
EVALUATION OF THE NEWARK COMMUNITY STREET TEAM (NCST)

INNOVATIONS IN COMMUNITY-BASED CRIME REDUCTION PROGRAMS

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We are also grateful for the participation of the residents, community stakeholders, and institutional partners who play a vital role in the NCST. As they participated in interviews, focus groups, and informal discussions, these individuals shared their perceptions, their thoughts, and their dreams, ensuring that community voice was a fundamental part of this effort.

We appreciate everyone who engaged in the research process for their devotion to transforming public health and community well-being, ensuring that violence can end and public safety can be sustained.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The work of the Newark Community Street Team (NCST) and the specific program strategies implemented by Outreach Workers, Case Managers, and High Risk Interventionists alongside the Community Sentinels Leadership Program and the Public Safety Roundtables represent a systematic and well-established effort at community violence intervention. This effort stands independent of law enforcement but at times communicates with trusted representatives of the police and/or sheriff when there is a need for sensitive intervention within communities where violence has occurred. In the current day, community violence intervention, or CVI as it is most often known, has refined and concentrated its efforts on engaging and training community residents and those with lived experience to respond with care and intention to the threat of violence. Alongside High Risk Interventionists, Community Outreach Workers, and Case Managers, residents have engaged in an organized effort that works to both short circuit current

The involvement of community members is not simply a matter of residents raising their hands and saying, “*I volunteer.*” Instead, the engagement of residents must be **intentional and sensitive**; it is also critical that it is based upon **training and constant supervisory support.**

violence occurring in the streets of various cities as well as prevent future violence from ever taking place. However, it is critical to note, the involvement of community members is not simply a matter of residents raising their hands and saying, “*I volunteer.*” Instead, the engagement of residents must be intentional and sensitive; it is also critical that it is based upon training and constant supervisory support.

Additionally, as part of this current iteration of CVI, there has been a renewed focus on the issue of effectiveness. Since the establishment of CVI (and group violence intervention), crime statistics have represented the sole data upon which effectiveness is measured. This is problematic for many reasons. First, crime statistics are often incomplete, lag, or must be updated and revised. Second, these statistics do not adequately portray all aspects of public safety or resident involvement necessary for CVI success and sustainability.

The following evaluation represents a preliminary effort at examining the impact of these two current changes: **the implementation and increase in community engagement aimed at violence intervention** and **the inclusion of multiple data points to measure CVI effectiveness**. It is critical to understand that with the research budget limitations, this evaluation has depended on descriptive statistics. However, despite these limitations, these findings will serve as a basis to seek further funding for a more robust and in depth quantitative as well as qualitative evaluation. Once such an effort is funded and completed, it will be possible to render a more complete picture of the impact of CVI. That is not to understate the significance of this effort. Ultimately, all of this work is about understanding and demonstrating the importance and effectiveness of community-based crime and harm reduction.

This report begins with the following research questions:

1. What kind of quantitative data has been gathered about the growth of the Newark Community Street Team (NCST) from 2020 to 2023?
2. How does the NCST staff describe their work and its impact on public safety and community wellness?
3. Going forward, what does NCST need to understand about its work and what is required to be effective?

In order to answer these questions, a review of quantitative data collected by NCST was conducted. Following that, qualitative data were collected to augment the statistical record. All of the evaluation research was guided by the effort to gain a better, more holistic understanding

of how NCST functions as a violence prevention, harm reduction, and public safety organization, drawing upon time spent with leadership and staff from NCST, as well residents, community-based nonprofit organizations, law enforcement, and elected officials. The research process was both participatory and intentional, conducted over three years from 2020 to 2023 and included six multi-day visits with follow-up video conferences and interviews as well as telephone interviews and focus groups.

Findings from the quantitative data analysis are presented in this report, followed by themes that emerged from qualitative data collection and analysis. Independent coding of the themes resulted in the development of three overarching themes and ten major themes that emerged from the qualitative portion of the evaluation. Both the overarching themes and the major themes were then used to guide the development of recommendations.

Overarching Theme One:

Throughout its 10 years of operation, NCST has exceeded expectations and has established its profile as an organization both “of and for” the community.

Theme One: There is a very robust referral network. Referrals for case management, training for the Community Sentinels Leadership Program, and participation in the Public Safety Roundtables were the result of a powerful network based on word of mouth.

Theme Two: The ongoing impact of trauma in every aspect of NCST among staff, clients, and the communities that are served must continue to be addressed.

Theme Three: Throughout every aspect of NCST programming there is a consistent and meaningful emphasis on self-care.

Overarching Theme Two:

The Public Safety Roundtable and the Community Sentinels Leadership Program performed far beyond expectations. There was enthusiasm about participation in both of these programs as well as respect for their profiles and work within the community.

Theme Four: The Sentinels Program builds on African history to give children, youth, and the community a grounding in African history and a sense of identity.

Theme Five: Leadership and participants in the Sentinels Program focused on each individual's desire to keep their communities clean, safe, and thriving.

Theme Six: The Public Safety Roundtables represented a major opportunity for community engagement and also served as a mutually reinforcing program alongside the Community Sentinels Leadership Program.

Theme Seven: There was a resilience shared by all involved in NCST programming. Outreach Workers/Case Managers, High Risk Interventionists, Public Safety Roundtable participants, and Community Sentinels viewed crises and problems as a challenge and an opportunity to learn.

Theme Eight: The support and programming offered by the Sentinels Program is highly valued by Newark community residents and stakeholders. This is accompanied by the ground level belief that it must continue – that it is not present to simply address a temporary problem, but instead, the program must be institutionalized as part of the community.

Overarching Theme Three:

What has been undertaken by NCST at every level is a strong example of collective efficacy.

Theme Nine: All aspects of NCST's programming are strengths-based. In particular, the Public Safety Roundtables and the Community Sentinels Leadership Program are each a significant source of community building and strengthening. Their impact is far reaching.

Theme Ten: A desire for sustainable change has guided so much of the work individuals described.

RECOMMENDATIONS

There are four key recommendations that emerged from the evaluation themes.

- 1.** Because it is the embodiment of collective efficacy, NCST programs in general – and the Community Sentinels Leadership Program in particular – should be elevated to a national model and best practice.
- 2.** Data Collection must be strengthened.
- 3.** Public Safety Roundtables must continue to be implemented and institutionalized. They require expanded and dedicated funding to ensure their growth and survival.
- 4.** Trauma-informed self-care for NCST staff must be expanded and funded. There should be a dedicated city budget item for this specific practice which is both valuable and necessary ensuring effective harm reduction, crime reduction, and NCST’s ongoing ability to address the impact of trauma.

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“Everything NCST does helps all of us. The Sentinels teach you about public safety. You see what it means to everyone. It’s easy to murder someone on purpose, but it’s hard to have a good day on purpose. Everything I learned, it teaches you about the community – that it’s a good community but it needs help. And you learn that there is something inside of you that wants to make things better. That feeling doesn’t last for a day or a week. It lasts forever.”

Much has transpired in the aftermath of the global response to the death of George Floyd and the demand for alternatives to traditional law enforcement approaches. Over the past three years, Community Violence Intervention (CVI) has received increased attention as part of the effort to both initiate and expand community-based crime reduction. It is critical to note that CVI and community-based efforts at creating and sustaining safe neighborhoods together do not represent a new idea. Instead, this approach has been part of public safety efforts for over two decades. Its origins can be traced to early efforts in major urban areas and cities including Boston, Chicago, and Los Angeles during the decades of high rates of violent crime. These initial efforts at violence intervention focused on gangs, a response to the explosion of gang violence that occurred during the 1980s and 1990s, an era many activists, practitioners, and policymakers labelled, “the decade of death.” However, as the understanding of the root causes of gang violence grew and were eventually linked to the overall issue of community violence, a second wave of community-based violence reduction began to evolve. Within this second wave, two major types of approaches evolved: (1) group violence intervention, which included law enforcement in its efforts and (2) community violence intervention, which existed separate from law enforcement with varying degrees of relationship with police. Both approaches were united

in one particular way: the reliance on crime statistics as the guide to measure program intervention and success. Any kind of program evaluation and assessment of effectiveness invariably turned to data collected by law enforcement which presented both opportunities and problems in its wake. However, as community-based violence reduction has evolved, so evaluation must also change and expand to consider multiple measures of effectiveness.

The efforts of the Newark Community Street Team (NCST) and the specific program strategies implemented by Outreach Workers, Case Managers, and High Risk Interventionists – alongside the Community Sentinels Leadership Program and the Public Safety Roundtables (PSRT) – represent a second wave of community violence intervention.

In the current day, CVI has refined and concentrated its efforts on **engaging and training** community residents and those with **lived experience** to respond with care and intention to the threat of violence.

This effort stands independent of law enforcement but will communicate with trusted representatives of the police and/or sheriff when there is a need for sensitive intervention within communities where violence has occurred. In the current day, community violence intervention, or CVI as it is most often known, has refined and concentrated its efforts on engaging and training community residents and those with lived experience to respond with care and intention to the threat of violence. Alongside High Risk Interventionists, Community Outreach Workers, and Case Managers, residents have engaged in an organized effort that works to both short circuit current violence occurring in the streets of various cities as well as to prevent future violence from ever taking place. However, it is critical to note, the involvement of community members is not simply a matter of residents raising their hands and saying, “*I volunteer.*” Instead, the engagement of residents must be intentional and sensitive; it is also critical that it is based upon training and constant supervisory support.

Additionally, as part of this current iteration of CVI, there has been a renewed focus on the issue of effectiveness. Since the establishment of CVI (and group violence intervention), crime statistics have represented the sole data upon which effectiveness is measured. This is

problematic for many reasons. First, crime statistics are often incomplete, lag, or must be updated and revised. Second, these statistics do not adequately portray all aspects of public safety or resident involvement necessary for their success and sustainability.

The following evaluation represents a preliminary effort at examining the impact of these two current changes: the implementation and increase in community engagement aimed at violence intervention and the inclusion of multiple data points to measure CVI effectiveness. It is critical to understand that with the research budget limitations, this evaluation has depended on descriptive statistics. However, despite these limitations, these findings will serve as a basis to seek further funding for a more robust and in depth quantitative, as well as qualitative,

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evaluation. Once such an effort is funded and completed, it will be possible to render a more complete picture of the impact of CVI. That is not to understate the significance of this effort.

Ultimately, all of this work is about understanding and demonstrating the importance and effectiveness of community-based crime and harm reduction.

