

GREATER CLE YOUTH JUSTICE COLLECTIVE: AMPLIFYING YOUTH VOICE

FEBRUARY 25, 2025



Rethinking Safety & Youth Success

Greater CLE YJ Collective Briefing Local Policymakers Overview



1. **Setting the Context: Kids Are Different**

2. **Youth Data Highlights**

- Youth Crime Trends & Youth as Victims of Violence
- Social & Emotional Challenges Facing Youth
- COVID Impact on Youth
- Juvenile Justice System & Detention Center

3. **A Better Path Forward: Opportunities Be Strategic (Not Reactive)**

- Creating a Youth Safety Vision
- Mobile Crisis Stabilization & Peer Supports
- Age-Appropriate Interventions, Diversion & Policing
- Evidence-Informed Approaches
- Juvenile Court Collaboration with City & County
- Economic Opportunity & Vibrant Neighborhoods

AGENDA: Youth Focus Groups Project

- Background
 - The Problem
 - The Solution
- Focus Groups
 - Goals
 - Methodology
 - Key Themes
- The Road Ahead



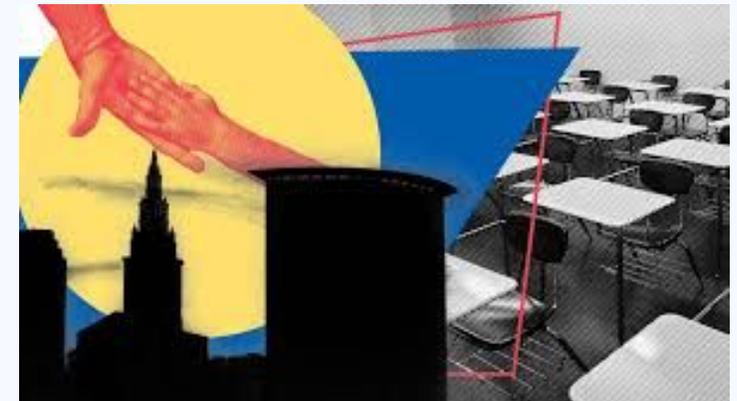
BACKGROUND

- **The Problem:** 2022-2024, Negative “buzz” in the media and elsewhere. Tough on crime narratives were pervasive with no context.
- **Our Partnership.** Education to counter false narratives and lay the foundation for treating all kids as kids.



BACKGROUND

- **The Solution:** Focus Groups to hear from Cleveland youth.
 - Partnered with B4U Services, specifically Dr. NJ Akbar and Djuan Wash, to conduct focus groups
 - Made possible by the generous support of The George Gund Foundation



PROJECT GOALS

- **Combat** harmful **rhetoric** on safety and youth.
- Understand how **negative framing** in the media, from public leaders, stakeholders and elsewhere **effects kids**.
- Humanize Cleveland's youth with the understanding of **all kids are kids**.
- Uplift impacted **youth perspective** and voice in this space.
- Offer a snapshot of the **challenges faced** by justice-involved youth, young adults, and families in underserved areas.
- Foster **greater understanding and empathy** among policymakers, law enforcement, and the broader community.



METHODOLOGY

Engagement Pool:

1. Youth **currently detained** or incarcerated in a state or local facility.
2. Youth **recently released** from the Cuyahoga County Juvenile Detention Center, an Ohio Department of Youth Services facility, or those currently under formal court monitoring.
3. Youth who live in key **zip codes**.
4. Young adults (ages 18–25) who were **formerly involved** in the juvenile court system.
5. Adults in key zip codes who are **system-impacted** (e.g., those who were themselves in the juvenile justice system, have/had children in the juvenile justice system or reside in one of the most impacted zip codes).



