

# Group Violence Intervention In Philadelphia

UPDATE: December 2021

## Introduction

The City of Philadelphia launched a pandemic-modified version of the Group Violence Intervention (GVI) strategy in August 2020 as part of our goal of reducing shootings by 30 percent by the end of 2023. The GVI strategy was developed by Professor David Kennedy of the National Network for Safe Communities at John Jay College in New York. GVI aims to reduce a specific type of gun violence: violence that involves members of neighborhood groups. This report provides a progress update on activities in the first 15 months of this initiative.

## National Context: The GVI Strategy

Over the past few decades, cities across the country have demonstrated that violence can be dramatically reduced when community members join together with government, law enforcement and social service providers to deliver a three-pronged antiviolence message on active street groups. Community members with moral authority over group members deliver a credible moral message against violence. Law enforcement puts groups on prior notice about the consequences of further group-involved violence for the group as a whole. And social service and outreach providers make a genuine offer of help for those who want it.

- 1) Nationally, the majority of victims and perpetrators of gun violence (60 percent or more) are part of a tiny, interconnected part of the population (about a half of one percent). These individuals are often part of a neighborhood group connected to the geographic area where the shootings take place.
- 2) Like many urban centers across the country, Philadelphia has had a low clearance rate in incidents where the victim survives, meaning there is no arrest or other legal consequences. This is

because the individuals in this half of one percent of the population are among the least likely to cooperate with police when they are victims of crime.

- 3) Shootings act like a contagion because of the propensity among group members to retaliate when they or their fellow group members are victimized. As a result, a single shooting can spawn five or more related shootings. The small percentage of victims and offenders, the low clearance rate for non-fatal shootings and the contagious nature of retaliatory shootings have been consistent parts of Philadelphia gun violence for at least the last 30 years.<sup>1</sup>



**I have nothing bad to say about GVI or those a part of it. They**

out here delivering a message that everyone needs to receive; I definitely needed to receive it. If I could give the quality of their message a 1 out of 5, I would give it a 10.

- GVI Participant



<sup>1</sup>Murder is No Mystery, An Analysis of Philadelphia Homicides, 1996-1999, Joseph P. Tierney, Wendy S. McClanahan, Bill Hangle, Jr. National Criminal Justice Reference Service (NCJRS).

Modeling Contagion Through Social Networks to Explain and Predict Gunshot Violence in Chicago, 2006 to 2014 Green, Horel, Papachristos, JAMA Intern Med. 2017

Even in communities with high rates of violence, very few people are involved in homicides and shootings, and they are connected to each other through groups. Members of these groups typically make up around half a percent of a city's population but are involved in 60 percent of its homicide and gun violence. These dynamics have been magnified by the proliferation of disputes on social media which have increased the frequency and geographic scope of rivalries and disagreements.

GVI responds to each of these enduring characteristics by:

- 1) Directly engaging the half a percent of individuals connected to groups that are involved in gun violence,
- 2) Creating consequences where there previously were none for the groups and group members in direct response to shootings, and
- 3) Interrupting the contagious effect of shootings by creating an incentive for individuals to discourage and resist violence to avoid promised consequences.

**“**

**At first I hated the idea of having these people at my doorstep.** But after they shared their message and gave me more insight on why they were there and what they were hoping to [accomplish] I was all on board. Gun violence is real, and my past experiences are real as well. And to have people at my door wanting to help me and trying to keep me [alive] is a blessing in itself.

**”**

**- GVI Participant**

Traditionally GVI is implemented by assembling a partnership of law enforcement, community representatives (e.g., parents of murdered children, street outreach workers, people with lived experiences in the criminal justice system and credibility in community), and social service providers, to participate in what is known as a Call-In. (See the Appendix for a glossary of terms). A Call-In is a face-to-face meeting between group members and representatives of this GVI partnership. Together, the GVI partners deliver the strategy's antiviolence messages to representatives of groups and then follow up on those messages. While the particular messages delivered from each representative of the partnership are nuanced, the underlying point can be boiled down to the following **GROUPS** message:

**G**roups Are Driving Gun Violence  
**R**ecieve Consequences If You Shoot Or Help If You Want It  
**O**ur Community (Including You!) Is Hurt By Gun Violence  
**U**Are Connected To Group Violence!  
**P**ut Down The Guns  
**S**hare This Message With Your Group