The research and evaluation team, which is affiliated with the Social Justice Research Partnership within the UCLA Luskin School of Public Affairs, has worked as an evaluation partner with the Newark Community Street Team since its inception in 2014. As part of this, the research and evaluation team undertook a qualitative evaluation that was completed in 2020. This effort then led to the current evaluation of what occurred in NCST once the organization received funding from the Innovations in Community-Based Crime Reduction (CBCR) grant in 2020. For this evaluation, both quantitative and qualitative data was collected and analyzed. Findings from the quantitative data analysis are presented in this report, followed by themes that emerged from qualitative data collection. The evaluation that follows presents a portrait of

the ongoing work and effectiveness of NCST, with a particular emphasis on the Community Sentinels Leadership Program and the Public Safety Roundtables.

INTRODUCTION

The Newark Community Street Team (NCST) was established in 2014 as a pilot program with seed funding and the complete support of Newark Mayor Ras Baraka. Its activities first focused on the South Ward of Newark where the highest rate of violent crime was centered.¹ Led by Aqeela Sherrills, NCST had its roots in community violence intervention that had occurred on the west coast, in the epicenter of gang activity, Watts California. It was there that Sherrills, along with key gang leaders, worked to broker the Watts Gang Peace Treaty of April 1992.² The lessons learned from the brokering of that treaty reinforced a growing belief that the most

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effective forces to deter future gang crime were not law enforcement officers but instead the former gang members who now wished to heal the streets they had once sought to destroy.

Additionally, these individuals who understood both individual and community transformation began to organize into the community violence

intervention groups operating in multiple neighborhoods throughout the city and county of Los Angeles that were considered “gang impacted.” These efforts gained the attention of elected officials and policy makers, although they were initially reluctant to acknowledge that law enforcement alone could not take care of the problem. Once it became a mantra that “we can’t arrest our way out of the problem,” the role of community violence prevention and intervention was elevated and officially recognized. In 2007, the Los Angeles Mayor’s office Department of Gang Reduction and Youth Development (GRYD) was established. This office offered a new approach to gang prevention and intervention, creating a pathway to community-based crime

¹ A complete history of the establishment of NCST can be found in the UCLA Documentary Narrative Evaluation <https://www.newarkcommunitystreetteam.org/2021/02/10/newark-community-street-team-narrative-evaluation/>

² <https://www.latimes.com/opinion/story/2022-04-22/la-uprising-watts-truce-gang-violence-riots>

reduction.³ Additionally, substantive quantitative and qualitative research was conducted that also created new models surrounding the measurement of effectiveness.⁴

At the same time, there was another development in the city of Los Angeles: the establishment of the Watts Gang Task Force (WGTF). Comprised of the residents of Watts who were joined by community stakeholders, elected officials, and law enforcement, the WGTF was the first citizen-led body in the city to not only monitor the efforts of law enforcement but to openly and actively *direct* community violence intervention efforts. Probably the most profound example of this could be found in the ongoing involvement in and consistent appearance of the LAPD Chief of Police Charlie Beck, who sought not only the counsel but the support of the WGTF in crime reduction efforts. The work of the WGTF ultimately gained state funding support for the One Watts program which combined community violence intervention with resident job training and placement programs, a three-year effort that led to substantive outcomes as documented in a three-year evaluation report.⁵

The establishment of the peace treaty, the ongoing efforts of the Los Angeles gang violence interventionists, and the impact of the Watts Gang Task Force all coalesced to play a vital role on what was occurring in Newark, New Jersey. Aqeela Sherrills, who had long been recognized for his work on peace-making, survivor strengthening, and community violence intervention, sought to bring the lessons learned in Los Angeles to the east coast. In partnership with Newark Mayor Ras Baraka, Sherrills soon determined that this New Jersey city would be a valuable proving ground for the methods developed on the west coast.

Six months later, in November 2015, NCST created a partnership with the City of Newark Department of Health and Community Wellness and instituted the West Ward Victims Outreach Services and Crime Reduction Initiative (WWVO). This effort represented an expansion into a second community – adding the West Ward to the South Ward as the focus of NCST efforts. The

³ <https://www.lagryd.org/index.html>

⁴ <http://www.juvenilejusticeresearch.com/projects/gryd>

⁵ The evaluation was conducted by Leap & Associates and can be supplied by this report's authors.

WWVO was conceived as an innovative crime victim services and violence prevention strategy, adding on to the overall grassroots work originally implemented by Mayor Ras Baraka 2014. As a result of braided funding from local philanthropic foundations⁶ and a grant from the U.S. Department of Justice, NCST both expanded its service sector and hired a full-time MSW. The funding enabled them to begin offering crisis/short-term counseling as well as the capacity to connect crime victims and their families to services and community resources. Because of this, the role and identity of NCST Outreach Workers and High Risk Interventionists grew and became more complex.

This established a pattern that NCST would follow for the next decade. There was an expansion of services and an ongoing emphasis on community engagement and collective efficacy. In assessing its brief history, it is clear that from 2015 to 2023, the Newark Community Street Team has evolved and further developed a complex and responsive mixture of approaches and services. In 2020, then Newark Public Safety Director Anthony Ambrose emphasized the significance of the work of the NCST High Risk Interventionists and Outreach Workers reporting, *“When there is a problem, we call them.”* Ambrose continued, *“Their work fills a void that cannot be filled by the police department.”* In evaluating its culture and its evolution, it is apparent that from its establishment onward, NCST has not remained rigidly fixed in place, drawing upon its early strategies. Instead, the organization has noted and responded to community needs with the intentional development of new approaches and services. The current evaluation is a reflection of the most current phase of that growth, occurring between 2020 and 2023. It is critical to take into account the fact that part of the service delivery occurred during the height of the global pandemic when there were quarantines and meeting restrictions.

NCST has not remained rigidly fixed in place, drawing upon its early strategies. Instead, the organization has noted and **responded to community needs** with the intentional development of new approaches and services.

⁶ These philanthropic foundations included the Prudential Foundation, the Schumann Fund, the Victoria Foundation, and Paul Profeta of the Profeta Urban Investment Foundation.

Nevertheless, NCST continued to work, intervening in violence while supporting and strengthening the community.

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WHAT DO THE NUMBERS SHOW: FINDINGS FROM THE QUANTITATIVE DATA

It is generally acknowledged that quantitative data is integral to understanding the impact of any community-based initiatives— particularly those aimed at violence intervention. However, in this rapidly evolving approach to crime reduction, data is often not accurately collected or analyzed. The Newark Community Street Team (NCST) and its program components have worked to change that reality. They have systematically collected data regarding the efforts of its Outreach Workers and High Risk Interventionists. NCST has also collected data on program activities that range from participation in the Public Safety Roundtable (PSRT) to the impact of its Case Managers, particularly on the relocation of individuals from high-risk environments.

The research and evaluation team has worked together with NCST to organize and present the first set of quantitative data that the NCST team has collected. The following quantitative picture presents descriptive statistics that illustrate the changes and improvements in program service delivery over time. This first set of findings is meaningful, not only in its portrayal of the impact of NCST but also as a foundation for further evaluation and research efforts to be carried out. The report will first describe the specific program component being portrayed. This will be followed by the data that demonstrates program component changes over time.

Outreach Workers and High Risk Interventionists

The mutually reinforcing roles of the NCST High Risk Interventionists (HRI) and Outreach Worker are multi-faceted and vital to NCST. Simply stated, these HRI workers and Outreach Workers comprise the engine powering the main NCST activities. These individuals view their relationship with the community – and between one another – as holistic; they are always aware of what is occurring in different settings and work together to intervene in violence and ensure the long-term well-being of community members, particularly high-risk youth and adults. Prior to examining each of their roles in depth, it should be noted that since its

establishment, NCST has never discriminated on the basis of gender and has included both female and male Outreach Workers as part of its professional workforce and leadership team.

To begin, it is critical to understand the role of the HRI. When considering the functions of HRI workers and Outreach Workers, their differing roles and responsibilities can be viewed as two sides of the same coin of public safety. The HRI workers focus on acute threats of violence and/or acts of community violence. As an embodiment of the public health model, HRI workers are committed to initiating and maintaining trust and relationships with neighborhood residents and their extended families, gang members, and associates, as well as community elders. Because they have lived in the communities they are now serving, these community-based interventionists leverage these relationships to intervene in threats or acts of violence. They also work in concert with Outreach Workers/Case Managers. Together, the trust these individuals build enable both HRIs and Outreach Workers to obtain critical information and intelligence that is *never shared* with outsiders, most notably law enforcement. This insight then allows them to short-circuit, de-escalate, and prevent violent events at danger of occurring in the South and West Ward communities and subsequently provide services to these residents. By mediating violence and ensuring peace, the efforts of HRI workers are designed to drive the crime rate down and decrease the number of violent incidents that occur in community settings.

This HRI also maintains communication with the Newark Police Department (NPD) but there is no high-level or formal collaboration, a relationship that is agreed to on both sides in order to ensure community trust. The NPD sends email notifications of homicides and shootings as soon as they occur, in real time. The High Risk Intervention team is required to respond to at least 3 crisis-level events every 24 hours. There is, however, no cap on the number of HRI responses that may occur in a 24-hour period.

Each High Risk Interventionist responds to active street disputes, helps de-escalate personal disputes, and collects intelligence at crime scenes without crossing the yellow line. They draw

upon trust and leverage relationships with all those associated with the perpetrator as well as victim(s) to further de-escalate rumors and prevent retaliation. Additionally, interventionists may follow shooting victims to the hospital for what is termed “a warm hand” off to the Hospital Violence Intervention (HVIP) Team based in the trauma unit. Beginning in 2020, the team received and responded to 2-3 calls from the Newark Police Department (NPD) per day with each of these calls originating from the South and/or West Ward. High Risk Interventionists receive intelligence from the police but, as stated previously, they never share their own intelligence with law enforcement. This arrangement has been accepted by NPD based on the mutual benefit and improved public safety that results from these practices.

In turn, it is necessary to comprehend the complementary Outreach Worker role and their extensive responsibilities as Case Managers. The NCST outreach and case management model is a cornerstone of NCST violence intervention and harm reduction approach. It focuses on deterring crime and retaliation through intensive case management of individuals who are victims of violent crime as well as those who have previously been involved in violent crime and are at-risk for recidivism and/or relapse. Often there are individuals who have been both actors and victims – the roles are not mutually exclusive. To best understand the needs of all of these individuals and to serve them effectively, the core of the case management model is comprised of the “Mentee Program,” which pairs at-risk individuals (mentees) with Outreach Workers (Case Managers). This pairing is not based on a brief intervention but is instead, a key relationship that is integral to long-term transformation. As trust is built between the Case Manager and mentee, they work together to create an individualized plan for the mentee’s involvement and/or reintegration into the community. It is critical to note that these are not “one size fits all” case management protocols. Instead, the Outreach Worker (mentor) and mentee build their case plan together. These plans may include relocation to avoid retaliation and/or domestic violence issues, substance addiction treatment, educational opportunities, and job training and placement.

