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ABOUT THIS REPORT:
This report provides a high-level overview of key findings around youth violence garnered through focus groups and one-on-one interviews with youth, parents, and other community stakeholders across the City of Aurora. More detailed findings can be found in the linked appendix.

QUESTIONS ABOUT THE CITY OF AURORA’S YOUTH VIOLENCE PREVENTION EFFORT?
Contact the Aurora Youth Violence Prevention Program at YVPPProgram@auroragov.org.
DESCRIPTION

In summer and fall of 2021, the Rocky Mountain Partnership Backbone Team garnered voice and perspective from youth, parents, and other community stakeholders to inform the City of Aurora’s strategies and actions to reduce and prevent youth violence.

A total of 63 stakeholders, including youth and parents, provided their voice and perspective through in-depth interviews and focus groups about:

- What should be done to prevent and reduce youth violence
- What work already underway across the community should be leveraged
- What the role of community stakeholders should be
- The current state of youth violence in the City

This voice and perspective was analyzed to identify themes and calls to action, which are highlighted in this report. These findings are being utilized alongside data compiled by Tri-County Health Department (specifically community survey data, the Healthy Kids Colorado Survey, and community-level data) to inform and drive the City’s Youth Violence Prevention Strategic Plan, and support City and community stakeholders make informed decisions about the action most needed to prevent and reduce youth violence across the City.

PARTICIPATING STAKEHOLDERS

Voice and perspective was garnered from 63 individuals, including 10 youth, 6 parents, 15 Parks and Recreation Department stakeholders, 10 community-based organization* stakeholders, 16 systems-based organization** stakeholders, 3 faith-based organization stakeholders, and 3 City Youth Violence Prevention Program staff, through 9 focus groups and 10 in-depth interviews. All responses gathered are anonymous. Specific individuals and the organizations they represent are not identified in this report. Below is a demographic breakdown for the 58 respondents who completed the demographic survey.

*Community-Based Organizations provide direct programming and resources to community members and include providers and non-profit organizations. They play a critical role mobilizing community members and advocating for improved community conditions.

** Systems-Based Organizations are part of the larger city system and infrastructure and provide critical legal, social, and other community services. They also may play a role in policy development, implementation, and enforcement, allocation of public funding, and improving civic and social infrastructure and systems.

NOTES ON DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

Stakeholders were recruited through their affiliation with the Aurora Youth Violence Prevention collective effort, therefore, voices included in these findings may not fully represent the larger City of Aurora community.

Not everyone was interviewed by the same interviewer, and not all respondents were interviewed using the same instrument or data collection methods, therefore, responses may vary between participants.

Outside researchers Emily Clarendon (MSc in Digital Anthropology) and Kassandra Neiss (MA in Social Anthropology) supported the analysis of these interviews and focus groups.

These interviews and focus groups were conducted during the global COVID-19 pandemic, which means many were conducted via Zoom conferencing. All participant groups point to how COVID-19 exacerbated the conditions around youth violence and impacted overall community well-being.
The City of Aurora’s Youth Violence Prevention Program enhances public safety and reduces the impact of youth violence in the Aurora community through a comprehensive and public health approach inclusive of youth, the community, partner agencies, and city leaders. This approach includes:

- **DEFINING THE PROBLEM**
- **IDENTIFYING RISK AND PROTECTIVE FACTORS**
- **DEVELOPING AND TESTING PREVENTION STRATEGIES**
- **ASSURING WIDESPREAD ADOPTION**

The City conducted a community assessment in 2021 to inform its strategies and actions to reduce and prevent youth violence. As part of this community assessment, the Rocky Mountain Partnership Backbone Team interviewed 63 individuals across the City of Aurora not normally included in decision making conversations, including youth, parents, and other community stakeholders. These individuals shared what they believe should be done to reduce and prevent youth violence across the City, what work already underway across the community should be leveraged, what they believe the role of community stakeholders should be, and their perception of the current state of youth violence in Aurora.

