


Newark Community Street Team

Evaluation and Proof of Concept

November 2025

CBPS COLLECTIVE

UCLA

NCST
NEWARK COMMUNITY STREET TEAM

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Acknowledgments

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It's a hot, September afternoon in Newark, right after 2pm. Three High Risk Intervention (HRI) workers are sitting in the Newark Community Street Team (NCST) office when all of their cell phones begin to alert at the same time. They look at one another knowingly and then reach for their phones. NCST's Executive Director, Rey Chavez, enters the room.

"You've heard? There's been a shooting on Clinton Avenue, near the fifth precinct. Two men are down and are being transported to the hospital right now – we don't know how serious the injuries are."

All three workers enter the address into their GPS and start to break down their strategy.

"The police are there already," one worker announces.

A pair of NCST Outreach Workers, two women, move slowly up 19th Street in the South Ward of Newark. They are trailed by a safety car, which is following their movement and ensuring there is nothing dangerous occurring, either on the street or in the general neighborhood. The women both carry a clipboard and pamphlets, greeting people standing in their front yards. Two men quickly cross the street and dart into a front door, slamming it shut.

"I guess they don't want to see us," one Outreach Worker laughs. "Sometimes they think we're the police or we're going to narc them out."

As soon as she explains, a thin man approaches the group. He is not wearing a shirt and his pants hang low on his hips.

"Who are you?" he asks.

"We've got to get down there to talk to the people on the street. And we need to let the PD know we are on our way."

Any idea what this is about?" one HRI asks.

"You know that's one of my blocks. There's been a lot of beefs in the neighborhood since Elementary got out of prison. He wants to be back in charge."

Another HRI adds, "We've got to make sure everyone is safe. We don't want anything to get started. You know the rumors will get going and then someone else will talk about shooting back."

"And the kids – we've got to get to the Safe Passages workers because the kids will just be getting out of school. They won't know what's going on and seeing the police and the yellow tape always scares them."

"We're here from the Newark Community Street Team. I don't know if you've heard of us. We've got an office over on 16th Street - just a few blocks away."

"I've never heard of you."

"We have all kinds of programs - case management and trauma services. We help you make a plan for what you want to do with your life."

The man looks closely at the workers. "I'm just out of prison," he offers, "Do you help people who've been incarcerated? In the pen?"

"Yes. And some of the people on our staff have been incarcerated in the past. We have services."

"Do you help with housing? I'm staying with my sister right now...but I can't stay here much longer. I don't have anywhere to go."

The three men stand simultaneously, then one calls out the name of another Outreach Worker, a woman who has been part of the team who can help connect people to the NCST Trauma Recovery Center (TRC).

“Sister, can you come with us. We don’t know what to expect. And we gotta look after the kids and we gotta think about trauma.”

Rey suddenly says, “Hey, there’s two people down – we need another Outreach Worker.”

In response to his words, the call goes out and a second woman joins the group.

“I already heard what happened and the rumors are flying,” she begins. “We’ve got to get this under control before someone starts talking about retaliation.”

“Agreed,” one of the HRIs replies, “Now let’s get into the details.”

“We can help you with all of that.” The worker hands over the packet and shows the man the office address. “Just come on over. You can walk over there.”

“Well…how much does it cost? What do I have to pay? I’m on SSI.”

The Outreach Worker puts her hand on his arm. “You don’t have to pay anything. These are services we provide for the community. We already have funding for them. You just have to sign up.”

The man looks at the woman in disbelief. Then he sees the safety car.

“What’s that car?” he asks suspiciously.

The Outreach Worker gestures to the driver who waves. “That’s our safety car - to make sure we’re okay and that nothing dangerous is going on in the neighborhood.”

As soon as she is briefed on the situation, she agrees that the children leaving school are a focus and adds, "We've got to watch over the kids. But we've got to make sure everyone in the community is okay."

"It's time to make sure everyone is okay – we can all take on a different group – the family, the residents, the school, and the hospital," Rey summarizes.

The group is on their way.

As soon as she says that the man relaxes.

"It's hard after prison - I'm kinda jumpy."

"You don't have to, but you ought to think about our trauma services."

"Yeah, okay. I'll see you."

"Good, I'll look forward to seeing you."

A small woman comes through the front door of the NCST House on 16th Street. She looks around carefully, as if she is trying to find someone. The receptionist sees her unease and asks her, "Are you okay? Can I help you?"

"I've been having some trouble sleeping...I just can't..." she speaks slowly. Then she bursts into tears. In between sobs she tries to get the words out. "I don't know what's wrong with me..."

The receptionist immediately stands up from behind her desk and moves over to embrace the woman.

"It's okay..." the receptionist says gently, "Is there anything bothering you that you can think of..."

The woman looks up. "I don't know what's going on. Well, I do sorta know. It's a year ago today my nephew was shot. Four girls and he was the only boy. And he was such a good boy...I don't know why this is happening now. We all mourned him, we had a funeral, everyone came. I don't know why I'm feeling this now..."

The receptionist sits down next to her. "I'm going to call someone to talk with you."

The woman sits up. "I don't need nobody, I got my faith, I got my family. I don't need help. Forget it."

"I'm not saying you need help. I'm saying there is someone who will talk to you for just a few minutes to see what you need." The receptionist says these words very softly. She then stands, goes back to her desk, and sends a text from her computer.

A few minutes later a young woman comes downstairs. She beckons the woman to come upstairs for a few minutes. "Would you like some coffee? Or a soft drink?" she asks.

The woman says, "Coffee would be just fine," and she follows the young woman.

After this, she returns to the NCST Trauma Recovery Center weekly and continues to keep her appointments to this day.

These three vignettes illustrate just a few of the facets of the Newark Community Street Team (NCST) and the work its staff engages in throughout Newark, New Jersey. While the organization has been operating in the city for over a decade, predominantly in the community known as the South Ward, NCST is known far beyond the city boundaries. Its impact on public safety has been admired, described in media reportage, and – with this evaluation and other efforts – seriously and consistently studied.

Before this evaluation begins, the most critical thing to understand about the Newark Community Street Team, or NCST, is that it is the first large-scale community-based effort focused on community violence intervention that **is not connected with any sort of government structure, university, institution, or larger organization.** Instead, this is an organization that, since its inception in 2015, has belonged entirely to the community; resident input and participation were – and are – integral to its structure, functioning, and overall purpose. As one resident and community organizer explained:

> *This is our organization – not a government organization, not a police organization, but a community organization. They belong to us and we belong to them. There is no one telling us what to do – we are the ones doing it.*

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

NCST Evaluation and Proof of Concept

As an innovator of community violence intervention (CVI) implementation, the Newark Community Street Team's (NCST) place-based violence intervention strategies have been so widely recognized that communities around the country travel to Newark, New Jersey to learn about the NCST model. However, NCST's multi-faceted model has never been scientifically evaluated by an external researcher using a *mixed methods* approach. This is the case for most community-based public safety work, in particular for those organizations that function at the grassroots level. This lack of rigorous study represents a profound challenge for the field of CVI and the organizations themselves. While local stakeholders are well aware of the impact of NCST and CVI work improving community safety and well-being, there is minimal data-driven "proof" of effectiveness.

However, because of its perceived impact, a recent surge in CVI-focused funding has occurred in both philanthropic and government sectors. In particular, there was meaningful investment through the American Rescue Plan Act (2021) federal funds as well as the Safer Communities Act (2022). While substantive funding has only recently been made available,[1] policymakers and funders are already asking, "How do we know that community-based public safety models such as CVI actually works?"

As part of these efforts, the Community Based Public Safety Collective ("The Collective") has overseen the initiation and growth of CVI strategies across the country since 2020. With shared roots and vision, NCST serves as a learning

[1] It is important to note that federal funds were withdrawn at the beginning of President Trump's second term (2025) and other public funding remains uncertain. However, the philanthropic sector continues to fund CVI efforts.

laboratory and guide for the CVI work directed by The Collective nationally. To document and advance the work being conducted by NCST, The Collective sought funding from the Ford Foundation to sponsor this rigorous evaluation of NCST with the intention of being able to make an empirically grounded case for the NCST model and the effectiveness of NCST's approach to CVI. It is critical to note that the Ford Foundation agreed to support this research and contracted directly with The Collective.

The UCLA evaluation study of the Newark Community Street Team was undertaken to holistically assess NCST and its impact on violence in Newark, with particular emphasis on the experiences of community residents over time. The evaluation process began in December 2023 with a three-month planning window. Embedded data collection occurred March 2024 through July 2025. In turn, the period of August through November 2025 was dedicated to data analysis and preparing this report and the accompanying briefs. The overall 24-month funded period ran from December 2023 through November 2025.

The UCLA evaluation study of the Newark Community Street Team was undertaken to holistically assess NCST and its impact on violence in Newark, with particular emphasis on the experiences of community residents over time.

From its onset, the goal of the evaluation study was to assess whether the NCST model actually works and if so, the extent of its impact on the community. As part of this research design, along with determining the effectiveness of NCST, the evaluation was also conceived to demonstrate Proof of Concept and consequently examine how key elements of this model of violence intervention can be sustained in Newark and implemented in additional settings nationally.

The UCLA research team has been deeply involved with NCST for over a decade. For this study, researchers built upon long standing relationships and archived documentation. They remained committed to a research process that was both participatory and intentional along with being dynamic, responding to organizational changes as they developed. In being participatory, the research process centered on authentic community involvement, beyond interviews and focus groups. Additionally, in place of waiting until the submission of the final evaluation report, researchers worked in active partnership with NCST leadership and staff throughout the evaluation process, refining data collection and updating all involved in research activities. As part of this, NCST leadership and UCLA research team members met regularly, in person and by Zoom, to discuss the project process, providing preliminary feedback and describing adjustments that were made during the course of the study research.[2]

STUDY DESIGN

In determining the effectiveness of NCST, and determining if Proof of Concept has been achieved, it was clear that key study questions were needed to guide the evaluation effort. These key questions were developed in collaboration with NCST leadership and with the NCST Research Advisory Committee. The study questions that were used to guide this research efforts included:

- How does NCST work?
- How does NCST's community-based model of intervention and trauma-based services improve resident perceptions of safety?
- How does NCST enable residents to help reduce dangerous conditions in their neighborhoods that fuel violent crime?

[2] The Year 1 Mid-Study Memo can be found in Appendix A.

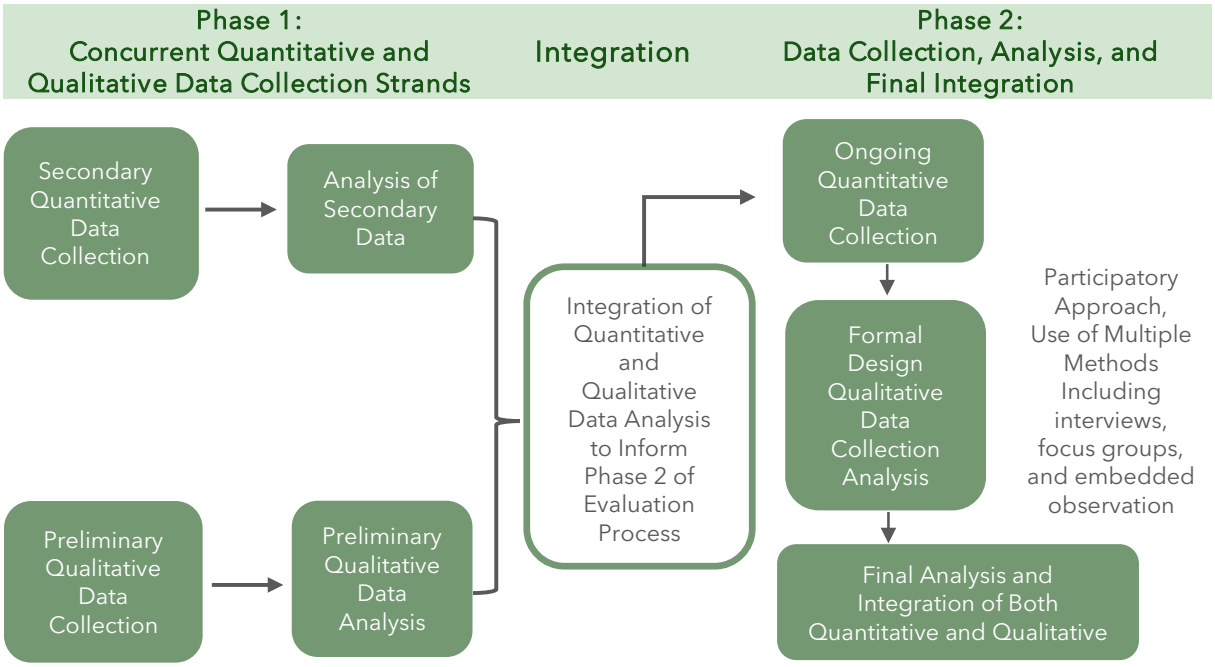
- Are there ways in which NCST helps residents disrupt violence in public spaces and increase resident comfort with using public facilities?
- How does NCST help residents deal with and resolve feelings of trauma?
- Does NCST reduce violent crime? And if so, how does it reduce violent crime?

The UCLA team was committed to working beyond standard research methodologies to ensure that this evaluation met community-based research best practices. These efforts all emphasized that any evaluation of a community-based, nonprofit organization ultimately be of value to residents, stakeholders, partner organizations, communities, and settings that are involved in and impacted. Because of this commitment, the NCST evaluation was based on the extensive participation of a large and diverse group of participants and stakeholders in the NCST system, with a specific focus on residents of the South Ward, which was a cynosure of crime and violence.

Beyond this, the full scope of this evaluation effort was informed by the transformative paradigm, which emphasizes the importance of identifying evaluation-relevant norms and beliefs with the goal of contributing to social betterment.[3, 4] In particular, data collection paid strict attention to both maintaining inclusiveness and ensuring that usually under-represented voices were heard and documented. This was reflected in the UCLA research team tailoring all research methodology to the particular needs and environment of Newark and NCST while keeping in mind the search for key elements that would be important to similar efforts in other settings. It was also necessary to respond to developments in the field once the evaluation was underway. Because of this, there were two phases of the research effort.

[3] Mertens, D. M. (1999). Inclusive evaluation: Implications of transformative theory of evaluation. *American Journal of Evaluation, 20,* 1-14.
[4] Mertens, D. M. (2012). Social transformation and evaluation. In M. C. Alkin (Eds.), *Evaluation roots: A wider perspective of theorists' view and influences* (pp. 229-240). Sage.

Figure 1. Visual depiction of the evaluation methodology.



The first phase of this evaluation was comprised of two separate and co-occurring streams of data collection and analysis. The quantitative data stream consisted of the secondary data analysis of multiple sets of statistics including: 1) documented incidents of high risk intervention; 2) Newark Police Department (NPD) sector crime; and 3) Public Safety Round Table (PSRT) data attendance and participation.

In turn, the qualitative data stream involved initial understanding of NCST from multiple perspectives. To examine and describe the experiences of NCST leadership and staff as well as residents and stakeholders, it was necessary to rely on a combination of useful approaches including document review, in-depth interviews, focus groups and ethnographic participant observation – all deemed best practices in qualitative research.[5] Together these qualitative research efforts were undertaken with

[5] Creswell, J. W. and Poth, C. (2018). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches*. Thousand Oaks: Sage.

the involvement of community residents, NCST staff, NPD officials, institutional partners, community-based organizations, and other community stakeholders who were participants in the Newark Public Safety Round Table (PSRT). This phase of the qualitative data collection was designed as part of an initial process study, to gain "on the ground" insight into how NCST functioned throughout the city of Newark and how specific interventions (NCST programs) were implemented.

The second phase of the evaluation was also comprised of two separate and co-occurring streams of data collection and analysis. The first of these, the interview and focus group data stream, was informed by phase one data collection which informed the development of interview protocols[6] and a focus group protocol.[7] Specific details about the methodology used in each of the two separate data streams – quantitative and qualitative – is provided in the full-length report. The overall evaluation process is depicted in Figure 1 on the previous page.

It needs to be noted that this evaluation was conducted under unique circumstances. The UCLA evaluation team has been working with NCST since its establishment in 2014. Researchers were not outsiders who were entering a new setting devoid of understanding. Instead, the development of the evaluation research plan was founded upon institutional history and knowledge that is rarely available in such efforts. This included a deep understanding of both NCST capacity and limitations in terms of data and data collection.[8] More significantly, as part of prior research efforts, members of the UCLA team had built relationships and trust with the NCST staff. At

[6] Interview protocols can be found in Appendix B.
[7] Focus group protocol can be found in Appendix C.
[8] For examples, see the previous documentary narrative (2020) and the Innovations in Community-Based Crime Reduction Programs evaluation of NCST (2024) conducted by the UCLA research team.

the same time, researchers had also formed relationships and trust with many community residents. These connections figured prominently in both the creation of a Research Advisory Committee and the further evolution of the research methodology. Additionally, this study was much more expansive than past engagements and this was designed to integrate both qualitative and quantitative methodology.

Robert K. Ross, M.D., who led The California Endowment for 24 years, often spoke of the need for "stories *and* numbers" in philanthropy and in research. This study has been guided by those words and by the visionary investment of the Ford Foundation, whose philanthropic efforts envelop global concerns and the innovation that addresses them. In developing its methodology, the UCLA team benefitted greatly from conversations with individuals from the Ford Foundation who truly understood both the research concerns and the search for relevance. In alignment with this focus, The Collective seeks to bring these research findings to those it trains and supports with CVI strategies. Working with these partners, along with the Newark community, the UCLA team has worked to honor all of these efforts in every way possible.

QUANTITATIVE RESEARCH FINDINGS

It is essential to call attention to the meaning of the quantitative data elements and the resulting analysis. The reduction of violent crime is a complex public safety challenge influenced by a multitude of factors. Understanding these factors is essential for developing effective strategies to create safer communities. Past research has identified key determinants influencing crime rates, including socioeconomic conditions, mistrust of law enforcement, poverty, unemployment, homelessness and lack of housing, social instability, and weather. In turn, any urban area dealing with violence has a multiplicity of agencies that attempt to drive down violent crime. These include government agencies, community-based organizations, faith-based organizations, public health clinics, and houses of worship. Each of these entities impacts violent crime and it is impossible to separate out one organization as having

a defined impact on crime. In considering this significant limitation, the UCLA evaluation team focused their quantitative analysis on documenting *how* and *when* NCST is responding to violence in order to better understand programmatic impact. The findings presented here must be considered in this context.

Description of Quantitative Data Elements

The quantitative portion of the evaluation is focused on analyzing and synthesizing the data elements described below:

High Risk Interventions

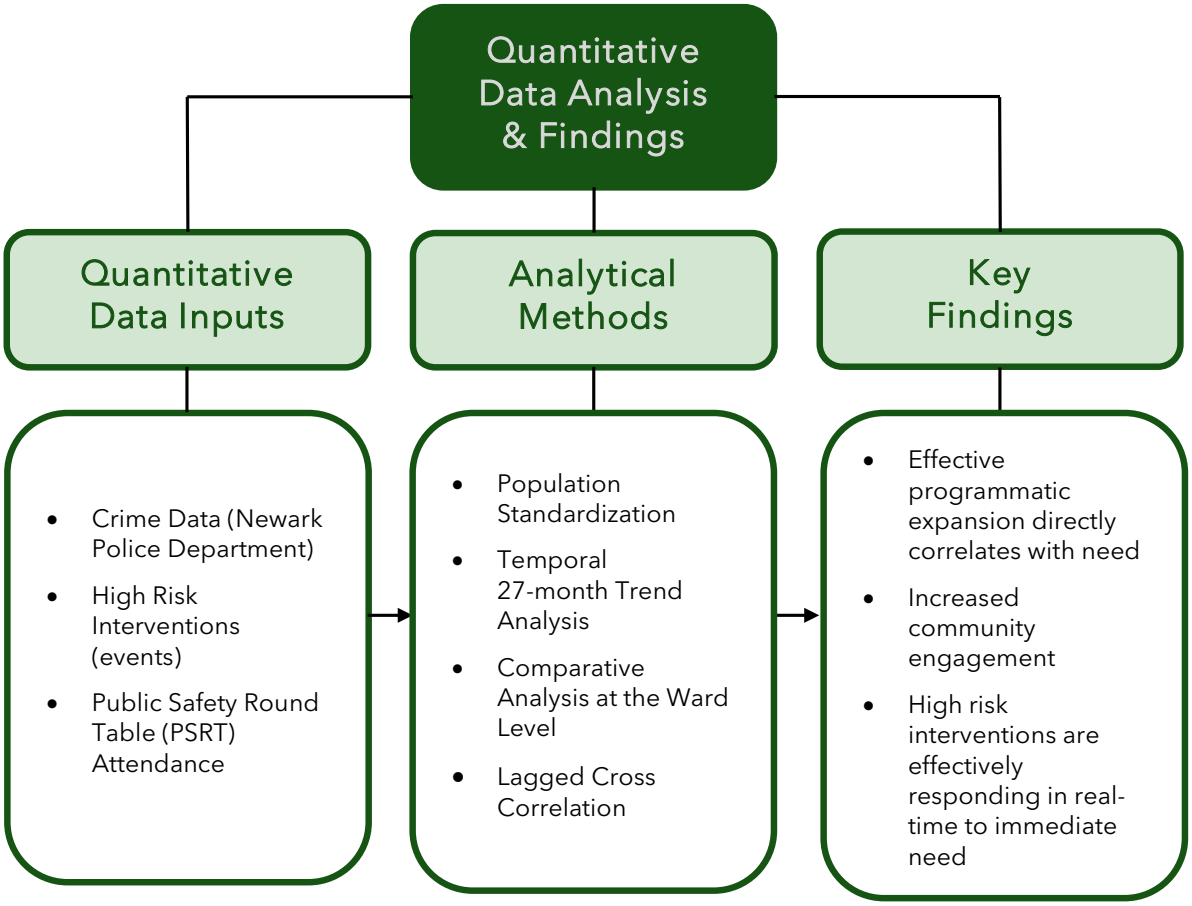
NCST Outreach Workers and High Risk Interventionists (HRIs) directly respond to acute threats of violence or acts of community violence. Each HRI responds to active street disputes, helps de-escalate personal disputes, and collects intelligence at crime scenes without "crossing the yellow line." They draw upon trust and leverage relationships with all those associated with the perpetrator as well as the victim(s) to de-escalate further rumors and prevent retaliation. For purposes of the present evaluation, NCST provided a monthly total of high risk interventions (specific events) by Ward, from January 2022 through March 2024, across the following three levels, defined as:

- Level 1: "Incident has Occurred": Incident likely to cause death or permanent serious injury, a 9-1-1 event (Homicide/Serious Assault/Weapon Violence).
- Level 2: "Probability Incident will Occur": Increasing potential for an incident to happen that could cause injury.
- Level 3: "Conceivable that Incident May Occur": Not an immediate safety concern.

The quantitative data stream consisted of the secondary data analysis of multiple sets of statistics including: 1) documented incidents of high risk intervention as detailed

above; 2) Newark Police Department (NPD) sector crime; and 3) Public Safety Round Table (PSRT) data attendance and participation. Analyses focused on post-pandemic data to avoid the confounding effects of COVID-19 disruptions on crime patterns and service delivery infrastructure. Figure 2 below provides an overview of the quantitative analysis.

Figure 2. Overview of Quantitative Data Analysis and Findings.



Data from the 2020 Census were utilized to generate population adjusted figures (per 10,000 residents) for each of Newark's five Wards. The granular Ward-level analysis affirms NCST's strategy of allocating resources to neighborhoods experiencing the highest burden of community violence. The South and West Wards, with violent crime rates approximately 2.5 times the national average, continue to receive the most

concentrated programming efforts, a pattern consistent with NCST's decade-long evolution from pilot project to established practice.

Moreover, NCST has sustained substantial programmatic expansion. High Risk Interventions doubled between 2022 and 2023. This expansion coincided with increased community engagement, as evidenced by a 16% growth in PSRT participation (from 2,207 participants in 2022 to 2,560 in 2023).

Lastly, cross-correlation analysis provides compelling evidence that NCST programming responds effectively to real-time violence dynamics. The analysis revealed a significant moderate correlation ($r = .459$, $p < .05$) between high risk interventions and violent crime at lag 0, indicating that NCST deploys interventionists simultaneously with violent incidents rather than operating on a delayed response model. This finding validates NCST's core operational strategy of immediate crisis response and conflict mediation.

These quantitative findings, because of the limitations of not having any control group, could not establish any causal relationships – in reality, as stated previously, no community-based evaluation can. However, what is significant is that the quantitative data documents NCST's successful implementation of evidence-based violence intervention strategies and their substantive impact on violent crime. These provide essential benchmarks for ongoing evaluation of community-based violence reduction efforts in Newark.

Findings and Insights

Taken as a whole, and the given the limitations described above, the quantitative results provide four key findings and insights about NCST and its programming. First, the present quantitative evaluation offers data at a granular level. Analyzing data at the Ward-level, rather than the city of Newark in its entirety, helps generate important

baselines for future evaluation. Moreover, this granular level of analysis has enabled additional insights. For example, the second key finding is that it is clear that NCST is allocating and directing resources to neighborhoods that are most impacted by community violence. During its tenure, NCST has focused its programming within the South and West Wards. As a pilot project in 2014, NCST's activities were implemented exclusively in the South Ward. In 2015, NCST expanded into the second community by partnering with the City of Newark Department of Health and Community Wellness to establish the West Ward Victims Outreach Services and Crime Reduction Initiative. During the past decade, NCST has continued to develop programming in these two Wards, primarily. Today, violent and property crime rates remain disproportionately higher in the South and West Wards, at 2.5 times the national average compared with the East Ward which experiences rates below the national average.

Third, NCST has continued to expand, both programmatically and in terms of community engagement. There has been significant growth in the number of HRIs NCST deploys. While their presence remains most substantial in the South and West Wards, all Wards experienced a doubling of the total number of high risk interventions (events) from 2022 to 2023. Additionally, the Central Ward experienced the largest proportional increase in high risk interventions (events) across the two-year period; which is a meaningful response given that, after the South and West Wards, the Central Ward had the highest rates of violent and property crime. It is unclear whether or not this is an intentional expansion into the Central Ward (from 115 high risk interventions in 2022 to 730 in 2023) or it is more a function of geography. Specifically, the Central Ward shares borders with both the South and West Wards[9] where NCST is most active and it is reasonable to assume there is spillover of crime – and resulting need – in critical areas within the Central Ward, which might explain the dramatic increase in high risk interventions (events) within

[9] A map of Newark Wards can be found in Appendix D.

the Ward. Along with this expansion of high risk interventions (events), NCST has also increased its community engagement over time. Since NCST has been collecting data on PSRTs, attendance has increased annually. In 2020, cumulative, annual attendance was just over 250 participant units and in 2024 it increased more than ten-fold to over 2,500 participant units.

Fourth and finally, cross-correlation function (CCF) analysis provides compelling evidence that NCST programming responds effectively to real-time violence dynamics. A CCF analysis can determine whether or not, and the extent to which, two patterns are related to one another. By generating lags in temporal data, the analysis helps identify the extent to which one variable, in this instance high risk interventions (events), might influence the other (violent crime) and during what time period. The analysis revealed a significant moderate correlation ($r = .459$, $p < .05$) between high risk interventions and violent crime at lag 0, indicating that NCST deploys interventions simultaneously with violent incidents rather than operating on a delayed response model. This finding validates that in addition to the continued expansion of programming and outreach, it appears that NCST is not only building a generally more robust infrastructure, but rather, has been effective in reacting in real-time to violent crime, crisis response, and conflict mediation.

The present analyses provide evidence that NCST is successfully implementing one of the most essential strategies informed by its mission and model: responding to, intervening in, and mediating community conflicts in real-time and reducing violence over time.

The results of the correlation analysis suggest two important conclusions. The first is that, given the positive correlations across the model, it appears that high risk interventions and crime are moving in the same direction. In other words, increased crime generated an increase in high risk intervention response, and vice versa. Second, and more precisely, NCST's HRI

programming is reactive and responding to an immediate need. Central to the NCST model is its ability to quickly respond to active disputes, as soon as they are notified of a homicide or shooting. The present analyses provide evidence that NCST is successfully implementing one of the most essential strategies informed by its mission and model: responding to, intervening in, and mediating community conflicts in real-time and reducing violence over time.

QUALITATIVE RESEARCH FINDINGS

To describe and examine the impact of NCST and the experiences of Newark community residents and stakeholders, it was necessary to rely on an ongoing series of qualitative methods consisting of in-depth interviews, focus groups, and participant observation. All three methodologies were employed with a specific emphasis on the South Ward. This multi-faceted qualitative data collection yielded extensive accounts of the experiences and outlooks of a broad range of NCST stakeholders and community residents. This research design, based on qualitative best practices, was implemented with the approval of the UCLA Institutional Review Board (IRB).[10]

The qualitative portion of the evaluation was integral to contextualizing the quantitative data and findings. During phase one, the research team met informally multiple times with community residents and stakeholders, along with the Research Advisory Committee, while conducting three preliminary focus groups as well as depth interviews with key individuals to construct qualitative interview and focus group protocols that could most authentically and effectively assess the impact of NCST upon the perceived safety and wellness of communities throughout Newark. Additionally, the research team attended and conducted ongoing ethnographic

[10] All members of the UCLA evaluation team, including those not involved directly in data collection, were required to complete mandated training sponsored by the UCLA Institutional Review Board to recognize and guard against implicit bias.

observation at the bi-monthly meetings of the PSRT. At the same time, research team members participated in Community Walks, a practice that would continue throughout the entire evaluation process. This led to phase two of the qualitative research process which is discussed in depth in the full report and portrayed in Figure 1 above.

Qualitative Research Design

It was essential for the evaluation team to consider how the "open-ended" questions that guide qualitative research could most effectively be asked. Interview protocols and a focus group protocol were designed to draw upon the experiences of community residents, community partners, and NCST staff. The protocols were designed to cover a variety of topics that related to participants' perceptions of how NCST has contributed to the reduction of crime and the building of community trust and a sense of safety. Consistent with the overarching research questions that guided the evaluation, there were two key questions this data stream addressed:

1.
What are residents' perceptions of and reactions to the Newark Community Street Team?

2.
How has the Newark Community Street Team and its related programs impacted individual perceptions of crime, violence, public safety, and community health?

During this more formal phase of the evaluation, the research team was particularly intent on understanding participant experiences in their own words and integrating that data with the other data streams. It was essential to document and understand residents' and community partners' perceptions, concentrating on their background in the community, their involvement with NCST, their thoughts on how the community has changed with the implementation of NCST, and their thoughts on the interaction between NCST staff, residents, and community stakeholders.

Qualitative Data Collection

Over the 24-month evaluation period, evaluation team members spent extensive time in Newark – particularly the South Ward – talking with residents and community partners.[11] Researchers attended community events, had informal conversations, and became familiar figures building new connections while drawing upon their previous relationship networks and experiences in the South Ward. The fact that the team members were already "known" and accepted by many in the community eased their way with residents and community partners.

Through a combination of opportunistic and snowball sampling, individual interviews and focus groups were scheduled and then conducted at the NCST offices at both 915 S. 16th Street and 678 S. 20th Street over a 16-month data collection period, from March 2024 through July 2025. Embedded ethnographic observation throughout this period was continuous. The interviews and focus groups covered a number of issues. Additionally, Community Walks and informal interaction with residents continuously involved NCST staff members who assisted with all informal engagement between the research team and community partners. Because of this, it was meaningful to engage a small group of dedicated community members and offer them stipends to serve as research team members who assisted with multiple aspects of the evaluation.

[11] Throughout the executive summary and the full report, community stakeholders, institutional partners, and community-based organizations will be referred to generally as "community partners."

Over the course of the evaluation, a total of 233 individuals formally participated in interviews and focus groups; these indicate separate individuals and are not duplicative. The participants can be separated into the following categories:

51	NCST staff members,[12] including High Risk Interventionists, Outreach Workers, Trauma Recovery Center Case Managers and Community Sentinels:
	22 of these participated in depth interviews
	29 of these participated in focus groups
6	NCST leadership team members (past and present)
175	Community residents and community partners
	35 residents participated in depth interviews
	140 residents and community partners participated in focus groups
Mayor Ras Baraka	

Additionally, 625 hours of ethnographic observation were completed.

Community response to interview and focus group outreach was positive. Both residents and community partners talked with team members at length – some even contacted their interviewer a second time to add more information to their interviews. The focus groups were lively and often lasted over two hours. The enthusiasm and commitment of all individuals involved made the qualitative research experience enlightening and rewarding.

[12] Over the 24-month evaluation period, some of these individuals left NCST and were replaced by other individuals.

Qualitative Themes

Following the collection of data, a detailed coding process and analysis occurred.[13] Coding of the themes then resulted in the development of six overarching themes that described the predominant concepts and are reflected in 15 major themes. In the table that follows, the overarching theme is listed first, with subsequent description of the related major themes in the next column. Lengthier discussion of each theme appears in the full report.

Table 1. Summary of Qualitative Themes.

Overarching Theme	Theme
1. Community Identification, Ownership, and Efficacy	1. NCST is authentically community-based. There is a deep community identification with and commitment to the vision of NCST.
	2. The basis of NCST is relational.
	3. NCST has shifted what it means to be a community member, with residents moving from passivity to a collective sense of agency.
	4. Through relationships built with NCST, residents' understanding of crime has evolved, with a recognition of the role of poverty, leading to the call for the fulfillment of community needs.
2. Public Safety and Law Enforcement	5. NCST gives community a voice with law enforcement, particularly through the Public Safety Round Table.
	6. While there is growing communication with law enforcement and no expressed antipathy toward the Newark Police Department, trust remains an issue. There are carefully maintained

[13] A detailed description of the coding process can be found in the full report.

	boundaries between NCST and the NPD in the implementation of intervention and community outreach.
3. ADDED VALUE FOR PUBLIC SAFETY	7. Over the decade of its existence, NCST has deeply extended its service provision and its identity, offering programs far beyond its beginnings in high risk intervention, with an additive impact on community-based public safety.
	8. NCST continues to extend its efforts as a resource for the formerly incarcerated.
	9. NCST has developed a reputation as a learning organization, serving as a thought partner and a training site for several national initiatives.
4. TRAUMA AWARENESS AND UNDERSTANDING TRAUMA	10. NCST continues to play a major role in both staff and residents being aware of and understanding trauma and seeking services to aid in healing, recovery, and resolution.
	11. The demand for trauma-based and recovery services far outstrips what NCST is able to provide. Increasing these services is viewed as a key aspect of future public safety.
5. THE NEED TO CARE FOR AND SUPPORT STAFF	12. There was a consistent concern over staff exposure to trauma and their need for support, including healing and trauma-based services.
	13. There was consistent concern over the need for increased financial support for staff, including more extensive benefits and fiscal security.
6. SUSTAINABILITY	14. There is a profound need for consistent financial sustainability.
	15. The culture of accountability, research, and evaluation that NCST has established must be sustained.

In terms of the UCLA team's qualitative data collection, NCST has been both positive and has facilitated all outreach to participants. However, the key point of the culture of accountability and evaluation that has thrived in NCST was best expressed by one Outreach Worker who said, *"In the end we are accountable to the community. That's who evaluates us."*

In considering the findings from the qualitative data, there is a collateral finding to keep in mind that attests to the overall impact of the Newark Community Street Team: both NCST staff members and community residents wanted to talk about it. The evaluation team members observed that the desire to engage in informal discussions, interviews, and focus groups surrounding NCST – its model and its implementation – was high and sustained. NCST staff, residents, and community partners all expressed their interest, their thoughts, and for the vast majority, their deep identification with and commitment to NCST. This continues to be the true sign of an organization founded *in, by, and for* community.

NEWARK COMMUNITY STREET TEAM EVALUATION PROOF OF CONCEPT

The term "Proof of Concept" has been applied in many settings with multiple applications. It was first used in 1967 in an arena far from community violence intervention (CVI) – as part of prototype testing in engineering and astronautics. However, the thinking behind this term has had application to multiple sectors, from filmmaking to software development. It has long been defined as the process of gathering evidence to demonstrate if a project or an intervention is feasible. However, in the realm of CVI, Proof of Concept is understood more broadly as the process of gathering evidence, in this case data, to prove the validity of a specific program or a series of interventions. It is this broad terminology that informed the UCLA evaluation of NCST.

In considering the findings from both quantitative and qualitative data described throughout this report, it is clear that for NCST, Proof of Concept has been achieved.

Ultimately, as the evaluation worked to rigorously and holistically assess the NCST model and its impact, it also aimed to create a blueprint for this model that could be taken to scale in other settings. Over the 24-month study, the goal of the evaluation has been to assess whether the NCST model currently works and – if NCST is determined to be effective – how the key elements of this model affect the Newark community residents, particularly in the South and West Wards, where crime has always been concentrated.

By following the research plan, it was understood that the evaluation must first determine the overall program effectiveness of NCST, thus establishing then fortifying the Proof of Concept. Additionally, once the quantitative and qualitative research demonstrated the impact of the NCST model there was added value for the achievement of Proof of Concept, particularly centered on professionalizing and validating CVI.

In multiple settings, Proof of Concept has been used to professionalize an emerging field of work in systematic and consistent ways. It legitimizes the field's practice and provides it with authority, credibility, and intentionality. This is true for the field, practice, and practitioners of CVI. The adoption of standard operating procedures, a defined and intentional model of practice, and infrastructure to document and collect evidence all work together to formally validate the field of CVI as a necessary collaborator in the national narrative pertaining to public safety. Additionally, historic

funding of CVI at federal and state levels over the past five years has shepherded the opportunity for unprecedented professionalization of the field. Again, the achievement of a Proof of Concept is vital to the continuation of this work.

Achieving Proof of Concept: The Challenge to Research

Any meaningful Proof of Concept depends on recognized research methodology. Drawing upon comprehensive research on CVI evaluation methods and community-engaged research practices, this Proof of Concept addresses many of the fundamental data-related challenges facing CVI organizations: how to build data collection and data management systems that balance academic rigor with community knowledge, capture both incremental and/or personal progress and population-level change, and maintain the trust and privacy of participants while also maintaining accountability to funders.

Proof of Concept is neither automatic nor easy to come by. The crisis of measurement in the CVI field is exacerbated by numerous challenges. First and primary among them is the extent to which data collection methods are fragmented or disconnected, coupled with resource constraints. For example, physical (paper) data collection forms are sometimes still utilized for intake assessments, data from partnering organizations such as hospitals or schools might only be available in variable electronic formats, and the data entry necessary to align disparate systems of collection is time consuming and error prone. Organizations are chronically underfunded, and the primacy of direct practice needs repeatedly overshadows an organization's capacity to both implement and sustain data collection and data management efforts.