This is not an easy process, nor is it as straightforward as this description. NCST Outreach Workers are deeply involved in the daily and even hourly struggles of their clients, creating a safe and intentional space for individuals to communicate and share with them. By conducting home visits, accompanying clients to interviews and appointments, and even spending “down time” with them, Outreach Workers build trust and a strong relationship with each one of their clients. Outreach Workers are not simply Case Managers, they also mentor each client who they work with. Over the course of the CBCR grant, from 2020 to 2023, NCST has continued to recruit and train Outreach Workers and High Risk Interventionists. Additionally, from 2020 to 2023 the number of people who have enrolled and been trained in these specific roles has increased by 66%. This is depicted in Figure One. There are now 39 people in staff roles in these two programs. This number indicates an overall increase but the yearly totals must be considered in terms of the impact of the pandemic upon program participation. The number of staff recruited and trained increased dramatically after quarantine practices ended.



Figure One: Outreach and HRI Workers 2020-2023

Because they are central to the mission of NCST, Outreach Workers/Case Managers were a particular focus of this evaluation. Data reveals that over the course of each month, Case Managers meet with their assigned mentees an average of 3.5 times, spending an average of 1.5 hours together per session. The number of mentees enrolled in the Case Management Program per year is portrayed in Figure Two. It is also important to note enrollments in each year:

1/1/20 - 1/1/21: 212 Mentees
1/1/21 - 1/1/22: 120 Mentees
1/1/22 - 1/1/23: 201 Mentees
1/1/23 - 1/1/24: 137 Mentees

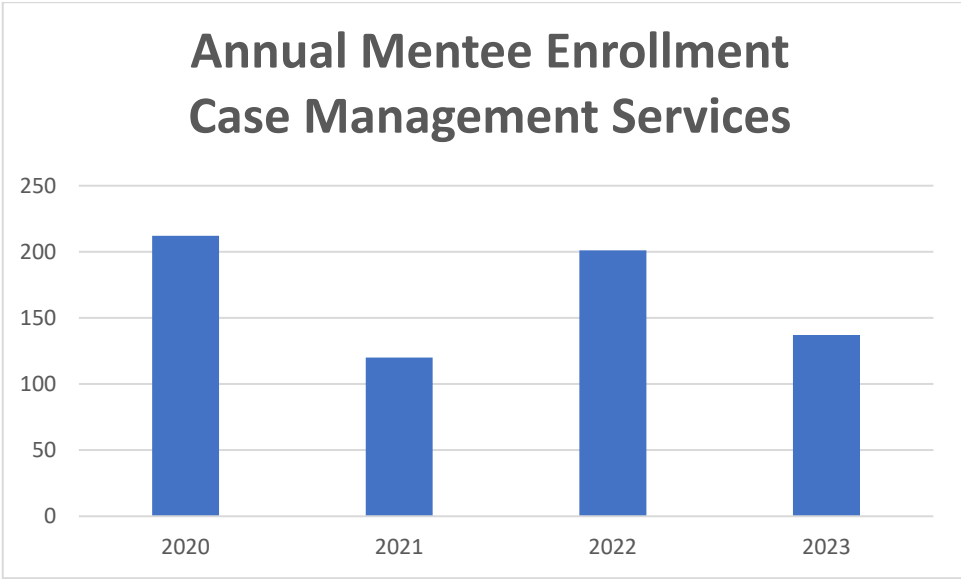


Figure Two: Case Management Mentee Enrollment

It has long been understood and documented that for many individuals, the most effective plan for avoiding further victimization and/or for successful community intervention consists of relocation to a new setting. Since 2020, NCST has relocated 122 individuals from high-risk environments where they faced myriad forms of violence that ranged from threats of retaliation

to ongoing domestic/intimate partner violence. **There were some individuals who feared that they would continue to be subjected to escalating partner violence while others expressed concerns that they would fall into substance abuse or criminal activities with friends, family, or associates from their past if they were not able to relocate. For these individuals, relocation represented a crime prevention strategy as well as an opportunity for individual healing and change.** At the community level, these relocations also accomplished the goal of preventing and/or deterring additional crime.

The response to the need for and completion of relocations is portrayed in Figure Three. It must be noted that while male relocation has waxed then waned, female relocation has steadily increased. Sadly, this is largely attributable to the increase in intimate partner violence occurring in the lives of community residents. Some, but not all, of this is due to the quarantine and household lockdown during the pandemic.

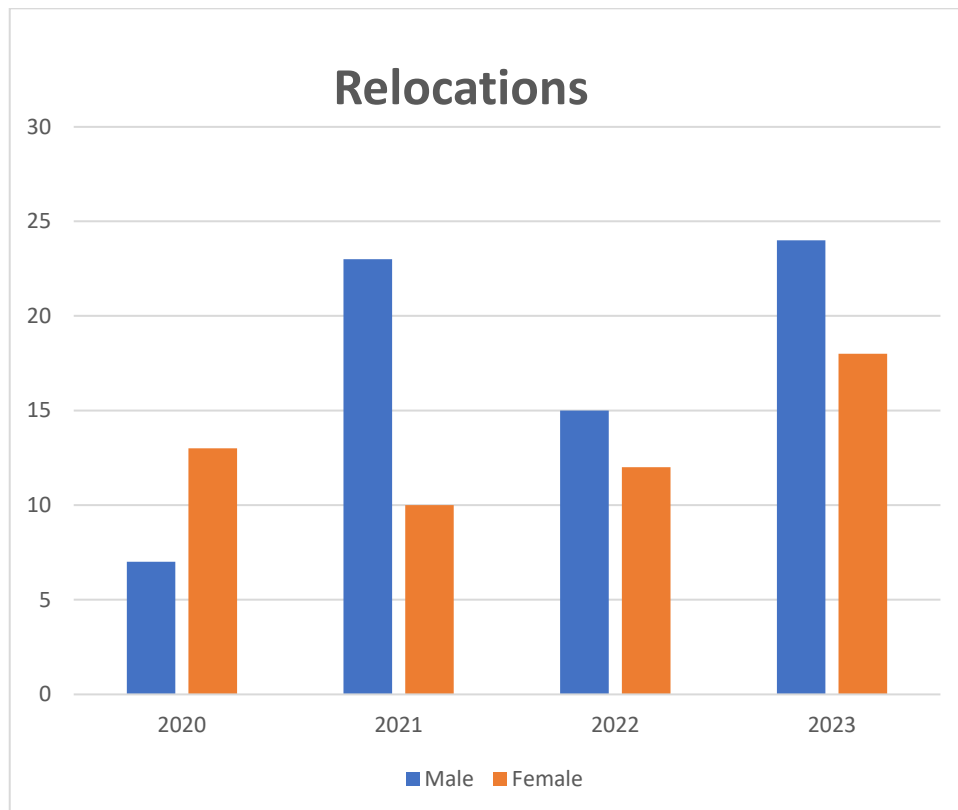


Figure Three: Relocation of Individuals from Original Communities

Public Safety Roundtables

Since the launch in November 2020, Public Safety Round Tables (PSRTs) have become an integral part of NCST. As stated previously, this is an approach modeled after the Watts Gang Task Force in Los Angeles. The PSRTs hold monthly meetings in the Newark communities most impacted by violence, crime, poverty, and economic neglect. Since their inception, the roundtables have been committed to providing a safe space for community members, service providers, stakeholders, law enforcement, elected officials, and political leadership to discuss problems, air grievances, develop solutions, and interact with one another in a non-threatening environment.

From 2017 to 2022, with a gap during the height of the Covid pandemic, meetings of NCST's Public Safety Roundtables were regularly observed by a member of the research and evaluation team. At each meeting, the Roundtable was comprised of members of the Newark Police Department, including a Captain, as well as High Risk Interventionists, Outreach Workers, community residents, along with staff of other local nonprofit organizations, and stakeholders. Initially, during the 2020 meetings, there was a small and committed group of residents involved, but their numbers grew over time. Their trust, however, took much longer to build, particularly after law enforcement's responsibility for the death of George Floyd and the civil actions that took place globally in its wake.

At every PRST, multiple agencies are consistently in attendance. The Newark Police Department is always present, making sure there is a representative from their leadership team. They are most frequently joined by a representative of the Mayor's Office. Additionally, the Director of the Newark Office of Violence Prevention and Trauma Recovery (OVP) reports on recent developments in the ongoing effort to reduce violence citywide. The evaluation team has regularly observed the meetings and the growing participation of community residents as well as stakeholders including *My Brother's Keeper* which focuses on youth as well as *Seeds and Berries*, which emphasizes the need for continued trauma-informed approaches to crime reduction, always aimed toward healing. The Newark Public Safety Collaborative provides data and guidance to community-based organizations regarding surges in crime so that services can

be directed to where they are most needed. Additional attendee organizations include New Jersey Together (NJT), Returning Citizens (after incarceration), and the New Jersey Institute of Social Justice (NJISJ). Additionally, elected officials attend the PSRT, particularly when there are concerns about emerging legislation. Past PSRT attendees have included New Jersey Attorney General Matthew Platkin and New Jersey State Senator Teresa Ruiz.

Despite a certain residue of mistrust of law enforcement, attributable to the post-George Floyd environment, it is clear that the approach and engagement of the Public Safety Roundtables has solidified. These groups cover a broad range of topics – most notably the needs of families, whether they are the families of victims of violent crime or the families of the accused. Over the months, along with its focus on public safety and community violence, there has been discussion of sex trafficking and street work, substance misuse and the availability of Narcan, ongoing issues at schools and outreach into school settings, and the significance of HRI and Outreach Worker efforts. Repeatedly, residents and stakeholders alike express their gratitude for both case management and violence interruption.

Most notably, the attendance and participation in PSRTs has increased. Since November 2020, NCST has hosted 37 monthly PSRTs attended by 6,251 people. From their onset to present, NCST has continually and dramatically increased attendance as illustrated by these year-to-year comparisons as portrayed in Figure Four.