- LIST OF AGENCIES PARTNERING ON GVI CALL-INS:**
- Office of Violence Prevention
  - Philadelphia Police Department
  - U.S. Attorney
  - Attorney General
  - Adult Probation
  - Juvenile Probation
  - Federal Probation
  - First Judicial District
  - District Attorney's Office
  - State Parole

## PARTICIPANT #1

Participant 1 is a member of a South Philadelphia-based group. The GVI team visited the client's home several times, and each time, the client refused the team's request to receive the GVI message and declined services. Later, the client would be arrested for illegal drug possession. Two months later, the client was released. The client immediately reached out to the GVI team for help and assistance after being released. The client was in desperate need of work and financial support. Within 48 hours of his release, the GVI team successfully connected and placed him on a GVI work crew – Mt. Moriah Cemetery. After three months of working at the jobsite, the client has been promoted to full-time employment and has been placed at the Mt. Airy Improvement District. The starting hourly wage is \$17.

During the Call-In, law enforcement representatives make promises of specific consequences for groups and individual group members if they or their group commit an act of gun violence. Social Service Case Managers offer an "off ramp" out of violence through prioritization for a variety of social service supports including employment, housing, and therapy. Credible members of the community tell the groups that the violence has to stop.

The offer of help is not an alternative to consequences but instead a recognition that some group members may need help changing their behavior.

## 103

individuals from law enforcement, social services, and moral voice/credible messengers have been trained to provide custom notifications to participants.

## Philadelphia Implementation: Adapting the Model to Pandemic

During the COVID 19 pandemic large group gatherings were prohibited. However recognizing the urgent need to quickly implement an intervention to address the increasing gun violence, the City launched a modified version of the GVI strategy in August of 2020.

The GVI Team consists of three full time case workers and one supervisor who work with the GVI partners to engage individuals who have been identified as at risk of continued violence. Under the modified strategy, the City conducted direct engagement in the community by deploying GVI teams consisting of the same messengers who would participate in a Call-In; police, prosecutors, surviving family members of murder victims and Social Service Case Managers. These teams known as Mobile Call-In Teams ("MCITs") engaged group members and or their families in the communities where they live.



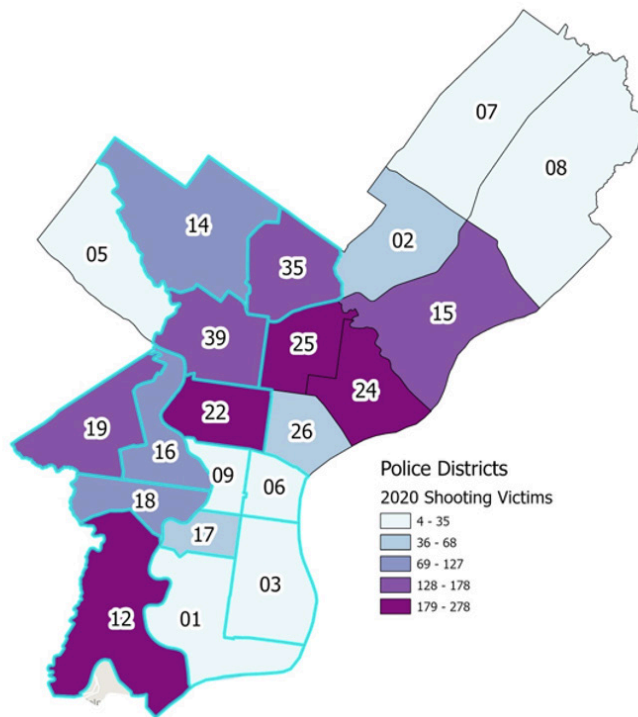
*David Kennedy the national expert on GVI has described the Philadelphia effort as heroic, unique and groundbreaking;*

## Philadelphia has launched this effort with real seriousness in the midst of a global pandemic

and a national outcry against abusive policing and for a new kind of public safety," Kennedy said. "We're seeing extremely serious, extremely innovative work, and the initial signs of results are exactly what we look for at these early stages.