Second, despite interventionists and outreach workers possessing irreplaceable expertise about their communities, current evaluation practices often systematically exclude their voices. For example, academic researchers frequently define

neighborhood boundaries that do not reflect lived community experience. The complexity of replicating place-based interventions is challenging enough, but at the heart of CVI work is its emphasis on intentional, local adaptation to meet the specific needs of individual communities. This can create tension between evaluators, who focus on fidelity in implementation for purposes of both evaluation and replication, and organizations, who rightfully serve the needs of community first and foremost. And often, when community partners contribute extensively to evaluations, they rarely receive acknowledgement formally in authorship or otherwise. Researchers will counter that gift cards represent acknowledgement, but these fall far short of recognizing the invaluable contribution so many partners make.

Third, current evaluation approaches, coupled with competitive grant cycles, systemically privilege large-scale outcome measures. There is a corresponding need to document what is being undertaken and accomplished by CVI and its practitioners, because focusing merely on outcomes fails to capture the true depth of the work. The capacity-building, collective efficacy, and social capital-building that results from CVI work – which is truly grounded in and established by community – are difficult to operationalize, quantify, and attribute causality from programming, but nonetheless critical to document. CVI is challenging in that it is micro

The capacity-building, collective efficacy, and social capital-building that results from CVI work – which is truly grounded in and established by community – are difficult to operationalize, quantify, and attribute causality from programming, but nonetheless critical to document. CVI is challenging in that it is micro work focused on individual interactions, needs, and actions with the understanding that individuals comprise the community: the macro impact of collective change. Improving one variable (housing, employment, trauma recovery) for an individual then ripples through the family, the home, the block, the neighborhood, and beyond.

work focused on individual interactions, needs, and actions with the understanding that individuals comprise the community: the macro impact of collective change. Improving one variable (housing, employment, trauma recovery) for an individual then ripples through the family, the home, the block, the neighborhood, and beyond.

Application to NCST

An understanding of these research practices and the direct or inadvertent harm they may have caused informed every aspect of the UCLA research efforts that proceeded at NCST. The NCST evaluation was strengths-based, community-driven, and a continuation of the broad engagement and community ownership that has characterized NCST since its creation and establishment. In short, the UCLA research followed the philosophical approach and practice of NCST; the Proof of Concept was centered on the community and what it needs to address safety. The involvement of community alongside statistics and staff experience adds to the depth and validity of the evaluation process. This interrelationship is also clear in the logic model[14] the research team developed.

The Proof of Concept achieved at NCST offers a transformative approach to CVI infrastructure that centers community participation, employs both asset- and deficit-based measures, integrates real-time data collection capabilities, and maintains the highest standards of participant privacy and data security. Additionally, the infrastructure the logic model establishes will enable CVI organizations to track participant engagement across multiple touchpoints, monitor violence interruption activities in real-time, demonstrate cost-effectiveness to funders, and most critically, begin to uplift a more complete story of community healing and transformation. It has informed the work undertaken and completed in the evaluation of the Newark Community Street Team.

[14] The NCST Proof of Concept Logic Model can be found in Chapter Eight (NCST Evaluation Proof of Concept).

RECOMMENDATIONS

The evaluation and Proof of Concept serve as a meaningful record of what NCST has accomplished over the past decade. However, their work continues, much of it within a larger socio-political environment that poses new challenges in addition to the ongoing dynamic of community violence. With this in mind, it is essential to offer recommendations on what is required to retain NCST's effectiveness in the years ahead. The UCLA evaluation effort cannot end with a report. Instead, this 24-month endeavor was designed to lead to actionable recommendations for the improvement and sustainability of the Newark Community Street Team and for the safety and well-being of the city of Newark and its residents. On the basis of extensive evaluation findings, the following recommendations are offered.

Table 2. Summary of Recommendations.

1.	The Newark Community Street Team should be identified as and recognized for its role as a national best practice.
2.	A systematic program of trauma-based self-care and healing must be developed, implemented, and prioritized for all NCST staff members; this can be modeled on the success of NCST's Trauma Recovery Center.
3.	Financial sustainability represents a crucial challenge for NCST as an organization.
4.	As an organization with programs and strategies that have repeatedly been found effective, there must be multi-year dedicated funding in the city and/or state budget to support NCST.
5.	The Public Safety Round Table must continue to function with its convenings expanded.
6.	NCST must engage in focused leadership development and succession planning.

7.	All NCST staff, as well as involved residents, should have access to professional development and higher education, including subsidized funding from NCST and its community partners.
8.	Data collection needs to be strengthened and standardized.
9.	There should be an increasing focus on youth programming.
10.	The culture of learning and NCST's identity as a learning organization must be sustained.

CONCLUSION

This UCLA evaluation represents a major step in validating the effectiveness of the Newark Community Street Team. Over the past two years, as this evaluation demonstrates, NCST has decreased violent crime, deepened community trust and engagement, and built both organizational and community capacity. There are still important steps to be taken in the future, centering on financial sustainability, trauma-related care and healing for staff, and the further development of data collection and research. Still, it is necessary to pause and note that NCST's greatest achievement has been its ability to engage residents and imbue them with a sense of agency in the safety and the future of their community. All of the individuals who participated in interviews, focus groups, and ethnographic participant observation have repeatedly expressed deep feelings of gratitude for the transformation they have been part of. As one community member succinctly and accurately expressed, ***"When I see this work, I see us."***

Chapter One

INTRODUCTION

The beginning of the 21st century brought forth both national and local concerns about violence in the United States. There was a slow but growing increase in violent crime in cities, crimes that involved victims of every age and color. At the same time violence was increasing nationally, a demand for just and effective alternatives to traditional law enforcement emerged from advocates and organizations across the country. As different efforts moved forward in urban centers, one meaningful approach began to develop to address both the violence that was rising and the losses left in its wake. A little over ten years ago, in 2014 an individual who had dealt both personally and professionally with violence and the trauma it created, brought together a small group of committed men and women in a basement in Newark, New Jersey. This individual was Aqeela Sherrills, who had a growing reputation as a peacemaker and a strategic thinker. The group he convened was brought together to address and resolve the violence that was raging in the South Ward, a Newark community long scarred by poverty and violent crime. These early interventionists and community outreach workers, most of whom had been incarcerated and knew the Newark streets from personal experience, formed what grew into the organization at the center of the current study.

As the history of the Newark Community Street Team (NCST) in Chapter Three (Origins of NCST) will detail, the founding of NCST occurred under the leadership and support of Mayor Ras Baraka and the unstoppable and determined efforts of Aqeela Sherrills. As these grassroots community-based efforts grew in the South Ward, it became imperative to understand just how NCST worked and beyond that, if it was actually effective in its programming and in reducing crime. Accountability in the form of research and evaluation has long been a part of that process – but any

evidence-driven examination had to first document just what the NCST model was: how it had emerged; what its model consisted of; and most of all, how its High Risk Interventionists (HRIs) and Outreach Workers perceived their work, the problem of violence, and the communities in which they engaged. Additionally, over its first decade of work in the South Ward and extending into other parts of Newark, NCST's leadership understood it was necessary to record the growth of this organization as well as the struggles it faced as part of understanding its eventual outcomes.

This was yet another unique element of the work of NCST. From the moment of its establishment, researchers – in partnership with community members and organization leaders – have been involved in NCST's development and its evaluation. The history of the interrelationship between NCST's theory of change, its practice, and its evaluation began in 2014 with participant observation and depth interviews which took place in the basement where NCST was taking form. This nascent effort eventually grew into a formal research process undertaken by the UCLA Social Justice Research Partnership (SJRP),[15] based on a long-term, past working relationship in Watts with Aqeela Sherrills. In the early days of the fledgling operation, NCST leadership and the UCLA research team agreed that the first step in a multi-year research process had to consist of telling the story of this innovative, community-based approach to violence interruption and the role it played in public safety and community well-being in Newark. But this could not be anecdotal storytelling.

Instead, after several years of ethnographic observation and participatory research which began in 2015, in 2019 the UCLA research team engaged in a documentary narrative evaluation and case study which detailed the origins and development of the NCST model and its successful implementation.[16] Along with this focus, the evaluation charted the evolution of NCST as it moved from a pilot project to a

[15] For ease of understanding, from this point forward, all references to UCLA are used to indicate the UCLA Social Justice Research Partnership (SJRP), under the direction of Jorja Leap, Ph.D.
[16] The evaluation was led Jorja Leap, Ph.D. and can be supplied by this report's authors.

promising practice. Finally, the documentary narrative served as the foundation for the next step of evaluation: systematically interpreting crime data that NCST has access to through its partnership with the Newark Police Department (NPD) and the Safer Newark Council. Of added significance, this documentary narrative (2020) was designed to assist in future efforts to replicate this model in other national settings, validating NCST as a public health–community safety best practice.

From the onset, it was clear that the Newark Community Street Team represented an approach that needed to be understood *in context.* The effectiveness of the Outreach Worker teams could not be separated from the environment in which they operated. Any research clearly required an immersive approach and data collection could not be phoned in or accomplished at a remote site. These research requirements aligned with both the philosophy and approach of the UCLA research team.

For over ten years, the UCLA Social Justice Research Partnership[17] has worked as a cross-disciplinary research, evaluation, and policy collaborative, composed of a multi-ethnic staff with varied educational backgrounds and areas of expertise. It is important to note that the work of this research team, although based in Los Angeles, has not been limited to the west coast. In fact, they have engaged in national work and global collaboration. Most recently this included serving as the lead evaluators for the 2021-2022 White House Community Violence Intervention Collaborative (CVIC), an 18-month initiative that was implemented in 17 cities across the United States, to scale and strengthen community violence intervention (CVI) infrastructure

[17] Established in 2012 as a research center within the UCLA Luskin School of Public Affairs, SJRP engages in community-based participatory research that is committed to the rigorous and authentic portrayal of the thoughts, beliefs, and voices of individuals and communities, with researchers embedded in any environment being studied. As a collaborative, SJRP possesses extensive experience in research and evaluation in the fields of criminal justice, public health, education, and social welfare focusing on community wellness, violence prevention and intervention, prison reform and reentry, government-community collaboration, and social policy.

throughout the nation.[18, 19] This experience and an ongoing relationship between Aqeela Sherrills and the UCLA team leadership led to the beginning of the research that ultimately culminated in this formal evaluation process and resulting Proof of Concept.

The relationship between NCST and UCLA can best be understood by recounting their shared history. Having grown up in Los Angeles himself, Aqeela Sherrills convened a group of Los Angeles leaders and researchers in early 2015 to discuss various violence prevention efforts and measures of their effectiveness. This convening included Jorja Leap, Ph.D., who had worked previously with Sherrills on CVI efforts in Watts. He prefaced this discussion by explaining he wanted to draw upon what had been accomplished in Los Angeles to inform what he was about to undertake on the east coast in Newark, New Jersey. After that meeting, Leap began traveling to Newark regularly to document the origins and earliest efforts of an organization that was on evolving the streets of Newark – under the leadership of Mayor Ras Baraka and Mr. Sherrills – the Newark Community Street Team (NCST). It was clear from the onset that what was occurring in Newark, while related to previous community-based violence prevention efforts, represented an innovative approach to street intervention work. Both Mayor Baraka and Mr. Sherrills were adamant that evaluation be part of this initiative from its onset. The UCLA team was equally clear that they would be embedded research partners with a commitment to observing and interviewing on site, in Newark, over the years that followed. There was no funding for this initial research but it was critical to the expansion of violence prevention that this level of collaboration and documentation be undertaken. Since that time, a long-term research relationship has evolved between the UCLA team, Aqeela Sherrills, and NCST.

[18] https://www.politico.com/news/2022/12/06/guns-community-violence-intervention-collaborative-00072630

[19] NCST was one of the community-based organizations participating in CVIC. NCST served as a model program and they received training and technical assistance (TTA) as part of the CVIC initiative.

Initially, the research conducted was pro-bono. Following the release of the documentary narrative evaluation in 2020, the UCLA research team continued its evaluation efforts with NCST. For two additional years, pro bono research and evaluation work continued with NCST. This timeframe aligned with UCLA 's engagement with the White House CVIC Initiative (2021-2023). As the CVI ecosystem was and continues to be intimately intertwined and deeply connected, NCST played a major role in CVIC, serving as a thought partner and providing capacity-building training for virtually all 16 jurisdictions. After this, for the first time, there was a small amount of funding from the Bureau of Justice Assistance Byrne Discretionary Grants Program (2020-2023). With this support, the research team engaged in a preliminary evaluation of the expansion of NCST programming, particularly the Community Sentinels Leadership Academy. This research (2020-2023) also included an initial quantitative evaluation of NCST programs.[20] This was a reflection of a major phase of NCST's growth that took place between 2020 and 2023. It is necessary to take into account the fact that part of NCST's service delivery occurred during the height of the global COVID-19 pandemic when there were quarantines and meeting restrictions – an especially difficult pivot for such a relational model. Nevertheless, NCST continued to work, intervening in violence while supporting and strengthening the community.

In this 2020-2023 effort, the UCLA team built upon the foundation of its past work, conducting a review of the preliminary quantitative data collected by NCST. Following that, qualitative data were collected to augment the statistical record. All the evaluation research was driven by an effort to gain a better, more holistic understanding of how NCST functions as a violence prevention, harm reduction, and community-based public safety organization. Data collection took place in myriad ways, relying heavily on time spent with leadership and staff from NCST, as well residents, community-based organizations, local law enforcement, and elected officials, among others. The research process was both participatory and intentional,

[20] The evaluation was led Jorja Leap, Ph.D. and can be supplied by this report's authors.

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. The statistics that were reported were descriptive alongside the qualitative data that chronicled just exactly what this organization meant to the community it served. This was also the next step in the pathway of understanding NCST from a contextual and programmatic standpoint, to drilling down into understanding the *impact* of NCST. The following timeline summarizes the evolution of NCST's research and evaluation culture.

Figure 3. Research and Evaluation Timeline.

While it was clear that violent crime in Newark was steadily decreasing and largely attributed to NCST efforts, it was next critical to understand just how and why that was occurring. Additionally, it was important to engage in large scale outreach and engagement of the community in this research effort. In short, NCST determined it was time for a multi-faceted, mixed-methods, quantitative and qualitative evaluation of their organization and the programs it offered.

Building upon its commitment to social justice and support for community-based, rigorous research efforts, the Ford Foundation was approached and ultimately offered financial support for the current study, the first large-scale evaluation of NCST. In contrast to previous funding, this support did not come attached to any larger programmatic grant. Instead, it was funding specifically for evaluation – a meaningful commitment on the part of the Ford Foundation. It should also be noted that the Ford Foundation funding was made to the Community Based Public Safety Collective ("The Collective") to ensure there was separate oversight of all fiscal distributions.

This funding enabled the UCLA team to engage in research that was both holistic and exhaustive. What will unfold in the following chapters is a multi-faceted examination of every aspect of the work of NCST. It begins with an exploration of the CVI literature followed by a history of Newark and a discussion the NCST model. This report then focuses in on the evaluation itself – its methodology, quantitative and qualitative findings and the resulting Proof of Concept. Finally, the UCLA team will offer recommendations and a conclusion. What begins with history will ultimately offer an account of the present and a model for the future.

Chapter Two

COMMUNITY VIOLENCE INTERVENTION IN CONTEXT
A Review of the Literature

While literature reviews are designed to bring together understanding of the research to identify gaps and build theoretical frameworks for advancing scholarship, they simultaneously reveal whose voices are centered and whose experiences, perspectives, and priorities remain systematically excluded from academic efforts. In reviewing the literature on community violence intervention (CVI), it appears that much of the present research often fails to assess, document, and uplift the transformative potential of community-led healing. Rather, the focus is on reductive quantitative crime metrics, which are important, but at the same time obscure the mechanisms through which CVI can effect change. Because of these concerns, this literature review aims to achieve three goals. First, it provides historical context for the evolution of CVI by clearly delineating what it is and what it is not. Second, it also highlights and describes numerous organizations and programs across the country to provide examples of the historical versions of CVI throughout the past half century. This includes the initial focus on the criminal justice lens, to the development of the public health model, to the present-day focus of centering community experience and local expertise. And third, this review documents the extent to which current research not only privileges quantitative findings, but more importantly,

In the literature on community violence intervention (CVI), it appears that much of the present research often fails to assess, document, and uplift the transformative potential of community-led healing.

This review documents the extent to which current research not only privileges quantitative findings, but more importantly, sometimes misrepresents the true impact of CVI programming.

sometimes misrepresents the true impact of CVI programming. We conclude the literature review by proposing a path forward that emphasizes qualitative and mixed-methods community-based research that centers stories of interventionists, survivors, and community members to help reveal the contextual factors and mechanisms that quantitative measures often systematically erase.

In cities across the United States, the final two decades of the 20th century were characterized by increasing community violence and escalating rates of crimes. Gang activity devastated urban areas across the eastern seaboard, Midwestern regions, and throughout California, while law enforcement struggled to address the problems unfolding. In 2025, nearly fifty years after the peak of this crime epidemic, gun violence persists as one of the most pressing public safety crises in the country. Each year, nearly 46,000 Americans die as a result of some form of gun violence and approximately 18,000 of these deaths are attributed to firearm homicide.[21] Additionally, the impact of gun violence is disturbingly disproportionate. Within the largest 20 counties in the United States, Black youth and men aged 15-24 experience a gun homicide rate 20 times higher than their white counterparts.[22] These sobering statistics do not scratch the surface of the devastation neighborhoods and families are forced to endure including the vicarious trauma, mental health consequences, and financial burden as survivors of community violence.[23]

[21] This constitutes well over one-third of the approximately 46,000 gun-related deaths annually (https://giffords.org/lawcenter/resources/gun-violence-statistics/)
[22] Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Wide-ranging Online Data for Epidemiologic Research (WONDER), "Underlying Cause of Death, 2018-2023, Single Race," last accessed August 20, 2025.https://wonder.cdc.gov/.
[23] United States. Public Health Service. Office of the Surgeon General. (2024). *Firearm violence: A public health crisis in America: The U.S. Surgeon General's advisory*. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Public Health Service, Office of the Surgeon General.

Present day community violence intervention (CVI) represents a critical paradigm shift in the response to urban violence. Its work has proven to be transformative because it advances thinking that gun violence as not merely a criminal justice issue, but rather a public health epidemic requiring comprehensive, community-based approaches. Contemporary CVI models also recognize that people of color have been systematically and purposefully concentrated into neighborhoods that have endured economic disadvantage, divestment, and ongoing discrimination. These are the very communities that are acutely plagued by community violence. Therefore, an important underpinning of CVI is that this work is informed and led by residents and stakeholders who have the deepest understanding of the unique needs of each community.

The Giffords Center for Violence Intervention defines **community violence intervention (CVI)** as: "A set of non-punitive, community-led strategies designed to interrupt the transmission of violence by engaging those at highest risk through the provision of individually tailored support services."[24]

CVI evolved from top-down approaches that failed to center the importance of community experience. The roots of modern CVI can be traced to the earliest efforts at ending gang activity that occurred in the nascent intervention programs of the 1960s, particularly in Los Angeles, Chicago, and Boston. Criminologist Malcom Klein's seminal evaluation of these early programs revealed fundamental challenges that would shape the field for decades and initially detract from its national implementation.[25] At its inception, the role of both "street workers" or social workers

[24] Giffords Center for Violence Intervention. (2025). *Moving the mission: Field insights from the 2025 CVI Conference*. GIFFORDS. https://cviconference.org
[25] Klein, Malcolm W. 1971. *Street Gangs and Street Workers*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.

who spent months earning credibility and acceptance by a gang, was integral to any sort of interventions. This was a meaningful finding.[26] However, Klein's work also called attention to the critical challenge of iatrogenic effects, or the idea that adverse outcomes could be inadvertently caused by the intervention itself. Klein posited that the interventions often strengthened the very group dynamics within gangs that they sought to disrupt. Largely for this reason, the early practice of what would later become CVI languished for several years.

In the mid-1980s there was renewed effort to develop a new model on the part of a professor and social worker at the University of Chicago, Irving Spergel, Ph.D. His efforts, now known as the Comprehensive or "Spergel" model of gang reduction, called for a coordinated response to gangs characterized by community organization and mobilization focused on violence prevention, coupled with supportive services that consisted of interventions that included jobs training and education, as well as a law enforcement-based suppression strategy (including arrest, incarceration and supervision).[27] The model was founded in social disorganization theory, which posited that an individual's location and environment were integral to their development, whether pro-social or anti-social. Consequently, altering the environment became key to creating sustainable individual and community change, and more specifically, reducing gang violence. During the early 1990s, the Spergel model became a central program within the U.S. Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) and was ultimately renamed the OJJDP Comprehensive Gang Model. Following initial demonstration sites in Bloomington (IL), Riverside (CA), Tucson and Mesa (AZ), and San Antonio (TX), several cities throughout the United States including, Milwaukee (WI), Los Angeles and San

[26] Ibid.
[27] Spergel, I. A. (1995). The youth gang problem: A community approach. Oxford University Press.

Francisco (CA), North Miami Beach (FL), and East Cleveland (OH) received federal funding to implement the Spergel model.[28]

The Emergence of The Public Health Model

Spergel's framework gave rise to a separate but related model often referred to as Group Violence Intervention (GVI). The most notable version of this model was led by David Kennedy and Anthony Braga, Ph.D. Beginning in late 1994, Kennedy and Braga, both based at Harvard University, initiated the Boston Gun Project, also known as Operation Ceasefire. The project aimed to address youth gun violence in Boston through an interagency, coordinated strategy that engaged predominately law enforcement agencies: the Boston Police Department; the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms; the District Attorney's office (Suffolk County); Departments of Probation and Parole; and the City of Boston school police.[29] Importantly though, City of Boston youth outreach workers, as well as Kennedy and Braga, were integral to the workgroup. Their findings suggested that supply-side interventions (those that disrupted the gun markets in Boston (i.e., those that focused on punishment for gun sales--i.e., law enforcement) and demand-side interventions (those that focused on reducing gun use--i.e., social services) work synergistically to reduce violence among a concentrated, small number of highest-risk youth.[30]

Operation Ceasefire was understood as an approach that focused on identifying a specific problem – in this instance youth homicide in Boston – which was followed by five distinct actions: 1) convening an interagency group of law enforcement; 2) engaging researchers to identify "key offenders," as well as behavior patterns; 3)

[28] Arciaga, M., Dougherty, V., Moore, J., Hale, K., Ray, S., & Howell, J. (2009). OJJDP Comprehensive Gang Model: A guide to assessing your community's youth gang problem. Washington, DC: Institute for Intergovernmental Research.
[29] Kennedy, D. M., Piehl, A. M., & Braga, A. A. (1996). Youth violence in Boston: Gun markets, serious youth offenders, and a use-reduction strategy. *Law & Contemp. Probs.*, *59*, 147.
[30] Ibid.

framing an appropriate and targeted response; 4) matching law enforcement prevention efforts with social services and community resources; and 5) repeated and continued engagement with target populations to "make them understand why they are receiving this special attention."[31] Ultimately, the Operation Ceasefire model was replicated and adapted for communities in Baltimore, Minneapolis, and San Francisco with mixed and un-sustained results.

However, there was widespread community suspicion surrounding this work and concern about the continuing emphasis on and involvement with law enforcement. This suspicion opened the door to the first major alternative to Kennedy and Braga's model, which was implemented in the late 1990s when Gary Slutkin, a physician and epidemiologist directing the Chicago Project for Violence Prevention at the University of Illinois, pioneered the application of epidemic disease control principles to violence prevention. Drawing from his experience combating infectious diseases internationally, Slutkin conceptualized violence as a contagious disease that could be interrupted through systematic intervention.[32]

Slutkin's organizing efforts in Chicago brought together religious leaders, law enforcement officials, and academics, with Cardinal Francis George and Police Superintendent Terry Hillard supporting the initiative. The coalition established formal cease-fire zones throughout Chicago in early 2000, creating the first major public action of what would become known as CeaseFire Chicago (distinct from Operation Ceasefire in Boston described previously). The program's innovative approach centered on employing "violence interrupters," or individuals with credibility in affected communities, often including former gang members, who could mediate

[31] Braga, Anthony A., Brandon Turchan, and Christopher Winship. "Partnership, accountability, and innovation: Clarifying Boston's experience with focused deterrence." Police innovation: Contrasting perspectives (2019): 227-247.
[32] Slutkin, G. (2013). Contagion of Violence: Forum on Global Violence Prevention. Institute of Medicine and National Research Council. The National Academies.

conflicts before they escalated to lethal violence.[33] Also central to the model was an emphasis on shifting community norms around violence to reinforcing nonviolent resolution, as well as providing behavior change supports through mentorship, case management, and social services.

Through funding from diverse sources including government agencies, private foundations, and community foundations, CeaseFire Chicago experienced significant growth over the first seven years of its development. The program initially restricted operations to specific high-risk Chicago neighborhoods containing established activist communities but later expanded to other neighborhoods starting in 2003. Local police facilitated the work by providing access to crime trend data through weekly meetings, establishing a collaborative model that would influence subsequent violence intervention approaches. In an effort to distinguish it from Operation Ceasefire in Boston, the model was renamed the Cure Violence Approach and the stage was set to replicate and adapt across the country.

The Growth and Impact of The Cure Violence Approach

Slutkin's Cure Violence Approach pioneered in Chicago gradually spread to other cities. These included Aim4Peace in Kansas City, Pittsburgh's One Vision One Life program, Baltimore's Safe Streets program, and New York City's Save Our Streets (SOS) Brooklyn. Other cities implemented distinct programs, including Phoenix's TRUCE project[34] and the Seattle Youth Violence Prevention Initiative.[35] Despite their regional and programmatic variations, these were all fundamentally founded upon a

[33] National Gang Center. (2017). Cure Violence: The interrupters. Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention. https://nationalgangcenter.ojp.gov/insights/25/cure-violence-the-interrupters
[34] Fox, A. M., Katz, C. M., Choate, D. E., & Hedberg, E. C. (2015). Evaluation of the Phoenix TRUCE project: a replication of Chicago CeaseFire. *Justice Quarterly*, *32*(1), 85-115.
[35] Gross Shader, C., & Jones, D. G. (2015). The City of Seattle could reduce violent crime and victimization by strengthening its approach to street outreach. Seattle, WA: City of Seattle Office of City Auditor.

Across these programs, a critical common component emerged: reliance on street-level workers or interventionists who recruited youth for special programming, engaged community members, assisted those at-risk, and provided street intelligence on gangs and potential violent incidents. These individuals – variously termed violence interrupters, community intervention workers, interventionists, and outreach workers – fulfilled the essential role of maintaining connection to the community and preventing or interrupting potential violence. Their credibility proved vital, as many came from the communities where they worked, often having been incarcerated or possessing past gang connections that provided deeper understanding of the environment and unique points of access.

public health model. Across these programs, a critical common component emerged: reliance on street-level workers or interventionists who recruited youth for special programming, engaged community members, assisted those at-risk, and provided street intelligence on gangs and potential violent incidents. These individuals – variously termed violence interrupters, community intervention workers, interventionists, and outreach workers – fulfilled the essential role of maintaining connection to the community and preventing or interrupting potential violence. Their credibility proved vital, as many came from the communities where they worked, often having been incarcerated or possessing past gang connections that provided deeper understanding of the environment and unique points of access. However, their credibility also rested on their separation from law enforcement, with the explicit understanding they would not share information or "snitch."

Still, robust evaluations of these programs yielded mixed results. Initial evaluations of CeaseFire Chicago generated a complex picture of processes and outcomes that defied simple conclusions. While shootings and homicides dropped across most

intervention sites, it was impossible to attribute changes to programming as crime was decreasing regionally across both intervention and non-intervention sites.[36] Moreover, data related to violence interrupter activities were poorly tracked and could not be linked to changes in rates of shootings or homicides.[37] Evaluations of the Safe Streets Baltimore project yielded similarly mixed results. Within intervention sites, while non-fatal shootings decreased significantly, homicides spiked.[38] And while there were "promising trends," changes in crime indicators could not be attributed to the intervention.

Beyond these mixed research outcomes, an evaluation of Pittsburgh's One Vision One Life program provided a sobering counterpoint to the promising results seen in similar community-driven violence reduction initiatives. Implemented in 2004 and modeled after Chicago's CeaseFire program, One Vision One Life deployed "community coordinators" to mediate conflicts, respond to homicides, and connect at-risk youth to social services across three high-violence areas of Pittsburgh. Using sophisticated research methods to analyze monthly crime data from 1996 to 2007, the researchers examined the program's impact on homicides, aggravated assaults, and gun assaults.[39]

The findings challenged assumptions about the transferability of seemingly successful violence reduction models. While the program had no measurable effect on homicide rates, it was associated with statistically significant increases in both aggravated assaults (approximately 25 per 100,000 residents monthly in Northside and Southside) and gun assaults across all target areas. However, there were clearly reasons for these outcomes. The assessment of program implementation revealed

[36] Skogan, W.G., Hartnett, S.M., Bump, N., & Dubois, J. (2009). Evaluation of CeaseFire-Chicago. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, National Institute of Justice.
[37] Ibid.
[38] Butts, J. A., & Roman, C. (2013). Cure Violence Evaluation Plan.
[39] Wilson, J. M., & Chermak, S. (2011). Community-driven violence reduction programs: Examining Pittsburgh's One Vision One Life. *Criminology & Public Policy*, *10*(4), 993-1027.

critical departures from the Chicago CeaseFire model. Specifically, “community coordinators” focused on general neighborhood conflicts rather than high-risk gang disputes, with only 1.8% of mediations addressing potential retaliatory violence. Unlike Chicago's systematic documentation and accountability structure, Pittsburgh lacked consistent program monitoring, and crucially, the initiative operated without any meaningful law enforcement partnership to communicate deterrent messages about illegal gun possession.

The authors posit that these failures in implementation may have produced iatrogenic effects in Pittsburgh's loosely organized gang environment. Drawing on Klein's (1971) "paradox of programming," they theorize that the intervention may have inadvertently increased gang cohesion by creating new social networks and strengthening group identity through the very activities meant to provide alternatives to violence.[40] This interpretation gains support from the differential results across cities implementing similar models. Chicago saw consistent reductions in violence across evaluated neighborhoods, Baltimore experienced mixed results including increases in one target area, and Pittsburgh showed increases across multiple violence measures. These findings underscored the complexity of replicating place-based interventions and suggested that community violence reduction programs required careful adaptation to local gang structures, systematic implementation fidelity, and integrated law enforcement partnerships to avoid unintended consequences.

Kennedy, the principal investigator and architect of Operation Ceasefire model (also known as the Boston Gun Project described previously) which relied more heavily on suppression and engagement with law enforcement, carefully reviewed these critiques. He argued that effectiveness issues stemmed not from streetworkers themselves, but from how violence reduction programs integrated street workers with

[40] Ibid.

other stakeholders and residents.[41] According to Kennedy, the most effective strategies fostered genuine partnerships between street interventionists, residents, stakeholders, and other peacekeepers, along with an alliance with law enforcement.

From Group Violence Intervention (GVI) to Community Violence Intervention (CVI): Removing Law Enforcement, Centering Community and Local Expertise

As GVI implementation continued across the U.S., academics, advocates, and community leaders alike elevated concerns about the extent to which these early programs relied upon law enforcement and the conceptualization of gangs as the singular problem. The association with law enforcement, however limited, carried with it complicating factors. Increased police intervention and law enforcement activity within neighborhoods ultimately subjected residents – and in particular, those not engaged in criminal activity – to greater police scrutiny.[42] As crime continued to increase in U.S. cities, it became clear that the suppression tactics systematically applied by law enforcement were not effective in reducing community violence. This called into question the emphasis on law enforcement as active partners in traditional GVI models and the need to shift to community-centered approaches. Marked concern was further strengthened by emerging research which suggested that proactive policing practices had a direct effect on the mental health of young men, with the strongest negative health implications associated with the most intrusive policing encounters.[43] This is of course distinct from the pervasive violence suffered at the hands of law enforcement which further exacerbated community violence.

[41] Kennedy, D. M. (2011). Whither Streetwork: The place of outreach workers in community violence prevention. *Criminology & Public Policy, 10*, 1045.
[42] Bhatt, M. P., Heller, S. B., Kapustin, M., Bertrand, M., & Blattman, C. (2024). Predicting and preventing gun violence: An experimental evaluation of READI Chicago. *The quarterly journal of economics*, *139*(1), 1-56.
[43] Geller, A., Fagan, J., Tyler, T., & Link, B. G. (2014). Aggressive policing and the mental health of young urban men. *American journal of public health*, *104*(12), 2321-2327.

It also became increasingly apparent that young people who entered gangs, and the older youth who sustained them, exhibited numerous risk factors originating from both their homes and their neighborhoods. Their neighborhoods suffered from economic disadvantage, systematic divestment, and ongoing discrimination, and while in their homes, inter-partner violence, child maltreatment, and parental neglect were more prevalent. Additionally, there existed broader systemic issues that included failing, overcrowded educational institutions, the difficulties faced by formerly incarcerated individuals returning to their neighborhoods, and particularly the widespread violence inflicted by law enforcement agencies. As these elements were recognized and examined, it grew evident that what had been incorrectly labeled as gang violence was in fact an issue of community-wide violence.

CVI centers on community as both the focus of problems and solutions, concentrating on residents and stakeholders who serve as real-time experts on local violence patterns. These individuals work as interventionists, case managers, mediators, violence interrupters, visionaries, and advocate who operate not just on the streets, but in community meetings, policy forums, hospitals, and other settings that vary by location and need.

Distinct from GVI, CVI has emerged as a state-of-the-art term only in the past decade, though the practice itself is much older and finally gaining recognition through its growing evidence base. CVI centers on community as both the focus of problems *and solutions*, concentrating on residents and stakeholders who serve as real-time experts on local violence patterns. These individuals work as interventionists, case managers, mediators, violence interrupters, visionaries, and advocate who operate not just on the streets, but in community meetings, policy forums, hospitals, and other settings that vary by location and need.

The CVI model's most significant feature is its lack of a rigid blueprint. Instead, it remains dynamic and responsive to each community's specific needs, always informed by residents and stakeholders who prioritize local challenges. Crucially, those who are most deeply affected occupy positions front and center in any violence response effort that impacts their community. While evidence-based practices inform the work, they never supersede community needs.

Contemporary CVI programs focus on the primacy of community-led approaches and de-prioritize engagement with local law enforcement. Operation Peacemaker Fellowship was perhaps the first CVI initiative to operate entirely outside the criminal justice system-law enforcement framework. Implemented in Richmond, California in 2010, the program uniquely targeted a small number of individuals identified as most likely to perpetrate firearm violence and engaged them through an intensive 18-month fellowship. The model's core components comprised individually tailored mentorship, 24-hour case management, cognitive behavioral therapy, internship opportunities, social service navigation, substance abuse treatment, organized excursions, and critically, conditional cash transfers of up to $1,000 monthly for participants who met specific goals, including abstaining from firearm violence.[44] Unlike programs such as Operation Ceasefire or Cure Violence that maintained partnerships, albeit limited, with law enforcement, Operation Peacemaker deliberately operated independently from police and probation, and instead relied solely upon former street-involved individuals as mentors to create a trust-based intervention space.

The program achieved substantial reductions in firearm violence, for example 55% fewer firearm-related deaths and hospital visits in health data and 43% fewer crimes

[44] Matthay, E. C., Farkas, K., Rudolph, K. E., Zimmerman, S., Barragan, M., Goin, D. E., & Ahern, J. (2019). Firearm and non-firearm violence after operation peacemaker fellowship in Richmond, California, 1996–2016. *American Journal of Public Health*, *109*(11), 1605-1611.

in crime data. Yet, it was simultaneously associated with unexpected increases in non-firearm violence, including 16% more non-firearm deaths and hospital visits.[45] Authors suggest a potential substitution effect that occurred with the removal of firearms from violent encounters. Rather than eliminating violence altogether, the absence of firearms may have inadvertently shifted violence toward other weapons or physical force rather than eliminating violence altogether. The study's research analysis (from 1996 to 2016) further complicates the picture, showing that initial protective effects appeared to diminish over time, potentially exacerbated by the civil unrest in 2015 following the murder of Freddie Gray in police custody.[46]

However, there continued to be a movement toward CVI. Advance Peace, which continues to operate in multiple cities across California, was a gradual extension of the Operation Peacemaker Fellowship program. Advance Peace also functions independently from law enforcement and adopts a holistic approach that prioritizes trauma recovery and healing rather than solely targeting gun crime reduction. The program employs a collaborative framework through its Life Management Action Plan (LifeMAP), that enables practitioners and clients to jointly develop comprehensive life goals spanning short-, medium-, and long-term timeframes that address trauma recovery, crime and conflict avoidance, and the cultivation of positive life opportunities.[47]

A recent evaluation of Advance Peace provided compelling yet nuanced evidence of the program's effectiveness during the COVID-19 pandemic across three California cities.[48] While national trends showed increases in firearm violence during 2020-2021, the study found that neighborhoods with Advance Peace presence

[45] Ibid.
[46] In contrast to the unpresented response to the murder of George Floyd, the murder of Freddie Gray in police custody did not generate national attention nor coverage. Gray's was one of approximately 1,031 individuals killed by law enforcement in 2015.
[47] Retrieved from: https://www.advancepeace.org/about/the-solution/
[48] The evaluation focused on the Northern California cities of Sacramento, Stockton, and Richmond.

experienced 5 to 52% decreases in gun homicides compared to pre-pandemic periods, with particularly striking reductions among Black men under 35, the demographic most disproportionately affected by gun violence.[49] Sacramento and Stockton saw 24-83% reductions in gun homicides within census tracts with predominantly Black populations, and the program documented 202 street-level conflict interruptions where firearms were present, potentially saving hundreds of lives and contributing to an estimated $65-494 million in public expenditure savings.[50]

Andrew Papachristos and the Application of Network Science

In concert with the increasing focus of community-led approaches to violence without law enforcement presence altogether, advances in methodological evaluations were underway. Andrew V. Papachristos, Ph.D. emerged as a pivotal figure in uplifting the theoretical and empirical foundations of CVI through network science applications. As Professor of Sociology and founder and Faculty Director of CORNERS (Center for Neighborhood Engaged Research & Science), Papachristos developed sophisticated analytical frameworks for understanding violence concentration and transmission patterns. His research demonstrated that within any given neighborhood, a relatively small number of individuals are involved in gun violence and tend to be connected to one another through a "web of relationships." Additionally, Papachristos' network mapping research revealed that violence tends to cluster within small, interconnected groups, with findings showing similar patterns across different sized cities, indicating fundamental human dynamics driving violent behaviors. The methodological innovation of network science application to violence prevention and intervention provided CVI with rigorous analytical foundations.