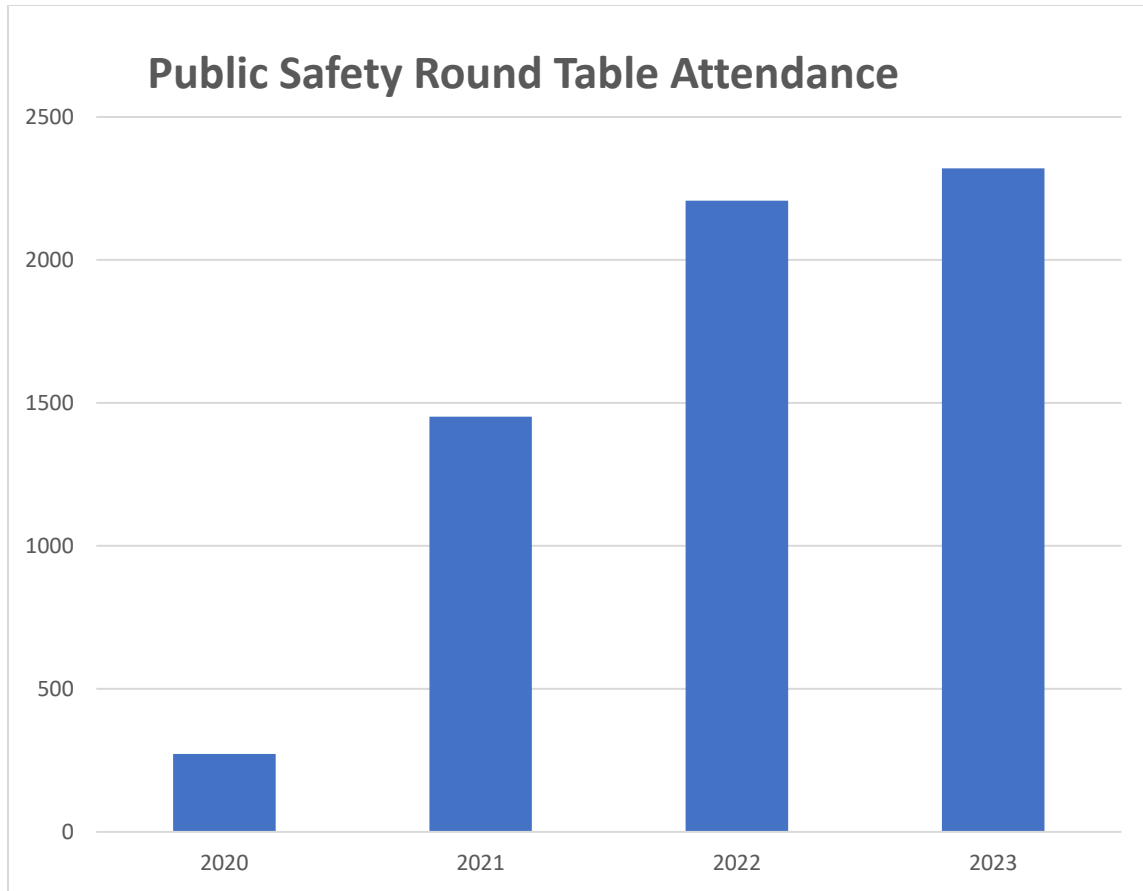


Figure Four: Public Safety Roundtable Attendance

Trauma Recovery Center

The NCST Trauma Recovery Center (TRC) focuses on delivering services and support to victims of violent crimes including physical assault, sexual assault, gunshot wounds, stabbings, domestic violence, and human trafficking. These victims, who live and work in historically marginalized communities such as Newark, have long been underserved by traditional institutions. Along with these service deficits, they face challenges in their recovery from traumatic events. To support their treatment and their healing, the TRC develops personalized service delivery plans that include the following services, which are tailored to individual needs and requirements.

Individual Mental Health Therapeutic Services: comprised of up to 32 weeks of free, intensive trauma-informed therapeutic services with counselors and therapists trained in trauma-informed care;

Group Therapy Services: based on a group curriculum and treatment approach comprised of trauma-focused cognitive behavioral therapy and dialectical behavioral therapy;

Community Outreach: ongoing and delivered by Outreach Workers who help by accompanying clients to appointments in the community, providing wellness checks, and encouraging community members to take advantage of the services offered by the TRC;

Case Management: delivered by specifically trained workers who provide individually developed personal plans as described previously.

The TRC is one of the most extensive and well attended components of NCST programming. From June 2021 through July 2023, the TRC has served 431 clients from virtually all age groups.

Hospital Violence Intervention Program (HVIP)

The NCST Hospital Violence Intervention Program (HVIP) is founded on a well-established partnership with the University Hospital Trauma Unit, providing intervention services to victims of violence receiving in-patient treatment at the hospital. NCST Outreach Workers are embedded in the Trauma Unit and work to reduce the threat of retaliation by providing ongoing 24/7 support to these hospitalized victims of violence. Yet, their work does not end when individuals leave the hospital. Instead, Outreach Workers follow individuals over the long-term, ensuring they return for follow-up visits and also guiding them in efforts to receive community-based services. In this way, the HVIP team provides seamless care to individuals, both while they are being treated inside of the hospital and afterwards, when they are discharged from hospital care and return home. Currently there are three NCST Outreach Workers at the University Hospital who are on call 24 hours a day. The HVIP team draws upon wraparound services, which include post-release trauma recovery, relocation from settings where they were

victimized, and reintegration assistance which may consist of job training and legal assistance. Additionally, the HVIP assists victims of violent crimes to apply for Victims of Violent Crime Act grants. As part of all of these efforts to ensure that all individuals can access the care they need, the HVIP links individuals with NCST case management services. From June 2021 through July 2023, HVIP enrolled 226 individuals who had been victims of violence in its program.

Overdose Response

There is an extensive history of research that demonstrates how tightly community violence and substance misuse are intertwined. Everyone on staff at NCST is well aware that Newark and Essex County has recorded some of the highest drug overdose rates in New Jersey.⁷ Black men between the ages of 45 and 64 years old are particularly vulnerable to deaths from drug overdoses. Despite state investment in treatment programs and law enforcement initiatives, these deaths from drug overdoses have continued to rise . Since 2022, NCST's community-based harm reduction programs have focused on this overdose epidemic through the partnership with University Hospital described previously; they are tasked with providing a community-led response to overdose emergency calls. All NCST staff, particularly HRI workers have been trained in recognizing the signs of an overdose; HRI along with other staff members, have been equipped with Narcan Kits enabling them to immediately render aid to overdose victims. Additionally, they have distributed nearly 900 Narcan Kits to community members in areas with historically high numbers of overdose incidents. These efforts have saved at least 44 lives so far, as illustrated in Figure Five.

⁷ <https://www.njoag.gov/programs/nj-cares/nj-cares-suspected-overdose-deaths/>

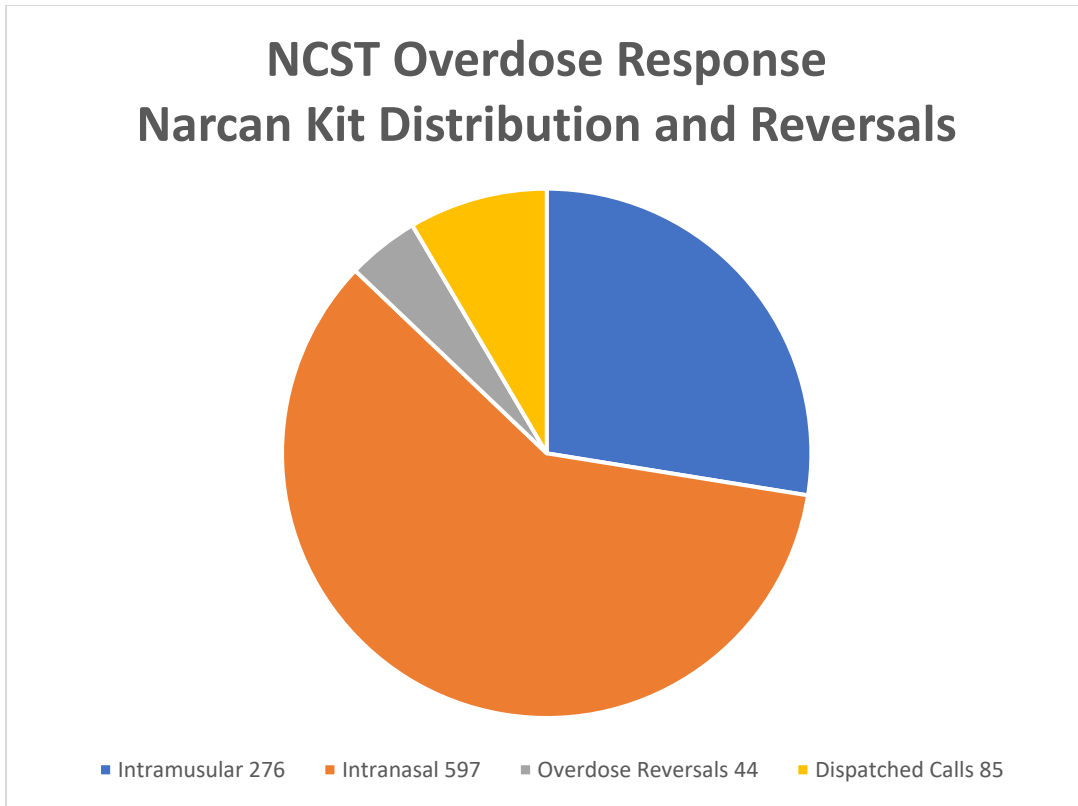


Figure Five: NCST Narcan Kit Use

The Community Sentinels Leadership Program

Evaluation research has revealed that the Community Sentinels Leadership Program currently represent one of the most effective components of NCST’s overall crime and harm reduction strategy. This program consists of community resident-volunteers who work directly with NCST’s High Risk Intervention team as first responders to low-level, quality of life issues such as loitering, school disputes, and personal disputes in the South Ward of Newark. Although all community members are encouraged to get involved in the Sentinels Program, young people are a particularly important group to attract due to their vulnerability to crime, drugs, and gang involvement.

However, this is not simply a program that seeks to involve community members in violence and harm reduction. Instead, the Sentinels Program begins with the idea that for many communities there is a generational struggle to confront past injustices, to understand history, and to prepare

youth to face the future with resilience. This is especially meaningful in the communities of Newark where there are youth at high-risk for mistreatment educationally, economically, and legally. However, this risk is further complicated by the divide and alienation that exist between adults and adolescents. Community Sentinels is a program that is intentionally cross generational. Modeled on best practices as well as research that emphasizes intergenerational bonding and attachment, the program is dedicated to nurturing educational growth and encouraging community leadership.