## Expansion of GVI over time 2020 - 2021



Month of GVI Implementation in Police Districts

Date Implementation	Police District
2020 Aug	12th
	18th
	19th
2020 Sept	16th
2021 Jan	6th
	22nd
2021 Feb	1st
	3rd
	17th
2021 Mar	14th
	35th
	39th

The strategy began in the Southwest section of the city, then expanded in to Central, followed by South, and then into the Northwest section of the city. In total the MCITs attempted to engage members of 75 different groups spread out over four different police divisions. Of those 75 groups attempted, the teams were successful in locating and engaging individual members of 56 groups. The remaining 19 group representatives were either unlocatable, actively avoided engagement, or were unresponsive to multiple attempts by the teams.

To date, through mid-December 2021, 598 individual candidates have been identified for Custom Notification or Mobile Call In (MCI)<sup>2</sup>. MCITs (Mobile Call-In Teams) have conducted approximately 1,191 home visits, resulting in direct engagements with 302 individual members and 239 collateral contacts with family members or influentials of GVI Candidates<sup>3</sup>.



**Mr. Deion and his team are saving my life. They are consistent and persistent.**

They are consistently trying to help me...you cannot be mad at people that genuinely want to help you. It is made up of people who been through what I been through or people who lost loved ones from gun violence – and I don't want my mom to lose me. So, overall, I connected with them on a personal level, and I appreciated it.

- GVI Participant



<sup>2</sup>26 additional individuals were referred by current participants.

<sup>3</sup>These engagements include follow up visits.

**598**

candidates have been identified for custom notifications/services

**1,191**

attempted custom notifications to date (includes follow-ups)

**302**

direct contacts with GVI candidates (includes follow-ups and Call-In)

**239**

collateral contacts with family members of GVI candidates (includes follow-ups)



**I never had interactions with police like I had during the [engagement].** They were serious

about stopping gun violence, but they were also really concerned for my [safety]. It was a weird encounter. Weird because it was positive not negative. More engagements like GVI can help build a bond between police and the community. You can't come to the community with a lock-you-up mentality. No one is going want to work with you. But when you come with respect and a sense of care for the people, we will be more open to having a conversation. I think GVI did a good job with that.

*- GVI Participant*



Beginning in October 2021 GVI began traditional in-person Call-Ins which are now supplemented by MCIT deployments following the group meeting. One in-person Call-In was conducted for parts of the Central Division and a single district in the Northwest Division.

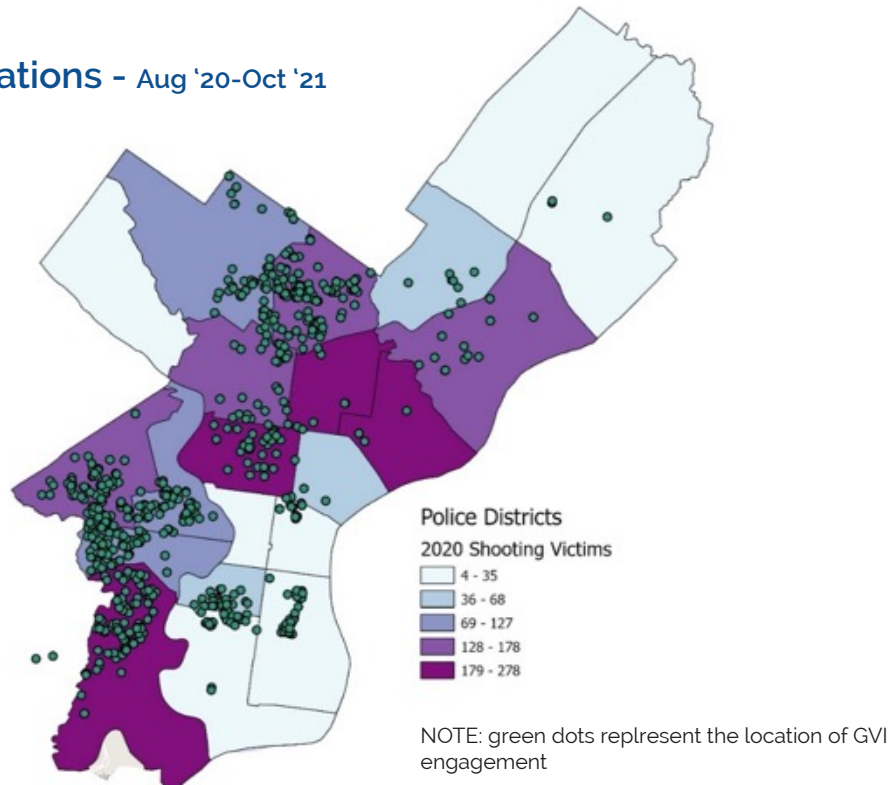
Call-Ins with supplemental MCITs deployments are planned for 2022:



NOTE: This timeline is subject to changes due to the impacts of the ongoing pandemic.

The City is currently working to expand GVI to the remaining two police divisions East and Northeast—including in the 24th and 25th Districts which have some of the highest rates of violence historically—so that GVI will be operating citywide and has begun onboarding additional GVI direct service staff.

## GVI Custom Notifications - Aug '20-Oct '21



## Engaging with the High-Risk Population

GVI is designed to serve those highest at risk of committing future shootings or being a future victim. Individuals directly engaged as part of the strategy are selected through a collaborative effort between Police, Probation and the District Attorney's Office based on a collective assessment of an individual's level of risk of involvement in gun violence.

Participants have had, prior to referral, an average of 6.6 previous arrests. The median age of individuals referred is 19. Ninety-six percent are black males, one percent are white males, one percent are Hispanic males, one percent are black females, one percent are white females, and less than one percent are Hispanic females. Of the individuals who accepted services, the average age was 24 (ranging from age 14 to 38) and 100% were African American. 32 percent of those who accepted services were shooting victims before any GVI Team engagement. After their initial engagement, only six or three percent have been shooting victims. Among those individuals who received an engagement but declined to actively engage in case management

36 percent were shooting victims before receiving the GVI Team Engagement. Since the engagement 19 people, or five percent, have been shooting victims.

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**Seeing my mom cry while the [moral messenger] talked about losing her son did something to me.** I am not perfect,

and I make mistakes every day. But no one comes between me and my mom. To see her react the way that she did made me re-think my chain of thought and really listen to what she says.

- GVI Participant

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## Moral Voices

One of the key GVI messengers is the Moral Voice of the Community. This voice is typically represented by the mother of a victim of homicide. In the traditional Call-In a mother speaks about the loss of their child to gun violence and provide a personalized testimonial of the impact of gun violence on families and the community. In order to fully staff the MCITs to conduct in-person direct engagement in the community Philadelphia sought volunteers from the survivors' community to staff multiple teams. Dozens of survivors, most of whom are the mothers of murder victims, participated in the MCITs on a voluntary basis almost every weekend for a year.

## Enforcement

Law enforcement partners communicate directly to group members to set clear expectations about consequences—at the group level—they can expect if the violence does not stop. If a group is the first to commit a shooting or the most violent group, the entire group will receive attention from law enforcement for any illegal activity they are engaged in, with a focus on finding the lowest level of enforcement that will change behavior. After the groups are placed on notice, the GVI law enforcement partnership monitors the violence to determine if an enforcement response is necessary. When enforcement is necessary, GVI capitalizes on the fact that members of groups are often involved in a variety of criminal offenses, so pressure can be applied to the entire group. The law enforcement partnership includes the Philadelphia Police Department, the District Attorney's Office, Probation, the Attorney General's Office, the US Attorney's Office, FBI, DEA, and ATF. Since August 2020, 26 groups have been the subject of a group enforcement action due to their sustained involvement in violence.