[49] Corburn, J., Boggan, D., Muttaqi, K., & Vaughn, S. (2022). Preventing urban firearm homicides during COVID-19: preliminary results from three cities with the Advance Peace Program. Journal of urban health, 99(4), 626-634.
[50] Ibid.

Contemporary CVI Models

As a practice and field, CVI has moved from being recognized in urban pockets of implementation to now being heralded as a nationwide movement. This is evidenced by historic investment at both the federal and state levels. Through Community-Based Violence Intervention and Prevention Initiative (CVIPI) and the Bipartisan Safer Communities Act under the Biden Administration, more than $300 million has been allocated to CVI programming.[51] In 2017 only five states – California, Connecticut, Illinois, Massachusetts, and New York – were making state-level investments in CVI programming, spending approximately $60 million.[52] This grew to $700 million in spending across 17 states in 2021. Yet today the practice of CVI finds itself in a troubled position, with federal CVI funding completely retracted by the Trump Administration and programs nationwide at a pivotal stage of growth given the support shown by the previous administration.

Over the last five years a cohort of innovative CVI programs have emerged across the country. Some representative examples, such as Roca, Inc. in Massachusetts and Maryland, Turn90 in South Carolina, and CRED in Illinois, will be discussed below but there are many additional examples. These models share a common operational framework: local community-based outreach workers identify and engage participants while combining supportive employment or financial assistance with therapeutic counseling (often Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT)). For example, Roca, Inc. is a nonprofit organization that focuses on violence intervention among high-risk young men and mothers aged 17-24 by providing "relentless outreach, transformational relationships, and stage-based programming." Roca's model, implemented across four cities in Massachusetts and in Baltimore, Maryland,

[51] Giffords Center for Violence Intervention (2025). *Intervention*. Retrieved from: https://giffords.org/intervention/
[52] Giffords Law Center. (2017). *Investing in intervention: The critical role of state-level support in breaking the cycle of urban gun violence*. Retrieved from: https://files.giffords.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/Investing-in-Intervention-02.14.18.pdf

combines intensive case management with educational or employment pathways, structured and unstructured programming, and CBT over a four-year, three-phased engagement model.[53] Turn90 (previously known as Turning Leaf) in Charleston, South Carolina, supports individuals returning from incarceration through 150 hours of CBT alongside case management and transitional employment.[54]

While causal evidence of the effectiveness of these programs is limited, two programs have been studied with methodology to account for selection bias inherent in many evaluations. Alongside other CVI experts, Papachristos conducted a sophisticated quasi-experimental evaluation of Chicago CRED's (Create Real Economic Destiny) street outreach intervention. CRED is a 12-18 month phased program that focuses on five foundational pillars: street outreach, therapy, life coaching, education, and job training. Published in *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, their evaluation used advanced statistical methods to address the challenge of selection bias inherent in CVI evaluation. Researchers were able to account for interconnected risk factors, such as prior arrests, gang involvement, or social networks, that could skew initial risk measurements and generate a more comparable control group.[55] The evaluation examined CRED's impact on 2,248 participants identified through street outreach between 2017 and 2020, using advanced statistical techniques to construct appropriate comparison groups. The study found significant reductions in arrests for gun violence with participants 73% less likely than the comparison group to have an arrest for violent crime in months following the intervention, though effects on other forms of violence were more limited. The research demonstrated the importance of

[53] Abt Associates (2021) "Implementation Evaluation of Roca Inc.," https://www.abtassociates.com/files/Projects/PDFs/2021/final-report_abt-associates_ roca-implementation-evaluation.pdf.
[54] Bhatt, M. P., Heller, S. B., Kapustin, M., Bertrand, M., & Blattman, C. (2024). Predicting and preventing gun violence: An experimental evaluation of READI Chicago. *The quarterly journal of economics*, *139*(1), 1-56.
[55] Ross, M. C., Ochoa, E. M., & Papachristos, A. V. (2023). Evaluating the impact of a street outreach intervention on participant involvement in gun violence. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, *120*(46), e2300327120.

distinguishing between different outcome measures when evaluating CVI effectiveness.

The Rapid Employment and Development Initiative (READI) Chicago study evaluated an 18-month intervention combining subsidized employment and CBT for men at extreme risk of gun violence in Chicago's highest-violence neighborhoods. The program successfully identified and engaged an extraordinarily high-risk population. For example, participants averaged 17 prior arrests and faced an 11% chance of being shot or killed during the 20-month follow-up period, approximately 52 times the risk of average Chicagoans.[56] While the study found no statistically significant reduction in its primary outcome, a composite index of serious violence, it revealed important heterogeneous effects and suggestive evidence of impact. The program reduced shooting and homicide arrests by 65%, though not statistically significant after adjusting for multiple hypothesis testing. And for men referred by community outreach workers specifically, both shooting/homicide arrests and victimizations declined substantially (79% and 43% respectively, remaining significant after adjustments).[57] Despite the mixed statistical findings, the intervention generated estimated social savings of $182,000 to $916,000 per participant due to the enormous societal costs of gun violence, yielding a benefit-cost ratio between 4:1 and 18:1.[58] The results also lend support to the idea that combining human expertise with algorithmic risk assessment may be more effective than either approach alone.

Challenges and Limitations in Current Evidence

Despite significant advances, CVI evaluation faces persistent research and methodological challenges. There is a two-fold problem with the emphasis on what

[56] Bhatt, M. P., Heller, S. B., Kapustin, M., Bertrand, M., & Blattman, C. (2024). Predicting and preventing gun violence: An experimental evaluation of READI Chicago. *The quarterly journal of economics*, *139*(1), 1-56.
[57] Ibid.
[58] Ibid.

so many consider the gold standard of research – Randomized Controlled Trials (RCTs) – and how these must be used to assess the effectiveness and impact of programs. First, RCTs often cannot be ethically or practically implemented in real-world violence prevention contexts. RCTs require that there be a "control" group that does not receive the intervention and is compared to the "experimental" group that receives the intervention. This approach is required in drug trials and other types of biomedical research and its application is appropriate. However, because researchers cannot deny prevention, violence interruption, or support services to those actively impacted by community violence, there can be no control group. As a result, selection bias will remain a significant challenge as participants will be fundamentally different than any comparison group. More specifically, the individuals most likely to benefit from CVI may also be most likely to seek out or be referred to services. Contamination and spillover effects present additional complications. Violence and its prevention are inherently social phenomena, making it difficult to isolate treatment effects when social networks span treatment and control conditions. These fundamental, inherent limitations call for greater sophistication in how both researchers and policy makers alike produce and understand CVI evaluations. The CVI research community must acknowledge that methodological compromises such as quasi-experimental designs, are not a sign of weakness, but rather necessary adaptations for studying life-and-death interventions in real-world contexts. The second and perhaps more important issue with RCTs is that the focus on violence reduction and causal inference fails to capture the more intangible benefits of CVI.[59] The capacity-building, collective efficacy, and social capital building that results from CVI work truly grounded in and established by community is difficult to operationalize, quantify, and attribute causality from programming.

[59] Hureau, D. M., & Papachristos, A. V. (2025). Re-centering the community in violence intervention: reclaiming legacies of street outreach in the provision of public safety. *Annual Review of Criminology*, *8*.

In March 2025, CORNERS convened a webinar with notable leaders in the CVI space titled "CVI at a Crossroads: Promising Progress, New Threats, and Collaborative Solutions." This professional conference brought together leading experts to discuss the current state and future trajectory of the field of CVI. To consider these issues, the panel was moderated by Dallas Wright of CORNERS and featured Papachristos, Yolanda Fields (Breakthrough Urban Ministries), Fernando Rejón (Urban Peace Institute), and Jordan Costa, Ph.D. (Giffords Center for Violence Intervention). Together, they addressed notable gaps in current research approaches to CVI. Papachristos argued that fundamental questions remain unanswered – not merely whether CVI works, but when, why, and under what conditions. Costa advocated for elevating qualitative data and lived experience as legitimate forms of evidence, challenging the primacy of quantitative metrics in determining program effectiveness. Perhaps most importantly, Costa noted that robust qualitative research is essential to our understanding of not only intervention outcomes, but the mechanisms, conditions, and contextual factors that facilitate or impede transformative change at both individual and community levels.

With this in mind, the current evaluation of the Newark Community Street Team (NCST) programming aims to add to the literature through this robust mixed-methods evaluation. Through employing rigorous qualitative and quantitative methods, this evaluation seeks to provide evidence related to unanswered questions and also formally establish NCST as a best practice and replicable model alongside demonstrating how it has achieved Proof of Concept. Specifically, the present evaluation

Costa advocated for elevating qualitative data and lived experience as legitimate forms of evidence, challenging the primacy of quantitative metrics in determining program effectiveness.

describes how NCST has increased and improved the community's perceptions of public safety, has helped residents reduce trauma, and how NCST has developed a model that can be taken to scale across America. In conjunction with the qualitative emphasis, the quantitative elements generate important Ward-level baseline statistics that inform programming within targeted geographies, highlight continued community engagement through participation in safety round tables, and demonstrate NCST's ability to respond to community conflicts in real-time. In its entirety, this evaluation provides further evidence and documentation of the transformative work NCST and the community has engaged in for more than a decade.

Chapter Three

ORIGINS OF NCST
Setting the Stage

The formation and growth of the Newark Community Street Team (NCST) cannot be understood without examining what has evolved in the city it serves. Newark, New Jersey has a long and complex history characterized by notable economic and artistic achievement, alongside ongoing struggles with public safety and violent crime. In examining the work of NCST and the quest for sustainable public safety, it is necessary to understand how the root causes of community violence can be traced back more than a century and must be contextualized in terms of the ongoing poverty and lack of resources that together have long challenged this strong and vibrant city.

HISTORIC CONTEXT

Settled in 1666, Newark is one of the oldest cities in the United States. It originally rose to economic wealth and prominence with the industrial development and population growth that occurred from the early 19th century. In that era, from the mid-century mark and on into the early 20th century, Newark blossomed into an economic and cultural hub of the northeast. Its population increased throughout the multi-ethnic waves of migration into the city that occurred from the mid-19th century until their peak in 1950. With a manufacturing base that provided jobs and opportunity to its citizenry into the years that followed World War II, the city's continued growth appeared assured. However, in the late 1950s and into the 1960s, Newark faced multiple problems – civic corruption, limited housing availability, the withdrawal of industry, and racial tension – which together led to urban decline and white flight to

the suburbs.[60] The exit of the white population that began in the post-World War II years intensified to the point that it is now estimated over 100,000 whites left the city, as its overall population declined from 438,000 in 1950 to 405,000 in 1960; the diminishing numbers of whites was offset by the influx of 65,000 nonwhites. Many of these individuals were Southern Blacks and Puerto Ricans relocating to Newark just as the industrial base was contracting. This meant these individuals who believed they were leaving poverty behind, would migrate only to confront it in their new home. Tom Hayden's seminal work, *Rebellion in Newark,* set the tone of the challenges Newark faced.[61] In this account published in 1967, Hayden wrote that Newark was saddled with "rats, roaches and ridiculous rents" and went on to describe the struggle for civil rights and political empowerment, led by community organizer Junius Williams[62] to galvanize community leadership and control of anti-poverty agencies and law enforcement. But civil rights organizers such as Williams and Hayden were not the only ones to point out the need for community-based solutions to the problems posed by poverty. The Lilley Commission Report on Newark (1967), commissioned by New Jersey Governor Richard Hughes in the aftermath of the Newark riots, posited that the violent uprising that occurred could be traced directly to failures in the public school system, housing, and law enforcement.[63] It is also critical to note that in the mid- to late-1960s, despite the exit of its white population, Newark's municipal power was still concentrated in the hands of white leaders. Additionally, in the Newark Police Department (NPD), only 150 police officers were Black (and primarily subordinate), in a force numbering 1,400. History has shown that

[60] Tuttle, Brad (2009). How Newark Became Newark: The Rise, Fall and Rebirth of an American City. New York: Rutgers University Press.
[61] Hayden, Tom (1967). Rebellion in Newark: Official Violence and the Ghetto Response. New York: Vintage Books.
[62] This is just a small part of Junius Williams' extraordinary biography which culminated in Tom Hayden's observation, "If he had come along forty years later, he might have been Barack Obama. But instead, he became one of those gifted young black [sic] leaders who invested their lives in creating the conditions for Obama's future." See: riseupnewark.com/junius-williams.
[63] https://governors.rutgers.edu/governor-richard-hughes-and-the-newark-report/

the problems that began with the 1967 uprising still haunt Newark nearly sixty years later.

Despite these concerns, beginning with the 1970 election of its first Black Mayor, Kenneth Gibson, Newark began to confront its challenges directly. The New Community Corporation, founded in 1968, became one of the most effective community development organizations in the United States, owning and managing 2,265 low-income housing units by 1987. Two decades after the 1967 riots, the city saw the beginning of ongoing redevelopment in downtown Newark. What has long been described as "Newark's Renaissance" began with the opening of the New Jersey Performing Arts Center (NJPAC) downtown in 1997. Featuring a range of artists including Lauryn Hill, Yo-Yo Ma, and the Alvin Ailey Dance Theater, the NJPAC is now considered part of the first step in the long-term transformation of Newark. There have been continued revitalization efforts concentrated in the downtown area which have ranged from the building of the Prudential Center to the completion of luxury lofts ready and available for sale. With the election of Cory Booker as mayor (2006), Newark began to be referred to as "the Renaissance City" as a result of the revitalization effort which also included work to establish itself as a Tech Hub spurring the relocation of several technology companies to its environs. Additionally, between the census conducted in 2000 until 2010, Newark reported its first population increase since the 1940s. This was repeated ten years later in 2020 as the city gained additional residents.[64]

However, this progress has not been without its obstacles. The proclaimed Renaissance impacted different parts of the city in varied ways. Over 25% of Newark residents continue to live in poverty with certain Wards experiencing higher poverty coupled with incomes lower than the national average. Alongside this, in the 21st

[64] According to the most recent U.S. Census, in 2020, the population of Newark has now reached 311,549 as compared with its lowest point in 1980 which was 275,221.

century, the city experienced problems centered on crime and violence as well as law enforcement abuses that persisted over time. The gravest threats to public health and community well-being could be found in the lack of safety and emerging violence in the streets. Since the 1980s many gangs and street organizations emerged in Newark, a handful with ties to the west coast Bloods and Crips, although most groups were indigenous to Newark itself. As gang activity increased, the level of community violence rose, and public safety decreased with severe consequences, particularly in certain Wards and communities. Residents did not feel safe outside of their homes, they were apprehensive about gathering in outside spaces and they feared for the safety and well-being of their families, especially their sons and daughters. There were also concerns about the quality and availability of programs available for children and youth. To add to the perfect storm of urban challenges, excessive force and racial profiling on the part of law enforcement further fueled the atmosphere of mistrust. Residents reported they were living in fear and they no longer felt safe walking city streets. In 2012, CNN reported that Newark was ranked the 6th most dangerous city in the United States, reporting 10 murders in 10 days and ending the year with 111 homicides, comprising close to 30% of all murders recorded in the state of New Jersey. Two years later, the U.S. Attorney released a July 2014 report that found "a pattern and practice of unconstitutional policing by the Newark Police Department" which resulted in the U.S. Department of Justice and City of Newark negotiating and filing a federal consent decree.[65]

Newark faced this collection of grave challenges when Ras Baraka was elected the city's 40th mayor in 2014. Baraka arrived at this position with a deep understanding of what was needed in this lively but violence-ravaged city. His knowledge was not academic; he had been an activist as well as serving as a principal of the city's Central High School. In naming the priorities of his incoming administration, Baraka was

[65] https://www.justice.gov/usao-nj/information-about-department-justice-s-consent-decree-newark-police-department

Newark Mayor Ras Baraka was committed to reconfiguring the city's public safety infrastructure to include a community-based component as a partner equal to traditional law enforcement. This was not a plan that was easily accepted – Baraka faced an uphill batting in getting others in city government to understand the process. The thought of undoing the singularity of law enforcement in addressing violence was a major departure from traditional public policy.

determined to defuse – and ultimately end – the violence plaguing Newark's communities. As part of this, he was committed to reconfiguring its public safety infrastructure to include a community-based component as a partner equal to traditional law enforcement. This was not a plan that was easily accepted and Baraka faced an uphill battle in getting others in city government to understand the process. The thought of undoing the singularity of law enforcement in addressing violence was a major departure from traditional public policy. However, his past history as an advocate and organizer, along with his deep dedication to community well-being ultimately led the way to an innovative approach to addressing violence and crime – one founded on key concepts surrounding public health and safety. This approach was nested in work that was being conducted in cities throughout the United States, offering a new approach to violence prevention and gang intervention. To understand the significance of what Mayor Baraka undertook, it is critical to track the development of community street intervention and outreach.

Newark was not unique in experiencing the epidemic of community-based violence. During the last two decades of the 20th century, cities across the United States found themselves confronting the rise of neighborhood violence and escalating rates of crime. In particular, gangs grew uncontrolled in major urban centers with law enforcement at a loss regarding how to resolve the issues that were being played out with deadly consequences in the streets. This epidemic of gangs and community violence gave rise to many programmatic approaches that were described in the

previous chapter (CVI in Context). However, what is most meaningful to understand in relation to Newark and NCST was what developing on the west coast.

Learning from Los Angeles

In all of these discussions of gang prevention and gang intervention, Los Angeles, California remained a world unto itself. Long considered "ground zero" for gang activity and violence, this multi-racial, multi-cultural, west coast, urban center had long been locked in the grip of gangs. From the mid-1980s to the 1990s – during what is now referred to as "the decade of death" – on average, three individuals a day were killed and countless others were victims of violent attacks; the vast majority of these traumas related to lethal gang warfare that accompanied the dual rise of crack cocaine and possessive territoriality that existed in communities throughout East and South Los Angeles.[66]

The statistics told an even more devastating story. In the city of Los Angeles in this era, homicides rose to a high of 1,200 a year, most of them gang related. There were independent, unfunded efforts to deal with the epidemic of gang violence. In East Los Angeles, Father Greg Boyle, a Jesuit priest, worked to bring peace to the gangs of Boyle Heights.[67] At the same time, in South Los Angeles, in one of the most violent communities in the United States, a different process was taking shape. It was there that Aqeela Sherrills, along with key gang leaders, worked to broker the Watts Gang Peace Treaty of April 1992.[68] The lessons learned from the brokering of that treaty reinforced a growing belief that the most effective forces to deter future gang crime were not law enforcement officers, but instead former gang members and formerly incarcerated individuals. These were men who now wished to heal the streets they

[66] Leap, Jorja (2012). Jumped In: What Gangs Taught me about Violence, Drugs, Love and Redemption. Boston: Beacon Press.
[67] Boyle, Greg (2012). Tattoos on the Heart: The Power of Boundless Compassion. New York: The Free Press.
[68] https://www.latimes.com/opinion/story/2022-04-22/la-uprising-watts-truce-gang-violence-riots

had once sought to destroy. Additionally, these fledgling interventionists who understood the dynamics of both individual and community transformation began to work with Los Angeles City Council members in their respective districts. For the first time, with government support, they created violence intervention groups in "gang impacted" neighborhoods throughout the city and county of Los Angeles.[69] These intervention efforts gained public attention, although many policy makers and residents were initially reluctant to acknowledge that law enforcement alone could not take care of the problem. But as crime refused to yield to traditional suppression efforts, even law enforcement leaders embraced the mantra "we can't arrest our way out of the problem." As a result, the practice of community violence prevention and intervention was elevated and officially recognized. In 2007, Los Angeles Mayor Antonio Villarigosa established the Mayor's office of Gang Reduction and Youth Development (GRYD). This office offered a new approach to gang prevention and intervention, creating a pathway to community-based crime reduction.[70] Additionally, substantive quantitative and qualitative research was conducted that also codified new models and outcomes, enabling the measurement of this intervention's effectiveness.[71]

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,[72] who sought not only the counsel of but the support of the WGTF in

[69] https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-1996-11-28-me-3835-story.html
[70] https://www.lagryd.org/index.html
[71] http://www.juvenilejusticeresearch.com/projects/gryd
[72] Beck served as the LAPD Chief of Police from 2009 to 2018.

crime reduction efforts.[73] The work of the WGTF ultimately gained state funding support in 2020 for the One Watts program which combined community violence intervention with resident job training and placement programs, a three-year effort that led to meaningful outcomes as documented in the final evaluation report.[74]

The establishment of the Watts Gang Peace Treaty, the ongoing efforts of the gang violence interventionists in the GRYD office, and the impact of the WGTF all coalesced to play a vital role in what was occurring in Newark, New Jersey as Mayor Ras Baraka sought to engage community members in public safety initiatives.

Because of Aqeela Sherrill's work in Los Angeles and his subsequent efforts in communities across the United States, Ras Baraka already had a connection to this community visionary. Now, as Mayor of Newark, Baraka was determined to implement alternatives to traditional law enforcement to quell the street wars brewing around Newark. The mayor wanted to turn to community interventions instead of the police to reduce and prevent violence. In Sherrills, who he often publicly referred to as "*a godsend,"* the mayor found the individual who could lead this effort.[75] There were many reasons an outsider like Sherrills represented an ideal choice.

Professionally and personally, Sherrills was no stranger to community violence and its resulting trauma. Growing up in the Jordan Downs Housing Development in Watts, he met what seemed to be an inescapable fate and briefly became involved with gang activity as a young man. But this youthful association did not protect him from the personal impact of community violence. In 2004, his son Terrell was murdered in what was believed to be a case of mistaken identity when several young gang members

[73] https://archive.nytimes.com/www.nytimes.com/2013/07/14/magazine/what-does-it-take-to-stop-crips-and-bloods-from-killing-each-other.html
[74] The evaluation was conducted by Leap & Associates, under the direction of Jorja Leap, Ph.D. and can be supplied by this report's authors.
[75] https://www.wsj.com/articles/an-l-a-peacemaker-tackles-east-coast-crime-and-trauma-1519932550?mod=searchresults&page=1&pos=2

burst into a party Terrell was attending. Beyond that unimaginable loss, as he grew into adulthood, Sherrills also began to speak openly about being a survivor of childhood sexual abuse. His own trauma was further compounded as he lost friends and extended family in the gang wars that endured in Los Angeles before he helped broker the peace treaty between the gang rival Bloods and Crips. However, Sherrill's community engagement and peace activism did not end there. Alongside football star Jim Brown, Sherrills co-founded the Amer-I-Can education initiative as well as The Reverence Project based in Watts. He was a recognized voice and expert in violence prevention, community healing, and health & wellness who ultimately could understand the challenges Newark faced.

MAYOR RAS BARAKA AND NCST: BEGINNINGS

At Mayor Baraka's request, Aqeela Sherrills went to Newark in 2014 to take what he had learned in Los Angeles and implement it in this east coast city. Because of his "on the ground" experience, Sherrills intuitively understood what research was showing, that community-based intervention, led by workers whose own backgrounds might be linked to the community beset with problems, most often offered the most effective immediate response to the epidemic of violence affecting communities across the country. The practice of defusing and resolving conflict accompanied by the creation of peace treaties in certain neighborhoods was gaining traction. But this crisis intervention and violence interruption alone was not enough; it needed to be integrated with case management and service provision focused on promoting community healing and future violence prevention.

Community-based intervention, led by workers whose own backgrounds might be linked to the community beset with problems, most often offered the most effective immediate response to the epidemic of violence affecting communities across the country.

No one knew this better than the residents of Newark communities. Before Sherrill's arrival in Newark, in fact even prior to Mayor Baraka's effort to reimagine public safety, there had been local street workers trying to keep the peace in the South and West Wards. These individuals were working entirely on their own – there was no methodology and no funding support. They were simply volunteers, worried about the community, out in the streets, trying to keep things safe. One resident recalled, *"These were just guys from the neighborhood. Sometimes they were the only ones these gang bangers listened to. And they were trying to keep us safe. We needed something big to help us and, in the meantime, these were the guys who tried to keep things safe."*

Based on the early work of these individuals, Newark had experienced a gang cease fire from 2007 to 2010 but this was never accompanied by any systematic or funded violence prevention or interruption effort. Additionally, there was no infrastructure to provide support services or programming. It was clear that for a cease fire to hold, there needed to be a structure to help the men and women who had been in the streets, trying to keep the peace. There also needed to be programming to sustain the peace once established. One individual who had worked in the streets summarized, *"We were trying to stop the violence but we didn't have an organization. We needed that – we needed the other part to finish the job."*

Once Ras Barak was elected, there was finally hope for just that sort of organization. Armed with a public safety plan drafted by Mayor Baraka that focused on community-based interventions, Aqeela Sherrills began the process of organizing and paying these local street workers. Each potential High Risk Interventionist (HRI) was interviewed and vetted. Then these workers participated in a three-day training led by Aquil Basheer and the Professional Community Intervention Training Institute (PCITI).[76] Sherrills was also intent on convening community partners and residents –

[76] Basheer and PCITI are discussed in further detail in Chapter Four (The NCST Model)

similar to WGTF – on a regular basis once the street intervention program was up and running.

The Newark Community Street Team began life as a pilot program in October of 2014 with seed funding from the Mayor's Office. Its activities focused on the South Ward of Newark where the highest rate of violent crime was centered at that time. What made violence and gang-related crime so intractable in the South Ward was the nature of gang activity itself. As one resident explained, *"The gang beefs are all internal, they're inside of each gang. And you can't even keep track of them – they change from day to day."* It was in the South Ward that NCST began the work of building community trust and reducing violent crime.

Aqeela Sherrills also knew that research and evaluation had to be integrated into this effort from the start. During the implementation of the pilot program, alongside the informal involvement of UCLA researcher Jorja Leap, three researchers from the Rutgers University School of Criminal Justice, Brian Wade, Shadd Maruna, and Rod Brunson, began work on a process evaluation to understand what NCST was undertaking.[77] For six months, the research team "attempted to directly observe" the implementation process, conducting ethnographic observation of worker applicant interviews, trainings, team meetings, and field work. Additionally, 11 of the 15 original "streetworkers" [78] were interviewed. From this initial process evaluation, the Rutgers team reported the following preliminary conclusions:

- Historically in other urban settings, streetworker programs have been part of a larger, multi-agency collaborative effort with few implemented as a "stand alone" initiative;

[77] All evaluation material in this section is derived from a Rutgers Power Point. No report was submitted to Mayor Ras Baraka or the Newark Community Street Team.
[78] Terminology used by Rutgers in their power point presentation.

- With some notable exceptions, over the six-month pilot NCST "largely struggled" to create collaborative relationships occurring in other successful streetworker interventions;
- There was evidence of what was termed "trickle down crime reduction" which consisted of:
    - Changing behavioral norms
    - Mentoring youth who might be criminally involved
    - Connecting at-risk youth with city services and jobs
    - "Enhancing collective efficacy" through patrols of hot spots.

The Rutgers researchers were clear that their focus "was not on evaluating the effectiveness, or lack thereof, of the initiative as a crime reduction strategy," rather their purpose was to document the pilot project to understand its implementation. However, even in NCST's early stages, this preliminary evaluation opened the door to the need for an effective evaluation that would be holistic and participatory. It is also worth noting that beyond the initial, academic process evaluation, there was an immediate and positive community reaction to what was being called the Newark Community Street Team, some of it even emerging from law enforcement.

From the onset, based on responses from leadership in the Newark Police Department (NPD) as well as anecdotal accounts, it was clear that the pilot program's efforts were proving effective. As a result, in May 2015, the Newark Community Street Team was officially established. The pilot program was now rapidly growing into a systematic community-based violence reduction initiative led by Mayor Ras Baraka.

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

focus of NCST's efforts. The West Ward Victims Outreach Services and Crime Reduction Initiative was developed as an innovative crime victim service and violence prevention strategy, adding on to the overall crisis intervention strategy originally implemented in by Mayor Baraka 2014. As a result of investment from local philanthropic foundations[79] and a grant from the U.S. Department of Justice, NCST both expanded its service sector and hired their first professional employee, a full-time MSW who supported the work of the street interventionists and outreach workers who were being paid an hourly wage. 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 (HRIs) grew and became more complex.

These were all welcome developments for the formal inaugural team of NCST; this group of HRIs and Outreach Workers was composed of 16 community residents, who were selected out of 40 original applicants. After these individuals were vetted, interviewed, and subjected to background checks by the NPD, they were hired as NCST staff. These were dedicated men and women, but they faced multiple challenges as well. Two years later, by November 2017, NCST was growing but still needed operational infrastructure. While it continued to function in the basement of the NAN Newark Tech World Community Center, it was rapidly outgrowing its quarters. Trainings and meetings were held in the same space where staff members also had their desks. Its nontraditional employees were struggling with traditional office protocol and time management. There were ongoing concerns with the fact that Outreach Workers and HRIs (particularly the latter group) needed to develop a stronger sense of professionalism and fidelity to the model and protocols of violence prevention as well as case management.

[79] These philanthropic foundations included the Prudential Foundation, the Victoria Foundation, and Paul Profeta of the Profeta Urban Investment Foundation.

The organization also faced ongoing concerns surrounding recordkeeping and data collection. NCST had hired a part-time data expert who was knowledgeable but was pulled in different directions. Because NCST could only afford to pay him part-time, he maintained multiple commitments outside of NCST. Ongoing observation by UCLA researchers quickly reinforced participant reports that the organization was struggling on two major fronts: 1) ensuring the professionalism of street workers and (2) implementing systems of data collection. These issues are not unusual for a start-up community-based organization, especially one that emerged organically from concerned residents committed to meeting the needs of a demanding environment at a time when funding support was limited. Simultaneously, at the federal level, there was a major shift *away* from the social justice orientation of the Obama administration. Instead, in his first term, President Trump, indicated there would be deep cuts in intervention programming and an emphasis on "law and order." This was not an easy environment for NCST to establish and stabilize its structure or to address the need to put more workers on the street to the deal with the concerns of youth, families, and community residents.[80]

However, at the same time, there were positive developments. Similar to the WGTF, the Newark Public Safety Round Table (PSRT) was up and running and engaged in major community-building initiatives. This group began meeting every other Tuesday in the basement of the Community Center, attracting residents and stakeholders in increasing numbers. The meeting was facilitated by two members of the NCST staff and as one explained, *"This is a community-driven public safety forum. There needs to be honest feedback. It's set up to let law enforcement know how they're doing in the community and what we need from them."*

[80] This occurred in 2017-2018 and represented only a precursor to the even more devastating actions that are occurring during the second Trump administration.

By late 2018, the number of partners involved with NCST was growing. Along with law enforcement, NCST was collaborating with the City of Newark, the South Ward Children's Alliance, hospitals, and an array of local community-based organizations. Data collection was prioritized and a full-time data administrator was hired. She promptly introduced the Apricot Data Management System, that became institutionalized within NCST as the most effective source for data collection and information technology. Alongside these internal developments, by 2018, three separate areas were being covered by NCST (Georgia King Village, along with the South and West Wards); however. the South Ward was the greatest focus for both case management and violence interruption.

The establishment of NCST and its growth kept pace with developments inside of City Hall. At the start of his second term in 2018, Mayor Baraka was clear that he wanted to reallocate money previously spent on policing and invest it in victims and families affected by violence and poverty. In a depth interview conducted during the course of UCLA's early evaluation research in 2019, Mayor Baraka described how ending violence required strengthening families and communities:

> *We are trying to fix the system. But to do this, we need to keep people alive and then we can teach them. We want to keep people out of jail while we create opportunities where they can grow. We need trauma-informed care and community round tables, but all of this takes time. Violence is a public health issue and we need to deal with it the way we dealt with polio – we have to change how we intervene, otherwise people are more than likely to catch this disease of violence and suffer even more.*

Baraka was very much aware of the latest public health strategies and how they informed the work of NCST. During the interview he talked extensively about the importance of collaboration because, *"people are talking to each other but they're not really working together."* The mayor was also deeply concerned with the future of NCST and figuring out how the organization could be sustained. He discussed how,

even as the NPD used law enforcement tools such as CompStat,[81] *"there is going to be disruption in all of these families – the more people you arrest, the more disruption occurs."* What Baraka was most interested in was the idea of "shared safety." He expressed his belief that:

> *The police need to see NCST as a supplement. When the crime stats showed that aggravated assault went up, then NCST sent out more resources. They* [NCST] *had an impact. We need to get everyone involved in this, including the state legislature. If we can buy garbage trucks under state contracts, why can't we do this?*

With Mayor Baraka's ongoing support, the structure of NCST continued to grow. In 2019 the organization moved out of the Community Center basement and into new offices that included a conference room and a larger meeting room. Framed photographs of each NCST staff member and Outreach Worker were centered on one of the freshly painted walls. There was space specifically dedicated to offices with this new site testifying` to the stability and professionalism of the organization. However, the changes were not limited to the location alone. As NCST continued to expand both its mission and vision, new leadership team members were added. Consistent with NCST's emphasis on hiring individuals whose experience is grounded in the reality of violence prevention and criminal justice, most of the individuals had previously been incarcerated. Additionally, four staff members – Toby Sanders, Ph.D., Daamin Durden, Reynaldo Chavis, and D'Renna Johnson – began to assume increased leadership responsibilities within NCST. In the years that followed, each of these individuals has contributed to the leadership of NCST in distinct ways.

[81] CompStat is short for Comparative Statistics and is a law enforcement approach to crime reduction which is based on identifying spikes in crime through comparative statistics and then addressing those spikes by targeted enforcement. It emerged in the wake of broken windows theory and has been popularized in police and sheriff's departments across the country. It has been criticized as only marginally effective and far too easy to manipulate.

Sanders was a long-time educator who noted a discriminatory gap in higher education. Taking action, he started a program for Rutgers University to help individuals move from prison to college. Sanders supervised this program as it grew to serve 700 incarcerated students and represented the depth of need for education during incarceration. At NCST, Sanders has continued to build the capacity of staff and helped them navigate their trauma. He eventually became the principal architect of the Community Sentinels Leadership Academy.

In turn, Durden was one of the first members of NCST – a leader who literally came up through the ranks from 2015 to eventually ascend to Executive Director in 2021. He deeply understood the organization and was recognized as a crucial guide to NCST's expansion before moving on to be National Training Director at the Community Based Public Safety Collaborative ("The Collective").

Another eventual member of the leadership team, joined NCST in 2021 right when Durden became Executive Director – Reynaldo "Rey" Chavis. Having been incarcerated for many years, Chavis emerged from the experience determined to educate himself and use knowledge to heal his community. He completed undergraduate studies at Rutgers and was employed as a research assistant, learning first-hand the mechanics and significance of data and its management that he put to work once he joined NCST as the Director of High Risk Intervention (HRI).

It is important to note that along with these three men, a woman, D'Renna Johnson, joined NCST's leadership team as the Director of Safe Passage. Johnson had first been a client at NCST, then transitioned into an Outreach Worker. She took an active role in food distribution during the COVID-19 pandemic and when NCST returned to full-strength, in-person services post pandemic, she became the Director of the Safe Passage Program.

At the same time the staff slowly grew, a succession planning process was instituted. As Aqeela Sherrills worked to expand the community-based public safety approach into a multi-state initiative, the NCST leadership team with support from its Board of Directors and The Collective continued to ensure that there was a seamless delivery of services and ongoing structure for all community-based efforts. This succession planning came to fruition in 2024 when Durden moved on to The Collective and Rey Chavis was named Executive Director.[82]

In reviewing its organizational development, it is apparent that from 2015 to 2025, NCST evolved and began to develop a complex and responsive mixture of approaches and services that will be described in detail in the following chapter (The NCST Model). To offer a preview of the growth and significance of NCST that will be delineated, it is important to note the words of the City of Newark Public Safety Director Anthony Ambrose who oversees the police and fire departments. Ambrose openly stated his support for the efforts of NCST's HRIs and Outreach Workers enthusing, *"When there is a problem, we call them."* Ambrose continued to explain, *"Their work fills a void that cannot be filled by the police department."* Despite external acknowledgment, this organization has not stayed rigidly fixed on its initial strategies but instead has responded to community needs with the intentional development of new approaches and services alongside the leadership and vision that continues to evolve.

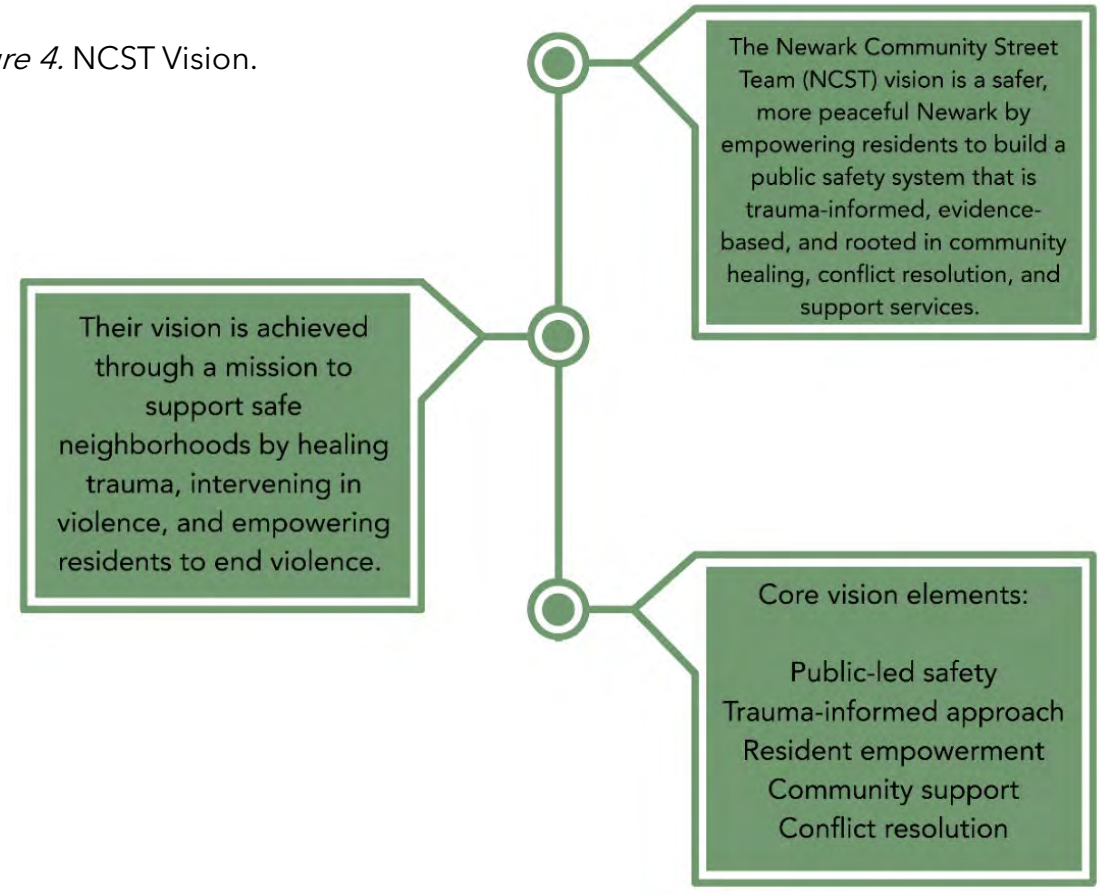
[82] https://www.cbpscollective.org/post/rey-chavis-appointed-as-ncst-s-new-executive-director-and-daamin-durden-as-national-training-directo

Chapter Four

THE NEWARK COMMUNITY STREET TEAM MODEL

With its establishment, expansion, and culture as a learning organization, the Newark Community Street Team (NCST) model has evolved over time. Evaluation research conducted by the UCLA team, beginning in 2015, has documented and examined key components of the model.[83] In addition, the organization's vision and mission statements and key program elements have been linked to understand the pathway NCST follows in its community-based efforts. This implementation is portrayed in the figure below:

Figure 4. NCST Vision.