METHODOLOGY, *continued*

Engagement Pool:

61 Total Participants

- **By gender:**
 - 42, Male
 - 19, Female
- **By age:**
 - 25, 17 and below
 - 29, 18-25
 - 7, 25+
- **By Zipcode:**
 - 41, High Priority Zip Codes
 - 17, Moderate Priority Zip Codes
 - 2, Unknown Zip Codes
 - 1, Lowest Priority Zip Codes

Population Group

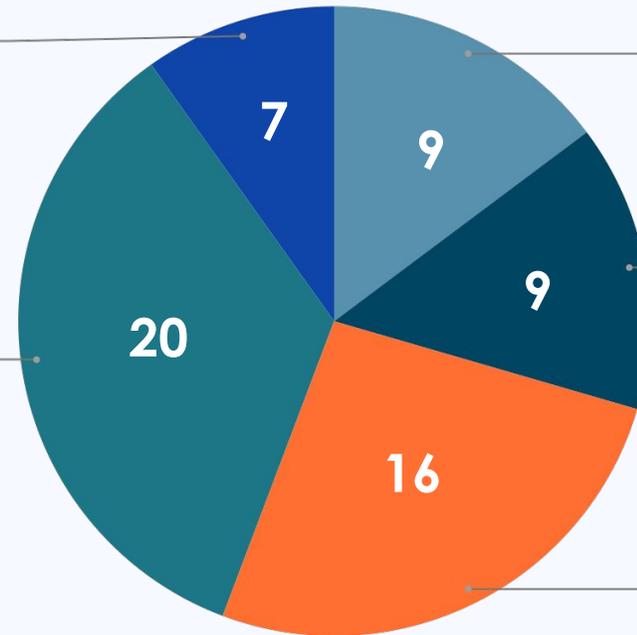
Adults & parents
9.8%

Recently released
14.8%

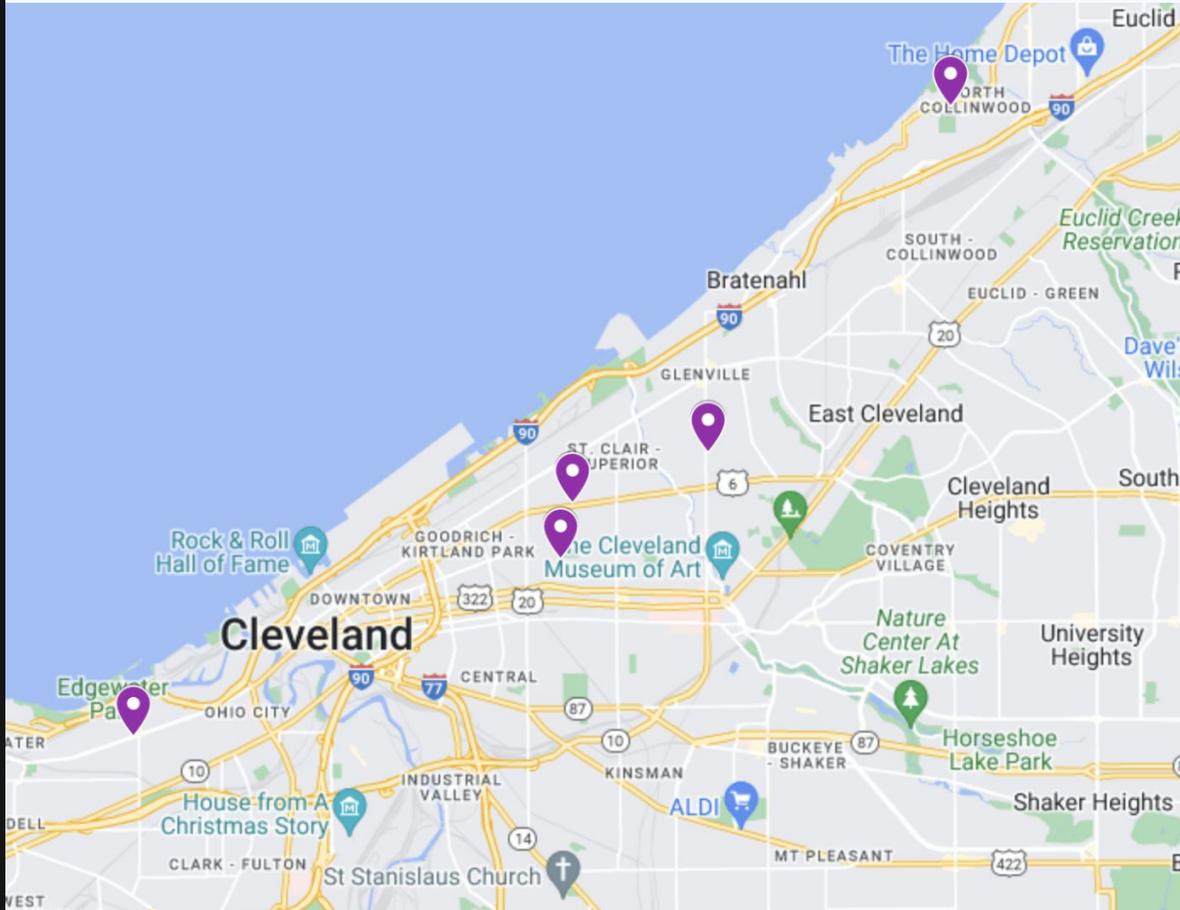
Young adults
34.4%

Court program
14.8%

Incarcerated CCJDC
26.2%



METHODOLOGY, *continued*



- **9 Focus Groups**
 - **Local Community Centers**
 - Addison Library
 - Cory Recreation Center
 - Collinwood Recreation Center
 - Hough Library**
 - LGBT Center of Greater Cleveland
 - **Cuyahoga county Juvenile Detention Center****
 - **Community-Based Intervention Center**



METHODOLOGY, *Focus Group Discussion Prompts*

1. How would you describe your community?
2. What do you want people to know about you?
3. If you could make one change in your community what would it be?
4. What do you think adults don't understand about kids your age?
5. Do you feel safe in your community?
6. What does "safety" mean to you?
7. What makes you feel safe ?
8. What have you seen/heard about crime?
 - a. Where have you heard it?
 - b. How does this make you feel?
9. What are adults/ the media/ politicians getting wrong on safety?
10. What should be changed for you and others who have experience with the juvenile justice system to have the best chance for success and personal safety?
11. Describe what a healthy, fun, safe Cleveland looks like to you.
12. What do you think is needed to help you feel good in your community?
13. How could the community – meaning the city and caring adults - better support you?
14. What resources do you wish your community offered?
