



Community Violence Initiative

Presented by

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BUNCOMBE COUNTY

Community Safety Initiative

Background: In October 2018, the County received \$1.75 million from [The John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation](#) to implement strategies to reduce jail numbers by addressing the main drivers of the County's jail population, address racial disparities, and increase community engagement.



Supported by the John D. and Catherine T.
MacArthur Foundation



Background

Both violence and the justice system have disparate impacts on Black people living in Buncombe County.

In the first seven months of 2020, there were **9** homicides, **7** of the victims were Black men.

In 2019, Black people represented 6.3 % of Buncombe County's population, yet comprised 25 % of the jail population and 69 % of gun violence victims.

COVID-19 jail reduction efforts led to dramatically reducing the average daily population by nearly 40%, or 158 people. While both Black and White people were released, the rate of disparity within the population increased, resulting in Blacks representing 33% of the average daily population in July of 2020.



Community Perspective: SJC Community Engagement Workgroup

Community members have a desire for community-led approaches to support safety in their neighborhoods. Based on a series of Safety Justice Challenge “Let’s Talk” listening sessions, common problems that were identified include the following:

- Violence, shootings
- Systemic Poverty, lack of jobs and resources as a root cause of criminal activity
- Different treatment based on race or wealth
- Fear of retaliation of reporting criminal activity
- The need to provide a bigger platform and connection to positive role models within communities most impacted by violence
- Lack of trust in the educational system related to the opportunity gap and the school to prison pipeline
- Confusion on how the criminal justice system works
- Roadblocks to restoring life based on having a criminal record

"LET'S TALK JUSTICE"

A Report Back to Community
Pisgah View Apartments -
November 2019

EVENT BACKGROUND

As part of the Safety + Justice Challenge, Buncombe County Government is creating opportunities for increasing community engagement in local criminal justice improvement efforts.



EVENT SUMMARY

"Let's Talk Justice," a series of listening sessions hosted by Buncombe County Government with the purpose of gathering community input on their experiences to inform change within the criminal justice system. There are two sessions in each "Let's Talk Justice" event.



11.05.19 - FIRST SESSION

Community members at Pisgahview Apartments shared their experiences, envisioned aspects of a safe community, and identified what is not working well within the criminal justice system.



14 key improvement areas were identified by participants.

IMPROVEMENT AREAS

The following is list of themes based on the key improvement areas. The comprehensive list of improvement areas can be found on the Pisgah View Apartments "Let's Talk Justice" Executive Summary.

- Systems of poverty that are drivers of crime
- Reintegration back in the community
- Community safety
- Lack of positive role models
- Limited knowledge of the justice system
- Law enforcement culture with negative policing behaviors
- Lack of supportive resources

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11.19.19 SECOND SESSION

The community members participated in a discussion regarding identified problems from the previous session and processed the contributing causes. Participants narrowed down the 14 items to 3 top priorities.



TOP 3 PRIORITIES

- Police mindset and behaviors
- Lack of job and resources
- Needing more positive role models



SOLUTIONS

Better training for law enforcement on racial equity (Understanding of the communities traumas and triggers (Training on Trauma and Resilience))
Diversity in law enforcement officers
Policy changes-prosecute police for criminal police practices The community needs to demand this shift in mindset and behaviors
Need access to education, diversity in peer support, and resources (mental health support; transportation; internet; job training including not having access to resources)
Groups within the community to support community building (mentorship programs for youth; investing in positive role models that are already in the community)
Access to legal wealth and employment; earning income legally



NEXT STEPS

Input received from community at "Let's Talk Justice" is being shared with other members of workgroups and the Buncombe County Justice Resource Advisory Council. These groups include members of local law enforcement, elected officials (e.g. Sheriff, Judges, District Attorney), defense attorneys, and Buncombe County Government leadership.



The information shared at Pisgahview will be communicated to other communities in an effort to discuss important changes within the local criminal justice system.



Safety and Justice Challenge: Racial Equity Workgroup

- Cross collaborative group
- Conducted deep analysis on jail racial disparities
- Learned and acknowledged institutional and structural racism in housing, education, economic, health, and criminal justice policies and practices have lead to disparate outcomes



A Call to Action

SJC Racial Equity Workgroup

Tuesday, March 5, 2020



- JRAC Racial Equity Workgroup attending the Racial Equity Institute Groundwater Training -

The JRAC's Racial Equity Workgroup working to engage the justice community in a thoughtful process of educating stakeholders about structural racism and racial equity, listening openly to citizens in our community mostly directly impacted by the justice system, and gathering data that demonstrates significant inequitable outcomes for this in our jail.

B.C. Child Fatality Review Team

Tuesday, June 21, 2020

Identified gun violence as a growing threat to the health of youth and adults in our community with the recommendation to include:

- Law enforcement agencies and municipalities in Buncombe County should lead or promote community work relating to gun violence, pulling together representatives from all sectors, including affected communities, to work on understanding & addressing the causes of gun violence in our community.

Justice Resource Advisory Council

Friday, July 10, 2020

Passed a proclamation [Declaring Racism as a Public Safety Emergency](#) and outlining action steps the JRAC will take to advance racial equity and justice in Buncombe County. One of the action steps included:

- implement courageous, innovative, and holistic solutions that enhance community safety and reduce racial disparities across our criminal justice system, from point of incident to re-entry.



Deliverables

Justice Services will seek proposals for a community organization (or organizations) to holistically promote community safety and reduce gun violence in the amount of \$225,000.

Development of a comprehensive plan (\$50,000)

- Community organization to lead governmental officials and community partners through a strategic planning process to develop a comprehensive plan that addresses community safety and reduces gun violence

Program/initiative working with communities most impacted by gun violence (\$175,000)

- Create intergenerational spaces that empower safety, trust and healing
- Promising practices across the nation



Next Steps



Questions