[83] The program components on the following page are presented in the order in which they evolved within NCST.

Figure 5. NCST Program Components.

NCST's vision and mission statements are both grounded in the public health model of violence prevention and community wellness. In this model, public safety is not understood simply as the absence of violence and crime; instead, public safety is viewed as the ongoing presence of a community sense of wellness, health and well-being. Based on these ideas, NCST draws upon the public health model and its emphasis on residents and community partners working together to create

sustainable long-term change in community well-being and safety. This also means that NCST creates community violence intervention (CVI) strategies to prevent violence and maintain public safety as well as understanding the risk and protective factors that affect community well-being.[84, 85] The public health model also informs how NCST interacts with law enforcement. The model notes the contributory role of law enforcement but at the same time holds that the police cannot handle all problems, nor are they often the best resource to do so. In this way, law enforcement is recognized but is not the dominant force in public safety and community health.

Building on the idea of community well-being, NCST interweaves its commitment to addressing trauma through all of its CVI programs and strategies. Repeatedly, NCST's founder, Aqeela Sherrills, continues to explain what this has meant in real-life terms, stating, *"We cannot stop any violence or help to heal these communities without addressing the underlying trauma that almost everyone in them has experienced."* This commitment guides any and all the work conducted by NCST's High Risk Interventionists (HRIs) Outreach Workers, and additional staff. It is a message that is carried by stakeholders and residents alike at the Public Safety Round Table (PSRT) meetings.

Mission and vision statements alone are meaningless; they must be accompanied by intentional and strategically supported action that is implemented through effective programming. Research conducted since 2015 has shown that from its establishment, NCST has relied on six delineated strategies designed to reduce violence and maintain peaceful stability, particularly in the South and West Wards of Newark, New Jersey – the neighborhoods where major crime, violence, and challenges to

[84] Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (n.d.) *Our approach.* Retrieved from https://www.cdc.gov/injury/about/approach.html
[85] Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (n.d.) *The public health approach to violence prevention.* Retrieved from https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/publichealthissue/publichealthapproach.html

community well-being have long existed. Serving as the foundation for all NCST programming, these strategies consist of the following:

1. **Identify, recruit, train, and deploy community-based, non-traditional leaders to serve as Interventionists and Outreach Workers;**
2. Provide case management to high-risk, high-promise youth and those in the community with the greatest vulnerability to becoming a victim and/or perpetrator of violence;
3. Draw upon varied methods and approaches, including (but not limited to) High Risk Intervention and Community Outreach to ensure community peace, particularly by intervening in and mediating conflicts that may result in violence and preventing retaliation;
4. Increase awareness of and access to healing and recovery services for victims/survivors of violence by providing direct services, advocacy, and public education, particularly those overlooked by traditional victims' services agencies;
5. Offer Safe Passage to cooperating and contracted schools;
6. Collaborate with citywide and regional public safety initiatives, particularly the Public Safety Round Table.

Building upon these strategies, NCST offers the following services and programs. Each is described in detail and will again surface in the qualitative research findings.[86]

[86] See Chapter Seven (Qualitative Research Findings)

High Risk Interventionists and Community Outreach Workers (Case Managers)[87]

The mutually reinforcing roles of NCST High Risk Interventionists (HRI) and Outreach Worker are multi-faceted and vital to NCST. Simply stated, these HRIs and Outreach Workers are the engine powering the core of NCST activities. Each is described below but it is critical to remember that they continuously and consistently work together. 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 they work together to intervene in violence and ensure the long-term well-being of community members, particularly high-risk, high-promise youth and young adults. Drawing upon the credo "hurt people hurt people," NCST staff (beyond HRIs and Outreach Workers) also collaborate to assess and assist individuals who may be highly vulnerable to being both victims *and* perpetrators of violence. 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 HRIs and Outreach Workers as part of its professional workforce and leadership team. This is one of the many unique aspects of the NCST model. In many settings implementing CVI strategies, HRI work in particular is often limited to male practitioners.

High Risk Interventionists (HRIs)

Returning to NCST's origins the role of the High Risk Interventionists (HRIs) must be understood. When considering the functions of HRIs and Outreach Workers, their complementary roles and responsibilities can be viewed as two sides of the same coin of public safety. First, HRIs focus on acute threats of violence and/or acts of community violence. As an embodiment of the public health model, these individuals

[87] The terms "Outreach Worker" and "Case Manager" are used interchangeably at NCST. To mirror that, they will be used interchangeably in this report as well.

are committed to initiating and maintaining trust and relationships with neighborhood residents and their extended families, friends and associates, as well as community elders. Because they have lived in the communities they are now serving, the community-based HRIs leverage these relationships to intervene in threats or acts of violence.

Just as significantly, HRIs work in concert with Outreach Workers to obtain critical information and intelligence that is *never shared* with outsiders, most notably law enforcement. Their insights and community knowledge allows them to short-circuit, de-escalate, and prevent violent events at danger of occurring in the South and West Ward communities. Following these acute efforts, they work to provide services to these residents. By mediating violence and ensuring peace, the efforts of HRIs are designed to drive the crime rate down and decrease the number of violent incidents that occur in community settings. But beyond that, they serve as a visible source of community support. The connection they have with residents means that they can help not only with defusing conflict and maintaining peace but helping

Figure 6. Summary of HRI Responsibilities.

those who have been affected by violence to heal by ensuring that they seek further services at the NCST Trauma Recovery Center.

In addition to all of these efforts, HRIs also maintain communication with the Newark Police Department (NPD). But it must be emphasized, this is neither a high-level nor formal collaboration. Instead, it is a relationship that is agreed to on both sides in order to ensure community trust. To ensure that trust and separation can be achieved, response protocols have been developed. The NPD sends email notifications to NCST's HRIs, alerting them to homicides and shootings as soon as they occur, in real time. There is no cap on the number of high risk incident responses that may occur in a 24-hour period.

Each HRI responds to active street disputes, acts intentionally to de-escalate personal disputes, and gathers information and 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, HRIs may follow shooting victims to the hospital and engage in what is described as "a warm hand off" to the Hospital Violence Intervention (HVIP) Team that is based at the medical trauma unit. Beginning in 2020, NCST records revealed that the HRI Team received and responded to two to three calls from the NPD per day with each of these calls originating from the South and/or West Ward. As part of these calls, HRIs may receive information and intelligence from the police – but, as stated above, HRIs never share any of their own intelligence with law enforcement. This arrangement has been accepted by the NPD based on the mutual benefit and improved public safety that has resulted from these practices.

Outreach Workers, Case Management, and Mentoring

Because their work is deeply intertwined with that of the HRIs, the complementary Outreach Worker role and their extensive responsibilities in the community must also

be understood. NCST's Outreach Workers are integral to virtually every aspect of the work of NCST. Each Outreach Worker functions as a Case Manager with varying levels of engagement. In many other community intervention and violence reduction efforts, these duties are bifurcated – they are either case managers *or* interventionists and violence interrupters. Within NCST, the function of the Outreach Worker is much more holistic – they work both as case managers *and* violence interrupters. Outreach Workers also work within the Safe Passage Program, alongside the Hospital Violence Intervention Program (HVIP) Interventionists, as leaders on Community Walks, as part of the Community Sentinels program, and in every aspect of Victims Services.

It is clear that NCST Outreach Workers work in virtually all NCST programming components, not "just" alongside HRI. No matter the program they are engaged in, the role of the Outreach Worker 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 vulnerable to recidivism and/or relapse. Often the individuals receiving services have been both perpetrators 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-mentors).[88] This pairing is not based on a brief intervention but is instead, a key relationship that is integral to long-term transformation. Once an individual enrolls in the NCST program, their

[88] This terminology is used as often as possible to avoid the power differential implicit in the terms "service provider" and "client." Instead, an emphasis on equal status and partnership is emphasized in all interactions.

Figure 7. Summary of Outreach Worker Responsibilities.

Outreach Worker assists them in completing a six-month life plan. As trust is built between the Outreach Worker and mentee, they work together to create an individualized case plan for the mentee's involvement and/or reintegration into the community. It is critical to note that these are not boilerplate, "one size fits all" case management protocols. Instead, the Outreach Worker (mentor) and the 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.

Here it must be noted that relocation is never undertaken lightly. Instead, it is carried out when the Outreach Worker and mentee agree that the optimal plan for avoiding further victimization and/or for successful community intervention requires relocation to a new setting. These are largely individuals who feared they would continue to be subjected to escalating partner violence while others expressed concern 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.

These case management and relationship interactions are not easy, nor is the process of planning 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 mentees to interviews and appointments, and even spending "down time" with them, Outreach Workers build trust and a strong relationship with each one of the individuals they are working with. Within the NCST model, Outreach Workers are never "simply" Case Managers, they also actively mentor each of the individuals they serve. Some of the mentees eventually join the staff of NCST and many have spoken with deep emotion about the impact of the mentoring and case management model.

Safe Passage

It is a regrettable fact that violence continues to occur in and around school settings. Because of this, early on, NCST included the Safe Passage program. Today, this program deploys a group of Outreach Workers at schools located in areas where violence "hot spots" have been identified. The program began with four school sites and has now grown to 20, a testament to its relevance and effectiveness.

While they are part of the same group within NCST, Safe Passage Outreach Workers receive specialized training. They work to develop relationships with youth, building trust and ongoing communication. The Outreach Workers position themselves at key entry and exit points at each school as well as at bus stops, intersections, and stores near the school where youth "hang out." The workers don't simply observe at a

distance, rather, through their relationships, they are able to intervene in and de-escalate potential conflicts and problems, before and after school, to protect students from any kind of attack or intimidation as they come and go from the school premises. In this role, the Outreach Workers serve as adult figures students can trust and confide in. There is particular attention paid to what is occurring on school campuses during Fridays because this often is a lead-in to the weekend. The opposite is true on Mondays as violence that has occurred over the weekend may spill over into the start of a new school week. Safe Passage Workers are deployed in teams Monday through Friday beginning at 7:30 am before school and during afternoon periods once school is dismissed. In between this daily deployment, the Outreach Workers engage in joint meetings and trainings.

Beyond the relationships they foster with students, the Safe Passages Outreach Workers develop partnerships with school security teams and NPD Officers assigned to school settings. This allows them to help prevent violence both on campus and, in certain instances, in the area surrounding schools. While the Safe Passage team may be called upon to break up fights, they also keep these conflicts from escalating into shootings and homicides.

Community Walks

Every Wednesday and Thursday NCST Outreach Workers (as described above) undertake a Community Walk in a neighborhood or area that has been noted as possibly having experienced "hot spots" and been affected by violence during the previous week. The Workers walk door-to-door and engage residents in casual conversations, offering information and resources. They may provide information on housing, case management services, or about NCST's Trauma Recovery Center (TRC). The walks also provide an opportunity to gauge

what is going on in specific neighborhoods – whether things are calming down or if there is cause for concern. In many cases, the walks produce intelligence about the potential for retaliations, the presence of at-risk individuals and other community concerns that require NCST intervention. These concerns may include (but are not limited to) mental health issues, gang activity, drug trafficking, child endangerment, or illegal gun sales. With this in mind, the walks serve as another method for talking with individuals of all ages about the work of NCST.

Hospital Violence Intervention Program (HVIP)

This innovative program, which is the first of its kind in the state of New Jersey, deploys three NCST Community Health Workers who are embedded full-time in University Hospital. These individuals are certified as Community Healthcare Providers after completing hospital training. As described above, the work of the High Risk Intervention program is directly related to these HVIP Community Health Workers who share the HRI commitment to intervening and preventing violence along with assisting victims of violence to follow a new life pathway, away from retaliation and revictimization. Because of this, one HRI and one Community Health Worker respond to individuals who have been hospitalized, providing them with comprehensive, wraparound services. When an individual is harmed, whether it is by a physical attack, rape, shooting or stabbing, they enter the hospital as a patient to be served. Sometimes there is warm hand-off from an NCST High Risk Interventionist and on other occasions, people enter the hospital on their own. In yet another protocol for referral, trauma center physicians treating victims of violent crime explain the services that NCST provides once their patients are stabilized. If the patient is receptive to NCST intervention, the physician contacts NCST and a worker arranges to meet with the individual. This process is guided by patient self-determination, not NCST overreach.

As part of this philosophy, it is important to note that NCST Community Health Workers do not position themselves at hospital emergency rooms waiting for individuals to be admitted, nor do they approach friends or relatives who may be arriving at the hospital following a violent event. NCST consistently observes protocols surrounding privacy and deep respect for the agency of victims of violence. If they are called to help, the Community Health Workers wait first to make sure the patient has consented to involvement with the program. With this consent, the Worker nurtures a deep relationship with each patient. They work together to build a safety treatment plan that will apply to the time the patience is in the hospital as well as once they leave. This strategy helps ensure that after they receive medical services, the individual does not face the same conflict or danger that brought them to the hospital in the first place. All of this is designed with future violence prevention in mind.

Many times, however, the HVIP team may not be able to connect with individuals who have been hospitalized, especially if their stay is short. Understanding this service gap, NCST created the Treat & Release Program as an adjunct to hospital-based outreach. Treat & Release is designed to ensure that no one falls through the proverbial cracks, including those individuals who have been harmed but not hospitalized. In this way, NCST reinforces its dedication to providing services to as large a population as possible.

Victim Services: Support and Advocacy

At NCST, there has long been an organizational recognition that any children, youth, parents, families, or residents who have been the object or victims of violence require immediate response on the part of NCST. Because of this, four well-trained and sensitive Outreach Workers work both individually and as a team, focusing on the needs of residents affected by community-based violence. Functioning as Case Managers, these staff members assist residents in applying for a range of services

including hardship assistance, life skills classes, wellness support, employment referrals, educational support, and crime survivor support services.

Additionally, residents are connected to a large number of related victims' services which can range from assistance with memorials to pro-bono legal services provided by Rutgers University; other resources include information regarding awards and funding for those who have suffered violence in their lives. As part of these efforts, NCST has received financial support through the New Jersey Victims of Crime Act, enabling them to fund a full-time Advocate on staff who helps all violence survivors complete applications so they can receive the dollars allocated for them. The Outreach Workers stay on top of any emerging services that may be available to community members, working to prevent retaliation and re-victimization.

Alongside the Advocate, the Outreach Workers in Victims Services have also been certified to serve individuals and the community through the National Advocate Credentialing Program; in other words, they are trained advocates who focus on activities that involve residents and stakeholders. NCST has been engaged in multiple advocacy efforts as well as community and peace building that have blossomed into healing and awareness events for survivors including the Annual National Days of Healing, the Heal the Block Summer Initiative, Healing through Yoga, and the Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault "Paint and Heal" events.

Within NCST, the word "victims" is rarely used. Instead, the term, "survivors," is integral to the NCST model, empowering individuals to act on their own behalf to receive services they are entitled to and require. Before NCST undertook this effort, 90% of

community residents were being denied victims services and compensation because they were labelled guilty of "contributing behavior." This was widely regarded as an antiquated policy that demonstrated lack of awareness at best. Working with the Public Safety Round Table, NCST successfully lobbied for a change in law enforcement policy so that individuals were not labelled "victim suspect" on police reports.

Public Safety Round Table (PSRT)

Along with these major services, NCST facilitates the Public Safety Round Table (PSRT), a community policy forum that meets twice a month in the NCST offices. This effort is modeled after the highly successful Watts Gang Task Force (WGTF) in Los Angeles, an effort which Aqeela Sherrills helped establish and successfully maintain. The PSRT met in person in the South Ward up until the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic. At that time, the PSRT shifted to Zoom. From that time onward, because Zoom is recognized as a best practice in community engagement alongside community enthusiasm for this platform, the PSRT continues to meet on Zoom. Throughout all of these developments, the PSRT has attracted and consisted of a wide spectrum of engaged stakeholders, including residents, elected officials, law enforcement, community-based organizations, faith-based groups, and others. PSRT meetings include updates from the NPD, describing crime reports so that residents can be informed about where violence is occurring in their neighborhoods. All service providers, most notably law enforcement, are held accountable by residents who are quick to point out when individuals or organizations are not providing the programs and/or services for which they receive funding. During these meetings, NCST reports

on conflicts they are trying to de-escalate and mediate. PSRT offers a public forum for vibrant exchanges on health and public safety as challenges arise in the South Ward.

Trauma Recovery Center (TRC)

Once its HRI and HVIP programs were established, NCST saw that a critical community need had to be fulfilled – a program to address the trauma that was widespread throughout the resident populations. It was not enough to have HRIs and Outreach Workers respond. Instead, long-term programming and support was essential. As a result, NCST created and the launched the Trauma Recover Center (TRC) to systematically provide clinical services to underserved and traumatized individuals and families. In the deepest sense, both physically and mentally, the TRC offers a safe space for crime survivors, providing them with services, mental health resources, and treatment, referrals, and advocacy.

As Outreach Workers participate in the Community Walks described above, residents learn about the existence of the TRC. While many residents have been aware of NCST's intervention efforts, not as many community members understood what the TRC had to offer. This has been further exacerbated by the stigma that surrounds receiving mental health services or any kind of psychiatric treatment. However, the Outreach Workers do not communicate around irrelevant models of "illness." Instead, there is discussion of trauma and workers describe the ability of the TRC to support individuals in healing. For all of this, the TRC draws upon evidence-based and trauma-informed best practices while fostering relationships built between individuals and the clinician assigned to their case. The TRC serves as a point of stability and support for anyone dealing with trauma.

The TRC is committed to being responsive to community needs and social crises. Because of this, the TRC maintains an online, virtual referral form to aid individuals with referrals made in real time. NCST is also working to expand both the TRC's capacity and programming, given the extent of community need. Untreated trauma is intertwined with violence and the success of any future violence prevention or intervention efforts cannot be separate from the work of the TRC. Additionally, the community has become an active partner in the TRC, with some residents becoming part of its staff.

Overdose Response Team (ORT)

There is an extensive body 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 the state.[89] 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 above. As part of this, NCST is tasked with providing a community-led response to overdose emergency calls. All NCST staff, particularly HRIs, have been trained in recognizing the signs of an overdose. Most significantly, HRIs and other staff members have

[89] https://www.njoag.gov/programs/nj-cares/nj-cares-suspected-overdose-deaths/

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.

Community Sentinels Leadership Academy

The Community Sentinels Leadership Academy currently comprises one of the most effective components of NCST's overall crime and harm reduction strategy.[90] This program is made up 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. This is yet another example of how residents "own" so much of the programming NCST offers. Although all residents and community members have the opportunity to become involved in the Community Sentinels Leadership Academy, young people are a specific focus of recruitment given their vulnerability to crime, drugs, and other illegal activity.

However, this is not simply a program designed to engage residents in violence intervention and harm reduction. Instead, the Community Sentinels Leadership Academy is founded on the idea that Newark, like many communities of color,

[90] The UCLA SJRP team completed an evaluation focusing on the Community Sentinels Leadership Academy in February 2024.

experiences a deep cross-generational struggle to confront past injustices, to understand history, and to prepare the next generation to face the future with strength and resilience. This is especially meaningful in the South and West Wards of Newark where there are many high-promise youth at high-risk for mistreatment educationally, economically, and legally. This risk is further complicated by the divide and alienation that exist between adults and adolescents. The Community Sentinels Leadership Academy is intentionally cross generational; modeled on best practices as well as research that emphasizes intergenerational bonding and attachment, the program is dedicated to nurture educational growth and to build leadership.

The Community Sentinels Leadership Academy draws on a curriculum that has included training on civic awareness, conflict resolution, self-efficacy, self-esteem, education, and community organizing. Those who have participated in the leadership training maintain a connection to the program and believe that the Community Sentinels Leadership Academy has enabled them to learn ways they can individually and collectively lift up the Newark community. Their leadership training has given rise to multiple efforts including community discussions, movie field trips, Block Parties, and convenings aimed at healing.

Public Safety Initiatives

In addition to hosting the PSRT, representatives from NCST regularly attend and actively participate in several local councils and task forces including the Safer Newark Council, the Law Enforcement Partnership Meeting, and the Newark Victims Services Task Force. NCST plays a significant role in the Safer Newark Council, which actually consists of two groups: (1) a smaller advisory group that includes the Mayor's Office, NPD, and NCST and (2) the larger Safer Newark Council.

Participation in each of these efforts is strongly aligned with all NCST service delivery and community outreach efforts. Simply stated, NCST does not exist in a silo but instead is engaged in ongoing collaboration with multiple city and regional efforts. The Law Enforcement Partnership meeting which is held twice a month at Rutgers University includes the NPD, the Office of the County Prosecutor, the State Attorney General, County offices of Probation and Parole, along with other law enforcement agencies who all meet together and discuss their responses to gang activities and crime. While NCST represents an alternative approach to public safety, their participation is essential to this group's work. Similarly, NCST is a member of the monthly Newark Victim Services Task Force, representing its Hospital Violence Intervention Program.

Education, Training, and Jobs

NCST is committed to wellness sustainability, both for individual residents as well as at-risk neighborhoods. As part of this commitment, in past years, staff has facilitated 12-week Amer-I-Can Life Skills training classes offered at the Georgia King Village and NAN Tech Center. This community-based learning program, founded by the late NFL football star Jim Brown, is designed to foster each participant's personal development by helping individuals cultivate both academic and life management skills, leading to increased pro-social behaviors and meaningful contributions to

society.[91] Additionally, NCST has built relationships with local employers, both public and private, and hosts a weekly job clinic, enabling residents to learn about available employment as they meet face-to-face with various public and private agencies, businesses, and organizations.

Training

From the onset, it was clear that Outreach Workers and HRIs would require professional training before they could begin to fulfill their roles in the community and neighborhoods they would be serving. And, just like everything else within NCST, the training and learning component of this organization has evolved. During the pilot phase of NCST, training was provided by Teny Gross who was then the Executive Director of the Institute for the Study and Practice of Non-Violence in Rhode Island.[92] Mr. Gross' training was highly professional and enthusiastically received by both HRIs and Outreach Workers who were hungry for knowledge. However, his approach was much more philosophical, revolving around the mindset necessary to both cultivate and model non-violence in the community. For NCST, there was a need for more specific training that identified specific protocols for how to proceed with case management and how to respond to threats as well as full blown crises in the community. To fulfill this training need, NCST turned to a different resource.

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In the next phase of organizational development, Outreach Workers and HRIs were required to complete 40 hours of professional training provided by the Professional Community Intervention Training Institute

[91] http://www.amer-i-can.org/about/about.html
[92] Mr. Gross is now the CEO of the Institute for Non-Violence Chicago.

(PCITI), [93] led by Aquil Basheer, a nationally recognized expert on violence intervention and public safety. Basheer possessed a long history of training community interventionists and outreach workers globally and represented the optimal choice to work with the NCST team moving forward.

Since 2015, the training that PCITI and Aquil Basheer offered NCST trainees each year focused on community-based intervention strategies tailored to specific Newark neighborhoods. The training emphasizes violence deterrence, crisis-abatement, de-escalation, pro-active scenario-based resolutions, critical incident response reporting, crime scene management and supervision, and retaliation protocols. Additionally, throughout the training, there is a continuing emphasis on the planning and implementation of holistic responses to individuals, groups, neighborhoods, business districts, government jurisdictions, and public agencies.

The sheer number of programs and initiatives NCST continues to implement is a testament to its commitment and responsiveness. It is also the dynamic embodiment of the basic tenets of the public health model. Because of this, NCST is always responsive to community needs and the shifting currents of violence. Additionally, these multi-faceted efforts at programming posed challenges to evaluation which resulted in rich and meaningful quantitative and qualitative data. This organization and all of its elements required meaningful data collection, analysis and understanding. The quantitative and qualitative chapters that follow (Chapters Six and Seven) represent that effort.

[93] The UCLA evaluation team has conducted two separate evaluations of the PCITI.

Chapter Five

OVERVIEW OF THE CURRENT NCST EVALUATION

As an innovator of community violence intervention (CVI) implementation, the Newark Community Street Team's (NCST) place-based violence intervention strategies have been so widely recognized that communities around the country travel to Newark, New Jersey to learn about the NCST model. However, NCST's multi-faceted model has never been scientifically evaluated by an external researcher using a *mixed methods* approach. This is the case for most community-based public safety work, in particular for those organizations that function at the grassroots level. This lack of rigorous study represents a profound challenge for the field of CVI and the organizations themselves. While local stakeholders are well aware of the impact of NCST and CVI work improving community safety and well-being, there is minimal data-driven "proof" of effectiveness.

However, because of its perceived impact, a recent surge in CVI-focused funding has occurred in both philanthropic and government sectors. In particular, there was meaningful investment through the American Rescue Plan Act (2021) federal funds as well as the Safer Communities Act (2022). While substantive funding has only recently been made available,[94] policymakers and funders are already asking, "How do we know that community-based public safety models such as CVI actually works?"

As part of these efforts, the Community Based Public Safety Collective ("The Collective") has overseen the initiation and growth of CVI strategies across the country since 2020. With shared roots and vision, NCST serves as a learning

[94] It is important to note that federal funds were withdrawn at the beginning of President Trump's second term (2025) and other public funding remains uncertain. However, the philanthropic sector continues to fund CVI efforts.

laboratory and guide for the CVI work directed by The Collective nationally. To document and advance the work being conducted by NCST, The Collective sought funding from the Ford Foundation to sponsor this rigorous evaluation of NCST with the intention of being able to make an empirically grounded case for the NCST model and the effectiveness of NCST's approach to CVI. It is critical to note that the Ford Foundation agreed to support this research and contracted directly with The Collective.

The UCLA evaluation study of the Newark Community Street Team was undertaken to holistically assess NCST and its impact on violence in Newark, with particular emphasis on the experiences of community residents over time. The evaluation process began in December 2023 with a three-month planning window. Embedded data collection occurred March 2024 through July 2025. In turn, the period of August through November 2025 was dedicated to data analysis and preparing this report and the accompanying briefs. The overall 24-month funded period ran from December 2023 through November 2025.

From its onset, the goal of this evaluation study was to assess whether the NCST model actually works and if so, the extent of its impact on the community. As part of this research design, along with determining the effectiveness of NCST, the evaluation was also conceived to demonstrate Proof of Concept and consequently examine how key elements of this model of violence intervention can be sustained in Newark and implemented in additional settings nationally.

As has been described in previous chapters, the UCLA research team has been deeply involved with NCST for over a decade. For this study, researchers built upon long standing relationships and archived documentation. They remained committed

to a research process that was both participatory and intentional along with being dynamic, responding to organizational changes as they developed. In being participatory, the research process centered on authentic community involvement, beyond interviews and focus groups. Additionally, in place of waiting until the submission of the final evaluation report, researchers worked in active partnership with NCST leadership and staff throughout the evaluation process, refining data collection and updating all involved in research activities. As part of this, NCST leadership and UCLA research team members met regularly, in person and by Zoom, to discuss the project process, providing preliminary feedback and describing adjustments that were made during the course of the study research.[95] A wide range of NCST staff were deeply involved in the research process, with one staff member, Genesis Chavez, serving as a co-author of the final report.

Throughout the 24-month period, there was a parallel and ongoing partnership established with Newark residents in the South and West Wards who served as active participants in every phase of the research study. Their involvement occurred at two levels. First, a Research Advisory Committee[96] was created with recommendations from the Public Safety Round Table with additional input from NCST leadership and staff; in three cases, there were matching names. Those three individuals along with two others served as a Research Advisory Committee, initially reviewing all research instruments and methodologies, making suggestions, and critiquing questions that needed to be reframed more effectively. One Research Advisory Committee member and Newark resident, Sharon Redding or "Miss Sharon" as she is known within the community, was deeply involved in research throughout the course of the evaluation – from envisioning the overall study to preparing this final report. Along with Genesis Chavez mentioned previously, Miss Sharon served as a co-author of the final report.

[95] The Year 1 Mid-Study Memo can be found in Appendix A.
[96] Members of the Research Advisory Committee include: Elijah Head, Donald Jackson, Desiree Johnson, Sharon Redding, Wallace Winstead, Al-Tariq Witcher.

Both Miss Sharon and Ms. Chavez embody the UCLA team's commitment to research that is authentically participatory and not in name only. Second, there was a schedule of incentives and stipends designed to compensate Research Advisory Committee members, residents, and stakeholders for their involvement in the study. This practice is a long-standing UCLA SJRP policy of both recognizing the contributions of community members who participate in research and providing incentives for that effort. The researchers are guided by the idea that every individual is an expert in their lived experience and their time is valuable and must be recognized and reinforced.

STUDY DESIGN

In determining the effectiveness of NCST, and determining if the concept has been proven, it was clear that key study questions were needed to guide the evaluation effort. These key questions were developed in collaboration with NCST leadership and with the NCST Research Advisory Committee. The study questions that were used to guide this research efforts included:

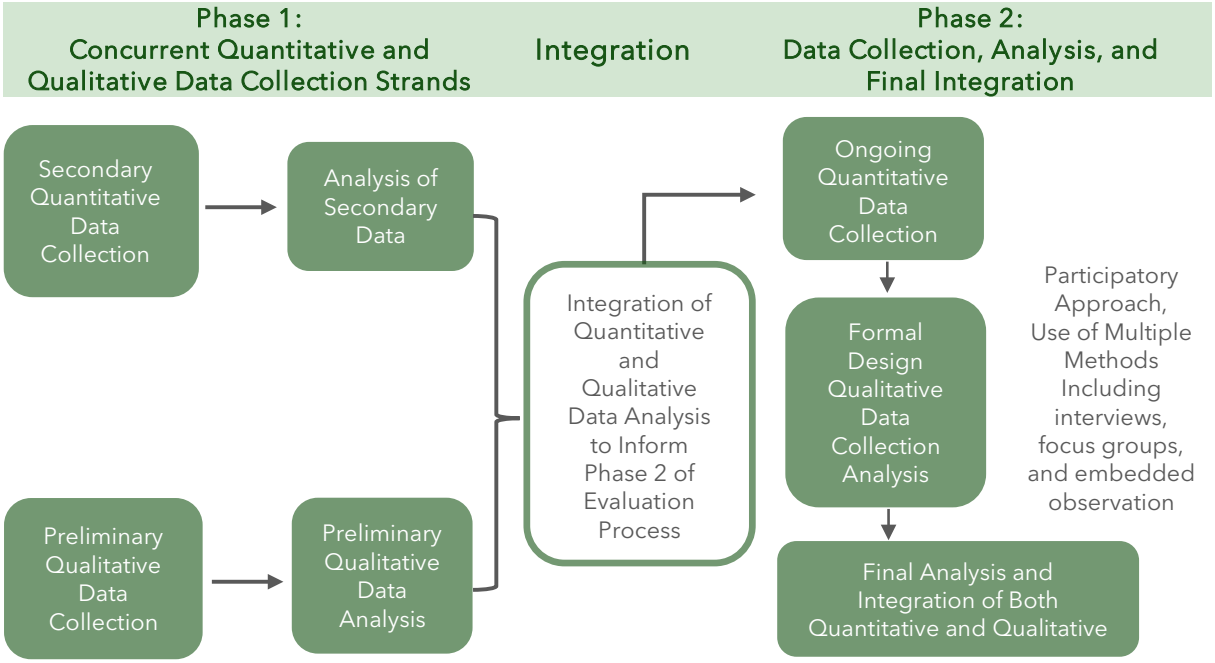
- How does NCST work?
- How does NCST's community-based model of intervention and trauma-based services improve resident perceptions of safety?
- How does NCST enable residents to help reduce dangerous conditions in their neighborhoods that fuel violent crime?
- Are there ways in which NCST helps residents disrupt violence in public spaces and increase resident comfort with using public facilities?
- How does NCST help residents deal with and resolve feelings of trauma?
- Does NCST reduce violent crime? And if so, how does it reduce violent crime?

The UCLA team was committed to working beyond standard research methodologies to ensure that this evaluation met community-based research best practices. These efforts all emphasized that any evaluation of a community-based, nonprofit organization ultimately be of value to residents, stakeholders, partner organizations, communities, and settings that are involved in and impacted. Because of this commitment, the NCST evaluation was based on the extensive participation of a large and diverse group of participants and stakeholders in the NCST system, with a specific focus on residents of the South Ward, which was a cynosure of crime and violence.

Beyond this, the full scope of this evaluation effort was informed by the transformative paradigm, which emphasizes the importance of identifying evaluation-relevant norms and beliefs with the goal of contributing to social betterment.[97, 98] In particular, data collection paid strict attention to both maintaining inclusiveness and ensuring that usually under-represented voices were heard and documented. This was reflected in the UCLA research team tailoring all research methodology to the particular needs and environment of Newark and NCST while keeping in mind the search for key elements that would be important to similar efforts in other settings. It was also necessary to respond to developments in the field once the evaluation was underway. Because of this, there were two phases of the research effort.

[97] Mertens, D. M. (1999). Inclusive evaluation: Implications of transformative theory of evaluation. *American Journal of Evaluation, 20,* 1-14.
[98] Mertens, D. M. (2012). Social transformation and evaluation. In M. C. Alkin (Eds.), *Evaluation roots: A wider perspective of theorists' view and influences* (pp. 229-240). Sage.

Figure 8. Visual depiction of the evaluation methodology.



The first phase of this evaluation was comprised of two separate and co-occurring streams of data collection and analysis. The quantitative data stream consisted of the secondary data analysis of multiple sets of statistics including: 1) documented incidents of high risk intervention; 2) Newark Police Department (NPD) sector crime; and 3) Public Safety Round Table (PSRT) data attendance and participation.

In turn, the qualitative data stream involved initial understanding of NCST from multiple perspectives. To examine and describe the experiences of NCST leadership and staff as well as residents and stakeholders, it was necessary to rely on a combination of useful approaches including document review, in-depth interviews, focus groups and ethnographic participant observation – all deemed best practices in qualitative research.[99] Together these qualitative research efforts were undertaken

[99] Creswell, J. W. and Poth, C. (2018). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches*. Thousand Oaks: Sage.

with the involvement of community residents, NCST staff, NPD officials, institutional partners, community-based organizations, and other community stakeholders who were participants in the Newark Public Safety Round Table. This phase of the qualitative data collection was designed as part of an initial process study, to gain "on the ground" insight into how NCST functioned throughout the city of Newark and how specific interventions (NCST programs) were implemented.

The second phase of the evaluation was also comprised of two separate and co-occurring streams of data collection and analysis. The first of these, the interview and focus group data, was informed by phase one data collection which informed the development of an interview protocols[100] and a focus group protocol.[101] These protocols were co-created with the Research Advisory Committee and were designed to better understand the experiences of community residents in both the South and West Wards. These efforts provided the opportunity to obtain a focused, more representative sample of the communities most highly impacted by violence. As interviews and focus groups were carried out, the data were coded, and analyzed; the quantitative data collection continued, leading to careful quantitative analysis. Specific details about the methodology used in each of the two separate data streams – quantitative and qualitative – will be provided in each of the two forthcoming chapters. The overall evaluation process is depicted in Figure 8 on the previous page.

Ensuring the usefulness of research stands as a major concern guiding evaluation work, and this evaluation was no exception. To that end, the UCLA team drew upon

[100] Interview protocols can be found in Appendix B.
[101] Focus group protocol can be found in Appendix C.

a range of residents and stakeholders alongside NCST leadership and staff in each of the data collection phases, exercised ongoing consideration of political influences, attitudes, and organizational structures, and as part of the evaluation effort, planned how to use multiple forms of communication for reporting the evaluation results to different and diverse audiences.[102, 103] Additionally, the evaluation was carried out with attention to the future to ensure it can serve as a useful resource to when other cities and communities seek to take the NCST model and its evaluation process to scale.

Developing the evaluation methodology was integral to the objectivity and accuracy of the research. In the two chapters that follow, the specific methodology used for collecting and analyzing each set of data will be delineated and findings will then be presented.

As discussed previously in detail, it needs to be noted that this evaluation was conducted under unique circumstances. The UCLA evaluation team has been working with NCST since its establishment in 2014. Researchers were not outsiders who were entering a new setting devoid of understanding. Instead, the development of the evaluation research plan was founded upon institutional history and knowledge that is rarely available in such efforts. This included a deep understanding of both NCST capacity and limitations in terms of data and data collection.[104] More significantly, as part of prior research efforts, members of the UCLA team had built relationships and trust with NCST staff. At the same time, researchers had also formed relationships and trust with many community residents. These connections figured prominently in both the creation of a Research Advisory Committee and the further evolution of the

[102] Preskill, H. (2012). The transformational power of evaluation. In M. C. Alkin (Eds.), *Evaluation roots: A wider perspective of theorists' view and influences* (pp. 323-333). Sage.
[103] In addition to this final report, the UCLA team prepared five briefs to help with public understanding of the evaluation research.
[104] See for example, previous documentary narrative conducted by UCLA team: https://www.newarkcommunitystreetteam.org/research/

research methodology. Additionally, this study was much more expansive than past engagements and this was designed to integrate both qualitative and quantitative methodology.

Methodologically, the previous evaluation work conducted by UCLA focused on documenting the growth of the organization, creating both a case history and a documentary narrative on the expanding work of NCST. The process evaluation and documentary narrative research methodology used previously offered the opportunity to paint a vivid portrait of the development of an organization that was centered both on and in community. Process evaluation is a recognized best practice that requires an evaluation team to draw upon multiple data sources, including, but not limited to documents, records, ethnographic observations, depth interviews, and "in-person" accounts to obtain both the historical and personal perspectives of individuals involved in a phenomenon or program.[105] Because of its approach, the documentary narrative methodology used by the UCLA team in the past, led to the effective description and qualitative assessment of NCST in the present, chronicling its development, its key elements, and its operations. Beyond this, the process evaluation methodology provided an account of the "on-the-ground" experiences of NCST staff and leadership over the first decade of their operation. These studies and embedded ethnography served as the ideal lead-up to the quantitative and qualitative evaluation described in this report.