From 2020 to 2023, the Sentinels Program has guided nine cohorts of student through a cross-generational leadership program. The curriculum includes training on civic awareness, conflict resolution, self-efficacy, self-esteem, education, and community organizing. The first two cohorts were comprised of twenty community activists and block leaders joined by adjudicated youth adults. While these two cohorts were largely successful, they also faced multiple challenges. They concluded with lessons learned surrounding the need to more effectively capture both the interest and the imagination of what NCST terms, *“our core target group – 16- to 24-year-old youth and young adults.”* This is also the age group at highest risk for involvement in community violence, criminal justice, and incarceration. The Sentinels Program followed up with youth and young adults who had dropped out of the program. These former program participants had multiple suggestions for how to improve the program and appeal to those who were younger. The research team worked to develop descriptive statistics to accurately portray the establishment and expansion of the Community Sentinels Leadership Program. First, Figure Six offers an overview of cohort recruitment, participation and graduation.

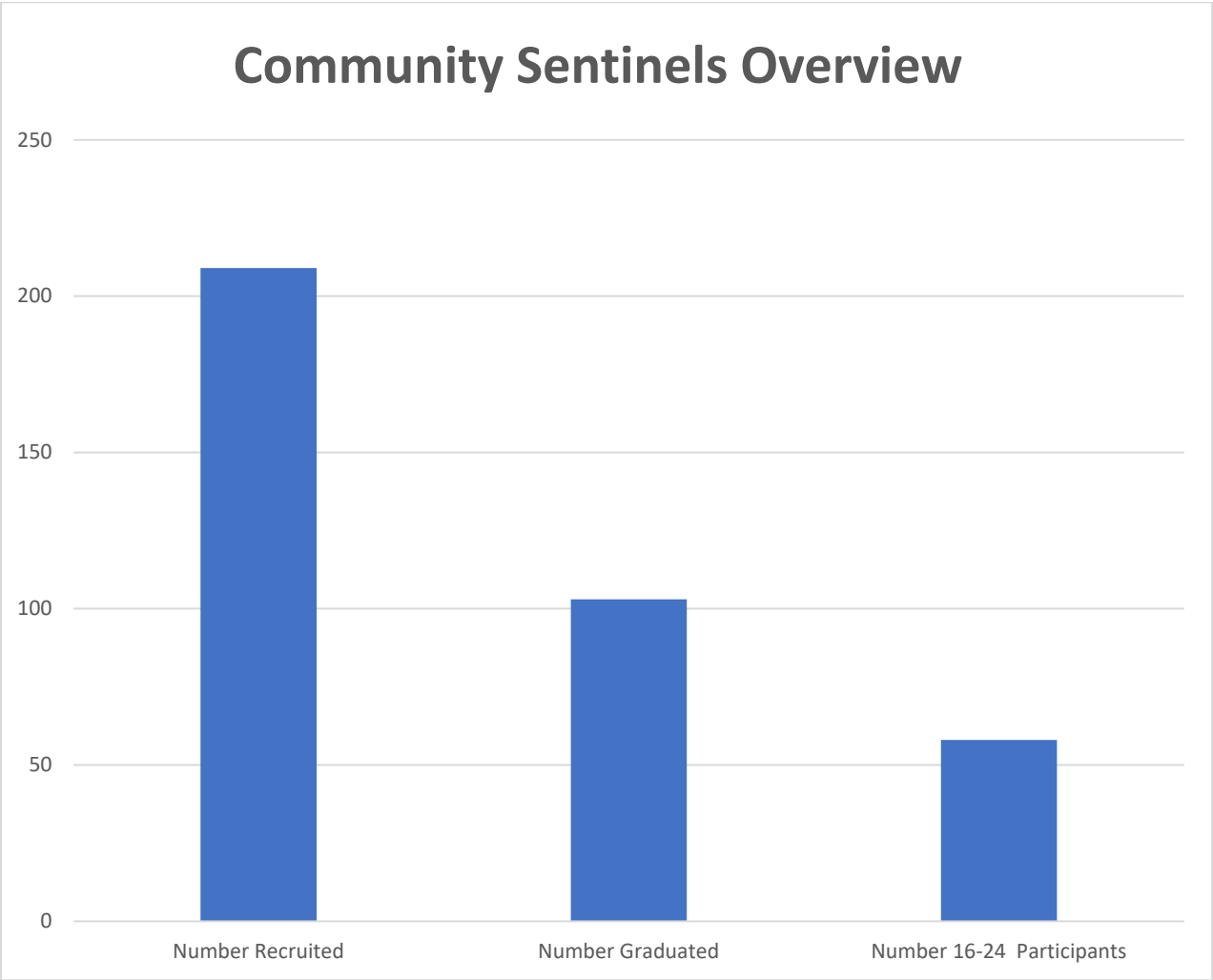


Figure Six: Community Sentinels Leadership Program Recruitment and Graduation

Data was then broken down to facilitate comparisons between specific cohorts. The growth and graduation *numbers* for each of the cohorts is portrayed in Figure Seven.⁸

⁸ No data was received regarding the individuals who graduated Cohorts 8 and A.

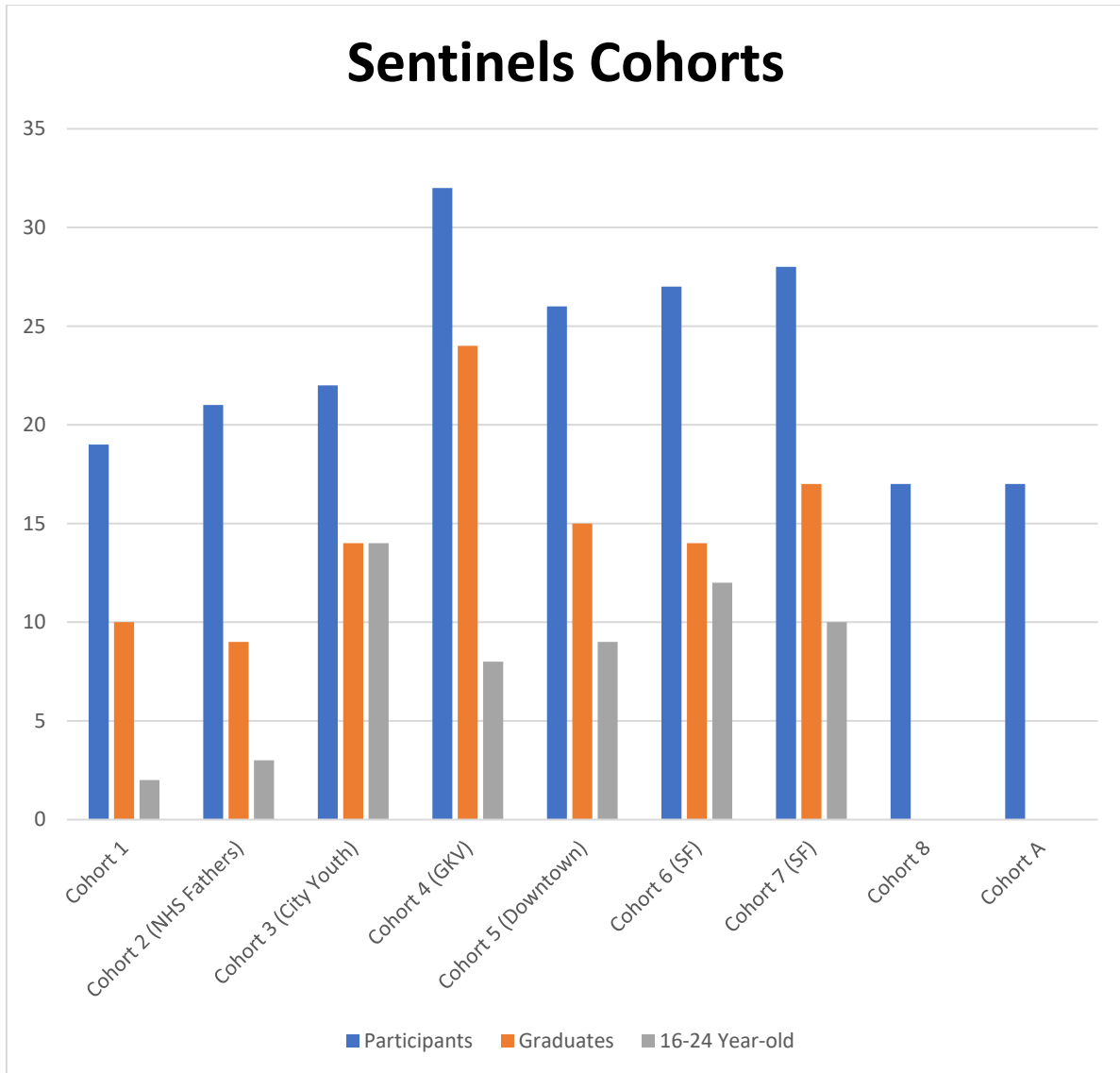


Figure Seven: Community Sentinel Leadership Program Participation and Graduation⁹

Complementing Figure Seven, Figure Eight portrays the graduation *rates* for each cohort, again with the exception of Cohorts 8 and A. It is also important to note that for the two latter graphs, the specific population or community/area of each group is noted.

⁹ In Figure Seven, for Cohort 2: NHS connotes Newark Head Start; for Cohort 3 the entire cohort was composed of adjudicated youth; for Cohort 4 GKV connotes George King Village; for Cohort 6 and 7 SF connotes the South Ward; for Cohorts 6 and 7 SF connotes the Schumann Fund which was a specific philanthropic partner involved; for Cohorts 4-8 their participants and graduates were all cross-generational.