Key findings from these conversations, including specific calls to action identified by community members, are summarized in this report. Also included is a high-level overview of the strategies and action prioritized by the City to date in alignment with these calls to action.

View more detailed findings in the appendix [HERE](#).
Youth, parents, and other community stakeholders shared their perspectives on what the current state of youth violence looks like in the City. These perceptions, summarized below, validated much of what practitioners say they already know about the current state of youth violence across the City.

- The City of Aurora is a multicultural, growing city; marked by socioeconomic and cultural divisions, rising housing costs and gentrification.
- Areas of the City that show visible neglect, rising homelessness, and situational and systemic poverty are community conditions impacting violence.
- Violence happens everywhere across the City, however, there are some areas where youth feel safe.

### TYPE OF VIOLENCE MOST IMPACTING THE CITY
As ranked by Youth, Parents, and Community Stakeholders

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<tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Gang Violence</td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Domestic Violence</td>
<td>7</td>
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<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Gun Violence</td>
<td>8</td>
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<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Emotional Abuse</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Child Abuse and Neglect</td>
<td>10</td>
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The types of violence happening in the City are varied, however, gang violence, domestic violence, gun violence, bullying, human trafficking, and other serious crimes were especially prominent in participants’ narratives.

- Youth violence is on the rise due to: the rise in substance use, the normalization of violence, the COVID-19 pandemic, the spread of violence across schools, youth’s struggle to express their feelings, intervention efforts not reaching youth early enough, ease of access to firearms, personal safety concerns, youth’s need for attention/belonging/community, and lack of structured activities/boredom.
- It’s not just direct victims impacted by violence – the whole community is affected, and the impacts on community members vary, from mental health, to community reputation and vandalism, to mistrust in the system and generational trauma.

View more detailed findings related to the current state of youth violence in the appendix [here](#).
Youth, parents, and other community stakeholders have clear calls to action for the City of Aurora when it comes to reducing and preventing violence across the community.

1: PROVIDE MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORTS, TRAINING, AND GUIDANCE
Youth have clear requests regarding behavioral health. They are asking for training and guidance that will support them to know how to look for symptoms, how to identify when they need help without anyone telling, or forcing, them to get help, and how to prevent a behavioral health crisis from happening.

2: RECOGNIZE COMMUNITY TRAUMA AND LIVED EXPERIENCE
Community-based organization stakeholders point out that while crime feels like it is on the rise, some families have been living in that reality for a while, so it is not new to them - treating it as a novel development is a disservice to their experience, and they call on the City to recognize the experience of historical neglect, generational trauma, and be sensitive to lived experiences in solution implementation.

3: ENGAGE IN CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE AND RELEVANT OUTREACH
Youth, parents, and community stakeholders are asking the City and its partner organizations to do more outreach around current programming, but highlighted that even more importantly, whatever outreach they do must be culturally responsive and relevant. Latino/a/x youth and parents say the City needs to improve how resources and information are disseminated so they reach the right communities in the right language through the right channels. Community stakeholders say there is an opportunity to further support parents to leverage existing systems of support.

4: IMPROVE OPERATIONS ACROSS ALL CITY SYSTEMS
Youth, parents, and systems-based organization stakeholders are calling for shifts in school infrastructures to focus on restoration and put staff in place to directly support prevention, restoration, and early intervention programming for youth involved in crime and violence. Community stakeholders are also asking for people in the justice system and civic system to be trained to be culturally competent and approach their work from a trauma-informed perspective. Community stakeholders are calling on City leaders and elected officials to develop a clear strategy and sustainability plan for community safety and well-being, including both short-term and long-term goals, policy changes, and accountability and transparency around funding. They are recommending that the Youth Violence Prevention Program move to a different department in the City that has the resources and expertise better equipped for deploying violence prevention and intervention work. They are also asking the City to increase already participating organizations’ capacity to handle the level of outreach, and fill gaps in programming at the small-town level parents and youth are asking for.