Robert K. Ross, M.D., who led The California Endowment for 24 years, often spoke of the need for "stories *and* numbers" in philanthropy and in research. This study has been guided by those words and by the visionary investment of the Ford Foundation, whose philanthropic efforts envelop global concerns and the innovation that addresses them. In developing its methodology, the UCLA team benefitted greatly

[105] Creswell, J. W. and Poth, C. (2018). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches*. Thousand Oaks: Sage.

from conversations with individuals from the Ford Foundation who truly understood both the research concerns and the search for relevance. In alignment with this focus, The Collective seeks to bring these research findings to those it trains and supports with CVI strategies. Working with these partners along, with the Newark community, the UCLA team has worked to honor all of these efforts in every way possible.

Chapter Six

QUANTITATIVE RESEARCH FINDINGS
Understanding NCST's Impact on Violence

Quantitative data plays a crucial and complementary role in assessing the effectiveness of community-based and community-led programs, especially those focused on violence intervention and reduction. Yet, within this rapidly developing field, data collection and analysis are challenging for numerous reasons. Both operationalizing and capturing timely change indicators at the individual-level (mental health, trauma, goal attainment, career readiness, recidivism), community-level (collective efficacy, resilience, engagement), and programmatic-level (referrals, program participation, program operations, staff characteristics and experience) require robust evaluation and service delivery infrastructure.

NCST continues to take steps to address these challenges. Program staff have methodically gathered data related to the work of their Outreach Workers and High Risk Interventionists (HRIs). Additionally, NCST has compiled data on various program activities, including attendance at the Public Safety Round Table (PSRT) and the outcomes achieved by Outreach Workers, such as relocating individuals away from dangerous settings. The UCLA team has collaborated with NCST to gather meaningful data for purposes of this evaluation. The present chapter provides a quantitative account of the change in program service provision across time specifically related to number of high risk interventions (events) and PSRT attendance. More importantly, these programmatic data are presented alongside synchronous property and violent crime statistics that are publicly available and derived from the Newark Police Department (NPD). These initial findings hold significance both for demonstrating NCST's impact and for establishing a baseline for subsequent evaluation and research

initiatives. Accordingly, this quantitative chapter encompasses the following elements:

- Context of Data and Findings
- Data Limitations
- Description of the Quantitative Data Elements
- GIS Mapping of Population Across Newark Wards
- Descriptive Statistics and Graphical Output of Property and Violent Crime Rates Across Wards (Annually and Monthly)
- Graphical Output of High Risk Interventions Across Wards
- Graphical Output and Lagged Cross-Correlation Analysis of Violent Crime and High Risk Interventions
- Graphical Output of Participation in Public Safety Round Table
- Findings and Insights

Context of Data and Findings

It is essential to call attention to the meaning of the quantitative data elements and the analysis that follows. The reduction of violent crime is a complex public safety challenge influenced by a multitude of factors. Understanding these factors is essential for developing effective strategies to create safer communities. Past research has identified key determinants influencing crime rates, including socioeconomic conditions, mistrust of law enforcement, poverty, unemployment, homelessness and lack of housing, social instability, and weather. In turn, any urban area dealing with violence has a multiplicity of agencies that attempt to drive down violent crime. These

include government agencies, community-based organizations, faith-based organizations, public health clinics, and houses of worship. Each of these entities impacts violent crime and it is impossible to separate out one organization as having a defined impact on crime. In considering this significant limitation, the UCLA evaluation team focused their quantitative analysis on documenting *how* and *when* NCST is responding to violence in order to better understand programmatic impact. The findings presented here must be considered in this context.

The reduction of violent crime is a complex public safety challenge influenced by a multitude of factors. Understanding these factors is essential for developing effective strategies to create safer communities. Past research has identified key determinants influencing crime rates, including socioeconomic conditions, mistrust of law enforcement, poverty, unemployment, homelessness and lack of housing, social instability, and weather. In turn, any urban area dealing with violence has a multiplicity of agencies that attempt to drive down violent crime. These include government agencies, community-based organizations, faith-based organizations, public health clinics, and houses of worship. Each of these entities impacts violent crime and it is impossible to separate out one organization as having a defined impact on crime.

Data Limitations

The COVID-19 pandemic created an unprecedented disruption to the social conditions that shape crime patterns, rendering data from the height of the pandemic (2020-2021) fundamentally unsuitable for baseline analysis. In March 2020 states began to implement systematic shutdowns, shelter-in-place orders, and school closures, some of which would not be lifted until late-2021. From a statistical perspective, the pandemic period represents what methodologists term an exogenous shock, or an external event that creates structural breaks in time series data. More specifically, the pandemic systematically disrupted many of the underlying drivers of crime according to routine activity

theory: motivated offenders, suitable targets, and the absence of capable guardians.[106] Through pandemic lockdowns, business closures, the adoption of remote work, and altered mobility patterns, all of these drivers were fundamentally altered. These disruptions created artificial fluctuations in crime rates that reflect pandemic-specific conditions rather than underlying crime dynamics relevant to post-pandemic operations.

Moreover, during the pandemic, programming within NCST was impacted. In 2020 and 2021, NCST continued to recruit and train Outreach Workers and HRIs. In fact, the number of people recruited and trained in these positions increased by 66% during this time.[107] Yet, while service delivery continued, quarantines and restrictions fundamentally altered the way in which residents, Outreach Workers, and program staff engaged the community. For example, PSRTs transitioned to Zoom and have continued in that format. Given these inherent limitations in the availability and replicability of early data, the quantitative analysis will focus on providing a post-pandemic portrayal of NCST programming to serve as a baseline for future evaluation efforts.

An additional limitation related to data also impacted the quantitative analysis. When conducting the quantitative analysis and preparing this report, crime data in the Newark region was only available through March 2024. Delays in reporting crime statistics are both challenging and common, most often resulting from the varied timelines and requirements of multiple agencies and jurisdictions responsible for reporting these figures. Because of these factors, the present analysis utilized programmatic and crime data from January 2022 to March 2024.

[106] Miró, F. (2014). Routine activity theory. *The encyclopedia of theoretical criminology*, 1-7.
[107] Leap, J., Leap, M., Lompa, K., & Gouche, W. (2024). Evaluation of the Newark Community Street Team (NCST): Innovations in Community-Based Crime Reduction Programs.

Description of Quantitative Data Elements

The quantitative portion of the evaluation is focused on analyzing and synthesizing the data elements described below:

High Risk Interventions

NCST Outreach Workers and HRIs directly respond to acute threats of violence or acts of community violence. Each HRI 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 the victim(s) to de-escalate further rumors and prevent retaliation. For purposes of the present evaluation, NCST provided a monthly total of high risk interventions (events) by Ward, from January 2022 through March 2024, across the following three levels, defined as:

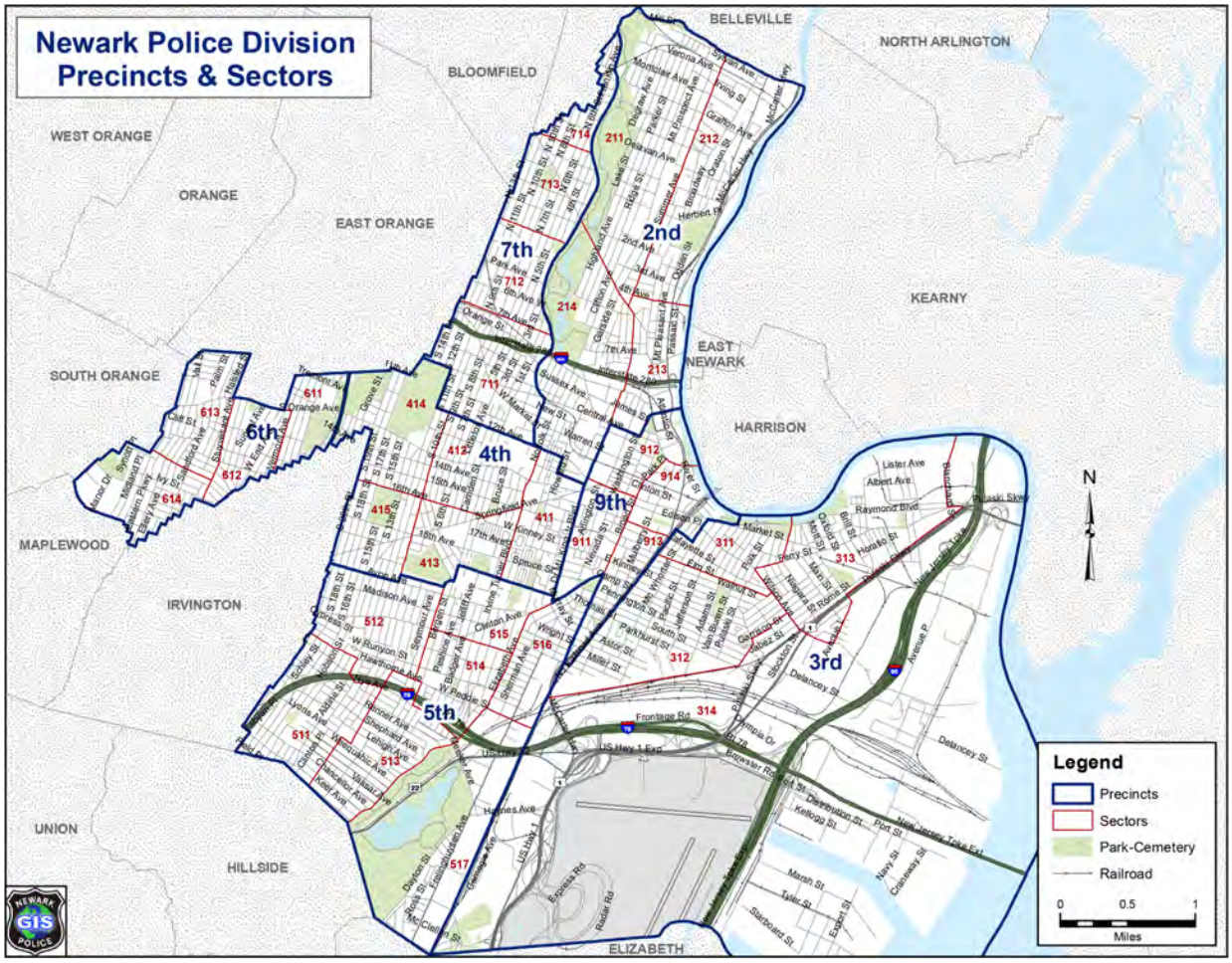
- Level 1: "Incident has Occurred": Incident likely to cause death or permanent serious injury, a 9-1-1 event (Homicide/Serious Assault/Weapon Violence).
- Level 2: "Probability Incident will Occur": Increasing potential for an incident to happen that could cause injury.
- Level 3: "Conceivable that Incident May Occur": Not an immediate safety concern.

Property and Violent Crime

On their website, NPD provides publicly available, timely data that is organized by precinct (administrative boundaries with physical police stations) and sector (operational subdivisions of roughly equal populations for determining patrol deployment and coverage). See Figure 9 on the following page for an illustration of Newark precincts and sectors. Eleven categories of crime data are collected: aggravated assault, auto theft, burglary, found property, murder, possession of weapon, rape, robbery, shots fired, theft, and theft from an auto. For purposes of the

present evaluation, violent crime was defined as aggravated assault, murder, rape, and shots fired. Property crime encompasses auto theft, burglary, theft, and theft from auto. Monthly totals of property and violent crimes were generated for each month, from January 2022 through March 2024, and aggregated across Wards.[108]

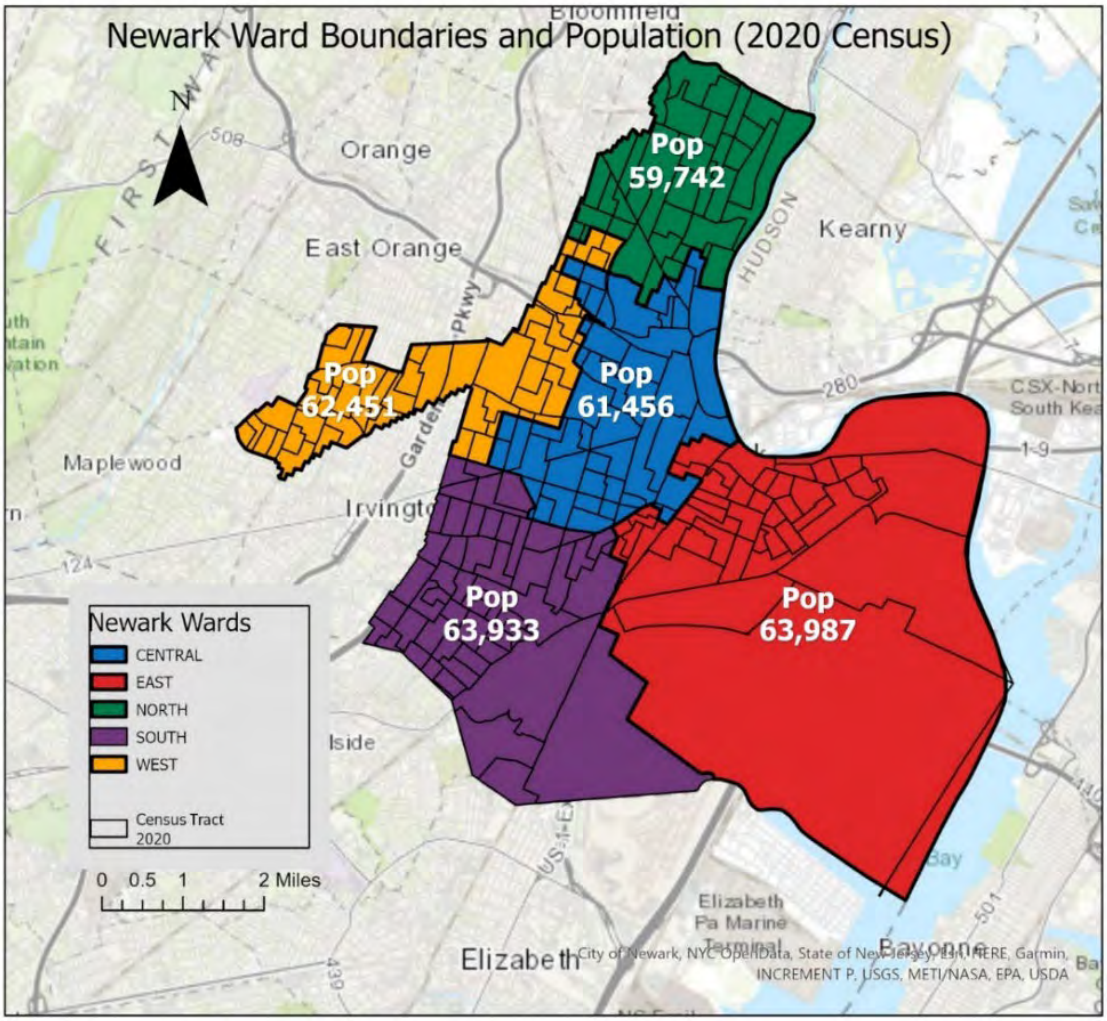
Figure 9. Boundaries of Newark's Precincts & Sectors.



[108] NCST utilizes Wards as their unit of analysis, not precincts, sectors, or other geographically defined neighborhoods.

Comparing aggregate crime numbers across geographic areas without accounting for population differences is a fundamental analytical error that can lead to dramatically misleading conclusions about public safety. Utilizing a population standardization through a per capita analysis is essential in transforming incomparable, raw numbers into meaningful rates that reveal the actual probability of victimization and the relative intensity of crime across jurisdictions of vastly different sizes. Therefore, data from the 2020 Census were utilized to generate population-adjusted figures (per 10,000 residents) for each of the five Wards (see Figure 10).

Figure 10. Population of Newark Across Wards.



Public Safety Round Table (PSRT):

The PSRT meets twice a month over Zoom and its organization and function is detailed in Chapter Four (The NCST Model). For purposes of the quantitative evaluation, NCST staff provided the total number of individuals in attendance for each meeting during the 27-month (January 2022 to March 2024) period.

GIS Mapping of Population Across Newark Wards

Figure 10 on the previous page is an ArcGIS choropleth map of Newark's Ward boundaries and population distribution, based on 2020 Census data. The combined population of all Newark Wards totals approximately 311,568[109] people, the largest of New Jersey's cities. The map effectively visualizes how Newark's population is distributed across its political Ward boundaries and provides context for how NCST's programming is implemented throughout the city, specifically in the South and West Wards.

Descriptive Statistics and Graphical Output of Property and Violent Crime Rates Across Wards

Table 3 below provides a descriptive analysis of *annual* violent crime patterns across Newark's five Wards, which reveals noteworthy disparities and exposes a stark geographic divide that persisted across 2022 and 2023. The South and West Wards experienced the highest rates of violent crime (96.7 and 93.0 per 10,000 residents respectively in 2022), approximately 2.5 times the national average. In contrast, for both years, rates of violent crime within the East Ward were well below the national average. Violent crime within the Central and North Wards was the middle ground. Violent crime across all Wards between 2022 and 2023 was relatively stable year-

[109] It is important to note that census blocks do not align cleanly with Ward boundaries in GIS mapping. In order to obtain the population for each Ward, an area-weighted population method was utilized that proportionally splits each census block that is positioned across two Wards.

over-year, with only minor decreases in the Central and North Wards (7.6% and 8.5% respectively).

Table 3. Violent Crime Trends Across Newark Wards (2022-2023).

	Central Ward	East Ward	North Ward	South Ward	West Ward	National Average
Population[1]	61,456	63,987	59,742	63,933	62,451	-
Total Violent Crimes: 2022	405	169	260	618	581	-
Population Adjusted Violent Crimes (per 10,000): 2022	65.9	26.4	43.5	96.7	93.0	38.1
Total Violent Crimes: 2023	374	164	238	616	581	-
Population Adjusted Violent Crimes (per 10,000): 2023	60.9	25.6	39.8	96.4	93.0	36.4

[1] Population data are generated from GIS shapefiles from City of Newark Planning and Zoning and 2020 Census Data.

Property crime tells a markedly different story (Table 4). All five Wards experienced substantial increases in property crime, suggesting a potential city-wide phenomenon transcending Ward boundaries. The surge was particularly acute in the West and North Wards, which saw property crime rates increase by 48.5% and 47.6%, respectively, while the East Ward experienced a 34.2% rise. Despite increases across all five Wards, the pattern of geographic disparity remained consistent, and the geographic concentration of property crime remained even more pronounced. The South and West Wards continued to have significantly higher property crime rates than the other three Wards, while the East Ward maintained the lowest rate, at nearly half the national average.

Table 4. Property Crime Trends Across Newark Wards (2022-2023).

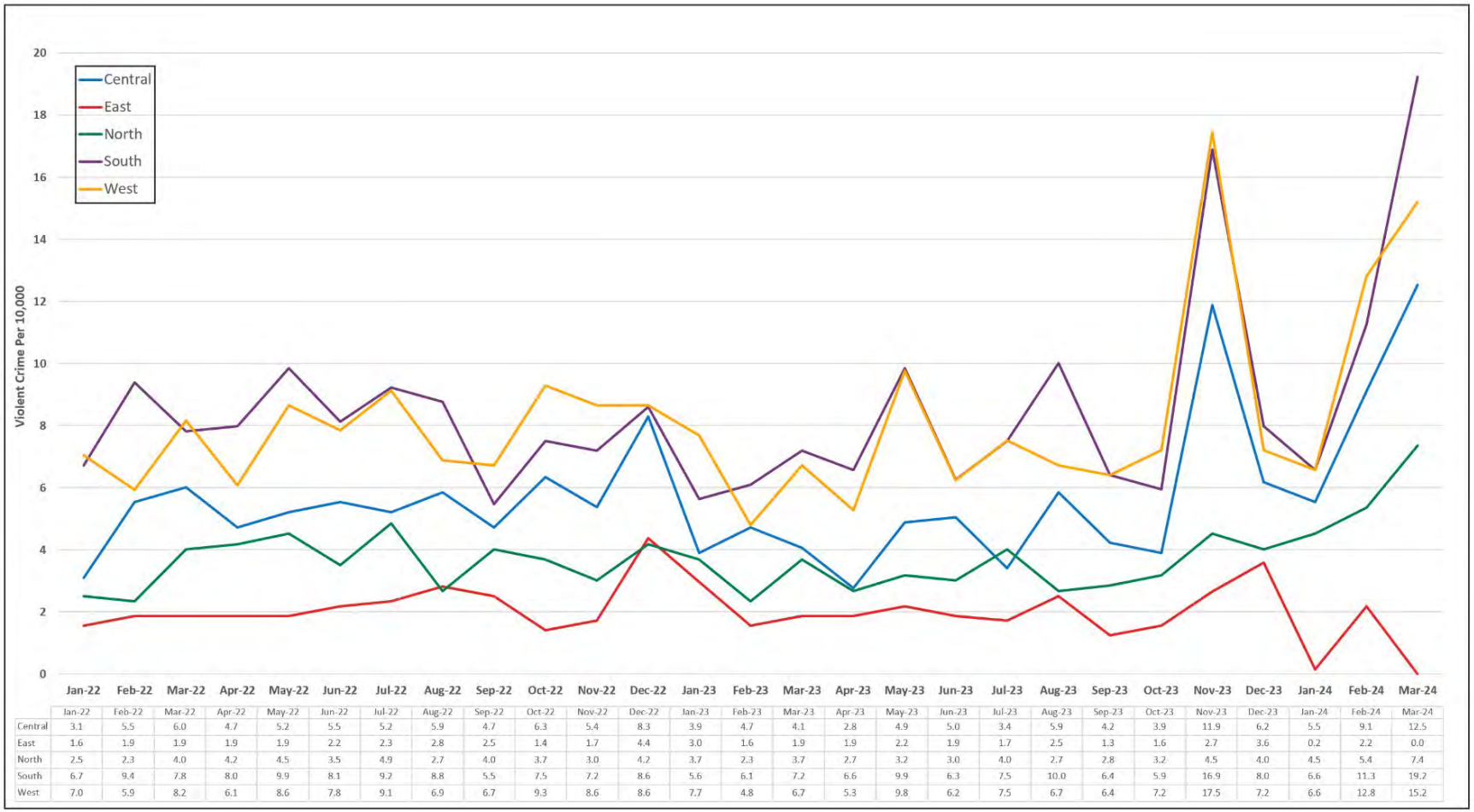
	Central Ward	East Ward	North Ward	South Ward	West Ward	National Average
Population[1]	61,456	63,987	59,742	63,933	62,451	-
Total Property Crimes: 2022	829	467	581	1,566	1,257	-
Population Adjusted Property Crimes (per 10,000): 2022	134.9	73.0	97.3	244.9	201.3	195.4
Total Property Crimes: 2023	1,022	627	858	1,792	1,867	-
Population Adjusted Property Crimes (per 10,000): 2023	166.3	98.0	143.6	280.3	299.0	191.7

[1] Population data are generated from GIS shapefiles from City of Newark Planning and Zoning and 2020 Census Data.

The population-adjusted rates (per 10,000 residents) enable meaningful cross-Ward comparisons despite varying population sizes. And the data revealed two distinct public safety challenges facing Newark: 1) property and violent crimes were concentrated in the South and West Wards, and 2) in 2024 there was a substantial increase in property crime that affected the city as a whole. The persistent nearly four-fold difference in violent crime rates between the South and West Wards and the East Ward, coupled with a three-fold difference in property crimes, underscores the profound inequality in community violence experienced by Newark residents based solely on their neighborhood.

Another pattern emerged when looking at *monthly* violent crime rates across the five Wards from January 2022 to March 2024. Figure 11 (following) documents a spike in late 2023, where Central, South, and West Wards all experienced sharp increases in violent crime. For example, the West Ward peaked at 17.5 incidents per 10,000 residents, while the South Ward climbed to nearly 17, which denotes roughly a doubling or tripling of their typical rates respectively.

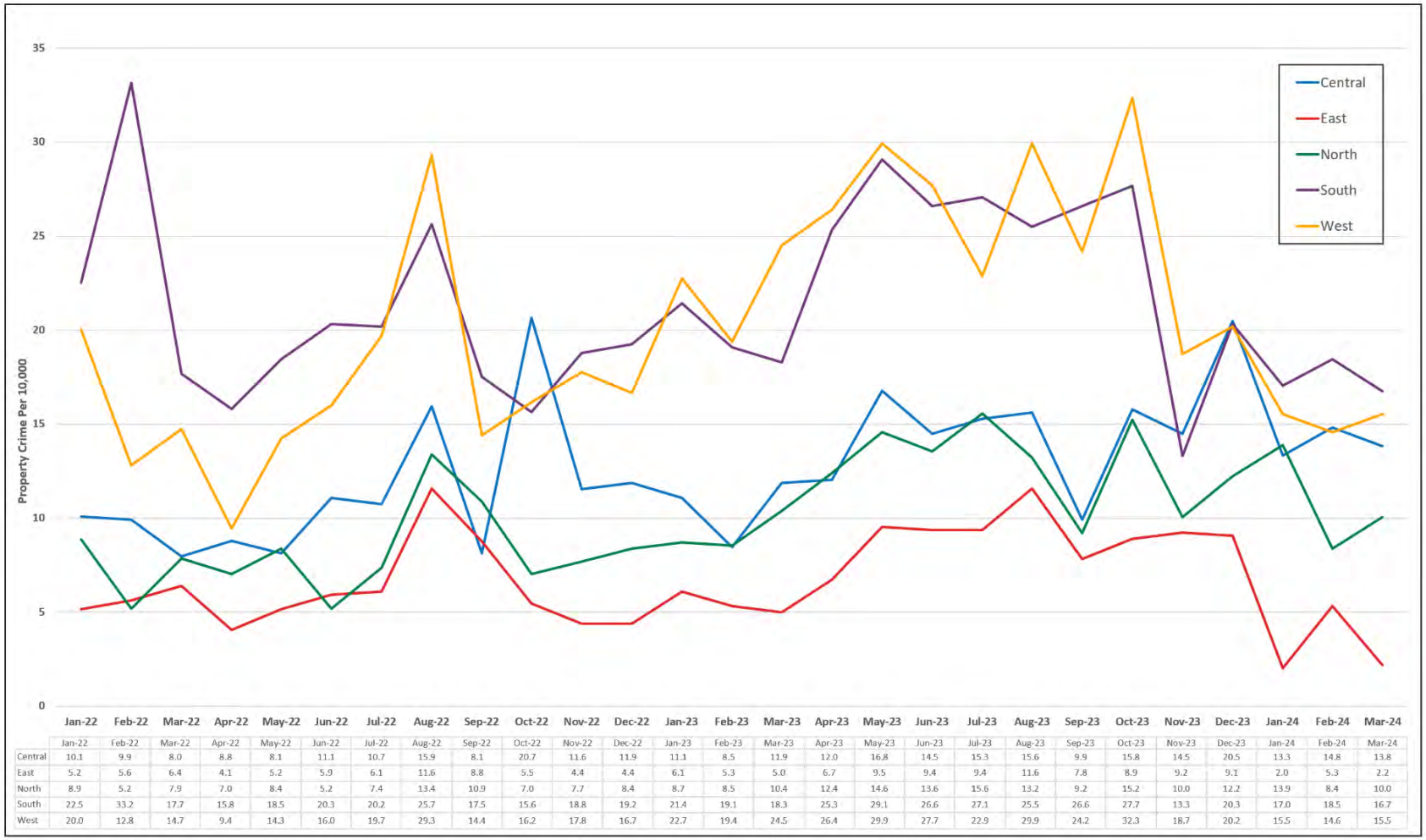
Figure 11. Monthly Violent Crime Per 10,000 Residents by Ward: January 2022 – March 2024.



	Jan-22	Feb-22	Mar-22	Apr-22	May-22	Jun-22	Jul-22	Aug-22	Sep-22	Oct-22	Nov-22	Dec-22	Jan-23	Feb-23	Mar-23	Apr-23	May-23	Jun-23	Jul-23	Aug-23	Sep-23	Oct-23	Nov-23	Dec-23	Jan-24	Feb-24	Mar-24
Central	3.1	5.5	6.0	4.7	5.2	5.5	5.2	5.9	4.7	6.3	5.4	8.3	3.9	4.7	4.1	2.8	4.9	5.0	3.4	5.9	4.2	3.9	11.9	6.2	5.5	9.1	12.5
East	1.6	1.9	1.9	1.9	1.9	2.2	2.3	2.8	2.5	1.4	1.7	4.4	3.0	1.6	1.9	1.9	2.2	1.9	1.7	2.5	1.3	1.6	2.7	3.6	0.2	2.2	0.0
North	2.5	2.3	4.0	4.2	4.5	3.5	4.9	2.7	4.0	3.7	3.0	4.2	3.7	2.3	3.7	2.7	3.2	3.0	4.0	2.7	2.8	3.2	4.5	4.0	4.5	5.4	7.4
South	6.7	9.4	7.8	8.0	9.9	8.1	9.2	8.8	5.5	7.5	7.2	8.6	5.6	6.1	7.2	6.6	9.9	6.3	7.5	10.0	6.4	5.9	16.9	8.0	6.6	11.3	19.2
West	7.0	5.9	8.2	6.1	8.6	7.8	9.1	6.9	6.7	9.3	8.6	8.6	7.7	4.8	6.7	5.3	9.8	6.2	7.5	6.7	6.4	7.2	17.5	7.2	6.6	12.8	15.2

Figure 12 (following) provides a visual description of property crime rates by month (January 2022 to March 2024) across the five Wards. Property crime data reveal notably higher baseline rates compared to violent crimes, with more pronounced volatility across all geographies. The South Ward showed the most dramatic fluctuations, starting with an extreme spike of approximately 33 incidents per 10,000 residents in February 2022, then experiencing another surge to roughly 27 in late-2023. The West Ward also appeared to have considerable instability throughout, with multiple peaks reaching 29 to 32 incidents per 10,000 residents in August 2022, August 2023, and October 2023. The East Ward maintained the lowest and most stable rates, generally remaining between 4 and 8 incidents per 10,000 residents until a modest uptick to around 11-12 in mid-2023, followed by a sharp decline to approximately 2 by March 2024. Notably, most Wards show declining or stabilizing trends in early 2024.

Figure 12. Monthly Property Crime by Ward.



	Jan-22	Feb-22	Mar-22	Apr-22	May-22	Jun-22	Jul-22	Aug-22	Sep-22	Oct-22	Nov-22	Dec-22	Jan-23	Feb-23	Mar-23	Apr-23	May-23	Jun-23	Jul-23	Aug-23	Sep-23	Oct-23	Nov-23	Dec-23	Jan-24	Feb-24	Mar-24
Central	10.1	9.9	8.0	8.8	8.1	11.1	10.7	15.9	8.1	20.7	11.6	11.9	11.1	8.5	11.9	12.0	16.8	14.5	15.3	15.6	9.9	15.8	14.5	20.5	13.3	14.8	13.8
East	5.2	5.6	6.4	4.1	5.2	5.9	6.1	11.6	8.8	5.5	4.4	4.4	6.1	5.3	5.0	6.7	9.5	9.4	9.4	11.6	7.8	8.9	9.2	9.1	2.0	5.3	2.2
North	8.9	5.2	7.9	7.0	8.4	5.2	7.4	13.4	10.9	7.0	7.7	8.4	8.7	8.5	10.4	12.4	14.6	13.6	15.6	13.2	9.2	15.2	10.0	12.2	13.9	8.4	10.0
South	22.5	33.2	17.7	15.8	18.5	20.3	20.2	25.7	17.5	15.6	18.8	19.2	21.4	19.1	18.3	25.3	29.1	26.6	27.1	25.5	26.6	27.7	13.3	20.3	17.0	18.5	16.7
West	20.0	12.8	14.7	9.4	14.3	16.0	19.7	29.3	14.4	16.2	17.8	16.7	22.7	19.4	24.5	26.4	29.9	27.7	22.9	29.9	24.2	32.3	18.7	20.2	15.5	14.6	15.5

Graphical Output of High Risk Interventions Across Wards

Figure 13 below illustrates both the distribution and growth in the total number of high risk interventions (events) that NCST staff engaged in in 2022 and 2023. The data reveal significant variations in the number of high risk interventions (events) across the five Wards with all experiencing substantial increases. High risk interventions (events) were most frequent in the South Ward during both years, though the Central Ward showed the largest proportional increase across the two years.

Figure 13. Total Number of High Risk Interventions Across the Five Wards (2022 – 2023).

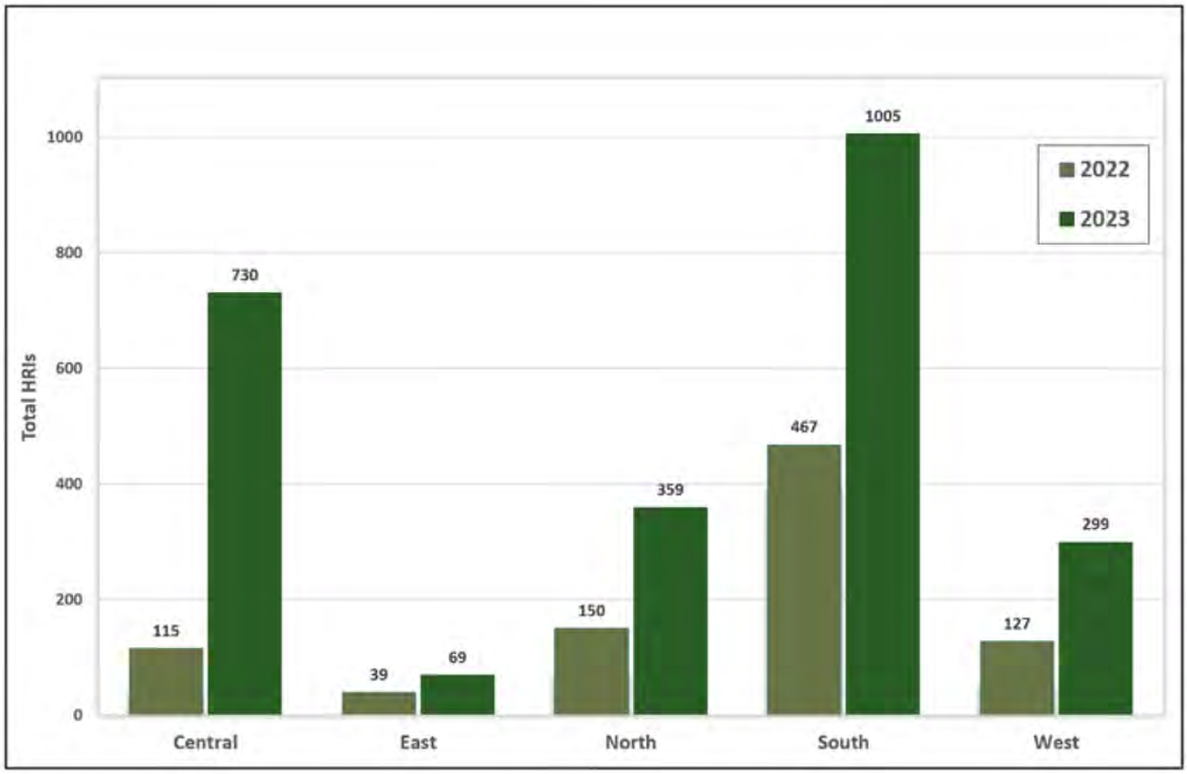
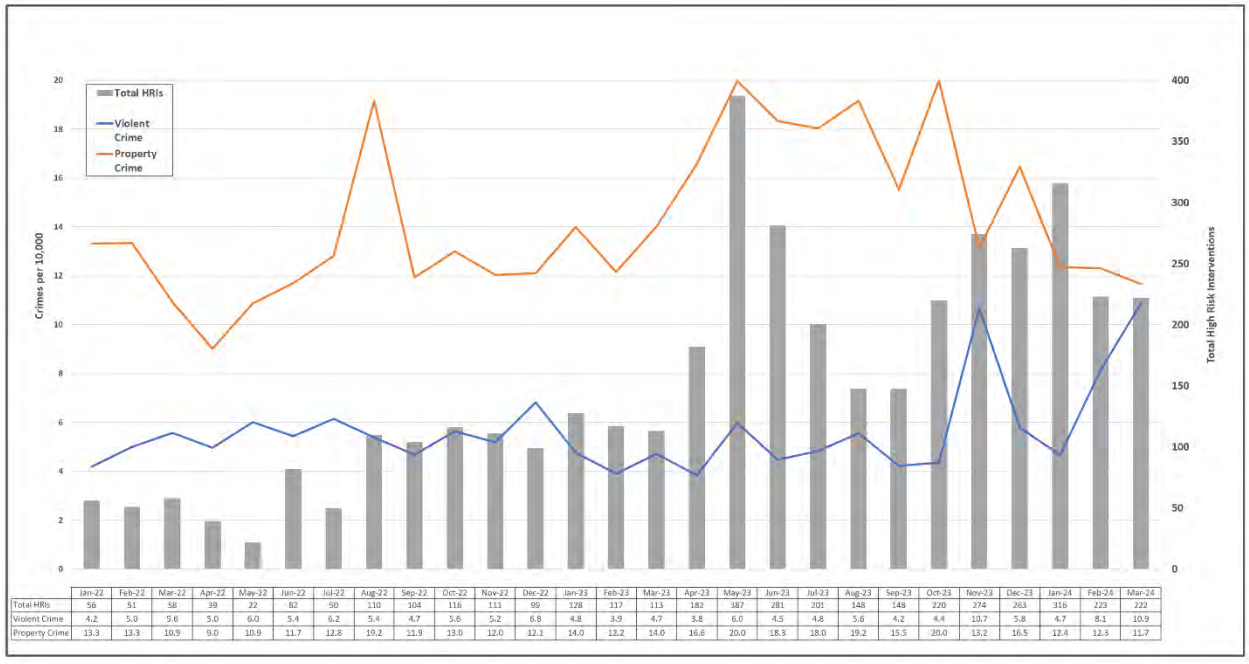


Figure 14 below presents a comprehensive depiction of crime patterns graphed alongside number of high risk interventions (events) over the period from January 2022 to March 2024. Both violent and property crimes were generated by averaging the respective per capita rates across the five Wards for each month. The high risk interventions (events), represented by gray bars on the secondary y-axis, show a dramatic upward trend over the study period, escalating from approximately 60 interventions in early 2022 to peaks exceeding 380 in May 2023, before moderating somewhat – but remaining elevated above 200 interventions monthly – through early 2024 (except for August and September 2023). This substantial increase in high risk interventions (events), which more than quadrupled during certain periods, appears to correlate directly with corresponding increases in property or violent crime rates, showing a reactive pattern wherein NCST is responding in real-time to community need.