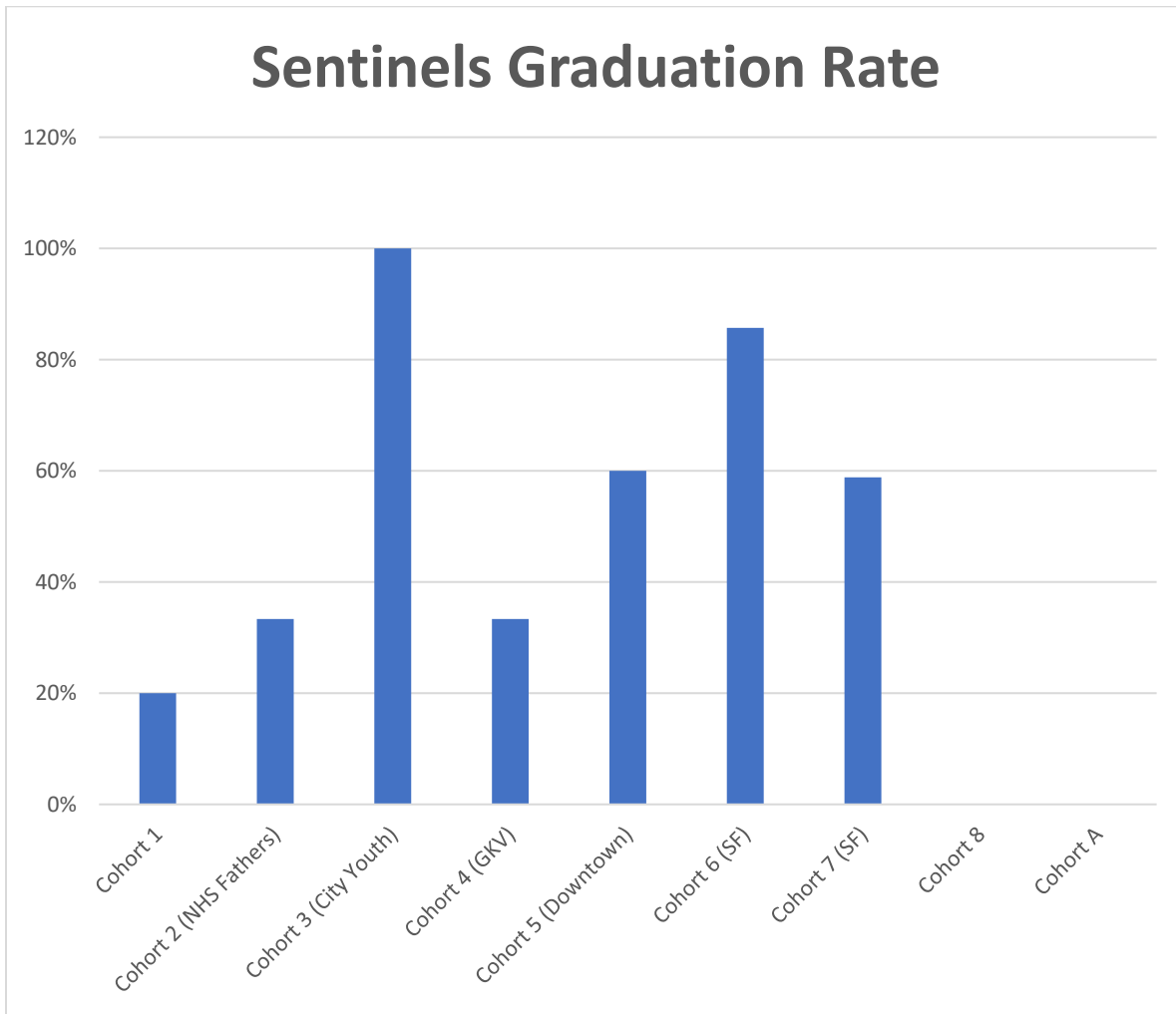


Figure Eight: Sentinel Cohort Graduation Rate

While training all of these individuals who will serve as Community Sentinels, the specific functions offered through the program are noteworthy. Those who are trained and serve in the Sentinels Program help to connect Newark residents to a variety of services NCST offers:

-
- History and Education Programs surrounding Identity
 - History and Education Programs surrounding Identity
 - Mediation/Conflict Resolution/Restorative Justice Services
 - Referrals to Support Groups/Wellness Services
 - Emergency Safe House
 - Pro Bono or Reduced Cost Legal Assistance
 - Emergency Relocation Assistance
 - Emergency Restraining Orders
 - Victim of Crime Application Assistance
 - Emotional Support
 - Intervention/Prevention/Education Programs
 - Public Safety Training
 - Resources (books, pamphlets, videos) on healing, trauma, and more
 - Working with community members to develop strategies for addressing quality of life issues
 - Hardship Assistance
-

In building the Community Sentinels Leadership Program, since 2021, NCST has recruited 209 participants who enroll to be trained and ultimately serve as sentinels. Of these recruited individuals, 103 have completed training and been deployed in their respective communities, 58 of whom were youth in the 16–24-year-old demographic.

A Note on Crime

Before moving on to the qualitative section of the evaluation research, it is critical to contextualize the work of NCST as portrayed in these descriptive statistics. The following graphs show what has occurred from 2022 to 2023 in terms of changes in the rate of crime in Newark. Crime data collected in 2023 points to an overall 15% decrease in city-wide crime with the exception of homicides, which increased from 32 to 37 or 16%. Consistent with a nationwide trend, property crime has increased, largely due to auto thefts. In future evaluation efforts, these data must be tied more clearly to the impact of specific programming in specific areas. However, it is safe to say that the efforts described in this report have played a major role in the downward trends demonstrated in these numbers.

Crime Statistics and Analyses

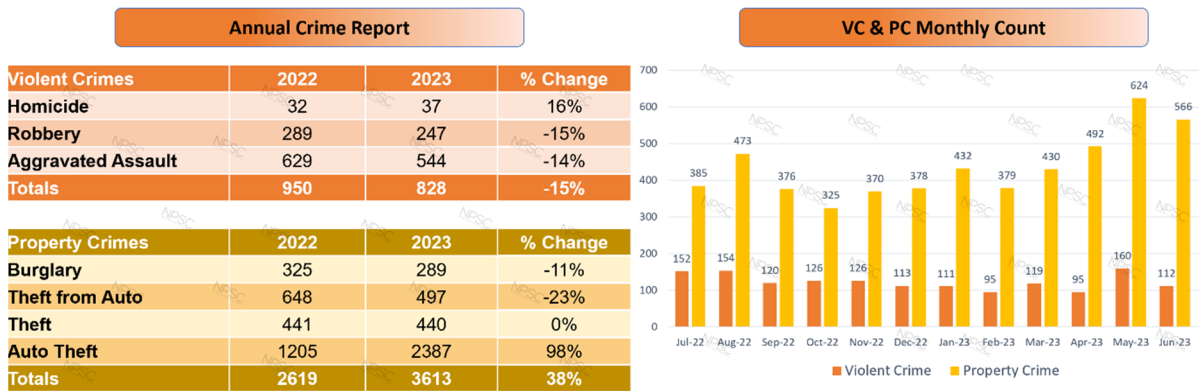


Figure Nine: Crime Statistics and Analysis

Qualitative Research and the Case Study

Although the evaluation team set out to collect and analyze quantitative data, in order to offer context and more extensive understanding, it was vital to carry out a concurrent qualitative evaluation based on the case study methodology. In this way, the qualitative portion of this evaluation builds upon the evaluation approach previously used by UCLA in its 2020 documentary narrative evaluation of the Newark Community Street Team.

The case study methodology offers a meaningful approach to understanding individuals as they work in the community or in specific settings. Combining ethnographic observation, informal discussions, depth interviews, and focus groups, case studies provide a multi-layered perspective on a broad issue.¹⁰ With this method, researchers collect information in the depth necessary to understand individuals, organizations, and communities including the processes and changes that comprise their structure and functioning. The current NCST evaluation required this “informational depth” to produce and understand the most useful and valid findings that emerged from multiple interviews, observation, and document analysis and augmented the descriptive statistics in this report. Just as important, the case study research methodology presents a view of “social problems and social programs in a way that accommodates their present understanding through direct and vicarious experience.”¹¹ In this way, case study findings can inform future interventions, as well as research on larger, more diverse populations.

The evaluation and research team is committed to active participation and collaboration with NCST and endeavors to lift up the voices of all of those engaged in CVI work. Extensive qualitative data, including on-site observations, in-depth interviews, and focus groups, was collected and analyzed, all in a systematic manner as described in the following section. In addition to providing formal consent to have interviews used for this evaluation, participants were also asked to indicate whether they consented to being observed and to having any interviews and focus groups audio-recorded for the sake of ensuring accuracy in the transcription process. All of the men and women approached by the embedded lead researcher consented to having their in-depth interviews and focus group participation recorded. Confidentiality was ensured at all times. The research team engaged in all data collection with respect and sensitivity for the leadership, staff, community residents, and stakeholders engaged with NCST.

¹⁰ Baxter, P. & Jack, S. (2008). “Qualitative Case Study Methodology: Study Design and Implementation for Novice Researchers.” *The Qualitative Report*, 13 (4), p. 544.

¹¹ Stake, R.E. (1978). The Case Study Method in Social Inquiry. *Educational Researcher*, 7(2): 5-8.

DATA COLLECTION, CODING, AND ANALYSIS: KEY THEMES

Multiple strategies were drawn upon to ensure the validity and reliability of the qualitative data collected. First, the lead researcher was responsible for conducting all interviews and focus groups; they were experienced in conducting in-depth interviewing and focus groups, with techniques based upon research methodology best practices. Second, all members of the research team, including those not involved directly in this project, have been and are required to complete mandated online training sponsored by the UCLA Institutional Review Board (UCLA IRB) to recognize and guard against implicit bias. Third, key data analysis was completed by other members of the research team – not the lead researcher – in order to further ensure validity and reliability. Finally, qualitative data for this report was collected over a lengthy time period beginning in 2020 and ending in 2023. During this period, the lead researcher also conducted multiple observations of NCST on site.

Participation in the evaluation was completely voluntary and confidential. A total of 48 individuals were interviewed over a three-year period (2020-2023); interviews were conducted either in person or by phone. As portrayed in this diagram, the majority of individuals who were interviewed were part of the NCST leadership team and/or served as High Risk Interventionists, Outreach Workers, or Community Sentinels at one time during the

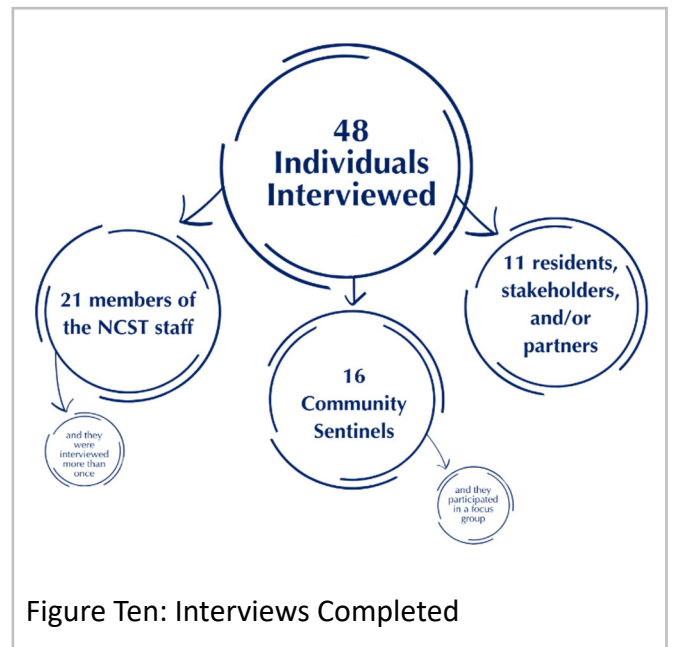


Figure Ten: Interviews Completed

three-year evaluation period. Of the 48 interviewees, the 21 NCST staff members were each interviewed more than one time. In addition, 11 individuals who were residents, stakeholders, and/or partners with NCST were interviewed. Finally, 16 individuals who completed the Community Sentinels Leadership Academy – and worked as Community Sentinels at the time of the interview – were both interviewed and then also participated in a focus groups.