5: ADDRESS GAPS IN EXISTING PROGRAMMING
Youth, parents, and other community stakeholders have identified a need for programming for youth ages 12 and above. System-based organizations see a need to revamp the programming they provide to meet the needs of youth in this day and age. Parents and community-based organization stakeholders believe community safety and behavioral health services also need to be revamped. Youth and parents believe food banks need to be more culturally relevant and are calling on schools to address the impacts of school start times.

6: BUILD A SENSE OF COMMUNITY WITHIN AND ACROSS NEIGHBORHOODS
Youth and parents are asking for a small town approach to bring people together by increasing community events and neighborly relationships.
7: END PROFILING AND LABELING BASED ON RACE, SOCIOECONOMIC STATUS, AND CIRCUMSTANCE
Youth and parents are calling for an end to profiling and labeling of community members based on race, socioeconomic status and circumstance. They are asking instead for the City and community to start recognizing youth for their positive contributions to the community.

8: HELP YOUTH UNDERSTAND AND PREVENT YOUTH VIOLENCE
Youth are asking for support to learn how to identify and understand what criminal activity looks like and what role that can play to reduce and prevent it from happening. Youth and parents also believe they can play a key role in spreading awareness peer-to-peer.

9: IMPROVE AREAS OF THE CITY THAT SHOW VISIBLE NEGLECT
Youth and parents call on the City to improve areas of the City that show visible neglect, including improving lighting, repairing run-down buildings, and ensuring foot paths that youth and families often use to commute to school and other essential activities, are clear, safe, and include visible shortcuts to neighborhoods where youth can seek help if they need it.

10: SUPPORT YOUTH TO BECOME INVESTED IN THEIR COMMUNITY
Youth, parents, and other community stakeholders are calling for civic education for youth that would support them to become more invested in their community. This includes things like education on avoiding littering, being thankful for public works, and participating in and looking after their city and world.

11: LEVERAGE EXISTING COMMUNITY STAKEHOLDERS AND EFFORTS
The biggest role youth, parents, and other community stakeholders say can be played is through the expansion and scaling of existing community programming to better support youth and families in all areas of life. However, in order to make that happen, the relationship between community stakeholders and the City of Aurora needs to improve, and partnership is needed for community stakeholders to co-develop solutions alongside the City in a way that is community-informed, transparent, and sustainable.

View more detailed findings related to these calls to action in the appendix HERE.
## STRATEGIES AND ACTION PRIORITIZED TO DATE

### PROGRAM INFRASTRUCTURE

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<th>#</th>
<th>Action</th>
<th>Details</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Hire Remainder of Program Staff</td>
<td>Hire remaining Youth Violence Prevention Program staff to further the program’s mission</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>Funding to Support Family Needs</td>
<td>Identify what funding is needed to support the immediate needs of youth and families until they are connected to long-term supports/resources</td>
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<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Development of Policies &amp; Procedures</td>
<td>Develop program policies, procedures and training standards for the Youth Violence Prevention Program Staff</td>
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### ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGE

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<th>#</th>
<th>Action</th>
<th>Details</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Professional Development Training Series</td>
<td>Implement a quarterly professional development training series for the Youth Violence Prevention Program network to provide opportunities to enhance stakeholder knowledge base and skills to best serve at-risk and high-risk youth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>System Coordination &amp; Barrier Removals</td>
<td>Identify areas of opportunity to remove barriers to services, and to increase social and economic opportunities. Develop effective criminal justice, school, and social agency procedures. Promote policies that will further the goals of the Youth Violence Prevention Program strategy</td>
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<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Data Collection Efforts</td>
<td>Continue to collect data to capture ongoing trends of individuals and communities impacted by youth violence</td>
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### INTERVENTION AND RE-ENTRY