Figure 14. Two-Axis Graph: High Risk Interventions and Crime by Month.



	Jan-22	Feb-22	Mar-22	Apr-22	May-22	Jun-22	Jul-22	Aug-22	Sep-22	Oct-22	Nov-22	Dec-22	Jan-23	Feb-23	Mar-23	Apr-23	May-23	Jun-23	Jul-23	Aug-23	Sep-23	Oct-23	Nov-23	Dec-23	Jan-24	Feb-24	Mar-24
Total HRIs	56	51	58	39	22	82	50	110	104	116	111	99	128	117	113	182	387	281	201	148	148	220	274	263	316	223	222
Violent Crime	4.2	5.0	5.6	5.0	6.0	5.4	6.2	5.4	4.7	5.6	5.2	6.8	4.8	3.9	4.7	3.8	6.0	4.5	4.8	5.6	4.2	4.4	10.7	5.8	4.7	8.1	10.9
Property Crime	13.3	13.3	10.9	9.0	10.9	11.7	12.8	19.2	11.9	13.0	12.0	12.1	14.0	12.2	14.0	16.6	20.0	18.3	18.0	19.2	15.5	20.0	13.2	16.5	12.4	12.3	11.7

Graphical Output and Lagged Cross-Correlation Function (CCF) Analysis of Violent Crime and High Risk Interventions

To test whether a correlation exists between the high risk interventions (events) and violent crime, UCLA researchers conducted a lagged cross-correlation analysis (CFF). A CCF can determine whether or not, and the extent to which, two patterns are related to one another. By generating lags in temporal data, the analysis helps identify the extent to which one variable might influence the other and during what time period. The analysis produces a correlation coefficient for multiple time lags. In the present analysis a three-month lag (-3 through 3) was utilized.

Results of the CCF are presented in Table 5 on the following page. First, all correlations are significant at the $p < .05$ level. The largest correlation coefficient (.459) occurs at lag 0, indicating that the strongest relationship between high risk interventions and violent crime exists simultaneously, without any time delay in either direction.[110] In other words, the two variables are neither leading nor lagging one another. Moreover, all correlations are positive throughout, indicating that the high risk interventions and violent crime are moving in the same direction (when one increases, the other increases or vice versa). These findings *do not* imply a causal relationship between high risk interventions (events) and crime – this analysis will not determine whether – or to what extent – high risk interventions (events) increase or decrease violent crime. The findings instead indicate a moderate association and suggest that NCST programming is responding to current crime conditions and that the HRIs are deployed reactively, in real-time to violent crime. Still, the findings provide compelling evidence around the extent to which NCST is successfully responding to violent crime and is clearly responsible for it decreasing.

[110] Per Cohen (1988), correlation coefficients are generally interpreted as: < .29 is weak, .30 – 49 is moderate, .50 - .69 is strong, and .70 – 1 is strong/very high.

Table 5. Cross-Correlation Analysis: High Risk Interventions and Violent Crime.

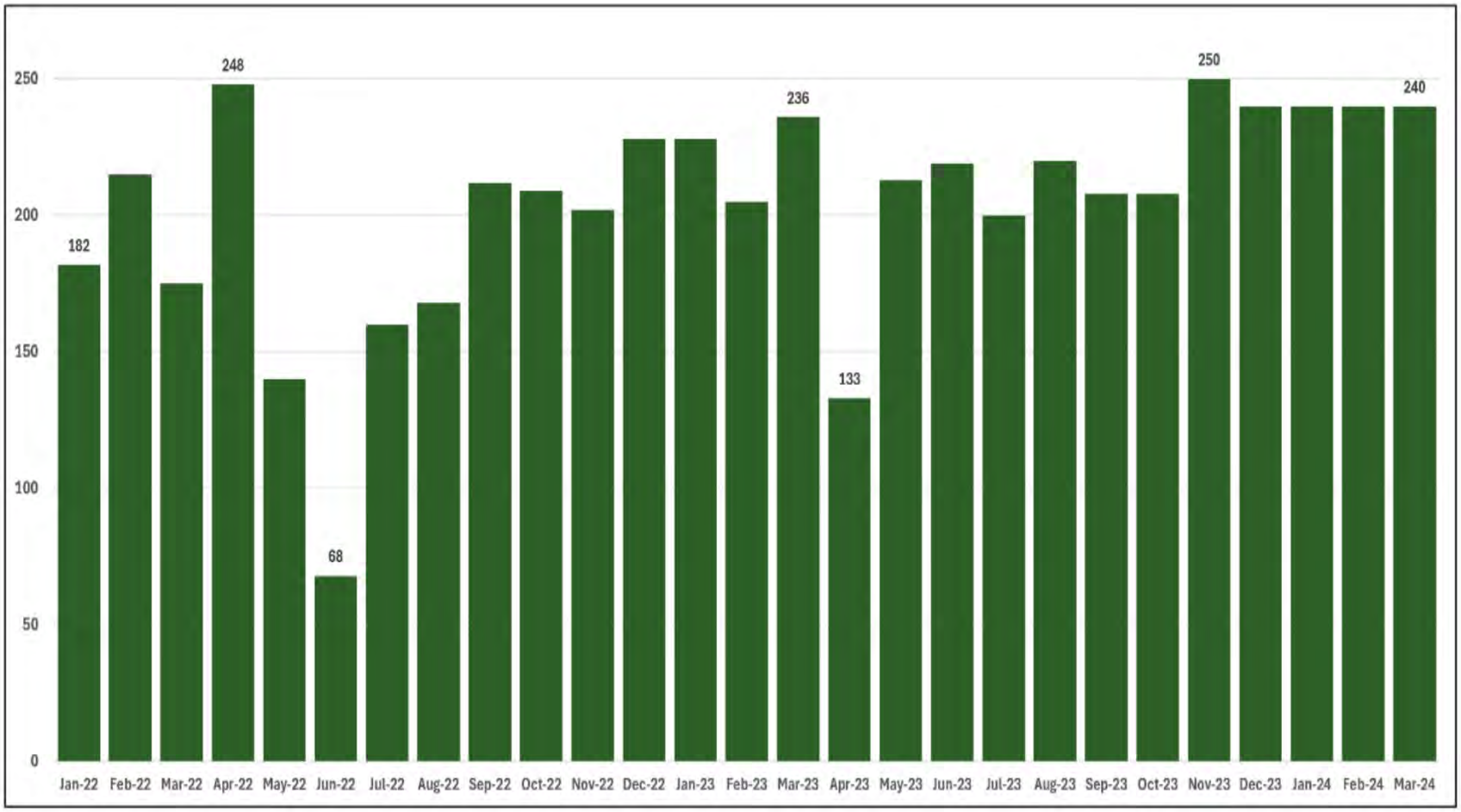
Lag (month)	Correlation Coefficient	Standard Error	Confidence Interval (95%)
-3	.383*	.087	[.212, .554]
-2	.408*	.087	[.237, .579]
-1	.425*	.087	[.254, .596]
0	.459*	.087	[.288, .630]
1	.396*	.087	[.225, .567]
2	.318*	.087	[.147, .489]
3	.390*	.087	[.219, .561]

* $p < .05$

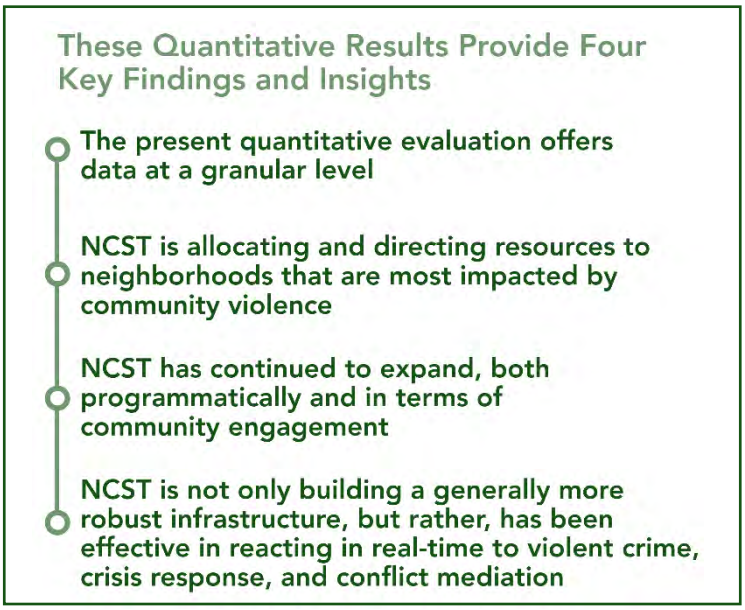
Graphical Output of Participation in Public Safety Round Table (PSRT)

There appears to be some early variability in PSRT attendance with considerable fluctuations over the first seven months of 2022. This was followed by a steady increase in monthly participation until a notable decrease in attendance in April 2023 (133 participants versus 236 during the month prior). After this dip, participation was characterized by consistently high attendance. Overall, there has been steadily growing engagement within the community as evidenced by a 16% increase in cumulative participation in PSRTs across years (from 2,207 in 2022 to 2,560 in 2023).

Figure 15. PSRT Attendance by Month (January 2022 – March 2024).



Findings and Insights

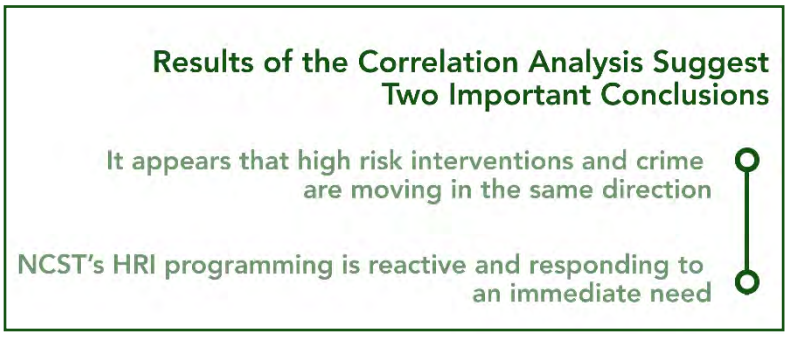


Taken as a whole, the quantitative results provide four key findings and insights about NCST and its programming. First, the present quantitative evaluation offers data at a granular level. Analyzing data at the Ward-level, rather than the city of Newark in its entirety, helps generate important baselines for future evaluation. Moreover, this granular level of analysis has enabled additional insights. For example, the second key finding is that it is clear that NCST is allocating and directing resources to neighborhoods that are most impacted by community violence. During its tenure, as it transitioned from a pilot project to an established and promising practice, NCST has focused its programming within the South and West Wards. As a pilot project in 2014, NCST's activities were implemented exclusively in the South Ward. In 2015, NCST expanded into the second community by partnering with the City of Newark Department of Health and Community Wellness to establish the West Ward Victims Outreach Services and Crime Reduction Initiative. During the past decade, NCST has continued to develop programming in these two Wards, primarily. Today, violent and property crime rates remain disproportionately higher in the South and West Wards, at 2.5 times the national average compared with the East Ward which experiences rates below the national average.

Third, NCST has continued to expand, both programmatically and in terms of community engagement. There has been significant growth in the number of HRIs NCST deploys. While their presence remains most substantial in the South and West

Wards, all Wards experienced a doubling of the total number of high risk interventions (events) from 2022 to 2023. Additionally, the Central Ward experienced the largest proportional increase in high risk interventions (events) across the two-year period; which is a meaningful response given that, after the South and West Wards, the Central Ward had the highest rates of violent and property crime. It is unclear whether or not this is an intentional expansion into the Central Ward (from 115 high risk interventions in 2022 to 730 in 2023) or it is more a function of geography. Specifically, the Central Ward shares borders with both the South and West Wards[111] where NCST is most active and it is reasonable to assume there is spillover of crime – and resulting need – in critical areas within the Central Ward, which might explain the dramatic increase in high risk interventions (events) within the Ward. Along with this expansion of high risk interventions (events), NCST has also increased its community engagement over time. Since NCST has been collecting data on PSRTs, attendance has increased annually. In 2020, cumulative, annual attendance was just over 250 participant units and in 2024 it increased more than ten-fold to over 2,500 participant units.

Finally, in addition to the continued expansion of programming and outreach, it appears that NCST is not only building a generally more robust infrastructure, but rather, has been effective in reacting in real-time to violent crime, crisis response, and conflict mediation. The results of the correlation analysis suggest two important conclusions. The first is that, given the positive correlations across the model, it appears that high risk interventions (events) and crime are moving in the same direction. In other words, increased crime generated an increase in high risk



[111] A map of Newark Wards can be found in Appendix D.

intervention response, and vice versa. Second, and more precisely, NCST's HRI programming is reactive and responding to an immediate need. Central to the NCST model is its ability to quickly respond to active disputes, as soon as they are notified of a homicide or shooting.

The present analyses provide evidence that NCST is successfully implementing one of the most essential strategies informed by its mission and model: responding to, intervening in, and mediating community conflicts in real-time and reducing violence over time.

Chapter Seven

QUALITATIVE RESEARCH FINDINGS
Examining Community Sentiments and Understanding of NCST

To describe and examine the impact of NCST and the experiences of Newark community residents and stakeholders, it was necessary to rely on an ongoing series of qualitative methods consisting of in-depth interviews, focus groups, and participant observation. All three methodologies were employed with a specific emphasis on the South Ward. This multi-faceted qualitative data collection yielded extensive accounts of the experiences and outlooks of a broad range of NCST stakeholders and community residents. This research design, based on qualitative best practices, was implemented with the approval of the UCLA Institutional Review Board (IRB).[112]

The qualitative portion of the evaluation was integral to contextualizing the quantitative data and findings. As described in Chapter Five (Overview of the Current NCST Evaluation), during phase one, the research team met informally multiple times with community residents and stakeholders, along with the Research Advisory Committee, while conducting three preliminary focus groups as well as depth interviews with key individuals to construct qualitative interview and focus group protocols that could most authentically and effectively assess the impact of NCST upon the perceived safety and wellness of communities throughout Newark. Additionally, the research team attended and conducted ongoing ethnographic observation at the bi-monthly meetings of the Newark Public Safety Round Table (PSRT). At the same time, research team members participated in Community Walks, a

[112] All members of the UCLA evaluation team, including those not involved directly in data collection, were required to complete mandated training sponsored by the UCLA Institutional Review Board to recognize and guard against implicit bias.

practice that would continue throughout the entire evaluation process. This led to phase two of the qualitative research process which will be described in detail in this chapter.

QUALITATIVE RESEARCH DESIGN

It was essential for the evaluation team to consider how the "open-ended" questions that guide qualitative research could most effectively be asked. Interview protocols and a focus group protocol[113] were designed to draw upon the experiences of community residents, community partners, and NCST staff. The protocols were designed to cover a variety of topics that related to participants' perceptions of how NCST has contributed to the reduction of crime and the building of community trust and a sense of safety. Consistent with the overarching research questions that guided the evaluation, there were two key questions this data stream addressed:

1.
What are residents' perceptions of and reactions to the Newark Community Street Team?

2.
How has the Newark Community Street Team and its related programs impacted individual perceptions of crime, violence, public safety, and community health?

During this more formal phase of the evaluation, the research team was particularly intent on understanding participant experiences *in their own words* and integrating that data with the other data streams. It was essential to document and understand

[113] Interview protocols and focus group protocol can be found in Appendix B and C.

residents' and community partners' perceptions, concentrating on their background in the community, their involvement with NCST, their thoughts on how the community has changed with the implementation of NCST, and their thoughts on the interaction between NCST staff, residents, and community stakeholders.

QUALITATIVE DATA COLLECTION

Over the 24-month evaluation period, evaluation team members spent extensive time in Newark – particularly the South Ward – talking with residents and community partners.[114] Researchers attended community events, had informal conversations, and became familiar figures building new connections while drawing upon their previous relationship networks and experiences in the South Ward. The fact that the team members were already "known" and accepted by many in the community eased their way with residents and community partners.

Through a combination of opportunistic and snowball sampling, individual interviews and focus groups were scheduled and then conducted at the NCST offices at both 915 S. 16th Street and 678 S. 20th Street over a 16-month data collection period, from March 2024 through July 2025. Embedded ethnographic observation throughout this period was continuous. The interviews and focus groups covered a number of issues. Additionally, Community Walks and informal interaction with residents continuously involved NCST staff members who assisted with all informal engagement between the research team and community partners. Because of this, it was meaningful to engage a small group of dedicated community members and offer them stipends to serve as research team members who assisted with multiple aspects of the evaluation.

[114] Throughout this chapter, community stakeholders, institutional partners, and community-based organizations will be referred to generally as "community partners."

Over the course of the evaluation, a total of 233 individuals formally participated in interviews and focus groups; these indicate separate individuals and are not duplicative. The participants can be separated into the following categories:

51	NCST staff members,[115] including High Risk Interventionists, Outreach Workers, Trauma Recovery Center Case Managers and Community Sentinels:
	22 of these participated in depth interviews
	29 of these participated in focus groups
6	NCST leadership team members (past and present)
175	Community residents and community partners
	35 residents participated in depth interviews
	140 residents and community partners participated in focus groups
Mayor Ras Baraka	

Each of these individuals received a $20 Amazon gift card for their participation in interviews and focus groups. In addition to these incentives, the Research Advisory Committee members received a $25 gift card each time they were consulted or met as a group. Additionally, 625 hours of ethnographic observation were completed.

Community response to interview and focus group outreach was positive. Both residents and community partners talked with team members at length – some even contacted their interviewer a second time to add more information to their interviews. The focus groups were lively and often lasted over two hours. The enthusiasm and commitment of all individuals involved made the qualitative research experience enlightening and rewarding.

[115] Over the 24-month evaluation period, some of these individuals left NCST and were replaced by other individuals.

QUALITATIVE DATA ANALYSIS

With two exceptions, interviews and focus groups were audio-recorded and transcribed.[116] After this, the 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 would be utilized due to the sensitivity and nuanced information that emerged from both interviews and focus groups. In order to guard against interviewer bias in the research process, coding was conducted by two independent coders who did not participate in any of the interviews or the focus groups. The coders were given specific instructions regarding the coding process. These methodological strategies were used to ensure both the reliability and validity of the data analysis. The coders began 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 with one another to ensure alignment and to eliminate any errors in the data or in resident or law enforcement accounts. The categories of information were then subjected to *axial coding*. Axial coding allows coders to build the ideas into a narrative that connects the categories of information. Finally, the connections identified within the categories of information were subjected to *selective coding.* This led to the identification of key themes as well as sub-themes, which built upon the ideas developed in the key themes. In other words, the coding process carefully led to an identification of key themes or ideas and sub-themes that further developed themes.

In order to create a full portrait of the impact of NCST, all of the themes that were identified were validated with ethnographic observation conducted by evaluation team members over the evaluation period. Team members attended informal and

[116] In every interaction, individuals or groups were asked if they could be recorded. Two residents expressed their wish not to be recorded. These two individuals proved to be extremely patient with the notetaking process.

internal meetings along with scheduled meetings of the Newark Public Safety Round Table (PSRT). They also participated in multiple Community Walks conducted by HRIs and Outreach Workers along with gatherings and community events. In addition, there was ongoing participant observation that occurred when researchers simply "hung out" in at NCST centers and in the community.[117] Ethnographic observation field notes were reviewed and coded for content. The coded content from observations was then compared with the coded content of interviews and focus groups for consistency. The determination of the themes that follow all depended on their presence in at least two thirds of the interviews and focus groups. Finally, selected members of the evaluation research team subjected the data analysis and theme development to critical review. The information reported in this chapter is designed to outline themes and ideas in terms of what constituted the mission, vision, and work of NCST.

QUALITATIVE THEMES

Based upon the data collected and analyzed, 15 major themes emerged. The final determination of these themes depended on the coding procedure described above. After coding, the data analysis and theme development was subjected to critical review by selected members of the evaluation research team. The 15 themes were then subjected to a meta-analysis by two evaluation team members. Independent coding of the themes then resulted in the development of six overarching themes that described the predominant concepts. The overarching theme is listed first, with subsequent description of the related major themes in the next column. Table 6 presents the themes, it will be followed by an in-depth discussion of each theme.

[117]One member of the research team had been part of evaluation efforts since the inception of NCST and was accepted as an honorary community member. This individual was frequently told, *"You are one of us."*

Table 6. Summary of Qualitative Themes.

Overarching Theme	Theme
1. Community Identification, Ownership, and Efficacy	1. NCST is authentically community-based. There is a deep community identification with and commitment to the vision of NCST.
	2. The basis of NCST is relational.
	3. NCST has shifted what it means to be a community member, with residents moving from passivity to a collective sense of agency.
	4. Through relationships built with NCST, residents' understanding of crime has evolved, with a recognition of the role of poverty, leading to the call for the fulfillment of community needs.
2. Public Safety and Law Enforcement	5. NCST gives community a voice with law enforcement, particularly through the Public Safety Round Table.
	6. While there is growing communication with law enforcement and no expressed antipathy toward the Newark Police Department, trust remains an issue. There are carefully maintained boundaries between NCST and the NPD in the implementation of intervention and community outreach.
3. Added Value for Public Safety	7. Over the decade of its existence, NCST has deeply extended its service provision and its identity, offering programs far beyond its beginnings in high risk intervention, with an additive impact on community-based public safety.

	8. NCST continues to extend its efforts as a resource for the formerly incarcerated.
	9. NCST has developed a reputation as a learning organization, serving as a thought partner and a training site for several national initiatives.
4. Trauma Awareness and Understanding Trauma	10. NCST continues to play a major role in both staff and residents being aware of and understanding trauma and seeking services to aid in healing, recovery, and resolution.
	11. The demand for trauma-based and recovery services far outstrips what NCST is able to provide. Increasing these services is viewed as a key aspect of future public safety.
5. The Need to Care for and Support Staff	12. There was a consistent concern over staff exposure to trauma and their need for support, including healing and trauma-based services.
	13. There was consistent concern over the need for increased financial support for staff, including more extensive benefits and fiscal security.
6. Sustainability	14. There is a profound need for consistent financial sustainability.
	15. The culture of accountability, research, and evaluation that NCST has established must be sustained.

OVERARCHING THEME ONE: Community Identification, Ownership, and Efficacy

THEME ONE: NCST is authentically community-based. There is a deep community identification with and commitment to the vision of NCST.

This theme is intentionally listed first because it proved to be interwoven with virtually every one of the interviews and focus groups conducted. The sense of community ownership and responsibility was consistent throughout all formal and informal evaluation activities. As one resident told researchers, *"There is no separation between us and them. We are in this together."* To further reinforce the sense of community identification and ownership, it was clear that NCST draws heavily from a pool of community members to train as staff members, as HRIs and Outreach Workers along with Community Sentinels.[118] The reality that NCST staff is predominantly (although not exclusively) drawn from the immediate community reinforces the organizational identity as a community-based agency that is neither led nor populated by outsiders. **This was clearly a strength of NCST.** One resident who is now an Outreach Worker explained, *"What drew me into NCST was everyone was asking what needed to be done in the community – rather than telling us what should be done to the community."* Similarly, a staff member offered, *"We have a real mission here. We are here to change lives, to create a sense of community."*

Having a sense of ownership went far beyond simple verbal affirmation. Many residents described what community involvement and identification meant to them. One woman observed,

> *When I say we are in this together, it really means we are meeting people where they are at. We invite them – come be a part of us. We are going to be sharing resources, listening to what you need, what you are asking us for.*

[118] See the description of how residents are trained in NCST's Community Sentinels Leadership Academy in Chapter Four (The NCST Model).

> *We are not telling people what they need. In the past, people have come into Newark to say 'Here's what's wrong with Newark, here's what we're going to do.' NCST doesn't tell us, they listen. They let us be part of the leadership. We are part of NCST in every way.*

This account was matched by the words of another resident who said, *"No organization in Newark is out there – outside and showing up in the community – there are other good organizations but they aren't here, they don't show up. NCST – they always show up and show out."*

Many individuals drew upon the same words repeatedly to depict what NCST accomplished. Over and over again, the research team heard, *"We know we have their support," "We know the community is with us,"* and *"NCST knows it's important that people always feel the support. We need it, they give it, and we are part of everything they do. We won't make decisions or create strategies without the community being involved."*

One woman described how she had been afraid to venture from her home until NCST Outreach Workers came to her door one day as part of the Community Walks they regularly conducted:

> *I was afraid to open my door to them but I saw these two women and somehow, they looked so welcoming. It turned out they had both lived in Newark, just a few streets away – they were my neighbors. They told me to come into NCST. The next day one of them came and picked me up and walked me over to the house.*[119] *I was able to meet amazing people – young and old – I know it was part of my life that I didn't have people to talk to…and now I did. I will be part of NCST forever.*

[119] This is the house at 915 S. 16th Street that serves as one of two NCST offices. It is located right in the heart of one of the most active Newark neighborhoods in the South Ward. Aqeela Sherrills explained, *"We deliberately chose a house in the heart of the streets that had the biggest problems."*

Ultimately, the sense of community identification is probably best summed up in the words of one young man who enthused, *"When I see this work, I see us."*

Still, community involvement also came with expectations and responsibilities. One HRI offered early on, *"The community holds us accountable, just like our team holds one another accountable."* He continued:

> *What is important about our work is the following: we try to mediate; we try to figure out what happened. Sometimes it's money, sometimes it's women, sometimes it's men, it's relationships. And we can never sit back and say our work is done. We've got to hold ourselves up to help keep the peace. And believe me, if we don't do our job, the community will let us know. They will not let us off the hook.*

Echoing this, another staff member explained, *"We come in, we mediate the situation, it settles down. But tomorrow it can be back on. We make sure whatever fire we sprinkle a little water on, make sure it stays out."* There was a shared sense of responsibility – the community supported NCST and in turn, NCST could not become complacent. An Outreach Worker summarized, *"We can never let our guard down. Never."*

THEME TWO: The basis of NCST is relational.

Second only to community identification with NCST, the theme of relationships came up repeatedly during interviews, focus groups, and ethnographic observation. The vast majority of individuals involved in the evaluation emphasized the significance of the relationships residents and community partners built with NCST staff. The constant discussion of the importance of relationships demonstrated that this was a bedrock, a nonnegotiable, for NCST. One staff member talked about what was hard to train but what could be found among all staff members, *"Relatability and emotional intelligence. You can't train it. It's just there. Or not."* Another staff member added:

> *Relationships are the most important thing. And you really can't teach that. We have to keep people working in the neighborhoods where they know people…You have all those things and you're okay living off a little money.*

Because so many staff members continue to be recruited from the community, this built community identification with NCST and also reinforced community strengths and collective efficacy.

The word "family" was most often invoked in discussions as exemplified by one resident who told researchers, "*The most important thing about NCST is that it's like a big family."* Another resident added,

> *You need to understand the empathy they give and the compassion they give to everyone. NCST has made many strides in the community that others have tried and failed. I am always going to be an NCST supporter. I love this organization so much; this is my second family.*

During a focus group, one resident who served as a Community Sentinel wept as she told the story of her nephew being killed and then said that whatever she does with NCST, she dedicates her work to him. *"It's helped me to grieve and then come out on the other side. When my nephew died, it broke my heart, but NCST found a way for me to make sense of it and help others."* In the same vein, many residents described how when they faced a dilemma, even if it did not involve violence or crime, they would still reach out to someone at NCST because of their empathy and understanding.

Often, during focus groups, community members were asked what words they would use to describe their relationship with NCST. Their choices flowed freely and emotionally.

*"NCST is **love and compassion**."*

*"NCST represents **growth and resilience** – we've all been through our own trials and tribulations – we're still here to be a team player and be a positive impact on the community, even when we've been victims of the same circumstances. You can learn a lot for yourself, if you allow it to teach you."*

*"NCST means **hope**. It empowers you by getting you through the process of accessing resources. They help you navigate your next moves and where you fit in. Sometimes you don't know what's going on with your community, they help you to learn."*

*"NCST means **safety**. They help in all kinds of situations, violent crime, victims of domestic violence – a whole lot of services that the community actually needs. Safety has always meant more than just crime for NCST. So, whether it's a Community Walk – then there would be a shooting, and they would respond – or your kid didn't want to go to school – they are there to help."*

*"Everyone says it but I will say it again –NCST is **family**."*

*"For me, NCST is **healing**. When you grow up in the South Ward, you see things…a fourteen-year-old killed a guy, a fourteen-year-old stole a car. But now you don't just see these things. You have a place to go to talk about it. People used to get closed off. Now they can put their feelings into words. That is healing."*

There was continuous reference to the impact of NCST and the ongoing relationships they built with the community. *"They're not hit-and-run. They're here to stay,"* one community partner reported. A resident grew emotional when they recalled, *"NCST and all of their staff are like prophets – they see what is coming, they relate to us and they are out here saving lives. If NCST had been around when I was growing up, some of my friends would still be alive."*

Staff were equally vocal about the meaning of relationships in the work of NCST. One HRI explained, *"It's powerful for the community and it's powerful for its employees/staff, it changed my life and so I was able to change other lives."*

THEME THREE: NCST has shifted what it means to be a community member, with residents moving from passivity to a collective sense of agency.

This was an overwhelming response from the majority of individuals who were interviewed or who participated in focus groups. Repeatedly, residents talked about how they had once felt as if they had no real control over their streets, their safety, or their lives. They often explained that there was no one who spoke for them and how, through working with NCST, this sense of ineffectiveness had been replaced with a deep sense of resident power. One woman offered, *"When I was growing up, I wish I had the things they are offering now. NCST has helped me to understand being a community leader, not just a community member."* Another resident, an elderly man, provided an overview,

> *I've been in Newark all my life. I've seen people come and go. Some moved away, some went to prison, some got shot and died, some got cancer and died. The cops came and went, some cops were good, most were bad. But with everything that happened, this all came down to one thing. We didn't have people who would protect us. We didn't feel safe. Even with the police around, we didn't feel it. But now, we are the people who are protecting us – we have the strength. Who is better to do this? No one is better than we are.*

A staff member echoed these same views, offering, *"NCST means we are in this together. Nobody feels like an outsider; nobody feels like a client – we all feel we're part of something greater than us. I love NCST, that's my family."* The same sentiments were expressed during a Community Walk as an Outreach Worker readily volunteered, *"When everybody comes together, we're operating like a family."*

This sense of agency has translated into tangible and sustained action. It was evident as residents described how they deal with one another and with youth in the community. One resident recalled:

> *NCST has made a big difference – there was a bunch of boys, they were sitting out on the corner, doing what they do – including my sons. They were just sitting there waiting for trouble. And they saw me going out to a meeting at NCST and they started asking me what was going on in the meetings – and I saw it, now I could actually do something! I brought them into the office, they each met with an Outreach Worker. They even talked to the police and after all of this, they got jobs. They made money, real money, and they didn't get in trouble. It's about being community – and all of us in the community taking care of each other.*

Research revealed that this sense of family and the environment of loving support is what has enabled so many residents to trust NCST and reinforced what other violence intervention leaders have referred to as "the community of kinship."[120] NCST staff, residents, and community partners all shared a sense of connection and shared fates. One Outreach Worker offered a compelling narrative that embodied this theme:

> *I got empowered by NCST at one of the most traumatic times in my life. The fact that the program is so completely trauma-informed, gives us all a little more grace. Everybody understand this is a community – it has to come together. You hear, this is never going to change, Newark is never going to change, but everybody who comes here, and gets involved, feels that positive energy and feels empowered. You feel that energy with folks who work for NCST. Other groups, it may be hit and miss. With NCST you have a sense of power. A lot of the people who want to make a lot of decisions for Newark, don't live here. But we do. And we are taking control of our community.*

[120] A term that originated with Father Greg Boyle, the founder of Homeboy Industries, a large anti-violence and reentry organization in Los Angeles. The term has also been used by multiple CVI leaders.

THEME FOUR: Through relationships built with NCST, residents' understanding of crime has evolved, with a recognition of the role of poverty, leading to the call for the fulfillment of community needs.

As the agency and community efficacy have grown, there has been increasing recognition of how deeply poverty and crime are intertwined. In discussing the relationship between poverty and the work of NCST, community members and partners expressed their shared need for the most basic resources. One resident summarized it clearly, *"In terms of crime prevention, Newark needs services for our families, for basic necessities."*

Both residents and staff consistently discussed the interrelationship between poverty and crime. A nuanced understanding of the root causes of violence and crime was shared by the majority of individuals either during depth interviews or as part of their participation in focus groups. During one focus group, a resident observed:

> *There's two things causing crime in the South Ward and in every part of Newark – guns and being poor. Most people commit crimes 'cuz they're poor – they rob or steal or deal drugs because they don't have money. Or they are hungry and their kids are hungry and they're angry and they'll go shoot someone up. You ever been hungry, really hungry? There's no telling what you'll do.*

This all embodied the desperation and expression of strain produced by deep poverty and the need for the most basic resources. While these discussions focused on basic needs, the demand for their fulfillment pointed to the sense of empowerment and community responsibility NCST had promoted. One woman concluded, *"We know about poverty. But I don't think we'd make the connection to poverty, our everyday lives and the fact that we need and should have these resources…I don't think we'd have that* [understanding] *without NCST."* Members of NCST were also part of the discussion of poverty, often voicing their thoughts that

"NCST needs money too…", "NCST needs as van!" and *"Why should NCST* [staff] *have to drive their own cars, they need company cars or SUVs."*

Several residents and Outreach Workers offered specific examples of what was needed by resident families. *"A lot of the feedback I get is that we need to provide clothing,"* one Outreach Worker explained. *"Not just a little t-shirt. When it's freezing, they need a coat; we need gear; we have real winters."* Another Outreach Worker said, *"You got a mother of three working one job – it's not enough for her with one check. All these programs are getting cut and are going to get cut, and what are these parents going to do?"* One HRI was emphatic that,

> *We need more resources in the community – if a family needs food or needs help with different services, we gotta be able to give them something. Most of the time we find out when the crime is happening – it's only a small percentage of people doing crimes just 'cuz they want to commit crime. Most of the time, it's because of poverty.*

One community elder described her concerns, saying, *"I'm on a fixed income and I'm lucky. I can imagine people having kids out here and not having a roll of tissue for the bathroom."* There were many who shared similar sentiments:

> *"Every day, we see people aren't having food. It could be anybody out there."*
>
> *"We could talk about this all day – but we've got people with needs."*
>
> *"Even the funding for laundromat – give the laundromat a fee and let the kids come and do their clothes."*

Several NCST staff members described how they would draw upon their own money to help residents. An Outreach Worker reported, *"A lot of time I pay for things out of my pocket – I take people to get laundry, and we're not getting paid enough here."*

These workers care very deeply about the community and they want to have enough money to buy essential items for them. One HRI recalled, *"Ice cream is now $4 a cone. And I love kids, but that's a lot of money,"* while another reminded the focus group yet again about the link between poverty and crime saying, *"We see kids who don't have decent clothes, kids who don't have a hot meal in them…those are some of the factors that get into these kids, cause them to have anger."* What was notable about all of these discussions is that it removed moralism from any discussion of crime and instead focused it on objective, root causes. This was part of the development of community, collective efficacy.

OVERARCHING THEME TWO: Public Safety and Law Enforcement

THEME FIVE: NCST gives community a voice with law enforcement, particularly through the Public Safety Round Table.

There was a consensus among evaluation participants, including members of the Newark Police Department, that the Public Safety Round Table (PSRT) was a meaningful part of NCST efforts but beyond that, the PSRT is as essential tool of civilian oversight and a source of collaboration. *"The Round Table tells the PD we are watching them and holding them accountable,"* one resident observed while another resident described it as a *"Gamechanger,"* and continued:

> *The police were always a problem. Obviously. You don't get a consent decree if you're doing a good job. But that still wasn't enough. At the Round Table, we got to ask questions. And if we didn't get answers, if they gave us the runaround, we could challenge them. Of course, the best cops came to the Round Table. The best cops still come to the Round Table. But we know they are listening and we know they take the stories back to the station.*

Ongoing ethnographic observation of the PSRT validated the residents' observations. At each meeting, a representative of the NPD presented crime statistics in real time and also described how the community effectively partnered with law enforcement to support public safety. One NPD officer actually enthused, *"In our history, we have never gotten along with the community so well. I wish they had done this years ago."* Another member of NPD leadership staff explained, *"We never really had a vehicle to communicate with people, especially on the South Ward. It was always adversarial or during the worst moments of their lives. Now, we can finally have day to day, informal talking. It's a relief."* Although it was limited, there was genuine discussion of collaboration with law enforcement. One young woman, a resident of Newark since her birth, delineated the situation:

> *Look, I'm never going to trust the cops completely. There's too much bad stuff that has gone one, that still goes on. I can't ignore that. But we can collaborate in a limited way – we can listen to each other. And sometimes, I'll show up at a [crime] scene and the cops will be there, we've got sort of a forced collaboration. The Round Table taught me to do that.*

Another resident offered that, *"The Round Table all comes down to respect for one another. I know people respect me; you don't have to like me but you have to respect me. I demand respect. I am gonna give them that respect, everyone at the Round Table, even if they are cops."*

THEME SIX: While there is growing communication with law enforcement and no expressed antipathy toward the Newark Police Department, trust remains an issue. There are carefully maintained boundaries between NCST and the NPD in the implementation of intervention and community outreach.

This was a theme that predominated among the High Risk Intervention Team and the Overdose Response Team (ORT). While there was consensus that the relationship with the NPD had improved, there was still a great deal of mistrust. The deepest mistrust

occurred among the HRI Team who were concerned about their credibility in the Newark community. One HRI explained the problem in detail:

> *Look, I know we're never going to abolish the police – no matter what some of these activists say. But I gotta be careful about how I am seen in relation to the police. I don't wanna get a reputation as a snitch – and that is an easy thing to say about someone. And once you get called a snitch, it's hard to take that back. It's out there and people look at you differently. If I go to a shooting or I go to the yellow tape* [a crime scene]*, I am polite to the PD but I keep my distance. Maybe there's good police now and I will talk with them a little, but remember, this department has brutalized and hurt us in the past. And we got people with a lot of suspicion even now. I don't want to take that risk.*

The issue of being viewed as a snitch or an active collaborator with law enforcement stayed in the minds of the HRI Team and the Overdose Response Team. One worker explained, *"Some cops understand when someone is OD'ing but others judge you – like, 'just let them die'. I don't really want anything to do with the cops."* But one NCST staff member had a different perspective, explaining, *"My son is in law enforcement. So, I gotta balance at all times."*

The relationship with law enforcement presented an ongoing challenge for NCST workers. This was mirrored by ambivalence among Newark residents. One long-time resident offered her viewpoint, which was shared by many, *"I* want *to trust the cops but I don't know if I* can *trust the cops. There's a lot of bad history."* Another resident suggested, *"If they really start hiring people from the community – the way NCST does – things might change. But they are the cops. I won't trust them until they have some of us on their payroll."* A limited number of people expressed the desire to have law enforcement present on the streets. One resident stated, *"I think it's all hands-on deck. We can use NCST and we can use the cops. Why not get all the help we can!"* While another opined, *"Look if someone is breaking in my house or someone is*

attacking me, I gotta be honest, I want someone there with a badge and a gun. But I don't want them there if I'm fighting with my husband or my kids."

