

IMPACTS OF FIREARM VIOLENCE POLICY PROJECT

SITE VISIT SUMMARY
MAY 24, 2023

Intervention as Prevention:

Mitigating Harm and Reducing the Effects of Trauma

REACH Team; Los Angeles, CA

The Opportunity

Exposure to firearm violence can have a lasting impact that hampers a child's ability to self-regulate, learn, develop skills, and build healthy, high-quality connections with others. This early trauma, like other Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs), not only harms the child but also increases the risk of violence in their future — as a victim, a perpetrator, or both.

Viewed from this lens, effective intervention is also upstream prevention. If traumatized children receive the services and supports that can mitigate the negative impacts of trauma, they are more likely to develop into stable, resilient adults who can contribute meaningfully to society and avoid perpetuating the cycle of trauma and violence.

This site visit gave Commissioners and staff a firsthand look at the REACH Team, a program that aims to interrupt this cycle by intervening in the immediate aftermath of a violent incident. Commission staff organized the visit in collaboration with this program and several of their community partners. All Commissioners and select Commission staff were invited to attend.



Site Visit Summary

Attendees met with members of the REACH Team and leadership within the Children’s Institute and the Los Angeles Police Department’s (LAPD) Community Service Partnership (CSP), two of the partners that collaborated to create and implement the team. (The other two partners are the LA City Attorney’s Office and Tessie Cleveland, a mental health agency that provides services to all ages.) A presentation provided an overview of the REACH Team, including an outline of their basic process:

- 1 **Referrals come in from several sources, including LAPD, daily police reports, schools, and an 800 number for the community to reach out directly.**
- 2 **The team responds to any incident of violence where a child was exposed within the program area (parts of South Los Angeles with the highest rates of firearm violence and violence in general).**
- 3 **When the team is deployed, a care coordinator and mental health provider meet with the families of children exposed, bringing a no-strings-attached, age-appropriate care package to each child within the home.**
- 4 **They offer crisis counseling to the child or children exposed (usually up to six sessions, and the child can be transferred to a long-term therapist via warm hand-off for addressing complex trauma). They also offer personalized services and supports to the family (which could include getting them a place to stay for the night, diapers or other supplies, money for groceries, linkage to other services, etc.). They use a trauma-informed approach and treat the family as a system, not just the individual.**
- 5 **Families often refuse services at first, but they can get in touch and receive support at any time after the incident; there is no time limit.**

In addition to the targeted work the REACH Team does, they also do community outreach, engagement, and capacity building through working with educators and school administrative staff, supporting youth community service projects, and offering educational programs and events for families in the community.

This dovetails with the work of the LAPD’s CSP bureau, which aims to build trusting relationships between the community and law enforcement through a holistic, wraparound approach that prioritizes providing support and meeting needs over making arrests. CSP officers spend time getting to know community members, particularly youth in the community. On multiple occasions during the ride-along, teens approached officers to greet them by name with a high five or a fist bump. These casual, friendly relationships help the community see law enforcement as a partner rather than an adversary, allowing for more open channels of communication about potential conflicts, gang activity, and violence prevention in the neighborhoods.

The REACH Team’s work also intersects with the work of dozens of community partners offering support and services to youth and families in the area. Site visit attendees met representatives from after-school tutoring and academic programs, scholarship programs, community centers, and sports programs for youth.



Recurring Themes from the Site Visit

- Firearm violence is often a **last resort** for people who are desperate to have their needs met. If we help these individuals meet their needs, they are less likely to turn to using a firearm to solve their problems.
- Support needs to be **flexible** and **customized**, meeting people where they are. Violence prevention can take many forms, like help with rent or groceries, job skills training, crisis counseling, or mentorship.
- Youths need to have **trusted, stable adults** in their lives to feel safe and supported. Ideally, this is the parents, but it can also be extended family, friends' parents, volunteers, community outreach workers, law enforcement officers, or any other adults working or living in the community.
- It takes a village: supporting the community and reducing violence requires a **network of partnerships** with warm hand-offs and good communication.
- **Mental health is stigmatized**, and there is still work to do in normalizing people seeking out and receiving mental health treatment or support, particularly in communities of color.
- There are many effective strategies, but organizations struggle to cobble together funding from multiple sources. Streamlining the move from a **promising approach to a sustainable program** would help ensure that effective strategies are implemented and scaled up.

The Commission staff are deeply grateful for the many partners who worked together to make this visit happen, including:

- Los Angeles Office of the City Attorney
- The Children's Institute
- LAPD's Community Safety Partnership
- Operation Progress
- Sisters of Watts
- Strive
- Watts Empowerment Center
- Uplift Sports and Mental Health
- Nick's Kids

NEXT STEPS

The Commission will explore other opportunities that combine prevention and intervention into one cohesive approach, interrupting the cycle of trauma and violence that underpins much of our community firearm violence. The REACH Team model will be disseminated as a promising model for future violence intervention and prevention approaches that may be adopted in other areas. Staff will continue to engage community members and those with lived experience with firearm violence to ensure the outcomes of this project are culturally responsive and shaped by the community.