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<td>7</td>
<td>Multi-Disciplinary Team</td>
<td>Convene and facilitate a Multi-Disciplinary Teams (MDT) to leverage resources, create wrap-around supports for identified youth, and identify barriers and needed organizational changes to support an efficient and well-coordinated service response</td>
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<td>8</td>
<td>Aurora Outreach Team</td>
<td>Facilitate Aurora Outreach Team meetings to discuss responses after violent incidents, discuss trends and reduce the likelihood of duplication of services to youth and families</td>
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<td>9</td>
<td>Critical Incident Responses</td>
<td>Develop a process to respond to critical incidents of violent crime at schools in the Aurora community to ensure violence interruption efforts are implemented and supports are provided to primary and secondary victims</td>
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<td>10</td>
<td>Violence Interruption</td>
<td>Fund a community-based organization to hire one Violence Interrupter to provide direct outreach after a violent incident in the community to reduce the likelihood of retaliatory behaviors and work directly with those connected to the groups actively involved in the violent crime occurring in our communities</td>
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<td>11</td>
<td>Hospital-Based Intervention Response</td>
<td>Fund the hospital-based intervention response, a multidisciplinary program that combines the efforts of medical staff and community-based partners to provide safety planning, services, and trauma-informed care to violently injured people, many of whom are boys and men of color</td>
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<td>12</td>
<td>Specialized Mental Health</td>
<td>Fund an Aurora Stakeholder to provide Functional Family Therapy (FFT), Multi Systemic Therapy (MST), Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing (EMDR) and mental health supports to those youth at the highest risk, in order to support a larger impact on behavior change</td>
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## SECONDARY PREVENTION

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<td><strong>Outreach Specialist Supports (At-Risk Youth)</strong>&lt;br&gt;Provide mentoring, advocacy and system navigation to at-risk youth in coordination with other involved organizations through Youth Violence Prevention Program Outreach Specialists</td>
<td><strong>Crimes Against Children (Runaway Youth)</strong>&lt;br&gt;Work with Aurora Police Department’s (APD) Crimes Against Children Unit and Denver’s Runaway Outreach Notification and Intervention (RONI) Project to develop a process to identify and serve runaway youth most at risk of becoming victimized and/or engaged in violent or delinquent behavior</td>
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<td><strong>Identification of At-Risk Youth</strong>&lt;br&gt;Work with schools, department of human services and community-based organizations to identify at-risk youth and connect them to services/resources</td>
<td><strong>Crisis Service Funds</strong>&lt;br&gt;Fund a community-based organization to provide funding supports to families that may be experiencing crisis situations</td>
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<td><strong>Strengthening Families</strong>&lt;br&gt;Fund one community organization to facilitate the Strengthening Families curriculum, an evidence-based family skills training program for high-risk and general population families</td>
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## PRIMARY PREVENTION