What was notable in the majority of responses was a sense of openness to change surrounding the relationship to law enforcement. While many individuals indicated that they struggled with completely trusting the NPD, most also shared that they felt more hopeful than they had in the past. In the words of one resident, *"I don't completely trust the cops yet but I feel better about them than I ever have in the past. I am hoping it will be better in the future."*

OVERARCHING THEME THREE: Added Value for Public Safety

THEME SEVEN: Over the decade of its existence, NCST has deeply extended its service provision and its identity, offering programs far beyond its beginnings in high risk intervention, with an additive impact on community-based public safety.

As is portrayed in the discussion of the NCST model in Chapter Four (The NCST Model), there are now nine additional service programs that have developed beyond the initial HRI and Outreach Worker efforts that grounded the organization's earliest days. The depth and extent of the current programs speak to NCST's responsiveness to community needs, with specificity in their purpose. Within the Newark community, community members were extremely supportive of all of NCST's up-to-date efforts. One young resident observed, *"Just when I think they're gonna run out of ways to help us and then they manage to find something new and offer it to us!"* There was a broad range of appreciation expressed, with individuals offering their opinions that, "*We need these programs, no one else is providing them," "I find myself wondering how we'd deal with these really serious problems like trauma or what to do when someone ODs if we didn't have NCST,"* and *"These people are so talented, there seems to be no end to what they are doing to help the community."* However, one individual did express reservations about *"How many hats NCST is wearing. I mean,*

can they really do everything?" Another resident asked, *"I know they're not getting money from the government. I know Trump took money away. So, are they going to have enough money to keep on going?"*

Residents and staff members alike expressed their appreciation for the programs that NCST offered but they also discussed their anxiety about the long-term stability of the organizations and the programs they offered. A staff member stated, *"I love what we're doing but I worry all the time if we can keep going."* Because NCST is authentically a community-based organization, in the words of one resident, *"It doesn't have government to fall back on. And sometimes I worry with everything they are saying about the crime rate going down – will they be okay? Or will people think the crime problem is solved? It scares me."*

Two relatively new programs were the focus of extensive community discussion: the Overdose Response Team (ORT) and the Community Sentinels Leadership Academy. The ORT, as previously described, deals with both immediate crisis intervention and supplying residents with Narcan Kits. *"No one really likes to talk about drugs and how much people struggle but this program is a godsend,"* one resident offered while another stated, *"Here is where NCST is literally saving lives."* There were no negative responses surrounding the ORT and its efforts. Similarly, the Community Sentinels Leadership Academy received overwhelming high marks from residents and staff alike. *"This is a program that really makes sure community members of all ages across the generations are involved with the work of NCST,"* one of the NCST staff involved with the program observed. Similarly, two residents expressed their deep appreciation and even their joy that such a program existed:

> *"I am so happy we have the Community Sentinels. This is a program that appeals to people in the community at every age you can imagine. You got people who are getting social security and kids who don't have their licenses yet. But we are all learning to take control of our own community and our own safety."*

"It's all in the name – it's the guardians of our neighborhoods and they are coming right from our community. These aren't people coming from the outside – these are people who grew up in Newark or who are growing up in Newark. This is just what we need!"

THEME EIGHT: NCST continues to extend its efforts as a resource for the formerly incarcerated.

This theme was an unexpected finding for the evaluation effort. It was not part of NCST's original intention or mission to provide reentry services for individuals who have been incarcerated. However, in an organic manner, NCST has evolved into both a work force center and a trauma recovery resource for individuals who are exiting jail or prison.

One of the most striking needs among individuals who are formerly incarcerated occurs due to the gap left by "halfway houses." Members of the evaluation team visited nearby halfway houses and observed and learned how deep their services failures are. *"The halfway houses fail us,"* one formerly incarcerated community resident explained. *"They claim they're rehabilitating you and that they'll help you. I don't see it, I've seen people come back to the same halfway house over and over again – and they don't help. In some cases, they make things worse."*

Individuals who had been incarcerated often first sought out NCST after being approached during Community Walks or because a resident had recommended it as a useful resource.

Observation, interviews, and focus groups all revealed that often the first NCST service sought by the formerly incarcerated was the Trauma Recovery Center (TRC). It was only after they sought these services that most individuals eventually expressed interest in being part of the High Risk Intervention (HRI) Team or other related services

such as the HVIP or the ORT. One formerly incarcerated individual emphatically stated,

> *"I want to have the impact out there that NCST has had on me."* Another talked about the effectiveness of NCST services, stating, *"It was obvious that I was having trouble and at that time I didn't know if anyone would accept me. NCST did and they gave me so much more than I ever expected."* A third individual, who had started to work on the HRI Team described how, *"It's a blessing to come to a job where they care about your mental well-being. They watch out for you – and they trust you. The message is, 'If you work here just come and go to work. We trust you.'"*

One of the women who worked at the TRC had formerly worked at a halfway house as a work release manager. She validated what the evaluation team had observed and what they were learning from interviews and focus groups:

> *Working at a halfway house showed me the way the system was set up, reintegration and rehabilitation was never the aspect of anything they were trying to do. They didn't understand how we're all in this together. At the end of the day, we're still individuals – just because one individual took a wrong step one day of their life – we need to see the before and after aspect of their lives. Nothing is set in stone. At NCST I've learned, if we believe in them, people will succeed.*

THEME NINE: NCST has developed a reputation as a learning organization, serving as a thought partner and a training site for several national initiatives.

During the ten years the UCLA research team has been involved in various evaluation efforts at NCST, it has evolved into a learning organization. One of the most dramatic examples of its efficacy in this role occurred during the 18-month White House Community Violence Intervention Collaborative (CVIC) initiative, which was spearheaded by the Biden Administration from 2021-2022. Throughout the CVIC

Initiative, representatives of CVI organizations in 16 jurisdictions and 17 cities across the United States traveled to Newark to participate in training offered by NCST. At that time, NCST emerged as a CVI model organization.

Over the past two years of the current evaluation, NCST has continued to host multiple visitors and teams from cities and jurisdictions across the United States. Most notably, community violence interventionists from Watts, California attended a training at the NCST offices on new strategies and approaches to developing challenges in different urban settings. Given that Watts was first studied as an example of a community-based strategy that could guide NCST, it was heartening to see, as one Watts interventionist described it, *"The student has now become the teacher."*

However, the emphasis on training is not limited to outside partners. Over the past two years, NCST has ensured that its staff participate in multiple in-service training efforts on varied topics – ranging from effective data collection to understanding cyber bullying and gang banging to updating community-based engagement. Staff development is a cornerstone of the work NCST engages in. *"I love being here because I'm always learning,"* one HRI told researchers during a depth interview. An Outreach Worker who had been part of the staff at the TRC was applying to an MSW program. *"It's because of this* [TRC] *program,"* she said, *"that I knew I wanted to learn more. This is what NCST does – it helps you to grow and to do things you never imagined."* Her experience was not unusual – people who are part of the staff are encouraged to pursue higher education. NCST has partnership programs with Rutgers University for staff who wish to earn a Baccalaureate Degree (B.A). Beyond that, both staff and residents are encouraged to pursue MSWs, MBAs, and MPPs.

OVERARCHING THEME FOUR: Trauma Awareness and Understanding Trauma

THEME TEN: NCST CONTINUES TO PLAY A MAJOR ROLE IN BOTH STAFF AND RESIDENTS BEING AWARE OF AND UNDERSTANDING TRAUMA AND SEEKING SERVICES TO AID IN HEALING, RECOVERY, AND RESOLUTION.

Alongside the emphasis on community ownership and relationships, one of the most striking findings to emerge from the qualitative data analysis was the preeminent role of trauma – being aware of it, understanding it, and treating it – in both the philosophy and practice among NCST staff and Newark residents. Throughout interviews and focus groups, the vast majority of individuals talked at length about how their awareness of trauma had expanded and how this knowledge and their engagement with services had changed their lives. *"I've learned so much about trauma and myself,"* one HVIP staff member offered, *"I've learned that when I'm hurting, I need to say it. I have to get things out in the open."*

Another staff member told researchers, *"When it comes to trauma, there is no single pathway to healing. Some of the folk want to see a therapist, others want the support system of NCST, and others want to work it through by serving the community."* One resident had been seeing a therapist twice a week for six years. When he talked about how much this had helped him dealing with the trauma he had suffered after two of his children were shot and died, a woman in the focus group said, *"I can't believe that!"* Immediately three community residents asked her why she was so judgmental – the focus group almost turned into a therapy group in front of the researchers. *"I'm not judging,"* the woman answered, *"I admire him – I don't know if I could do it. And I don't know if I could survive losing my children."*

During focus groups and interviews, NCST staff and residents spoke openly about how their understanding of trauma had positively affected their lives. A supervisor at

NCST explained that he had been working with NCST for six years. The entire time he had worked there, he had sought therapy and support to heal from his trauma, explaining, *"I had a son and I knew things had to be different for him. I was a perpetrator and also victim…but because of my son, I started changing. I wanted to heal. And now, more than anything, I'm in love with NCST."*

There was a small group of individuals out of all the staff and residents who participated in interviews and focus groups who expressed skepticism about *"all the emphasis on trauma."* Although they were clearly in a minority, this group all centered on the same point: that the work of NCST should not be concerned with trauma but instead it should focus on bringing crime down. *"Let the therapists and mental health people at the County do that work. NCST should use its funding to make the streets safe,"* one resident intoned, representing the content of this minority view.

Nevertheless, the majority of individuals were supportive and, in many cases, enthusiastic about the intertwining of CVI and healing from trauma. There was discussion about the educational aspect of the Community Sentinels Leadership Academy and how it helped youth. One resident remarked, *"It was very dope to see how the individuals come to each class – how they had conversations man-to-man and I think it's very important to give these young men their space to talk about their problems and their traumas. We need more programs that do that, not just for young men but also for young women."* There were also candid admissions from NCST staff with one HRI reporting, *"I know this sounds weird but my favorite part of working here is the trauma part – I didn't get to talk about a lot of stuff until NCST."* He was joined by a member of the ORT who offered, *"I got sober and then I learned how to process my trauma. I could handle my life and be a role model."* An Outreach Worker who oversaw the Community Walks described how she *"came to work at a vulnerable time in my life. I watched someone I love get killed right in front of me…this work saved me. And it helped me work through my trauma."* The openness with which staff and

residents alike described their own experiences and how NCST helped them both formally and informally to face their trauma and heal was striking. One resident who became an NCST Outreach Worker described the process and what it meant to them:

> *We're a form of God's work, in a good way. We're on a teeter totter, we show up at a place when you are at your lowest. We bring you in like family – we're a safety lever. Demons can fool you – they come in the form of beauty, so you let your guard down; but when you need them, angels come in the face of fearfulness. I feel like everyone here is an angel and they face their demons, they face their trauma.*

During focus groups, when individuals described losses and pain they had experienced, it was possible to actually see NCST in action – one person comforted another; groups were supportive even when their members disagreed. Still, several NCST staff members expressed concerned about residents who struggle with unrecognized trauma. One staff member summarized:

> *There's so much pain and trauma out there. Sometimes people don't understand how that leads to crime. We give out clothes and stuff, we go on the Community Walks, but people out in the community still don't even know about the Trauma Recovery Center. And I see the difference – people are able to talk about the trauma they've been through…parents and children are appreciating what has been done to help them heal."*

THEME ELEVEN: The demand for trauma-based and recovery services far outstrips what NCST is able to provide. Increasing these services is viewed as a key aspect of future public safety.

The majority of individuals who were interviewed or participated in focus groups expressed their concern that NCST would not be able to fulfill the demand for trauma recovery services. This finding was reinforced by ethnographic observation conducted during Community Walks when most individuals discussed two major

concerns with Outreach Workers: housing and the trauma they had experienced. There are community partners who provide trauma-based services in Newark but it appeared that none of these agencies had the same profile or relationships within specific neighborhoods, especially the South Ward. *"If I don't have a car,"* one resident explained, "*I'm gonna want services at a place I can walk to – that's NCST."*

Still, the residents and staff offered their opinions that *"it was just too much for NCST – there is more trauma than they can handle."* One staff member discussing their experiences shared their thoughts, saying, *"Some of this is just basic. We may not have enough space to see people and we may not have enough therapists. You need funding for all of that."* A resident described her fears that, *"NCST can't keep going at this level – I feel like they are trying to respond to everything. How much can one organization do?"* Another resident agreed, *"We are part of them but we are all a community that needs more funding. No one at NCST is living or working in the lap of luxury."* Although the focus group laughed at this last comment, at the same time their heads were nodding and one individual added, *"I think we're joking so we don't start crying."*

Despite these fears about the demand exceeding NCST capacity, staff members also expressed their concern about youth in Newark and the need for more youth-focused trauma recovery services. These remarks also included a focus on gender. One resident explained, *"I'm a woman – I can't raise a boy, I can't teach him how to be a man. That's what I look to NCST for – I need them. I've got three sons and they need male role models."* At the same time, another resident stated, *"You've got three sons and I've got three daughters. I want them to grow up to be strong young women but they've already had to deal with young men trying to force themselves on girls. What do we do about that?"* The sensitivity of both staff and residents and their attunement to youth issues was a marked part of interviews and focus groups. *"It's overwhelming*

sometimes," a staff member observed, *"When I think of what these mothers deal with. We've got some fathers too, but it's mainly mothers who are shouldering a lot of the family issues."*

It was apparent from all that occurred during observation, interviews, and focus groups that the concern for youth was paired with a concern for community trauma. One HRI explained NCST's shared belief that:

> *Trauma is not just an individual problem. We have a community that's experienced trauma. In the past, the streets of Newark have not been safe. Now they are safe, murder is down, violent crime is down but we all have that memory of what the streets were like. The trauma doesn't go away when the crime goes down – or even when the crime goes up. Trauma it's part of this community and we gotta always remember that.*

OVERARCHING THEME FIVE: The Need to Care for and Support Staff

THEME TWELVE: THERE WAS A CONSISTENT CONCERN OVER STAFF EXPOSURE TO TRAUMA AND THEIR NEED FOR SUPPORT, INCLUDING HEALING AND TRAUMA-BASED SERVICES.

"The staff needs help." These were words the researchers heard repeatedly during interviews and focus groups. The significance and urgency of these needs is recognized by both NCST staff and Newark residents. Staff was candid about their challenges as one remarked, *"We have our own issues. We have our own traumas. We need more support at different levels."* A resident observed, *"They do so much for us, we want to make sure they get the help they need."* Another staff member was very clear about the discrepancy between services available to the community and services available to staff:

> *It would make our job much better if we – the workers – had healing services. When I first started at NCST, there was the understanding that we are doing a thankless job. That has tendency to add trauma to what you're already*

experiencing. If you're handling case after case after case it takes a toll on you. I appreciate the healing modalities that are on the books but we need more. In the past we might had a day healing retreat and that was good – but we need something that's more weekly, even daily. And we need more healing modalities – your way of healing is not my way of healing. People heal on their own terms. We need different healing modalities for different people. A 17-year-old girl is not going to want the same healing services as me – a 31-year-old man who has been incarcerated.

It is also important to note that several staff members, including HRI and Outreach Workers shared how they struggled with being triggered when a resident or NCST client described traumatic experiences. *"My heart started beating because it was just like what I had gone through,"* one Outreach Worker recalled after a young woman described seeing a loved one get shot and killed. *"I reached out to the other staff and we talked – we really do support each other because we know what we're going through. But I still felt like I needed more."* This vignette and others like it underscored the need for trauma-related services and healing for staff.

One staff member, a professional with an MSW, discussed the need for more trauma related services for NCST staff during a depth interview. Her remarks offer an important pathway for the future, which informs the final chapter on recommendations. She observed:

This staff has some of the most devoted practitioners I've ever seen. But it's that old cliché of how on an airplane you need to put an oxygen mask on the mother before you put one on the baby. I'm often worried that that the staff here forgets their emotional oxygen mask – they just keep helping people in the community. And sometimes there's also the problem of the men on the staff – the HRIs and the HVIPs. They don't want to seem weak and needing therapy. But recognizing trauma and healing from it takes a lot of forms. I want to see NCST be more intentional about their staff. I know they're working on it now but there needs to be more of this on a regular basis in the future."

THEME THIRTEEN: THERE WAS CONSISTENT CONCERN OVER THE NEED FOR INCREASED FINANCIAL SUPPORT FOR STAFF, INCLUDING MORE EXTENSIVE BENEFITS AND FISCAL SECURITY.

It is important to note that this issue endures, not only in Newark but throughout the United States. From the 2020 evaluation conducted by UCLA onward, this has been a deep concern for NCST staff members, both past and present.

The NCST staff's deep concern about adequate and stable salary and benefits reflects a nationwide sentiment shared by community violence intervention workers – particularly those that work in violent high-risk environment. The low pay and the lack of benefits/low level of benefits often becomes as impactful as the trauma individuals in the field endure. The dual impact of emotional and financial stress results in some of the most talented individuals having to leave the CVI field. *"We need more money and more support,"* one staff member remarked. "*I love this work but I don't know how much longer I can afford it."* Another staff member stated, *"We also need more support from administrative staff. I gotta worry about the residents and I gotta work about my paperwork – sometimes it's too much."*

The significance and urgency of these needs is recognized both by NCST staff and residents. One long-term client told researchers, *"They need to support the workers. Well, we* all *need to support the workers."* The financial need staff experienced was a major arena of anger and concern that was mentioned in many interviews and focus groups alongside the emphasis on healing and *"the need for time to take care of yourself."*

There was also an unexpected tone to this finding. In interviews and focus groups, there were cross generational issues. Younger[121] generation staff members were

[121] In discussion that involved UCLA evaluators, NCST leadership and the Research Advisory Committee, it was determined that "Younger" would be defined as those below 30 years old and more experienced would be defined as those 30-49 years old. Community Elders would be defined as those 50 years or older.

more forceful in their demands. One younger HRI was vocal, *"We need health insurance. We need life insurance. You don't see City Hall people going without benefits. We're just as important as they are."* A more experienced HRI pushed back, saying, *"We don't just need more money. We need more bodies to work. We have to keep pushing. I really remember when NCST first started, we were crawling. Now we're walking and we're getting ready to run. But it takes time."* Another experienced worker who is now part of NCST leadership was clear that there was a strong need for financial equity with government workers and more established nonprofit organizations but also noted emotional concerns as he explained:

> *I do this work because it is all in my heart. The check helps – but it's important to remember our purpose, we are still doing what we have to do. There's always going to be someone of something trying to stop us – that includes paying the bills. I'm a fighter. We've always survived as a people because we adjust. Maybe we have to stop eating meat because it costs too much. Maybe we become vegetarians. You have to do what you have to do. The money might be a little tight, but we are part of this community. Ain't no stopping us, I'm going to continue to do what I do because I see a path down the line – we will be policing our communities. The day is coming soon when the big CBOs won't be getting the money. We will – you gotta be patient.*

Nevertheless, the issue of salary and benefits will continue to endure in the CVI community in general and at NCST in particular. It will be necessary to resolve this, particularly in light of the next group of themes.

OVERARCHING THEME SIX: Sustainability

THEME FOURTEEN: There is a profound need for consistent financial sustainability.

Throughout Newark, it is a well-known fact among residents, stakeholders, and staff members that NCST remains on precarious grounds financially. Several individuals who participated in interviews and focus groups were residents who were former

NCST staff members. These individuals had previously been laid off when funding was cut. Despite the fact that they temporarily lost employment and had to find other jobs, these individuals did not express any bitterness toward NCST. Instead, one explained, *"I know NCST wanted to go on paying me,"* and described how even though they eventually found other work, their belief in NCST and its importance to the community remained intact.

With four exceptions, every individual who participated in the qualitative data research expressed their concerns about NCST being sustained financially while adding that the organization should continue to grow. There was overwhelming community support for the growth of the organization in the future. One individual spoke honestly:

> *I get pissed off at certain things that happen at NCST, I don't agree with everything they do. And I don't hold back; I tell them what I am worried about – I'm not just an Interventionist, I live here in Newark, so I have a lot at stake. But no matter what, I am going to fight for NCST because I know what it is about. We are all here to stay and help Newark, no matter what age you are. I want there to be a lot of Miss Sharon's, the elders who help our community and our youth. That's why we need to have money – we should always be in the mayor's budget.*

The last comment was echoed by other residents and staff members. There was an ongoing reference to the city budget that was typified by comments surrounding law enforcement including, *"The cops are in the budget, why aren't we?"* and *"We do the same job as law enforcement, we keep the streets safe. We should be just as much a part of the mayor's budget as the police and all the city hall people."*

There were also questions about why there was no money coming from the State of New Jersey and hope expressed about the priorities of the new governor after the election. *"You know Newark is the biggest city in New Jersey,"* one resident began. *"If*

I'm the governor, I gotta make sure Newark is safe – and I am going to spend some state money, some attorney general money on that." Throughout interviews and focus groups, there was a strong demand that consistent public funding be dedicated to NCST. In the words of one staff member, *"NCST and community violence intervention should just be a line item no matter what."*

Many individuals observed that NCST's need for financial support alongside the community. *"Newark needs the money."* But as part of the ongoing concern about the future of both federal and state funding, there was anxiety about upcoming financial change. *"What happens when funding gets cut – what are they back-up plans?"* one resident asked while a staff member remarked, *"We are always the first to get cut."* Ultimately, while there was deep community commitment to NCST, there was little faith and a great deal of concern surrounding its financial future.

It is also important to examine the responses of the dissenting minority who felt that NCST needed to be accountable for what funding they did receive and allocate it properly. Their lack of funding was viewed as a matter of accounting and *"making sure the money is spent the right way."* One individual expressed skepticism about *"paying money to people who had been in prison, we don't know what they're doing with the money."* These viewpoints cannot be discounted; they may not be the majority but they do communicate thoughts and beliefs that residents and even policymakers may hold. For that reason, the practice of transparency, accountability, and evaluation will continue to be part of NCST organizational culture.

Still, the overall sentiment expressed by staff and residents is concern for and endorsement of increased and sustained funding for NCST. Even as financial considerations were discussed, individuals talked about their commitments. *"Of course, there has to be funding,"* one staff member intoned, *"You don't know the feeling I get by helping people every day. And I want to go on helping them. I wish I*

had enough money that I could do this for free. When I talk about making sure NCST has enough money, it's not just for me. This work needs to go on in the community, no matter what."

Theme Fifteen: The culture of accountability, research, and evaluation that NCST has established must be sustained.

As described earlier, NCST integrated research and evaluation into its organizational culture from its earliest beginnings. Since that time the organization has partnered with both east coast and west coast academic research centers at UCLA and Rutgers. Additionally, it has begun to establish data collection systems within its administrative structure. Throughout the course of this evaluation, NCST was also approached by Equal Justice USA (EJUSA) and the Scaling Safety Initiative to participate in large scale evaluation efforts. With all of these partnerships, NCST has maintained both its interests and its organizational integrity.

"It's part of what we do to be involved with research," one staff member explained. Another community resident who had been an Outreach Worker on the NCST staff added, *"What is great about the research that NCST does is that everyone knows about and talks about how important it is."* A staff member explained, *"We don't want to be part of research without anything coming back to us. We know that this helps with funding. And it shows people how important the work is. We need people across the country to understand what this means and how we do it."*

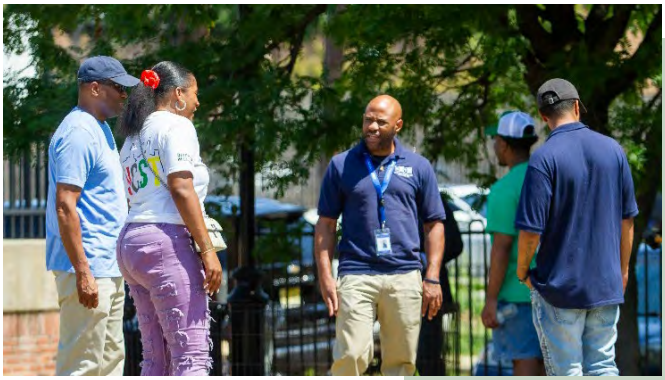
This positive attitude toward research, evaluation, and accountability does not come without boundaries. As one staff member recalled, *"Everyone wanted to study us and no one wanted us to have control over what they were doing."* With the assistance of the UCLA research team and two additional outside researchers, NCST established its own Institutional Review Board (IRB) in 2022. Staff members and residents serve on the NCST IRB and review all proposed research to ensure that there is neither

exploitation of residents nor violation of community norms. The NCST IRB does not provide a rubber stamp. In fact, as one HVIP staff member recalled:

> *A few years ago, a group of researchers wanted to come and interview people in the hospital while we were working with them. Everyone went nuts when they heard this idea. And the hospital was supporting the idea! The NCST IRB was really our protection – we want to make sure we are accountable and have good research but people can't take advantage.*

In terms of the UCLA research team, NCST has been both positive and has facilitated all research efforts. However, the key point of the culture of accountability and evaluation that has thrived in NCST was best expressed by one Outreach Worker who said, *"In the end we are accountable to the community. That's who evaluates us."*

In considering the findings from the qualitative data, there is a collateral finding to keep in mind that attests to the overall impact of the Newark Community Street Team: both NCST staff members and community residents wanted to talk about it. The evaluation team members observed that the desire to engage in informal discussions, interviews, and focus groups surrounding NCST – its model and its implementation – was high and sustained. NCST staff, residents, and community partners all expressed their interest, their thoughts, and for the vast majority, their deep identification with and commitment to NCST. This continues to be the true sign of an organization founded *in, by, and for* community.



Chapter Eight

NEWARK COMMUNITY STREET TEAM EVALUATION PROOF OF CONCEPT

The term "Proof of Concept" has been applied in many settings with multiple applications. It was first used in 1967 in an arena far from community violence intervention – as part of prototype testing in engineering and astronautics. However, the thinking behind this term has had application to multiple sectors, from filmmaking to software development. It has long been defined as the process of gathering evidence to demonstrate if a project or an intervention is feasible. However, in the realm of CVI, Proof of Concept is understood more broadly as the process of gathering evidence, in this case data, to prove the validity of a specific program or a series of interventions. It is this broad terminology that informed the UCLA evaluation of NCST.

In considering the findings from both quantitative and qualitative data described throughout this report, it is clear that for NCST, Proof of Concept has been achieved.

In determining Proof of Concept, the evaluation of NCST was designed to examine the impacts, outcomes, and challenges that have emerged over the last decade of experience with this authentically community-founded and based public safety organization. Over the course of the last two years, two teams of researchers from UCLA have deeply evaluated this model, using both quantitative and qualitative research methods to analyze crime data as well as study the viewpoints of NCST staff, Newark residents, and myriad community partners. The preliminary research

questions that guided the evaluation are discussed in Chapter Seven (Qualitative Research Findings). These questions have served as the "true north" of the evaluation for both quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis. It is clear that the combined efforts of NCST leadership and staff, the residents of Newark, the community partners, and the Public Safety Round Table have all coalesced to create a model that can be taken to scale to transform communities across America.

Ultimately, as the evaluation worked to rigorously and holistically assess the NCST model and its impact, it also aimed to create a blueprint for this model that could be taken to scale in other settings. The evaluation plan, detailed in Chapter Five (Overview of the Current NCST Evaluation), was established in collaboration with NCST. Over the 24-month study, the goal of the evaluation has been to assess whether the NCST model currently works and – if NCST is determined to be effective – how the key elements of this model affect the Newark community residents, particularly in the South and West Wards, where crime has always been concentrated.

By following the research plan, it was understood that the evaluation must first determine the overall program effectiveness of NCST, thus establishing then fortifying the Proof of Concept. Additionally, once the quantitative and qualitative research demonstrated the impact of the NCST model there was added value for the achievement of Proof of Concept, particularly centered on professionalizing and validating CVI.

In multiple settings, Proof of Concept has been used to professionalize an emerging field of work in systematic and consistent ways. It legitimizes the field's practice and provides it with authority, credibility, and intentionality. This is true for the field, practice, and practitioners of CVI. The adoption of standard operating procedures, a defined and intentional model of practice, and infrastructure to document and collect evidence all work together to formally validate the field of CVI as a necessary

collaborator in the national narrative pertaining to public safety. Additionally, historic funding of CVI at federal and state levels over the past five years has shepherded the opportunity for unprecedented professionalization of the field. Again, the achievement of a Proof of Concept is vital to the continuation of this work.

Achieving Proof of Concept: The Challenge to Research

Any meaningful Proof of Concept depends on recognized research methodology. Drawing upon comprehensive research on CVI evaluation methods and community-engaged research practices, this Proof of Concept addresses many of the fundamental data-related challenges facing CVI organizations: how to build data collection and data management systems that balance academic rigor with community knowledge, capture both incremental and/or personal progress and population-level change, and maintain the trust and privacy of participants while also maintaining accountability to funders.

Proof of Concept is neither automatic nor easy to come by. The crisis of measurement in the CVI field is exacerbated by numerous challenges. First and primary among them is the extent to which data collection methods are fragmented or disconnected, coupled with resource constraints. For example, physical (paper) data collection forms are sometimes still utilized for intake assessments, data from partnering organizations such as hospitals or schools might only be available in variable electronic formats, and the data entry necessary to align disparate systems of collection is time consuming and error prone. Organizations are chronically underfunded, and the primacy of direct practice needs repeatedly overshadows an organization's capacity to both implement and sustain data collection and data management efforts.

Second, despite interventionists and outreach workers possessing irreplaceable expertise about their communities, current evaluation practices often systematically

exclude their voices. For example, academic researchers frequently define neighborhood boundaries that do not reflect lived community experience. The complexity of replicating place-based interventions is challenging enough, but at the heart of CVI work is its emphasis on intentional, local adaptation to meet the specific needs of individual communities. This can create tension between evaluators, who focus on fidelity in implementation for purposes of both evaluation and replication, and organizations, who rightfully serve the needs of community first and foremost. And often, when community partners contribute extensively to evaluations, they rarely

The capacity-building, collective efficacy, and social capital-building that results from CVI work – which is truly grounded in and established by community – are difficult to operationalize, quantify, and attribute causality from programming, but nonetheless critical to document. CVI is challenging in that it is micro work focused on individual interactions, needs, and actions with the understanding that individuals comprise the community: the macro impact of collective change. Improving one variable (housing, employment, trauma recovery) for an individual then ripples through the family, the home, the block, the neighborhood, and beyond.

receive acknowledgement formally in authorship or otherwise. Researchers will counter that gift cards represent acknowledgement, but these fall far short of recognizing the invaluable contribution so many partners make.

Third, current evaluation approaches, coupled with competitive grant cycles, systemically privilege large-scale outcome measures. There is a corresponding need to document what is being undertaken and accomplished by CVI and its practitioners, because focusing merely on outcomes fails to capture the true depth of the work. The capacity-building, collective efficacy, and social capital-building that results from CVI work – which is truly grounded in and established by community – are difficult to operationalize, quantify, and attribute causality from programming, but nonetheless critical to document. CVI is challenging in that it is micro work focused on individual interactions, needs, and actions with the understanding that individuals comprise the community: the macro impact of collective change. Improving one variable (housing, employment, trauma recovery) for an individual then ripples through the family, the home, the block, the neighborhood, and beyond.

Recent reviews of current CVI programs and practices have revealed significant gaps that stand to undermine both effectiveness and sustainability of this model. A recent comprehensive review of 149 CVI evaluations found that 76.4% rely solely on deficit-based measures – tracking failures, such as recidivism, rather than successes.[122] In turn, only 38.9% combine both process and outcome measures, and despite 42.3% of evaluations involving CVI practitioners in some capacity, only 10.7% credit them as authors or co-authors, highlighting a profound disconnect between community expertise and formal knowledge production.[123] These patterns perpetuate harmful

[122] Girma, M., Schleimer, J., Aveledo, A., Mustafa, A., Rencken, C., Thurston, C., ... & Rowhani-Rahbar, A. (2025). Evaluating Community Violence Intervention Programs: A Scoping Review Synthesizing Methods and Measures. *INQUIRY: The Journal of Health Care Organization, Provision, and Financing*, *62*, 00469580251361742.
[123] Ibid.

narratives about communities experiencing violence while simultaneously failing to capture the full spectrum of CVI impacts or the overall philosophical principles of centering community in this work.

Application to NCST

An understanding of these research practices and the direct or inadvertent harm they may have caused informed every aspect of the UCLA research efforts that proceeded at NCST. The NCST evaluation was strengths-based, community-driven, and a continuation of the broad engagement and community ownership that has characterized NCST since its creation and establishment. In short, the UCLA research followed the philosophical approach and practice of NCST; the Proof of Concept was centered on the community and what it needs to address safety. The involvement of community alongside statistics and staff experience adds to the depth and validity of the evaluation process. This interrelationship is also clear in the logic model the research team developed.

The Proof of Concept Logic Model

Logic models attempt to bridge program planning and program evaluation by making the implicit explicit and the theoretical operational. The following logic model articulates NCST's transformative approach to CVI and provides direction for the scaling of their Proof of Concept to communities beyond Newark. By mapping the pathway from inputs through activities, outputs, outcomes, and ultimately to systemic impact, this framework operationalizes an ecosystem approach that addresses community violence through community healing. It thus serves as both an accountability tool and a roadmap for communities seeking to establish empirically validated, culturally grounded responses to violence, helping communities conceptualize and actualize their own definitions of public safety, health, and justice.

NCST Proof of Concept Logic Model

Establishing a research-validated Proof of Concept is dependent on the synthesis of NCST interventions and related activities with evaluation best practices. This synthesis guides the rigorous examination of internal quantitative data and crime statistics alongside qualitative data surrounding community perceptions and eco-system impact. The present logic model provides the road map for how the process of establishing and validating Proof of Concept was developed. It is critical to note that the logic model and the evaluation that followed was informed by collaboration with NCST staff and Newark community.

Resources / Inputs	Activities	Outputs	Outcomes	Impact
• CVI credibility and external expertise • Community engagement and support • Public-Private alignment (government, NPOs, coalitions) • Policymaker and elected officials' commitment • Community-based participatory research partners with eco-system knowledge • Committed funding • Compliance and accountability • National reputation and support	• Engaging TTA for professionalized CVI implementation • Community outreach • ID and hire local residents • MOUs with schools, hospitals, data sharing • Data collection and database expansion • Fundraising and strategic planning • Compilation of long-term, committed, and *diversified* funding (private, local, state, fed) • Create nonprofit entity with sustain-able infrastructure	• Locally adapted CVI model (responsive to local eco-system) • Holistic, wraparound, supportive services available to the community members • Delineated relationship with law enforcement • Eligibility for diverse funding • Transformative definition of public safety that centers community • Public education re: CVI • Community engagement through roundtable • Reliable data re: efficacy, operation, and decision making • Reliable data to document program changes • Ability to respond to change in community needs and public safety eco-system	• Effective community centered public safety • Crime Reduction • Community perceptions of safe, responsive eco-system • Public knowledge, support for CVI • Understanding of the drivers of crime (poverty, addiction, etc.) • Awareness of and ability to respond to trauma at the individual and community level • Effective interagency and inter org collaboration, resource sharing-complementary not duplicative	• Decrease in crime • Increase in markers of community well-being healthier communities • Resilient communities • Equitable opportunities • Increase in individual and community resilience • Transformation in public safety culture to center on public health • Transformation in the public safety eco-system to ensure community voice and participation is documented and elevated

As CVI moves from being recognized in urban pockets of implementation to being embraced as a nationwide movement, the need for rigorous evaluation and systematic data collection has never been more pressing. Contemporary CVI programs recognize that meaningful research and data collection must be community-led and culturally responsive, capturing not only violent crime statistics, but also the transformative work of violence interrupters, the nuanced patterns of conflict mediation, and the long-term trajectories of participants navigating trauma recovery. This research and data infrastructure must document the essential work performed by outreach workers whose interventions often occur outside of traditional service delivery settings and at all hours.

Moreover, robust data infrastructure including all aspects of data collection and data management will enable NCST and the CVI programs that take its model to scale to document outcomes beyond violence reduction that truly reflect the holistic nature of this work. This includes tracking improvements in mental health, employment stability, educational advancement, and critically, the community-building and social capital development that results from CVI work grounded in and established by communities. As noted by leading CVI researchers, the focus on violence reduction metrics alone fails to capture the intangible benefits of collective efficacy and community healing that effective CVI produces.[124,125,126]

Building this infrastructure requires sustained investment that has historically been absent from CVI funding streams. Programs need resources not only for data

[124] Hureau, D. M. (2023). Community violence interventions and the vulnerability of "the violent". *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, 120(51), e2318197120.
[125] Girma, M., Schleimer, J., Aveledo, A., Mustafa, A., Rencken, C., Thurston, C., ... & Rowhani-Rahbar, A. (2025). Evaluating Community Violence Intervention Programs: A Scoping Review Synthesizing Methods and Measures. INQUIRY: *The Journal of Health Care Organization, Provision, and Financing*, 62, 00469580251361742.
[126] Costa, J., Adrianzén McGrath, S., & Carrillo, P. (2025). Defining CVI: a critical review of current conceptualizations and their implications for policy, research and practice. INQUIRY: *The Journal of Health Care Organization, Provision, and Financing*, 62, 00469580251366146.

management systems but also for training staff in consistent documentation practices, protecting sensitive information about high-risk participants, and developing evaluation frameworks that honor both quantitative metrics demanded by funders and the qualitative narratives that capture the transformative power of community-led violence intervention. This dual approach – combining systematic quantitative tracking with qualitative documentation – provides the comprehensive evidence base necessary to secure continued investment and support the field's expansion to communities nationwide.

The Proof of Concept achieved at NCST offers a transformative approach to CVI infrastructure that centers community participation, employs both asset- and deficit-based measures, integrates real-time data collection capabilities, and maintains the highest standards of participant privacy and data security. Additionally, the infrastructure the logic model establishes will enable CVI organizations to track participant engagement across multiple touchpoints, monitor violence interruption activities in real-time, demonstrate cost-effectiveness to funders, and most critically, begin to uplift a more complete story of community healing and transformation. It has informed the work undertaken and completed in the evaluation of the Newark Community Street Team.