15. If you had a magic wand, what needs to change soon that would make life better for youth?



KEY THEME: SAFETY IS COMPLEX

Honestly, nothing makes me feel safer. I can feel safer with my family but it ain't going to make me feel safer other than getting a gun. I can't really do that. I just got to do what I got to do. Stay in the house. Try to stay sober.
"Jordan" (M, 14-18 yrs)

Safety means having people you can trust to protect you, but we don't have that here. – "Laura" (F, 14-18 yrs).

I feel safest when I'm at home, but even there, it's not guaranteed. – "Tyler" (M, 18-25 yrs)



KEY THEME: GUNS HAVE A DUAL ROLE

It feels like you have to choose between being a target or having protection. – “Fred” (M, 14-18 yrs).

Every time there’s gun violence, it just adds more trauma to the community. – “Gus” (M, 14-18 yrs)

Guns are everywhere. It’s like you can’t avoid them even if you try. – “Kari” (F, 14-18 yrs).



KEY THEME: GRIEF AND LOSS IS PERVASIVE

Grief is part of everyday life for us, and it's exhausting. "Fred" (M, 14-18 yrs)

It's like losses, loss after loss...that's a struggle. It's a lot on your plate...you got a lot of pain to hold on to, you got a lot of emotion built up in you. "Terrance" (M, 18-25 yrs)

Grief is just part of life here. We don't talk about it because we don't have the tools to deal with it. "Tina" (F, 14-18 yrs)

Every time I lose someone; it feels like a part of me is gone too. How can you feel safe when that keeps happening? "David" (M, 18-25 yrs)



KEY THEME: TRAUMA IS GENERATIONAL, NORMALIZED & COMPROMISES MENTAL HEALTH

*Trauma runs deep,
and we don't have
anyone to help us heal.*
"Cosby" (M, 14-18 yrs)

*Every generation carries
the weight of the last.
We're never really free.*
"Marcus" (M, 18-25 yrs)