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<td><strong>Safe Havens</strong>&lt;br&gt;Fund a faith-based organization to facilitate the implementation of the Safe Haven Program where faith and community organizations work together to respond to critical incidents of gang and gun violence</td>
<td><strong>Public Awareness Campaigns</strong>&lt;br&gt;Increase community awareness of available resources/services and change community norms around specific risk-factors</td>
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<td><strong>Youth Advisory Council Service Projects</strong>&lt;br&gt;Increase the community’s resiliency and quality of life as a primary prevention effort in targeted hot spots of the city that have been identified by crime data by funding the Youth Advisory Council’s quarterly service projects</td>
<td><strong>Parks and Recreation Annual and Daily Passes</strong>&lt;br&gt;Continue to fund the distribution of Parks and Recreation daily recreational passes, and expand efforts to include the distribution of annual recreation memberships to youth as an incentive offered by the Youth Violence Prevention Program to address behavioral challenges being experienced</td>
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<td><strong>Aurora Library Youth Programming Efforts</strong>&lt;br&gt;Partner with the Library &amp; Cultural Services Department to fund the creation of a youth specific space in a library in northwest Aurora where youth will be able to access gaming equipment and skill-building classes and where community-based partners will have access to a room to facilitate youth programming activities</td>
<td><strong>Aurora Public Schools Funding</strong>&lt;br&gt;Fund school-specific efforts in Aurora Public Schools to support and engage students and families student/family engagement, and a district-wide transition fair that would include several schools in the Northwest community and will engage families in educational supports and increase awareness of community level resources</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Gang Resistance Education and Training (G.R.E.A.T.) Curriculum</strong>&lt;br&gt;Fund a law enforcement or Criminal justice agency that operates in the city of Aurora to administer the Gang Resistance Education and Training (G.R.E.A.T.) curriculum in Aurora elementary and middle schools</td>
<td><strong>Community Mobilization Team Efforts</strong>&lt;br&gt;Fund programming activities of organizations actively engaged with the Youth Violence Prevention Program Community Mobilization Team to host individual organization or collaborative efforts such as pop-up events, youth programming, Safe Havens, Safe Passages, and other efforts</td>
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Youth, parents, and other community stakeholders shared their perspectives on what the current state of youth violence looks like in the City. These perceptions validated much of what practitioners say they already know about the current state of youth violence across the City.

Overall, youth, parents, and other community stakeholders believe the City of Aurora is taking the right steps forward to respond to the ongoing public health crisis across the City, but that there is still much to be done. And the City of Aurora shouldn’t do it alone.

Youth, parents, and other community stakeholders have clear calls to action for the City of Aurora when it comes to reducing and preventing violence across the community. These calls to action varied from improving and scaling existing community programming and supports; improving City, civic, and social infrastructure and operations; and equipping youth, parents, and other community stakeholders with the resources and tools needed to lead and drive the work to reduce and prevent youth violence.

These findings and calls to action are being utilized alongside data compiled by Tri-County Health Department to inform and drive the City’s Youth Violence Prevention Strategic Plan (to be released in February 2022). The City of Aurora and its community partners have prioritized a set of strategies and action for initial focus.

As the City of Aurora works to further develop its strategies and actions to reduce and prevent youth violence, the following opportunities have emerged for next steps and further exploration:

- **✓** Involve youth and families, particularly those who have personally been involved in or directly connected to youth violence, and other community stakeholders in the ongoing development of and prioritized strategies, action, and community funding opportunities. *This is in progress and will continue.*

- **☐** As strategies are further developed and implemented, connect with additional youth, parents, and community stakeholders to identify ongoing improvements to best meet community needs.

- **☐** Continue to identify and track other programs, services, and efforts that already exist across the City of Aurora and can be leveraged to yield the greatest impact.
APPENDIX: DETAILED VOICE AND PERSPECTIVE

Detailed findings from this effort to garner voice and perspective from youth, parents, and other community stakeholders around youth violence can be found in a separate appendix document. Click the links below to dive deeper into specific topics.

· The Current State of Youth Violence in the City
· The Aurora Community
· Community Conditions Impacting Safety and Well-Being
· Where Violence is Happening, and Where Youth Feel Safe
· Types of Violence Happening Across the City
· Why Youth Violence is on the Rise
· The Impact of Violence on Youth and Community Members
· Calls to Action from the Aurora Community (youth, parents, other community stakeholders)
· Provide Mental Health Supports, Training, and Guidance
· Recognize Community Trauma and Lived Experience
· Engage in Culturally Responsive and Relevant Outreach
· Improve Operations Across All City Systems
· Address Gaps In Existing Programming
· Build a Sense of Community Within and Across Neighborhoods
· End Profiling and Labeling Based on Race, Socioeconomic Status, and Circumstance
· Help Youth Understand and Prevent Youth Violence
· Improve Areas of the City that Show Visible Neglect
· Support Youth to Become Invested in their Community
· Leverage Existing Community Stakeholders and Efforts