Chapter Nine

RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION

The evaluation and Proof of Concept serve as a meaningful record of what NCST has accomplished over the past decade. However, their work continues, much of it within a larger socio-political environment that poses new challenges in addition to the ongoing dynamic of community violence. With this in mind, it is essential to offer recommendations on what is required to retain NCST's effectiveness in the years ahead. The UCLA evaluation effort cannot end with a report. Instead, this 24-month endeavor was designed to lead to actionable recommendations for the improvement and sustainability of the Newark Community Street Team and for the safety and well-being of the city of Newark and its residents. On the basis of extensive evaluation findings, the following recommendations are offered.

1. The Newark Community Street Team should be identified as and recognized for its role as a national best practice.

Drawing upon both qualitative and quantitative methods and community-based research best practices, this evaluation has demonstrated the effectiveness of NCST. Labeling NCST – its programs and its philosophy – as a national best practice is the logical outcome of this completed research. Additionally, having successfully existed for ten years without any formal institutional connections (government, academic, or public agencies) speaks to the fact that this is an authentically community-supported public safety effort and an effective model for CVI nationally.

2. A systematic program of trauma-based self-care and healing must be developed, implemented, and prioritized for all NCST staff members; this can be modeled on the success of NCST's Trauma Recovery Center.

Both residents and staff members expressed deep concern about the trauma staff members have experienced in their personal lives, as well as the trauma they are continually exposed to as they fulfill their professional roles. While staff applauded efforts that had been made on their behalf in the past, it was also clear that a regular program of diverse healing practices needed to be instituted. Based on this, it is recommended that NCST pursue multiple strategies to address trauma experienced by staff. Suggestions include a monthly standing meeting that involves all NCST staff focused solely on their trauma concerns. This monthly meeting should be augmented by additional smaller meetings for specific staff groups (e.g., a meeting for Outreach Workers, a separate meeting for HRIs). There should also be an annual assessment of the effectiveness of these efforts on the part of NCST leadership with feedback from staff members.

3. Financial sustainability represents a crucial challenge for NCST as an organization.

Nationally, CVI faces serious funding challenges. Despite this, NCST must confront what has continued to be a problem – sustained funding. It is critical to note that NCST has consistently pursued funding – both public and private – and has never taken its financial position for granted. Before this evaluation was underway, the organization received two major CVIPI grants from the federal government that were subsequently cancelled without warning early in the Trump administration. Recovery from those abrupt financial losses has been painful. Previous evaluations have recommended that there be dedicated state funding as described in Recommendation Four that follows. Additionally, NCST must continue to pursue private and philanthropic sources of support. It is hoped that this evaluation and other related research can be used to support such efforts.

4. As an organization with programs and strategies that have repeatedly been found effective, there must be multi-year dedicated funding in the city and/or state budget to support NCST.

This recommendation was first offered in the UCLA Narrative Evaluation completed in 2020. So far, it has not seen fruition. It is repeated here with an even greater degree of emphasis and credibility, given the current evaluation findings. Because municipal agencies, stakeholders, and communities benefit from the work of NCST and involved residents, this effort requires and merits multi-year direct support through local, state, and federal government institutions. It is once again recommended that the City of Newark and/or the State of New Jersey create a line-item in its public safety budget to support the efforts of NCST. Such a budget allocation would inoculate the organization against the instability of federal government grants described above. Accountability can be ensured with evaluation efforts throughout the funding period. An outside evaluator could conduct both a process evaluation and then a final outcome evaluation to ensure this public funding was correctly allocated and effectively implemented.

5. The Public Safety Round Table must continue to function with its convenings expanded.

This evaluation research has pointed to the ongoing significance of the Public Safety Round Table (PSRT) in NCST's execution of its mission and strategy. The PSRT meetings are a meaningful forum for residents, stakeholders, community partners, and law enforcement to meet, communicate and even mediate conflicts on a regular basis. However, in a change instituted during the COVID-19 pandemic, the PSRT began meeting online using Zoom and this practice has remained in place. While online meetings should continue as they ensure inclusivity, it is recommended that these should be supplemented with in-person gatherings at regular intervals – possibly twice a year or every quarter. During informal conversations, many residents supported this idea which would require advance planning and input but would further reinforce the relationships that already exist.

6. NCST must engage in focused leadership development and succession planning.

The evaluation revealed that NCST currently has highly effective senior leadership. However, it is critical to ensure that there is an integrated and institutionalized effort at developing future senior leadership. Additionally, there must be ongoing identification of future leaders from among involved community residents and current staff. This undertaking must also include both training and higher education as outlined in Recommendation Seven.

7. All NCST staff, as well as involved residents, should have access to professional development and higher education, including subsidized funding from NCST and its community partners.

Alongside the issue of financial sustainability, human sustainability is integral to the future of NCST. With this in mind, NCST should continue to build and extend the partnerships it has initiated with community colleges, four-year colleges, and universities to offer certification and degree programs to staff and highly engaged community residents. Additionally, these same partnerships can be drawn upon to engage current staff and future NCST leaders in courses and additional learning options. The issue of financial support for these individuals should also be pursued with the institutions of higher learning and stakeholders with the financial means to contribute or subsidize.

8. Data collection needs to be strengthened and standardized.

While it has improved, there are still troubling inconsistencies in NCST's data collection procedures. This evaluation measured the impact of NCST's interventions on crime. The evaluation compared the number, type, and locations of NCST's interventions with the crime data obtained from the NPD. The police crime data was aggregated by police sectors – small geographic areas used by NPD to track crime trends at the neighborhood level. Because NCST's intervention data is aggregated by Ward, which are larger geographic areas than police sectors, it was not possible to compare

them in an "apples-to-apples" fashion. It was therefore necessary to redistribute the crime data to show both the sector and the Ward in which it occurred. While this produced data that validated NCST's positive impact on crime at a macro level, it was not possible to determine impact on a neighborhood level. To more accurately depict the impact NCST's interventions have on crime at the neighborhood level, it is recommended that NCST develop a system to track its interventions specifically by police sector.

9. There should be an increasing focus on youth programming.

Both formally and informally, there was interest in greater expansion of NCST services for youth. As part of this, offering separate gender-specific programming for boys and young men as well as girls and young women is integral to the future of NCST. The Community Sentinels Leadership Academy serves as an excellent foundation and trusted springboard for future youth engagement efforts. Additionally, public and private partnerships to foster year-round youth job development must be created and implemented. Alongside these efforts, NCST (youth) mentoring must continue to expand and be strengthened.

10. The culture of learning and NCST's identity as a learning organization must be sustained.

As noted in previous recommendations, it is critical to maintain the learning environment that has characterized the development of NCST. It is just as essential for NCST to both recognize and build upon its identity as a national thought partner and training provider. As NCST continues to evolve, it must document the training it provides and develop formal published curriculum that offers a guide for how to replicate this best practice in other settings. This curriculum could potentially be a source of revenue for the organization.

CONCLUSION

This UCLA evaluation represents a major step in validating the effectiveness of the Newark Community Street Team. Over the past two years, as this evaluation demonstrates, NCST has decreased violent crime, deepened community trust and engagement, and built both organizational and community capacity. There are still important steps to be taken in the future, centering on financial sustainability, trauma-related care and healing for staff, and the further development of data collection and research. Still, it is necessary to pause and note that NCST's greatest achievement has been its ability to engage residents and imbue them with a sense of agency in the safety and the future of their community. All of the individuals who participated in interviews, focus groups, and ethnographic participant observation have repeatedly expressed deep feelings of gratitude for the transformation they have been part of. As one community member succinctly and accurately expressed, ***"When I see this work, I see us."***

It is necessary to pause and note that NCST's greatest achievement has been its ability to engage residents and imbue them with a sense of agency in the safety and the future of their community.

Appendices

Appendix A
Year 1 Mid-Study Memo

UCLA Luskin School of Public Affairs

To: The Community Based Public Safety Collective Leadership Team
From: UCLA Social Justice Research Partnership
Subject: Mid-Study Memo: Year 1
Date: November 2024

The Newark Community Street Team (NCST) place-based violence intervention strategy has been acknowledged as a highly innovative approach to community violence intervention and prevention. It has received media attention over the past five years, with corresponding growing interest in its efforts. Its multi-faceted programs have been so successful that communities and municipalities around the country travel to Newark to participate in training to learn about the NCST model, which is credited with directly contributing to the double-digit reduction of homicides, shootings, and violent crime in Newark, driving the city to a 60-year low in rates of violence. Alongside its effective program implementation, NCST has included research and evaluation as part of its practice since the organization's inception.[1]

At the mid-project point in the multi-year UCLA Social Justice Research Partnership (SJRP) rigorous study of NCST, the evaluation team has made significant progress toward the outcomes identified in our original proposal. To understand what has occurred over the past 11 months, this memo will memorialize the study design, discuss the quantitative study and qualitative study progress, describe preliminary themes and findings, and outline proposed study adjustments.

STUDY DESIGN

The NCST evaluation study was designed as a mixed methods evaluation. Neither quantitative nor qualitative methodology was comprehensive enough to measure program and organizational effectiveness. However, the combination of both methodological approaches was essential in

[1] https://www.newarkcommunitystreetteam.org/2021/02/10/newark-community-street-team-narrative-evaluation/

understanding how NCST functioned and the extent and degree of its impact. Additionally, the research study design has been consistently and intentionally grounded in community, beginning with community approval of the study design itself. Before discussing the methodological specifics, it is critical to note that the UCLA team conducted an extensive planning effort that was centered in the Newark community as well as in the NCST organization. This involved three separate and integrated strategies. First, the study design and protocol[2] drafts were presented to the NCST leadership team and to other staff members, including High Risk Intervention workers, Safe Passages workers, and Community Sentinels. Their feedback was sought and incorporated into design revision, particularly regarding crime statistics and how to engage in effective quantitative comparison between areas being served by NCST and those that received no intervention. Second, with input from NCST, the UCLA team completed extensive outreach, identified and received the cooperation of six selected and highly engaged community residents and stakeholders who possess deep knowledge of the work of NCST and of the Newark community. We developed a brief overview of Advisory Board commitments and responsibilities then secured agreement from all six participants. These individuals have already met one time with ongoing meetings scheduled for the remainder of the study. During the initial meeting, the group discussed the evaluation and its implementation, with a particular focus on participant observation, depth interviews, and focus groups. There have been follow-up phone calls and virtual meetings with different group members to fine tune research instruments. Most significantly, the Community Advisory Group has emphasized the need to build trust within the different Newark wards served by the NCST before any questions could or should be asked. As one Advisory Group member told us, *"Don't go out there with questionnaires until folk know who you are. Let them see your faces first."* Third, through virtual technology, the research team has been able to continually participate in the Newark Public Safety Roundtable (PSR), presenting and discussing different aspects of the evaluation research as it has unfolded. The PSR has proven to be an invaluable source of both information and support in shaping evaluation methodology. With the mixed methods approach, the involvement of NCST staff, alongside community residents and stakeholders, has been – and continues to be – integral to our efforts.

[2] All protocols can be found in the appendix.

Additionally, over the first half of the evaluation, members of the research team have traveled to Newark multiple times, meeting with NCST staff to determine baseline measurements, identifying what data should be collected by the organization, understanding what data would be accessible through outside organizations, and considering what categories of information would potentially guide data analysis. In addition, these trips have provided the opportunity to meet both individually and in groups with NCST staff, community residents, and stakeholders and – as advised – *"to let your faces be seen."* All these efforts were augmented with informal observation and the onset of the collection of ethnographic data. The research team, NCST, and residents agreed, there was simply no way to adequately capture the impact of NCST without integrating both quantitative and qualitative methodologies and ensuring that the evaluation team has "boots on the ground."

Community residents and stakeholders were enthused and provided critical information about what the evaluation team should include in any type of research approaches and instruments that will be developed. They also stressed the need for updates "*in real time.*" As one long-time resident who has been deeply involved in the work of NCST told researchers, "*You gotta tell the whole story. We are the ones who drove down the violence – all of us, not the police – you gotta tell that story.*"

Quantitative Data

In the initial research efforts, the evaluation team has downloaded crime data from the Newark Police Department for nine specific crimes/incidents covering the period January 2022 to June 2024. These crimes comprised the following categories:

- Shots Fired
- Theft from Vehicle
- Theft
- Robbery
- Rape
- Homicide (murder)
- Burglary
- Auto theft
- Aggravated Assault

This data was then geolocated to the specific police sector (there are 35 police sectors in the City of Newark) in which it occurred and distributed by month over the aforementioned time period. The research team then began a detailed analysis of crime looking for "peaks and valley" trends. While this analysis was underway, the evaluation team developed a tool that NCST could use to upload the number and type(s) of interventions implemented over the same time period for each of the police sectors. Although this database is not yet complete, when it is completed, it will allow the research team to draw meaningful, evidence-based conclusions which focus on how NCST strategies and programs are impacting crime and community quality-of-life issues throughout Newark. It will also enable the research team to compare police sectors that are the site of concentrated NCST efforts with those that are not. This type of comparative data analysis also adds to the evidence base surrounding NCST program effectiveness.

All quantitative data collection plans were submitted to the UCLA Institutional Review Board (IRB). The UCLA IRB ensures that all research conducted is ethical and consistent with the highest standards of scholarly endeavor. Its principal goal is to ensure the rights and safety of all individuals involved in data collection. This approval was obtained prior to the beginning of any formal data collection. However, it must be noted that the UCLA team faced an unanticipated challenge when the UCLA IRB system was shut down, completely re-organized, then launched with an all new format. This caused considerable delays in the research request and approval process of both quantitative and qualitative data collection. Nevertheless, the SJRP evaluation plan was met with approval and we continue to maintain a productive relationship with the IRB, with gratitude for their protection of our research subjects and the evaluation endeavor.

Qualitative Data

In drawing upon the mixed methods approach to evaluating the work of NCST, the evaluation team worked to develop and ultimately present both meaningful statistics and community-based narratives to examine the effectiveness of its programs and practices. During this first year of planning and initial evaluation engagement, the research team met in person multiple times with community residents and stakeholders. The research team held three focus groups and also conducted depth interviews with individuals to understand what questions they sought to answer and how to best assess the impact of NCST upon the safety and wellness of communities

throughout Newark. During this time period, as described above, the research team conducted ongoing ethnographic observation and attended the bi-monthly meetings of the Newark Public Safety Roundtable (PSR), engaging in participant observation and collecting field notes that were then subjected to preliminary coding and analysis. These ethnographic efforts and participant observation will be ongoing throughout the remainder of the evaluation period.

During the planning period and with input from the community, the SJRP evaluation team created interview and focus group protocols. These protocols went through a substantive review process involving the NCST Leadership team and staff, the Community Advisory Group, and the Public Safety Roundtable. Consistent with quantitative data collection, the qualitative data collection protocols, which were also submitted to the UCLA Institutional Review Board for approval; these protocols are attached at the end of this memo. In addition to the three focus groups noted above, the UCLA evaluation team has also conducted ten preliminary depth interviews to better understand community sentiment toward NCST and public safety. This initial data collection effort also enabled researchers to obtain further input on the research process, which guided the administration of both interview and focus group protocols.

PRELIMINARY THEMES AND FINDINGS

The UCLA SJRP evaluation team has made considerable progress in identifying themes and findings that relate directly to the research questions and outcomes identified in the original proposal and scope of work. The research effort has centered on initial depth interviews and focus groups with Newark residents and stakeholders to elicit community perceptions of and sentiments toward NCST and its work in multiple Newark wards. Additionally, interviews and focus groups have probed resident and stakeholder attitudes toward community safety and well-being.

Overall positive reaction to NCST High Risk Intervention Teams
Desire for increased NCST presence
Increased agency and ownership surrounding public safety

Findings from the initial interviews and focus groups have provided substantive data that has been coded and analyzed. These data have proven invaluable in helping the evaluation team understand and contextualize community response to NCST. As the three themes above indicate, residents as well as stakeholders express a uniformly positive response to the work of NCST. Repeatedly the SJRP team was told, *"I finally feel safe," "I feel there is someone I can call,"* and sentiments similar to these. Residents in particular voice their desire for an increased NCST presence in their streets and at their schools, noting the meaningful work of the High Rist Intervention Teams, the Safe Passages workers, and the Community Sentinels. But what was unexpected in these early findings was how many research participants offered their experiences surrounding agency – taking ownership for ensuring safety efforts in their neighborhoods. This was probably best voiced by one long-time Newark resident, a retired schoolteacher who explained: *"We were used to things being done to us. Finally, we are doing it – we are leading public safety. It's not the police keeping us safe, it's us, the community, all together."*

The Public Safety Roundtable is meaningful, even to those who do not consistently participate
Relationship with law enforcement remains inconsistent, evoking hope alongside skepticism

These two themes emerged from both interview and focus group discussion surrounding trust. The SJRP team uncovered slowly evolving feelings of trust toward law enforcement which was attributed to the work of the Public Safe Roundtable. Still, due to past history, the community-law enforcement relationship continued to be ambivalent. As one resident observed, *"I'm not worried about the cops who come to the Roundtable. They're the good ones. But what about the others? We've had a lot of abuse in this community...we'll see."*

Professionalization of community violence intervention

One of the unexpected themes that was discovered during the evaluation effort was both resident and stakeholder assessment of NCST workers. *"They are incredibly professional,"* one resident offered while a nonprofit stakeholder reported, *"I really doubted the workers in the beginning – I thought they can't possibly deal with all the*

problems and the trauma. But their training is incredible. And they can deal with it." There was extensive commentary about how respectful, professional, and well-informed NCST staff continued to be. One elderly resident remarked, *"They should train the police."*

Crime Statistics

The quantitative section of the NCST evaluation has not yet yielded consistent reportable outcomes. However, there is one trend that has clearly emerged from a preliminary review and analysis of available crime statistics: violent crime in the areas served systematically by NCST remains low and continues to decrease incrementally. The SJRP team will continue refining the collection and analysis of quantitative measures, as will be described in the next section of this memo.

PROPOSED STUDY ADJUSTMENTS

As noted above, in the section on crime statistics, the quantitative data has posed the greatest challenge to the UCLA SJRP team. Data Collection has had to be refined over the past six months because the quality of NCST data was not consistent. The UCLA team is assisting with collecting and improving this quantitative data. Additionally, NCST is woefully understaffed in terms of their database management. This is not surprising, nor is it problematic in terms of the evaluation study. However, it will be part of the study recommendations – that NCST should pursue and receive funding dedicated specifically to the collection and management of all data.

Additionally, the Newark Police Department (NPD) data is incomplete. Because of these challenges, the evaluation team has been continuously refining data collection directly related to NPD crime statistics and NCST intervention and service statistics. This is not simply a matter of monitoring if crime rates are increasing or decreasing. The SJRP team is committed to accurately reflecting community needs and responses around public safety. Along with these concerns, the study team continues to be engaged in cleaning and analyzing police sector data which often do not rigorously follow the boundaries of specific wards in Newark. It is our

intention that cleaning the data will lead to analysis and findings that prove applicable and actionable.

There is an additional potential revision in the evaluation plan related to the quantitative data. Ensuring appropriate identification of comparison sites is integral to effective evaluation. The SJRP team has worked to identify comparison sites in Newark. However, it may be necessary to add comparison sites outside of Newark. Again, this is dependent on external crime data which has not been forthcoming. One potential comparison site, the city of Irvington, New Jersey, is being explored as a possible comparison site but the status of its crime statistics is unclear.

Finally, NCST and its community violence intervention efforts must be understood within the context of limited resources, which may diminish further given recent national electoral events. It is clear that more funding is needed. This will not affect the current evaluation efforts. In fact, as the evaluation team collects qualitative data from the community, it is important to note that we are committed to compensating all of the community members who participate in the evaluation, beginning with the Community Advisory Board and extending to all of the individuals who participate in interviews and focus groups. What we as researchers have observed over time is the profound need to financially support all of the individuals who play a consistent role in community-strengthening efforts (e.g., Community Sentinels, the Public Safety Roundtable) and who do so on a completely voluntary basis. Newark residents and stakeholders stand at the center of public safety efforts and should be recognized for their effort, experience and expertise.

The first year of planning and research implementation has been exciting and rewarding. What is most significant is the involvement of the Newark community in this effort. From its inception, the NCST model has emphasized the role of residents and stakeholders in all of its efforts. Even in preliminary research findings, both quantitative and ethnographic/qualitative, this has proven to be very much the case.

Over the next half of the evaluation, the research team will focus on quantitative and qualitative data collection, with its work culminating in a report including both findings and recommendations regarding the effectiveness of this model and its meaning for other settings.

Appendix B
Interview Protocols

Interview Protocol *NCST Evaluation*

Consent & Introduction

In this project we are interested in examining the work of the Newark Community Street Team (NCST) and drawing upon the perspectives and experiences of community residents, stakeholders and individuals who have been impacted by NCST's work in the community. We are focused on the experiences that relate to how NCST has contributed to the reduction of crime and the community perspective of NCST.

I have a list of prepared questions to ask you. At times, I will ask you to say more about something or to clarify or expand your answers. As a reminder, your participation in this interview is completely voluntary -- if at any time you feel uncomfortable with a question, you can tell me to skip it, or if you would like to withdraw completely from the study, that is okay too.

Finally, you may remember from the consent form that, if it's okay with you, I would like to audio record this interview. The reason for that is so that I can focus on what you're saying without trying to write it all down. Later, research staff will create a transcript of the interview. The transcript will be reviewed, and anything that may identify you -- such as names or locations -- will be deleted or replaced with non-specific information. This might be something like inserting "John Doe" for a person's name. In written reports from this project, we will never identify you as a participant or provide any information that allows other people to figure out you took part in the study. So, is it okay with you if I audio record the interview?

If participant says no: No problem at all. I will take notes during our conversation to help me remember what you said. Do you have any questions before we begin the interview?

If participant says yes: thank you, do you have any questions before we begin, and I start the recording?

If participant agreed begin recording
This is [name] interviewing participant [code] on [date]

Background

1. I'd like to begin by learning a bit more about you. Could you please provide me with your background in Newark?
Prompt: Please tell me where you have lived in Newark and how long?
Prompt: Please tell me where you went to school in Newark?
Prompt: Please tell me how long you have worked in Newark?
Prompt: What is your role in the community?

Great! I'd like to take some time now to talk about the Newark Community Street Team in general. Just as a reminder your responses will be kept confidential and there are no right or wrong answers

The Newark Community Street Team

1. How did you learn about the Newark Community Street Team?
Prompt: What do you think of the NCST?
Prompt: What has your relationship with NCST been and how has it developed?

2. What do you understand to be the main goals and objectives of the Newark Community Street Team?

3. How well do you think these goals and objectives are being met?

A. *Follow-up:* What do you think have been the main barriers to achieving these goals and objectives?
B. *Follow-up:* What do you think have been the main support and encouragements to achieving these goals and objectives?

Thanks for sharing all of that with me! I'd like to focus a bit more on your community.

The Community

1. Has living in your community changed with the implementation and work of the Newark Community Street Team?
Prompt: How has it changed?

A. *Follow-up(if participant reports something positive):* Have you noticed any negative impacts from the implementation of the NCST?
B. *Follow-up(if participant reports something negative):* Have you noticed any positive impacts from the implementation of the NCST?

2. I'm particularly interested in your experiences with collaborations with the NCST and other partners in your community? Can you describe ways in which you collaborate with NCST?
Prompt: What are things that contribute to a successful collaboration?
Prompt: What have been the challenges to successful collaborations?
Prompt: Can you give me an example?

3. What do you perceive to be community residents' feelings about the NCST?

A. *Follow-up (if participant reports something positive):* Have you observed any negative responses to the NCST? What have these been?
B. *Follow-up (if participant reports something negative):* Have you observed any positive responses to the NCST? What have these been?

4. What are residents' perceptions and beliefs about the NCST in the future?
Prompt: Are they hopeful? Mistrustful? Pessimistic?

Prompt: Do residents have specific goals in mind for the community's relationship with the NCST? What are these goals?
Prompt: Do residents have specific concerns about the NCST? What are these concerns

5. How do you think NCST is impacting crime and violence in Newark?
Prompt: Violent crimes, property crimes, gang activity
Prompt: Please describe what ward you live in and how NCST is impacting crime and violence?

6. How do you think NCST is contributing to the overall health of [community]?
Prompts: Public round tables, safe passage, less violence.

Thank you for everything you have shared with me! I really appreciate your honesty and you taking the time to talk with me. I just have a few wrap-up questions before we finish up the interview.

Conclusion

1. Is there anything you think we should have talked about regarding your experiences with the NCST?
Prompt: Were there other questions you were expecting me to ask?

2. Do you have any suggestions for what the NCST program can do better?

3. Is there anything else you'd like to say about the Newark Community Street Team?

Debrief

Thank you again for taking the time to participate in this interview. I'd like to take a couple of minutes to tell you a little more about the purpose of this study.

The reason we are doing these interviews is to try to determine the effectiveness of the Newark Community Street Team. Your participation will be very helpful for this project and we hope that the results will help to inform the overall evaluation of NCST. Just as a reminder, all of your responses will always be kept completely confidential and they will never be linked with your name or any other identifying information.

**********STOP RECORDING NOW**********

Compensation

As you know, you will be receiving a $20 gift card to thank you for taking part in this interview.
Provide participant with the gift card after being sure you noted the gift card code associated with this participant.

Consent & Introduction

In this project we are interested in examining the Newark Community Street Team and drawing upon the perspectives and experiences of community residents and NCST staff. We are focused on the experiences that relate to how the NCST has contributed to the reduction of crime and the building of community trust.

I have a list of prepared questions to ask you. At times, I will ask you to say more about something or to clarify or expand your answers. As a reminder, your participation in this interview is completely voluntary -- if at any time you feel uncomfortable with a question, you can tell me to skip it, or if you would like to withdraw completely from the study, that is okay too.

Finally, you may remember from the consent form that, if it's okay with you, I would like to audio record this interview. The reason for that is so that I can focus on what you're saying without trying to write it all down. Later, research staff will create a transcript of the interview. The transcript will be reviewed, and anything that may identify you -- such as names or locations -- will be deleted or replaced with non-specific information. This might be something like inserting "John Doe" for a person's name. In written reports from this project, we will never identify you as a participant or provide any information that allows other people to figure out you took part in the study. So, is it okay with you if I audio record the interview?
If participant says no: No problem at all. I will take notes during our conversation to help me remember what you said. Do you have any questions before we begin the interview?

If participant says yes: thank you, do you have any questions before we begin, and I start the recording?

If participant agreed begin recording
This is [name] interviewing participant [code] on [date]

Background

1. I'd like to begin by learning a bit more about you. Could you please provide me with your background, before your work with NCST and during your time on staff?
Prompt: What made you interested in a career in community violence intervention?
Prompt: How long have you been with the NCST?
Prompt: Where have you worked in the past?
Prompt: Why did you decide to become part of the NCST?
Prompt: Have you had any past experience with the community you are working in now?
Prompt: What was the process of becoming part of NCST staff like?

Thank you for sharing that with me! I'd like to shift now to talking a bit more about the Newark Community Street Team. Just as a reminder your responses will be kept confidential and there are no right or wrong answers.

The Newark Community Street Team

1. What do you understand to be the main goals and objectives of the Newark Community Street Team?

2. How well do you think these goals and objectives are being met?

Prompt: How effectively are these goals and objectives being achieved?

A. ***Follow-up:*** **What do you think have been the main barriers to achieving these goals and objectives?**
B. ***Follow-up:*** **What do you think have been the main facilitators to achieving these goals and objectives?**

Great! I'd like to focus in a bit more on the community where you work.

3. What was your NCST training like?

Prompt: How was it different from any other training or education you have completed?

4. What has your own experience been as a part of the NCST in Newark?

Prompt: What are your interactions with community residents like?

Prompt: How has being part of the NCST been different from your previous experiences working or being part of the community?

A. ***Follow-up (if participant reports something positive):*** **Have you had any negative experiences since you started working for NCST? Can you tell me about them?**
B. ***Follow-up (if participant reports something negative):*** **Have you had any positive experiences working for NCST? Can you tell me about them?**

5. What are some activities you are engaging in now, as part of the NCST staff, that you didn't engage in before your involvement with NCST?

Prompt: For example, if you were a resident or part of community outreach, did you engage in the same kind of community events?

The Community

1. I'm particularly interested in your experiences with collaborations within the community. How is that going?

Prompt: What were some of the initial collaborations like? How have they changed?

Prompt: What are some examples of successful collaborations?

1. *What made them successful?*
2. *What were some of the challenges?*

Prompt: What are some examples of collaborations that didn't work?

1. *What prevented them from working?*
2. *What do you think would have made them successful?*

2. What is the role of community leaders in NCST collaborations?

Prompt: Can you please tell me about some examples of community-based leadership?

Prompt: How have you seen community-based leadership change?

3. What do you perceive to be community residents' feelings about the Newark Community Street Team?

A. ***Follow-up (if participant reports something positive):*** **Over time, have you observed any negative responses to the NCST? What were those?**
B. ***Follow-up (if participant reports something negative):*** **Over time, have you observed any positive responses to the NCST? What were those?**

4. As part of the NCST staff, how do community residents react to you?
Prompt: How does it is now compared to when you first started?
Prompt: How is it different with different groups of people within the community (e.g., children vs. teenagers vs. adults)?

5. How do you think the NCST is impacting crime and violence in [community]?
Prompt: Violent crimes, property crimes, gang activity

6. How do you think NCST is contributing to the overall health of [community]?
Prompt: After school positive activities, staying in/going to school, safe passage

Thank you for everything you have shared with me! I really appreciate your honesty and you taking the time to talk with me. I just have a few wrap-up questions before we finish up the interview.

Conclusion

1. Is there anything you think we should have talked about regarding your experiences with the Newark Community Street Team?
Prompt: Were there other questions you were expecting me to ask?

2. Do you have any suggestions for what the NCST programs can do better?

3. Is there anything else you'd like to say about the Newark Community Street Team?

Debrief

Thank you again for taking the time to participate in this interview. I'd like to take a couple of minutes to tell you a little more about the purpose of this study.

The reason we are doing these interviews is to try to determine the effectiveness of the Newark Community Street Team. Your participation will be very helpful for this project and we hope that the results will help to inform NCST policies and practices. Just as a reminder, all of your responses will always be kept completely confidential and they will never be linked with your name or any other identifying information.

Appendix C
Focus Group Protocol

Resident Focus Group Protocol *NCST Evaluation*

Consent & Introduction

In this project we are interested in examining the Newark Community Street Team and bringing together the perspectives and experiences of community residents and NCST staff. We are particularly interested in your experiences and how these relate to effective or ineffective reduction in crime and the building of community safety and trust.

I have a list of prepared questions to ask you all. At times, I will ask you all to say more about something or to clarify or expand your answers. At other times I may ask that we move to the next question to respect everyone's time and stay on schedule. Also, I will be taking a few notes during our conversation, so I may need to pause now and then.

As a reminder, your participation in this focus group is completely voluntary -- you can answer some questions but not others. It's up to you.

We also ask that you respect the privacy of the other participants in this focus group. You are free to share your participation with others, but we ask that you do not reveal the identity or responses of other participants. While sharing your opinions and thoughts, please do not mention the names of others, this is critical to maintaining privacy.

Finally, you may remember from the consent form that, if it's okay with you, I would like to audio record this discussion. The reason for that is so that I can focus on what you're saying without trying to write it all down. Later, research staff will create a transcript of the interview. The transcript will be reviewed, and anything that may identify you -- such as names or locations -- will be deleted or replaced with non-specific information. This might be something like inserting "John Doe" for a person's name. In written reports from this project, we will never identify any of you as participants or provide any information that allows other people to figure out you took part in the study. So, is it okay with all of you if I audio record the discussion?

If any participant says no: No problem at all. I will take notes during our conversation to help me remember what you all said. Are there any questions before we begin?

If all participants say yes: thank you, does anyone have any questions?

Background

1. Before we begin the recording, I'd like to just get an idea of who's in the room. Would you all be willing to share with me your name and how long you've been living in Newark?

Great! Thank you everyone for sharing. I'm going to start the recording now, just as a reminder your responses will be kept confidential and there are no right or wrong answers.

Begin recording

This is [name] conducting focus group number [#] on [date].

The Newark Community Street Team

1. My questions are focused on to the Newark Community Street Team -- has anyone heard of this before?

A. ***Follow-up (if participants have heard of NCST):*** **How would you describe the NCST?**

Prompt (if no one knows about the NCST): The Newark Community Street Team uses a public health approach in its strategy to reduce violent crime and promote public safety in the city of Newark. NCST specializes in resolving relationships-based disputes towards a peaceful outcome. It works to coordinate its efforts with partners, including city agencies, services providers, policy organizations and more in order to improve the quality of life of citizens in the city of Newark.

NCST Experiences

1. How do you feel about the Newark Community Street Team?

A. ***Follow-up (if participants reports something positive):*** **Have you had any negative experiences?**
B. ***Follow-up (if participants reports something negative):*** **Have you had any positive experiences?**

2. What about the NCST workers, how do feel about them? Let's ask about each group:

A. **High Risk Interventionists**
B. **Safe Passages Workers**
C. **Community Sentinels**
D. **Case Managers**

3. What are residents' perceptions and beliefs about the NCST in the future?

Prompt: Are they hopeful? Mistrustful? Pessimistic?
Prompt: Do residents have specific goals in mind for the community's relationship with the NCST? What are these goals?
Prompt: Do residents have specific concerns about the NCST? What are these concerns?

4. How do you think the Newark Community Street Team is impacting crime and violence in [community]?

Prompt: Violent crimes, property crimes, gang activity

5. How do you think the Newark Community Street Team is contributing to the overall health of your street/ward?

Prompt: After school positive activities, staying in/going to school, safe passage, use of outdoor spaces, comfort and sense of safety.

Thank you for everything you have shared with me! I really appreciate your honesty and you all taking the time to talk with me. I just have a few wrap-up questions before we finish up the interview.

Conclusion

1. Is there anything you think we should have talked about regarding your experiences with the Newark Community Street Team?

Prompt: Were there other questions you were expecting me to ask?

2. Do you have any suggestions for what the NCST and its programs can do better?

3. Is there anything else you'd like to say about the Newark Community Street Team?

Debrief

Thank you again for taking the time to participate in this focus group. I'd like to take a couple of minutes to tell you a little more about the purpose of this study.

The reason we are doing these focus groups is to try to determine how effective the Newark Community Street Team and how well it works. Your participation will be very helpful for this project and we hope that the results will help to inform the NCST in the future. Just as a reminder, all of your responses will always be kept completely confidential and they will never be linked with your name or any other identifying information.

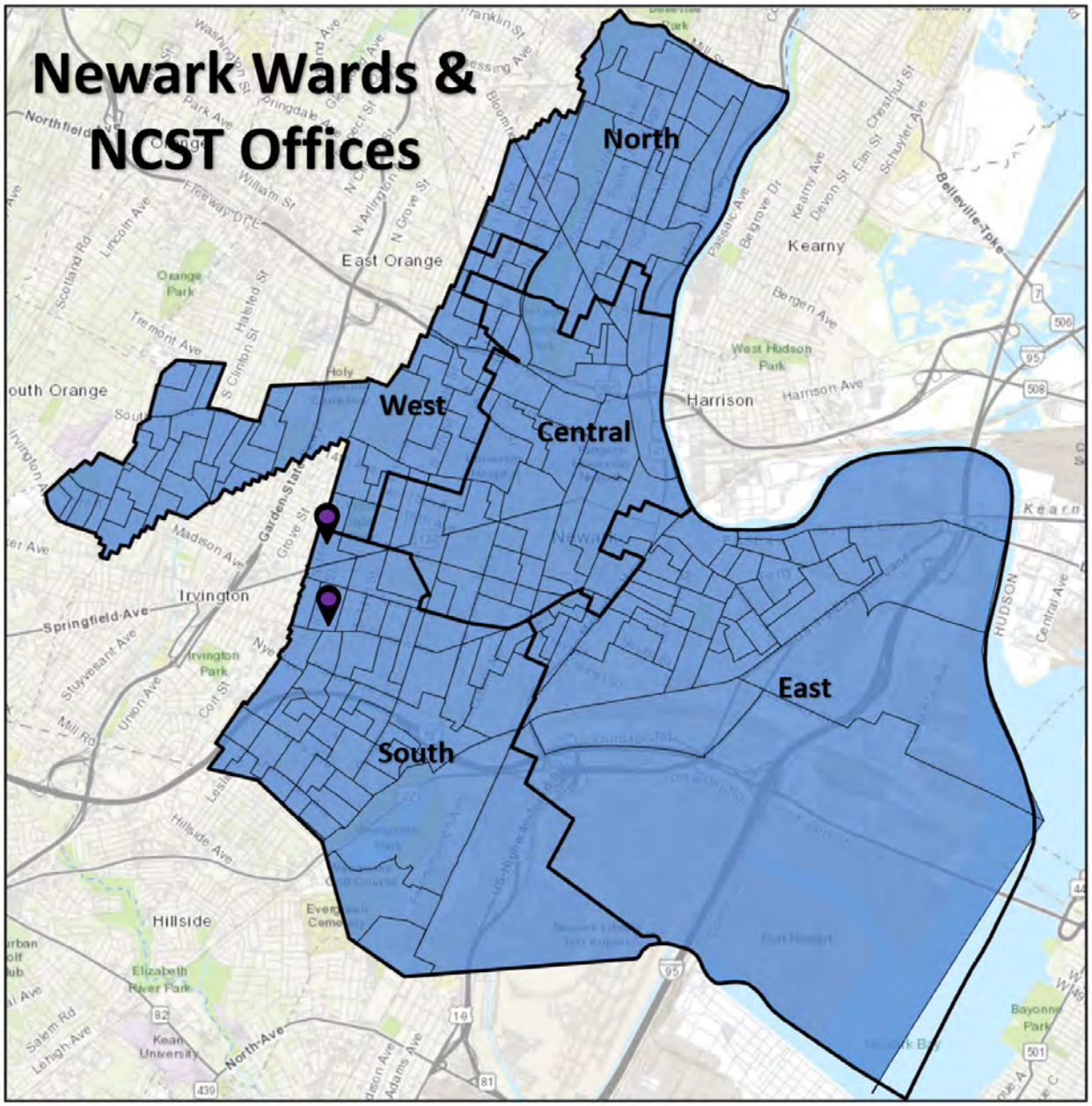
**********STOP RECORDING NOW**********

Compensation

As you know, you will each be receiving a $15 gift card to thank you for taking part in this interview. So please give us a moment as I make sure each of you gets your gift card.

Provide participants with one gift card each after being sure you noted the gift card code associated with each participant.

Appendix D
Map of Newark Wards

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