Within the interview process, the research team sampled to the point of informational redundancy or saturation. That is, researchers gathered information to the point of diminishing returns; they stopped when there was no new information to be gleaned at this point in the research effort.¹²

After asking participants for their permission, all interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed. Following this, the interview transcriptions were subjected to an intensive process of data analysis, comprised of a three-stage coding procedure. It was determined that hand coding rather than coding software be utilized due to the sensitivity of the data and the different language styles used. In order to guard against interviewer bias in the research process, the coding was completed by two independent coders who did not participate in any of the interviews. In addition, the coders were not aware of the overall study design or goals. Instead, the coders were given very specific information regarding the coding process but not about the research questions or aims. These methodological strategies were used to ensure both the reliability and validity of the data analysis. The coders first initiated their work with the process of *open coding*. Open coding allows the individual coder to develop categories of information. At this point, the two coders met together and compared their categories of information to one another to ensure alignment and to eliminate any errors in the data or in NCST's accounts. The categories of information were then subjected to *axial coding*. Axial coding allows the coders to build the ideas into a narrative that connects the categories of information. Finally, the connections identified within the categories of information was subjected to *selective coding*, which led to the identification of ten major themes. After coding, the data analysis and theme development was subjected to critical review by selected members of the evaluation research team. These ten themes were then subjected to meta-analysis by two evaluation team members. Independent coding of the themes resulted in the development of three overarching themes that described the predominant concepts that emerged from the qualitative data collection. The overarching theme is listed first, with subsequent description of

¹² Glaser, B. & Strauss, A. (1967). *The Discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategies for Qualitative Research*. Chicago: Aldine Publishing.

the related major themes. Both the overarching themes and the major themes were then used to guide the development of recommendations.

Overarching Theme One: Throughout its 10 years of operation, NCST has exceeded expectations and has established its profile as an organization both “of and for” the community.

Theme One: There is a very robust referral network. Referrals for case management, training for the Community Sentinels Leadership Program, and participation in the Public Safety Roundtables were the result of a powerful network based on word of mouth.

Throughout the Community Violence Intervention movement, there is extensive discussion of how to ensure effective community outreach. During interviews and focus groups, it emerged that there was a highly effective referral network based on NCST’s profile in neighborhoods throughout Newark. Repeatedly the research team was told, “*I got involved because of NCST – they connect everyone,*” and “*You know that if it’s a program that NCST told you to go to – that it was gonna be good.*”

It is also noteworthy that this referral network is based on community communication – what is often referred to as the “*hood grapevine*” and the “*hood network.*” Rather than television, radio, or social media, individuals described hearing about NCST, the Public Safety Roundtables, the Community Sentinels, and other related programs by word of mouth. “*I learned from my auntie,*” or “*I learned from Miss Redding [a community activist]*” or “*I heard about it from my friend who had gotten out of prison and worked there [NCST],*” are examples of some of the statements that researchers heard over and over again. The well-developed communication network, the credible Outreach Workers and High Risk Intervention workers as well as the elevated profile of NCST programs all coalesced to create a dynamic referral network for the different programs that are profiled in this evaluation.

Theme Two: The ongoing impact of trauma in every aspect of NCST – among staff, clients, and the communities that are served must continue to be addressed.

Trauma-informed care is virtually a mantra in the world of community violence intervention. Nevertheless, during interviews and focus groups, the ongoing presence and force of trauma was overwhelming. Just as strongly, it was emphasized the people “*speaking their truths*” in order to process and share what they had endured. One interviewee explained the value of the Sentinels Program in this regard, “*The Sentinels have shown us that you matter. It’s not like what some of us have known in our pasts: if you are being abused, there is a culture that you close your mouth, you zip it. Not here – we talk about our pain and our truth.*”

Many individuals described how serving as a Case Manager and as a Community Sentinel, as well as participating in the Public Safety Roundtables, enabled them to move toward healing their own trauma. This is a positive outlook. Nevertheless, given the depth of the trauma individuals have described – as well as the impact of engaging in community violence intervention – it continues to be necessary to consider how trauma affects all individuals who serve the community. One individual summarized it effectively:

All of us are here because of what has happened to us in our lives. We all know what this feels like. And so, we know what the people we’re working with feel like. And what’s going on in our communities. That’s why we come together. You know we’re gonna have a baby shower soon for one of the women who’s having a baby but it’s also a good time for us to come together. To see that good things happen in our community. And we need to support one another.

Theme Three: Throughout every aspect of NCST programming there is a consistent and meaningful emphasis on self-care.

During focus groups and interviews, there was constant discussion of the need for self-care. At the same time, in discussions with the leadership and staff of NCST, there was a voiced concern for past traumas workers had experienced as well as the current exposure to violence and loss that both triggered memories and ignited future trauma. One staff member explained,

You have to listen to these people’s stories – especially the men who’ve been incarcerated and the women who’ve experienced so much loss and abuse – and you

know that we have to watch out for them. Sometimes they think they can handle more than they can. We don't want to stop them from their work, but we've got to watch out what it does to them as well. That's why we're always checking in – making sure they're okay.

Individuals who functioned as Outreach Workers openly described how difficult it was, particularly when a client shared past traumas that reminded them of what they had experienced themselves. When this occurred, many individuals shared that they depended on one another, *“because we're the only ones who know what we're going through.”* One woman explained, *“I can't tell you what it's like that I've been abused. Then I talk to a woman who's being abused. Then I need to talk to my sisters here.”* In particular, the Community Sentinels provided support and empathy to one another. However, it was clear that there was a need for ongoing self-care. A professional social worker, who also worked alongside the Outreach Workers, the HRI workers, and the Community Sentinels also emphasized this need, stating,

Look, they can't go on indefinitely. They need to remember to take a break, take care of themselves. Even when they're taking care of one another – sometimes they need a counselor or a therapist to support them. It's hard to do this kind of work, day after day. We all need to be vigilant about this.

Overarching Theme Two: The Public Safety Roundtable and the Community Sentinels Leadership Program performed far beyond expectations. There was enthusiasm about participation in both of these programs as well as respect for their profiles and work within the community.

Theme Four: The Sentinels Program builds on African history to give children, youth, and the community a grounding in African history and a sense of identity.

Repeatedly, Sentinels participants described how meaningful it was that the Sentinels Program taught everyone involved about African culture. This education included participants and cohort members who learned and then communicated about these components of the African culture. One Community Sentinel explained how she had originally been recruited by another

community member who had already completed the program. Her own training began during the height of Covid. She described her commitment and the learning process, recalling,

I'd always gravitated towards helping youth. The Sentinels program gave me a way to do that. I started out in the training letting them know about my story – I was a menace to society. We were in classes on Zoom first. Then we started to come in person. I wanted to take what we were learning in the training and use it to tutor kids and help them with their skills. The Sentinels program is where we talked about everyone learning about Africanism and learning about your community. I loved the classes. They taught me so much – and I knew I wanted to share it.

As this woman offered her perceptions, the other focus groups members began to nod. Several reinforced her experience, saying, “That’s what we need” and “That’s what it’s about.” The gratitude for the learning and understanding of African history was palpable and underscored the program’s meaning and success.

Theme Five: Leadership and participants in the Sentinels Program focused on each individual’s desire to keep their communities clean, safe, and thriving.

During a focus group, one participant described how she had served as a Newark Security Guard who then became interested in the Sentinels Program. She recalled what it meant: “get[ting] started as a Sentinel opened up my eyes a little bit more...I saw that I was going to learn so much more. And it was a deep kind of education. I was going to learn about my culture and learn to be a leader.” Another woman recalled how,

Everyone in the training was genuine. It’s not easy for me to open up to people...but a couple of weeks before my graduation I saw what I was learning. These were all people who wanted to make it better. No one gave a damn about what these kids were going through. But all the sudden, here we were, a group of women and we were gonna stop dogging each other, stop fighting each other, and really do something to help the youth in our community. And not just once a week, but all the time – every single day, every moment we could. And we found the youth wanted us there – everyone wanted us there because we were part of the community. We weren’t coming from the outside, we lived there.

During a second focus group that was strictly made up of women, everyone described how meaningful it was to connect with the residents and the youth in their community. One woman embodied the overall sentiments of the group when she explained how she became a Community Sentinel because, *“It took me to another level to want to do more and help my community.”*

Several women shared stories of what they encountered when they went into their neighborhoods, with the lessons learned from the Sentinels Program. One woman described how:

When I was young – I was put in a box – I was told, ‘this is what is expected of you’...it was hard for me, but I had a structure. To be put in an environment where these kids didn’t have that, you have no idea what these kids go through. I didn’t have to ask any questions – I knew them. I knew those kids. Forget law enforcement or even other professionals – all due respect. The Sentinels are going to learn more about what is going on in the streets and what is really needed to help our youth, to build our people. And as we help others, we are helping ourselves. This program is doing things for me emotionally, mentally, spiritually I never ever imagined. It has helped me heal from so much of what I’ve experienced in my own life. I can’t begin to tell you what it’s been like.

Theme Six: The Public Safety Roundtables represented a major opportunity for community engagement and also served as a mutually reinforcing program alongside the Community Sentinels.

One interviewee explained how the PSRT drew her in immediately, saying, *“I came to the first Public Safety Roundtable – they embraced me so much – and they asked me, what do you want to do for your community.”* There was extensive discussion of the value of the PSRTs and how significant it was for the community to have a place to exchange their experiences and concerns.

During interviews and focus groups, there was a very positive reaction to the PSRTs, with many agreeing that this was exactly what the Newark neighborhoods needed. The one caveat to this experience was the ongoing mistrust of the police. As one resident explained,

Look we had a hard time with the police to begin with. And then George Floyd happened and it was like people everywhere started to understand what we had been through. I cried when I watched the video of that policeman with his knee on George Floyd's neck. And I didn't feel like going to the Public Safety Roundtable. But I made myself go – because how are things gonna get better if I don't go? The problem is the police at those meetings are the good ones. The bad ones aren't at those meetings – they're out in the streets, beating up people. I still don't know if I can trust them.

