

Town Square

Young Black Men at Risk Speak About Gun Violence Culture

By Bonnie Eisenfeld

ManUpPHL, a nonprofit organization, in collaboration with Drexel University, conducted focus groups with young Black men involved with gun violence and gun culture in high-crime Philadelphia neighborhoods. Participants in the group discussions included victims, perpetrators, and peers. They described their life experiences, behaviors, and activities, and offered ideas for deterring gun violence.

The discussions revealed that gun violence had brought trauma to their lives, and sadly, they were becoming numb to the pain. Many did not have fathers around as they were growing up. They learned to imitate behaviors around them. Their families understood the situation and reacted by praying and attempting to demonstrate how to live. However, the young men developed connections with friends, and retribution was a necessity.

"We all live in this sick village," said one. Their options were restricted by inadequate schools and lack of financial resources. These young men felt that no one ever talked to them about what they needed to learn in school.

The young men said they needed meaningful educational opportunities and more magnet schools as alternatives. One person, who did not get into a magnet school because of low grades, said about his local school: "...you're putting me around with other monsters...so I had no option but to become that too to protect myself."

They needed well-paying jobs as an alternative to the drug business. "You gotta come up with a better business than this (drug) game," said a participant.

They came up with ideas about what kind of people might be able to help them, including convicted criminals who had created successful anti-violence initiatives within the prison system, as

well as trusted people in their communities to talk to about their problems and connect them with resources.

Focus-group participants were recruited through ManUpPHL's "Listening to the Streets" program. Almost all were between the ages of 19 and 26. Each group discussion lasted approximately two hours. Neighborhoods represented included North Philadelphia, South Philadelphia, Overbrook, and Frankford. Incentives to join "Listening to the Streets" include a \$240 stipend, daily complimentary meals, a group session with a licensed therapist, a mentor, and a job opportunity with a program partner.

According to their website, "ManUpPHL's mission is to step into the lives of the men who are statistically most likely to be victims or perpetrators of gun violence in our city, and to provide them with the mentoring, accountability, resources and consistency they require to change their lives and make our communities better. We provide support in 5 areas: Employment, Criminal Justice, Education, Family & Fatherhood, Financial Literacy."

The Eagles granted ManUpPHL \$5,000 from their Social Justice Fund. ManUpPHL put together a round of care packages—food, clothing, and transportation—for the organization's mentees.

[ManUpPHL](#) is a nonprofit organization. Donations pay for stipends, job clothing, and transportation for participants, as well as salaries for part-time staff members. The organization's [Advisory Board](#) consists of Solomon Jones, Executive Director; Brian Ellis, Board Chair; Akbar Hassan, Board Treasurer; and Jeff Brown, Board Secretary. KYW NewsRadio [reported the study](#) on December 3: The full report, "Exploring the Lived Experiences of Black Males in Philadelphia Around Gun Violence and the Behaviors/Activities that Encourage Gun Culture," is available at <https://www.manuphl.org/lts-academic-study>

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Register to Vote! Primary Election May 17

Last day to register before the Primary Election is **Monday, May 2.**

You must be a U.S. citizen and a resident of Pennsylvania for at least 30 days before the next election to register to vote in Pennsylvania.

Register [online](#).

Primary Election: Tuesday, May 17

General Election: Tuesday, November 8

This election includes Governor of PA and U.S. Senator.