## Outreach and Support Structure

Each GVI participant who accepts the offer of services is assigned a Case Manager. GVI Case Managers coordinate and provide care that is safe, timely,

## PARTICIPANT #2

Participant 2 was recently released from prison. He served several years in a Pennsylvania SCI. The participant's focus was to gain meaningful employment, enroll into a trade school, and find a place of his own. The participant was successfully connected to CEO for employment. The GVI team and the participant continued to seek additional job opportunities. After, several weeks of extensive job searching, the participant was offered a position at Canada Dry. Pay wage begins at \$18 an hour. The participant has been active member of Canada Dry for five months now, he recently enrolled into a local trade school, and is in the process of submitting a down payment for his very first apartment.

effective, efficient, responsive to needs, and client-centered. Realizing this is a very high-risk case load, Case Managers are prepared to meet people where they are and conduct multiple follow ups to keep lines of communication open and set clients up for success. Case Managers are accountable for the full client-care cycle. Case Manager duties include assessing, planning, implementing, monitoring, and evaluating actions required to meet the client's needs. Case Managers can provide internal services such as intensive case management, documentation attainment, allocation of emergency funds (Visa gift cards), transportation assistance, work-referrals, among other services. Some of the most requested services include removing immediate barriers and helping to navigate social services. For example, clients have requested diapers for children and laptops for virtual school.

In addition to removing these immediate barriers, the GVI Social Services Team connects participants with employment and social services. However, the most frequently requested service is employment. Employment was requested by 83 percent of those who desired GVI social services.

## Employment

GVI participants have the opportunity to immediately enter employment, if they choose, through [Center for Employment Opportunity \(CEO\)](#). CEO guarantees every participant who completes a one-week job-readiness orientation up to four days a week of transitional work on a crew with daily pay. Wage rates start at \$11.75 for the transitional work but move up to \$14-18/hour in the permanent positions. As an incentive to get individuals to follow through on opportunity for immediate employment candidates are given a \$100 Visa gift card if they show up and complete orientation.

In addition to work and daily pay, CEO provides a robust set of wraparound services. On days when participants are not working, they receive job coaching to find full-time employment. Once participants find full-time positions, CEO continues working with them for a year to ensure they have the support they need to grow in their careers.

Employers of GVI participants include Nelson & Kellerman (waterproof environmental and sports performance instruments), Philadelphia Building Trades, and Waste Management.

## Out of all of those individuals who have accepted services

**147**

individuals receiving GVI Case Management

**104**

of these are receiving additional services

**89**

of these have been connected to employment

## PARTICIPANT #3

Participant #3 is a very active group in West Philadelphia. The GVI team went to the participant's house and spoke with the participant's mother. Despite not being able to contact the participant, the mother shared his phone number, and team members were able to contact him via phone. He expressed an interest in working but appeared hesitant to commit. A GVI Case Manager introduced the participant to one of our employment partners, CEO. The participant was scheduled for three orientations, but he was unable to attend all of them. His excuse for missing the orientations was due to his fear of rejection. "Will they accept me? "Can I do the work?" "Am I ready? These were questions he asked himself constantly. To best support the participant, we registered the participant for his fourth orientation. As a moral support-person, the GVI Coordinator picked up the participant and drove him to orientation. After completing orientation, the participant was assigned to a GVI work crew. After working on the crew for three weeks, the participant referred three additional members of his group to the GVI work crew. We have successfully placed them all on a GVI work crew.

## Education

GVI participants also have the opportunity to connect to education services. Partners include services at [E3 Centers](#), and Temple University's [Workforce Education and Lifelong Learning \(Well\) program](#) (High School Diploma and GED).

## PARTNER AGENCY SPOTLIGHT:

Concilio services include: informing victims and witnesses about the criminal justice process, reporting any victim-witness intimidation and/or retaliation, and providing supporting victims with support needs throughout the process. Concilio clients are offered emergency housing relocation services, emergency funds, support groups, and victim awareness education.





**After the team came to my house, I told all of my friends ‘the DA, police and social services was at my door talking about they know us.’**

When my friend said [the team] visited his house, that is when I knew it was...real. The cool part about it is that none of us had anything bad to say about it. We all started to share the flier and the job information with others. Since then, two of my friends and myself got a job. So, it worked out in the end.

*- GVI Participant*



## Workforce Development/Job Training

For youth who want to train for additional employment options, GVI partners with Temple's [Youth Employment Project \(YEP\)](#), NCI's [Herbert J. Hoetler Center \(VTC\)](#) (vocational training in automotive, transportation, construction, culinary, and HVAC). [Career Link](#), [OIC](#), and [Urban League](#).

GVI also connects participants to emergency housing and relocation through the [District Attorney's Office – Victim Services Unit](#) and other support services through the [City's Office of Reentry Partnership \(ORP\)](#).