However, several interviewees shared another sentiment – that the PSRTs are the only way to ensure that the relationship between law enforcement and the community could grow into a positive one. “*We need this,*” one woman in a focus group declared, “*Because we gotta get started talking to each other somewhere.*” Another man talked about the fact that law enforcement maintained the majority of the financial resources and believed, “*We could get them to share if we just start talking.*” While still another interviewee offered a positive view of the function of the PSRTs, “*Look, I'd rather be fighting with the cops at the Public Safety Roundtable instead of in the street. No one is gonna get killed that way.*”

Overall, the majority of individuals believed that the PSRTs and the Community Sentinels together represented an effective way for residents and stakeholders to take responsibility for their communities – explaining, “*This way we can be accountable to ourselves.*” One woman, a longtime community activist, best portrayed their mutually reinforcing relationship, explaining,

The Community Sentinels and the NCST Outreach Workers stop the violence on the ground. At the same time, we use the Public Safety Roundtables to get the word out that this is what we are doing and this is why the violence is going down. When they bring out the numbers and say crime is going down – we can show people that this is what we are accomplishing. And the Roundtables are the way to get the word out and find out how people feel.

Theme Seven: There was a resilience shared by all involved in NCST Programming. Outreach Workers/Case Managers, High Risk Interventionists, Public Safety Roundtable participants, and Community Sentinels viewed crises and problems as a challenge and an opportunity to learn.

During one focus group a woman described a heartbreaking story of the abuse that had occurred in her life – first during childhood and then once she married and was subjected to intimate partner violence. After seeking services and going through case management, she was brought in to be part of the staff of the Newark Community Street Team. She attended the PSRTs, then went through Case Manager training and Community Sentinel training. As a voice of resilience, she described how all along she knew she wanted to help other individuals who were victims of violence. Eventually, NCST created a Victim’s Services department – she is now the first Director of the Victim’s Services department, overseeing two full-time Victims’ Advocates, five Case Managers and a full-time Coordinator. She described all of the different events and days of healing that are organized and implemented, to “*go into neighborhoods and find out what people need. We don’t tell them what they need, we listen.*” Her resilience and dedication to helping the Newark community was mirrored in the accounts of so many others interviewed. One staff member described how being present at the Public Safety Roundtables and fulfilling his role as an Outreach Worker helped him heal the wounds of incarceration:

When I was in prison, all I focused on was getting out. I had gotten a life sentence but I was determined to beat it and I studied the law and knew my case inside and out. But I was so focused on my appeal, I never thought about what I was gonna do when I got out. But the first time I went to the Public Safety Roundtable I knew...I was gonna heal myself by healing my community. And I never looked back.

Repeatedly, the idea of **change** was invoked, with virtually every interviewee and focus group participant agreeing that the goal of NCST and those involved in its programs was **changing the community inside and out.**

One leader in the Community Sentinels team used a positive lens to talk about how they often find themselves and the organization “*at a crossroads to grown and learn more.*” Repeatedly, the idea of change was invoked, with virtually every interviewee and focus group participant agreeing that the goal of NCST and those involved in its programs was changing the community inside and out. “*We can learn from one another,*” one formerly incarcerated man explained, “*And we can grow stronger together.*”

Theme Eight: The support and programming offered by the Sentinels Program is highly valued by Newark community residents and stakeholders. This is accompanied by the ground level belief that it must continue – that it is not present to simply address a temporary problem, but instead, must be institutionalized as part of the community.

The Community Sentinels Leadership Program offers an opportunity for self-actualization and the strengthening of both individual and community identity. *“My goal working with the community is: I don’t care where you are, it doesn’t matter if you want to be better.”*

Repeatedly, individuals emphasized the community-building role played by the Sentinels. Additionally, residents and stakeholders alike expressed their respect for the program. *“We’re so glad it’s here. Even with the smallest things – like holding events.”* Indeed, individuals who had completed the Sentinels training described their ability to put together community events – with one activist saying, *“E [NCST staff member Elizabeth Ruebman] put it in my hands – she didn’t have a lot of money – and we had our first event – this is right when things were beginning to happen!”*

Individuals emphasized the **community-building** role played by the Sentinels.

Along similar lines, a resident recalled, *“They just started doing stuff – the Sentinels – and it was great to get the community together. The thing is, we don’t want it to go away. We need to keep it here.”* This was a sentiment expressed repeatedly by all involved and one that was understandable. Often, initiatives and programs have an expiration date; they exist in communities for a limited period of time. It is vital to the Newark communities that the Sentinels Program continue as well as the PSRTs. *“We don’t want this stuff to go away,”* one resident urged while another worried, *“The Sentinels are so good, I’m worried they’ll go away.”* This is why the sustainability and institutionalization of this program – and other NCST programs and initiatives aligned with it – is crucial.

Overarching Theme Three: What has been undertaken by NCST at every level is a strong example of collective efficacy.

Theme Nine: All aspects of NCST’s programming are strengths-based. In particular, the Public Safety Roundtables and the Community Sentinels Leadership Program are each a significant source of community building and strengthening. Their impact is far reaching.

The value of NCST’s programming was evident during both interviews and focus groups. One young man described that “*when you get to graduate – you feel special.*” Another Sentinel described how important NCST was to his community and the direct impact of the training he was part of, describing how:

Everything NCST does means something. The Sentinels teach you about public safety. You see what it means to everyone. It’s easy to murder someone on purpose, but it’s hard to have a good day on purpose. Everything I learned, it teaches you about the community – that it’s a good community but it needs help. And you learn that there is something inside of you that wants to make things better. That feeling doesn’t last for a day or a week. It lasts forever.

His response was echoed by individuals who were interviewed and who participated in focus groups. One summarized, “*Every part of NCST makes you feel that way. That you’re giving back and making your community stronger,*” while another concluded, “*NCST is such a powerful movement.*”

One formerly incarcerated man explained, “*The Sentinels want to grow leaders – and want to have the resources to do that. The Public Safety Round Tables are the place where we get to demonstrated our leadership. It all works together.*” The efficacy of the programs that NCST offers was described succinctly and effectively by one focus group participant who quietly stated, “*NCST creates a family – no matter what happens to you – you gotta speak up and you will have a family behind you.*”

Theme Ten: A desire for sustainable change has guided so much of the work individuals described.

Repeatedly, researchers were told about the importance of NCST’s leadership and its impact on HRI, Outreach Workers, and Sentinels Program participants. Individuals described being guided by a sense of expansiveness. *“We are here to change lives and to create a sense of community,”* one individual explained while another offered their strong belief that, *“it is important that people always feel the support.”*

One focus group participant described how she had been living out of state for several years and was in the midst of experiencing personal abuse – both physically and emotionally – when she got called to come back to Newark to see her father who was terminally ill. She explained that *“In the process of my father dying, I decided to stay in Newark. Instead of the past, I had to think about the future. I had to choose myself, I had no direction.”* During this time period she saw a colleague with an NCST vest and she subsequently *“got a job with Safe Passage. I was homeless but I made sure I got to work.”* Even while facing the challenge of being unhoused, NCST staff saw she was helping a woman who was pregnant and they determined she would be a strong Case Manager and an excellent candidate for the Sentinels Program. She graduated from cohort 5 and was a Case Manager for 8 months where her work commitment grew deep. Required to follow 15 mentees, she soon had 33 mentees. When lauded for her work, she modestly stated, *“I needed someone to help me change the same way the community needs us to help it change.”* Her self-discovery and change is emblematic of the NCST programs.

RECOMMENDATIONS

There are four key recommendations that emerged from the evaluation themes.

Recommendation One: Because it is the embodiment of collective efficacy, NCST programs in general – and the Community Sentinels Leadership Program in particular – should be elevated to a national model and best practice.

Now that this evaluation has been completed, it is clear that NCST programs – particularly those that involve the High Risk Intervention workers and the Outreach Workers, as well as the Community Sentinels – should be studied in a systematic way. It is suggested that the next, a more complex stage of evaluation be undertaken, with the aim of elevating these initiatives to the status of a national model and best practice. **Currently, NCST can be viewed as presenting promising practices.** The addition of more program resources and the development of a longitudinal evaluation should enable NCST to accomplish that goal.

Recommendation Two: Data Collection must be strengthened.

As the goal of formal program evaluation is considered, the process of data collection and analysis must be reviewed and expanded. It is critical for NCST to “own” all the data that is collected. However, it is equally important for data to be inventoried and for gaps to be clearly identified. Additionally, community members and stakeholders, including the Community Sentinels, should be trained in data collection and research methodology so that all processes around data can be strengthened. While it is essential for NCST to maintain its evaluation partnerships and for outside evaluation be conducted, it is also critical for internal expertise to match external engagement.

Recommendation Three: Public Safety Roundtables must continue to be implemented and institutionalized. They require expanded and dedicated funding to ensure their growth and survival.

It is very clear from the research just conducted that the PSRTs have been a vital part of services aimed at harm reduction, violence intervention, and community strengthening offered by NCST. In particular, the PSRTs have played a meaningful

role in lessening community-law enforcement tensions. While there is still a long way to go in terms of healing the collective memory of past abuses and brutality, the PSRTs represent a major pathway of resolving past losses and community estrangement. The PSRTs are currently operating with only minimal funding, and their current fiscal condition must be remedied. More extensive funding paired with evaluation for accountability is vital to their growth and effectiveness.

Recommendation Four: Trauma-informed self-care for NCST staff must be expanded and funded. There should be a dedicated city budget item for this specific practice which is both valuable and necessary ensuring effective harm reduction, crime reduction and NCST's ongoing ability to address the impact of trauma.

Public health research has demonstrated the short- and long-term impact of experiencing trauma. The majority of NCST's staff, most notably Outreach Workers, High Risk Interventionists, Case Managers, and Community Sentinels all experience both first-hand and vicarious trauma. It is strongly recommended that trauma-informed care (including trainings on dealing with trauma, relaxation, meditation, counseling, and health care) be made available to NCST staff and volunteers. Additionally, there needs to be policy developed regarding self-care, respite, and staff retreats to reinforce such practices. The effectiveness of NCST and community violence intervention will always be dependent upon the wellness and well-being of all those engaged in this effort.

CONCLUSION

This evaluation represents a significant step in understanding how the work of the Newark Community Street Team in general – and the efforts of the Community Sentinels and the Public Safety Roundtables in particular – have strengthened community violence intervention, reduced harm, and are reducing crime while simultaneously increasing community strengths and capacity. Important steps remain, with a focus on evaluating program effectiveness both quantitatively and qualitatively. Nevertheless, it is important to pause and note that NCST’s greatest success has been allowing residents and stakeholders to participate in the process of community building, expanding both individual esteem and collective efficacy. One Community Sentinel explained, “*We want to be responsible for our streets. We want people who live in the community to look at one another and say – we can do this! That’s what our work is about – because there is so much to build on right here in our neighborhoods.*” This research marks another step in the transformative work that surrounds individual lives and communities worthy of change.

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