*If mental health
resources were
prioritized we could
break the cycles of
violence.* "Kristin"
(F, 18-25 yrs)

*It's not just about me –
my kids feel this too
and I don't know how
to protect them.*
"Gloria" (F, 25+ yrs)



KEY THEME: PROTECTIVE FACTORS & CARING ADULTS

[If I had a magic wand] I would rewind the way that adults address (us) when wrong is being done. Instead of them coming at (us) crazy or hurting (us) physically or putting harsh punishments, I feel like they should come to (us) stern, strict, but with love and telling (us): “Come on, I got you. You need help. I'm gonna pick you up every time you fall down. Try it again. We're gonna keep trying and trying. No matter how many times you fall down, you ain't gonna stay on that ground. You're gonna get up and you're gonna keep pushing. You can't. You can't stay there.” I feel like the world would be so much better. “Vera” (F, 14-18 yrs)

Music helps me process my emotions and stay grounded - “Jay”

Drawing and journaling help me stay out of trouble - “Cece”

Helping others in my community motivates me to keep going - “Tim”

Sports taught me discipline and hope for my future - “Traci”

Creating something from nothing is my way of pushing through hardships - “Aaron”

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KEY THEME: COMMUNITY CULTURE - BELONGING & NEGLECT

The people in my community are resilient; they support each other through tough times.
"Tim" (M, 18-25 yrs)

It's not all bad. There's still a lot of good in our community.
"Brad"
(M, 18-25 yrs)

A strong community means there's always someone looking out for you, but that doesn't happen here anymore.
"Janice" (F, 25+ yrs)

Having someone to talk to about my problems makes me feel less alone.
"Cece" (F, 18-25 yrs)

There's nowhere safe to just hang out without feeling like a target. – "Aaron" (M, 14-18 yrs)

It's hard to focus on education when your environment is chaotic. "Jay" (M, 14-18 yrs)

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KEY THEME: SOCIAL MEDIA CAN BURDEN OUR YOUTH

I feel like the media creates a narrative that Black people are the ones causing crime, which isn't true... The media puts out these stories to scare people, so when we walk in the community, people fear us. They think we're out to hurt them, which isn't the case at all. - "Jerry" (M, 18-25 yrs)

I hear about crimes on Instagram, YouTube, outside, the news, specifically the Cleve Remembrance page. Yeah, a numerous number of places. - "Carl" (M, 18-24 yrs)



KEY THEME: RACIAL & ECONOMIC DISPARITIES HARM YOUTH

The police see us as threats, not people. – “Jordan” (M, 18-25 yrs)

Shouldn't nobody feel like they have a target on their back just because of ethnicity, skin color, sexual orientation, any of that.

– “Kristin” (F, 18-25 yrs)

We're guilty before we even speak. – “Jerry” (M, 18-25 yrs)

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KEY THEME: CLEVELAND HAS WORK TO DO

Cleveland ain't safe for us. I feel like I have to leave to breathe and not always look over my shoulder. - "Marty" (M, 18-25 yrs)

If I stay here, it's like I'm stuck in this cycle. I've gotta get out to have a chance at something better. - "Gabe" (M, 14-18 yrs).

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KEY THEME: DESIRE FOR INCLUSION IN DECISION-MAKING

Representation means more than just being seen—it means being valued. – “Cece” (F, 18-25 yrs)

If we’re not included, how can we trust the system to work for us? – “Theo” (M, 18-25 yrs)

“Politicians promise a lot but deliver nothing. – “Joshua” (M, 18-25 yrs)

Youth voices matter, but we’re never given a seat at the table. – “Linda” (F, 18-25 yrs).



KEY THEME: ASPIRATIONS & HOPE FOR THEIR FUTURE

I want to go back to school and get my diploma because education is key.
"Nico" (18-25)

My goal is to learn a trade so I can provide for my family.
"Traci" (18-25)

Career training programs would make a big difference in my life.
"Elliot" (14-18)

I dream of becoming an entrepreneur and creating opportunities for others.
"Aaron" (14-18)

I look up to people who have succeeded despite the odds.
"Theo" (18-25)



WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

Questions & Conversation

