



2023

ANNUAL  
REPORT

# A MESSAGE FROM OUR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Since its inception in July of 2022, Turn Up Knox has made a significant, positive impact on the Knoxville community. Created to help interrupt the increase in different cycles of gun violence Knoxville has seen over the years. With supporting, equipping, and empowering people to create a safer and healthier community, the program has interrupted cycles of gun violence in the area.

Through our various outreach efforts, Turn Up Knox has helped to reduce the number of incidents of gun violence in the community while also fostering a sense of unity and empowerment among residents.

Thanks to the hard work and dedication of its members, Turn Up Knox has become a beacon of hope for the Knoxville community, inspiring positive change and making a lasting impact on the lives of a number of individuals.



**Denzel Grant**

**Executive Director, Turn Up Knox**

# VISION

Turn Up Knox will serve as a community-informed intervention program that reduces gun violence in the Knoxville area. We envision a community where ALL residents are safe from gun violence.

# MISSION

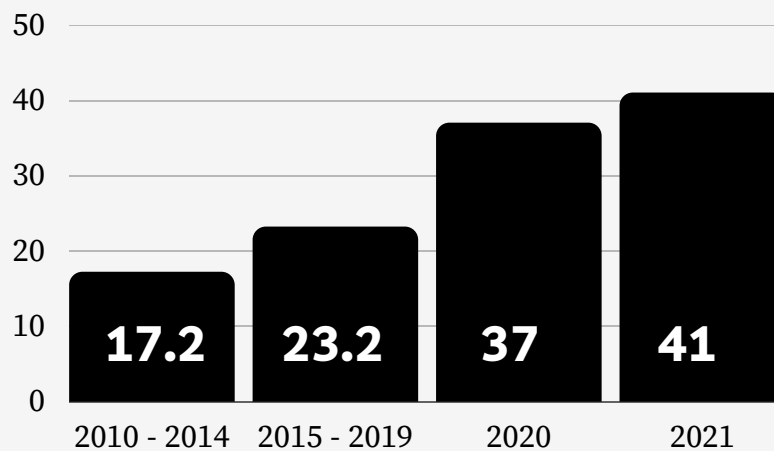
Turn Up Knox strives to interrupt cycles of gun violence in the Knoxville area. We support, equip, empower people to create a safer and healthier community.

# THE PROBLEM

The City of Knoxville is a mid-sized city in East Tennessee, known for its location near the Great Smoky Mountains. It is the third-largest city in Tennessee and the largest in the eastern division. Knox County, where Knoxville is located, has a population of around 478,971, with approximately 190,740 residents in the city. Unfortunately, like many other cities in the United States, Knoxville saw a significant increase in violent crime during 2020 and 2021.

Between 2010 and 2014, Knoxville averaged 17.2 homicides per year; between 2015 and 2019, the city averaged 23.2 homicides per year. In 2020 and 2021, the city experienced 37 and 41 homicides, respectively. In 2020, while the nation experienced 7.8 homicides per 100,000 people, Knoxville experienced 19.7 per 100,000 people. In 2021, that number rose to 21.4 per 100,000 residents. In 2021, 93% of homicides in Knoxville involved a firearm. In 2022, 35 lives were lost to violence.

## AVERAGE NUMBER OF HOMICIDES PER YEAR



# THE PROBLEM

In an average year, more than 35,000 15- to 24-year-olds are shot and killed or wounded in the US—58% of these deaths are by gun homicide, and 46% of these injuries are by gun assault.<sup>4</sup> Violence in cities is often cyclical, and the trauma that comes with it can lead youth to engage in violence. The same youth who are victimized by violence are often also perpetrators. In cities during 2019, youth under 25 made up 42% of arrests for murder and nonnegligent manslaughter, 52% of arrests for robbery, 27% of arrests for aggravated assault, and 39% of arrests for weapons offenses.

**93%**

**Of homicide incidents  
involved a firearm in  
2021**

One concerning aspect is that homicides in Knoxville disproportionately affect the Black population. Although Black residents make up about 17% of the city's population, they account for about 75% of individuals involved in shooting incidents between 2019 and 2021. The violence is concentrated in areas with high concentrations of Black or poor residents. Black Knoxvilleans not only bear a larger share of the burden of community-based violence but also face higher poverty rates than other racial demographics.

In Knox County, Black residents represent approximately 9% of the population, yet nearly 30% live below the poverty line, while 12.2% of white residents do. The poverty rate among Black residents in the City of Knoxville is approximately 34%, the highest among any racial demographic in the county. These disparities highlight the challenges faced by Black residents in terms of violence and poverty in Knoxville.

**35**

**lives were lost  
in 2022**

# TURN UP KNOX OBJECTIVES

**Community Outreach, Public Awareness and Restorative Events**

**High-intensity Engagement and Support for Youth and Families**

**Support Wrap-Around Care for High-Risk Youth**

**Support and Connection for Families and Younger Siblings**

**Decreased Negative Law Enforcement Contact**

## COMMUNITY PROGRAMMING

Turn Up Knox focused heavily on community programming and event sponsorship to build awareness around the organization throughout the project year. This was a critical component for the organization early on. Turn Up Knox relies on referrals from the community and in order for its Violence Interrupters to be effective, community members need to know that the organization exists and can be a helpful resource for interrupting violence throughout the city of Knoxville.