## GVI Formal Evaluation

Reducing violence is crucial to creating healthy, safe, and equitable communities for all Philadelphians. A rigorous evaluation of the current GVI implementation in Philadelphia will help us assess of whether the implementation has achieved its primary goal of reducing violence and help us determine how to continue to improve its effectiveness. While GVI implementations across the country have been extensively evaluated, there are many unanswered questions about the precise mechanisms for GVI effectiveness. The Philadelphia evaluation seeks to

provide further information about what makes GVI effective and, to the extent possible, answer some of these questions.

The University of Pennsylvania is conducting empirical evaluations of the current GVI implementation in Philadelphia. The evaluation will test the effect of GVI as a violence reduction strategy in Philadelphia. Quantitative-based questions currently include the following:

- What is the effect of the intervention on each street group that receives the GVI treatment?
- What is the place-based effect of the intervention?
- What is the effect of direct contact on the individual group member's rate of recidivism and victimization?

The evaluation will look at the effects of the intensity of the intervention ("dosage") and will explore differences across different locations in the city.

The evaluation will also gather qualitative information about the current GVI implementation including:

- How do residents of GVI-affected communities perceive health, procedural justice, and safety?
- How do the GVI notification team members perceive their function? Do they perceive that the GVI recipients and their families are receptive to GVI? What are the most challenging aspects of the call-in process? How has COVID-19 affected the process?
- How do GVI recipients perceive GVI? For GVI recipients who have successfully changed their behavioral patterns, what aspects of GVI did they perceive to be the most or least useful? What key factors do they identify as instrumental to changing behavioral patterns? Are these factors part of GVI? External to GVI? What is their perception of social media as an instigator of violence? How do family members perceive GVI?

**The evaluation is anticipated for completion in late 2022 or early 2023.**

## Glossary

**call-in.** A key GVI communication tool, a meeting during which a partnership of law enforcement, community members, and social service providers delivers the no-violence message to group members and, through them, back to their associates. The strategy can entail other methods of notification, but the call-in is its traditional communication mechanism. The partnership usually holds a call-in in a place of civic importance, and it ideally lasts about one hour. The term "notification" is also often used to describe direct communications between the partnership and group members.

**community moral voice.** (1) The collective standards of a community affected by violence that are articulated through individuals with moral standing and credibility in the eyes of group members. (2) The selected individuals who, by the virtue of their moral standing, articulate the community's standards, aspirations, frustrations, and expectations and who, by the virtue of their life experiences, have the respect of group members. During call-ins, community moral voices speak directly to group members to clarify and reinforce community standards. This includes openly addressing street and community norms that can drive violence.

**custom notification.** Also referred to as a Mobile Call-In, brings the GVI message to the individual selected to receive it. The Custom Notification Team or Mobile Call In team is comprised of a GVI case manager, Police, a representative of the Moral Voice of the Community, an Assistant District Attorney and a Credible Messenger.

**enforcement action.** Coordinated law enforcement action against members of a violent group, performed by the law enforcement operational team (i.e., local, state, and federal agencies) of the GVI partnership. Sanctions include performing full conspiracy investigations, vigorously enforcing the conditions of group members' probation or parole, serving outstanding arrest warrants, performing drug buys and arrests, serving warrants for outstanding child support, checking group members for unregistered cars, and performing housing code enforcements.

**group audit/group mapping.** The process of identifying all violent groups in a jurisdiction, their areas of operation, and their alliances and conflicts, and estimating the number of their members. This is most often done by convening and debriefing experienced frontline officers and other street-knowledgeable practitioners, such as field parole/probation personnel.

**group involved shooting.** Any shooting involving a member of a group. This includes any shooting where a group member is a victim, perpetrator or co-conspirator.

**incident review/shooting review.** The process of reviewing a jurisdiction's violent crime incidents for group member involvement, motive, connection to prior and subsequent violence, and similar key aspects. This is most often done by convening and debriefing experienced frontline officers and other street-knowledgeable practitioners, such as field parole/ probation personnel.

**influential.** A person known to have a positive influence in a group member's life.

**project manager.** The person who facilitates GVI implementation at the local level, taking the lead for the professional and administrative functions.