actual/potential collaborations. These questions included the extent to which they believed that Newark was “a better city” due to the work of these organizations; whether they wished that their organization would collaborate more with them; and whether more funding was needed for these agencies. All responses were set to range from 1=strongly disagree to 5=strongly agree. Overall, responses were positive and very similar between questions. The organizations that received the highest ratings were, in addition to those listed above, the Newark Youth Opportunity Network, My Brother's Keeper, and the Office of Violence Prevention and Trauma Recovery.

Taken together, these findings confirm that, from a network perspective, the ecosystem for healing being developed in Newark is robust in terms of action and intention, with all actors known to each other and most related to one another through active collaboration and broader relations of respect and support.

Challenges and possibilities

Departing from frameworks imposed from the outside, many of the Newark leaders we spoke too signaled the need to redefine risk and sense of safety from a collective perspective that emphasizes shared dangers as well as local solutions. With the help of these leaders, we identified some specific risk factors conducive to violence. These Newarkers also spoke about systemic conditions that promote environments of harm. Critically, when mapping these broader forces, they also talked about their personal stories of strength, trauma, and vulnerability, including the conditions that helped them to rebuild and recover from the inside out. Here we summarize the factors of vulnerability and protection framing the Newark landscape.

Risk factors

- ✗ Concentrated economic disadvantage in specific neighborhoods mostly populated by Black and Latinx residents.
- ✗ Absence of employment opportunities.
- ✗ Reduced access to quality housing.
- ✗ Culture of fear: division among wards that lead to framing narratives of friends and enemies, promoting unhealthy conflict and stereotypes.
- ✗ Proliferation of guns.

Protective factors

- Historic transcendence of grassroots organizations promoting healing and mediating conflicts at the neighborhood level.
- Federal, state, and local governments' willingness to redistribute budget and actual funding of community-based violence reduction initiatives.
- Philanthropic efforts open to support governments and communities' creative projects for violence reduction and prevention.
- Institutionalized (permanent) participation efforts and periodically defined spaces to gather and share resources, interact with institutions, and foster community interactions.
- Strong board of education and a diverse curriculum already in place, with an emphasis on Black and Latinx history.
- Social workers known by the community in institutions responding to violence.
- Consent decree enforcing the transformation of relationships between police and Newark residents, all considered members of the community.
- Multiple faiths in conversation.
- Culture of participation.
- Legacy of arts and creative inquiry.

From these conversations we also learned about a series of concerns directly connected to this ecosystem, and its sustainability, that keep the flame and the call for action alive:

- Funding possibilities are tied to political will. A different mayor or governor could jeopardize the future of funding for initiatives centering the experiences of survivors from a public health approach.
- Trust is day-to-day work, and some community members still struggle to find comfort in institutional amendments as the shadows of the past are still too dark in relation to their own traumas.
- Interpersonal and community violence have increased in Newark, although the trends have not been as high as in other cities around the country. Amid the global health pandemic and economic strains, leaders must continue monitoring violence closely.
- There are still concerns tied to the consent decree. Although abusive use of force and lethal encounters have decreased, most violent interactions between the NPD and community members are still targeting Black and Brown communities. The Monitoring Team and adjacent organizations must continue to revise existing standards and create lasting change as part of the police culture transformation.
- Latinx community participation needs a boost. Their underrepresentation in this work might be related to the city's large undocumented population, whose experiences with institutions have made them skeptical or fearful of engaging with law enforcement or government.
- There is a generational gap impacting newer participants in the activism arena. Elder Newarkers are determined to seed the future and come up with new possibilities to instill their knowledge and organizing capabilities to younger community members.
- The civilian review board is still a work in progress.

Summary

An ecosystem, by definition, is a complex arrangement of interdependent parts. It is also constantly evolving, changing, reacting to different conditions. We hope, then, that it's clear that Newark's public safety ecosystem is not a finished project. We think it is special — and that it could represent something of a blueprint for other cities invested in their communities and open to the idea that those communities might best understand the solutions to violence that threaten their collective well-being. But we know that Newark's ecosystem can improve and encompass more of the community's needs. As much as this document might be a blueprint, it is also a promise to continue striving for better solutions and stronger peace.

WE WANT TO ALSO RECOGNIZE THAT THE COMPLEXITY OF THIS ECOSYSTEM MADE IT IMPOSSIBLE TO SPEAK WITH EVERY ORGANIZATION, LEADER, AND ACTIVIST WHO CONTRIBUTES TO NEWARK'S PUBLIC SAFETY. BUILDING THE PEACE THAT WE SEEK IS A RESPONSIBILITY WE ALL CARRY, AND THERE ARE MANY ON THE FRONT LINES WHOSE VOICE WE COULDN'T CAPTURE HERE. BUT THEIR EFFORTS ARE VITAL AND INSPIRE US TO KEEP RISING, TO KEEP SHAPING THE FUTURE OF PUBLIC SAFETY.

ENDNOTES

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