# TURN UP KNOX STRATEGY

**Short  
Term**

## **Intervention**

**Strategies that address gun violence happening right now**

**Focus on interruption & intervention of violence**

**Targets efforts to specific individuals & groups most likely to shoot or be shot**

**Medium  
Term**

## **Prevention**

**Focus on addressing factors that put youth & other individuals at risk of future involvement with gun violence**

**Programs include mentoring, mental health services, after-school programs**

**Long  
Term**

## **Transformation**

**Goal of transforming communities so that they no longer induce violence**

**Focus on economic development**



## **COMMUNITY PROGRAMMING (CONT'D)**

Partnership with local community organizations remains a critical component of building awareness around the organization, improving trust with the community, and enhancing community partnership. Turn Up Knox has continued to partner with several local community-based organizations, including Emerald Youth Foundation, Drums Up Guns Down, Shadetree Therapy, Love is the Answer, YWCA, and Boys & Girls Club, for a number of community events. To date, there have been a total of 121 community contacts made, including local business owners and other local organizations. We have established continuing partnerships with Drums Up Guns Down, YWCA, Emerald Youth Foundation, and Safe Haven. These relationships have been important for our violence interruption work. It has been a priority for Turn Up Knox to build trust not only amongst the community members but also among other organizations that have been around for some time. This has allowed Turn Up Knox to create even more awareness around the work of the organization.

## **OUR PARTNERS**

**Drums Up, Guns Down**

**YWCA Phyllis Wheatley Center**

**The Change Center**

**Emerald Youth Foundation**

**Walk-Ons**

**Community Mediation Center**

**Knox Heritage**

**Lawson Family Foundation**

**Knoxville Area Urban League**

**Mental Health Association of East Tennessee**



# TURN UP KNOX YEAR-AT-A-GLANCE



**120**

made over 120  
community contacts in  
the Knoxville  
community



**21**

events hosted and/ or  
co-sponsored



**66**

referrals made to  
mental health services  
and therapy, housing,  
employment



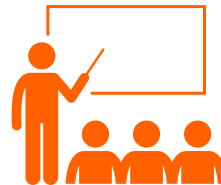
**4**

Held 4 focus groups for  
families impacted by  
violence



**8421**

Reported hours  
amongst Turn Up Knox  
staff



**9**

Staff participated in 9  
professional  
development  
workshop, trainings,  
and presentations



**240**

logged by volunteers  
with the organization

# OUR 2023 IMPACT

The success and impact of Turn Up Knox can be best demonstrated through the voices and experiences of those directly impacted by our efforts. In this section, we present a collection of testimonials from individuals who have participated in or benefited from our violence prevention program. These testimonials provide personal insights, stories, and perspectives on how the program has positively influenced their lives and communities.

Through their words, we gain a deeper understanding of the program's effectiveness and its transformative power in preventing violence. These testimonials serve as a testament to the importance and value of our violence prevention efforts and inspire us to continue our work towards creating safer and more resilient communities

“Turn Up Knox has played a very important role in my growth as a man. All the situations I have faced, whether bad or good, I always felt those situations were preparing me for something else. Being a part of TurnUpKnox has given me that purpose of being that I have searched for so long. I have made my fair share of bad choices, but now I am committed to being the voice that could keep someone from making those same choices”

**K.M. - Turn Up Knox Staff**

“Working for Turn Up Knox has been a transformative experience for me. Through the program, I received training that helped me better understand and manage my emotions, which prevented me from committing an act of violence when my father passed away. The program has also opened up new doors for me, providing me with valuable skills and knowledge that I can use in other areas of my life. I am grateful for the opportunity to work with Turnup Knox and for the positive impact it has had on my life.”

**Q.V. - Turn Up Knox Staff**



# TESTIMONIALS



“Jeremiah's experience with Denzel Grant and Turn Up Knox has been incredibly positive. As a 70 year grandmother, it's been somewhat of a challenge getting Jeremiah to change his behavior. He was struggling both academically and with his behavior at school. After having to meet with the principal because of his behavior, she recommended contacting Denzel Grant. Since the very beginning, his mentorship has helped him turn things around. With their support, Jeremiah finished the remainder of the school year improving his grades, and he developed much better social skills and responses to things. I can tell he is a much happier and more confident young man, and I'm so grateful for Denzel's help.”

**-Grandmother of a Turn Up Knox Participant**

“ Turn Up Knox has had a truly positive effect on my everyday life. Although I am known in my community, it is rarely for anything as positive as my involvement with Turn Up Knox. Since I joined the organization, I have received compliments from community members on my transformation, which motivates me to continue pushing forward and not disappoint them. In fact, I have encountered other people on the streets who have asked me how they can get involved as well. I believe that Turn Up Knox's direct engagement with the community has opened people's minds to the idea of making a change is possible . While the work we do is just one aspect of how we're making a difference, seeing people from the same area like myself involved has the biggest positive impact. “

**-R.W. - Turn Up Knox Staff**

# TESTIMONIALS



"I was struggling with a life-threatening conflict and honestly didn't know where to turn. Somehow they got my information from somebody and actually reached out to me. I reached a point where I was going to harm somebody and not realizing it at the time but putting myself and my family potentially in harm's way. Talking with them and allowing them the opportunity to mediate the situation was one of the best decisions I could have made. They did not hesitate to provide me with the support and resources I needed to get my mind right at that time. I still have days that I struggle, but it does help to know that I can reach out to Denzel and his staff any time I need help or a space to be vulnerable. You don't get those opportunities too much nowadays without being judged, so I'm thankful. Turn Up Knox has for sure been a lifesaver."

**-Youth Turn Up Knox Participant**

"Turn up Knox has done a lot for my community and changed my life. It changed how I react and respond. It gives me and everyone around me a whole different perspective. The trust and respect from the community is top tier. They reach out and support even young people. While this is only the beginning, I'm ready to see what we can accomplish in the 2-3 years.

**-S.C. - Turn Up Knox Staff**

