

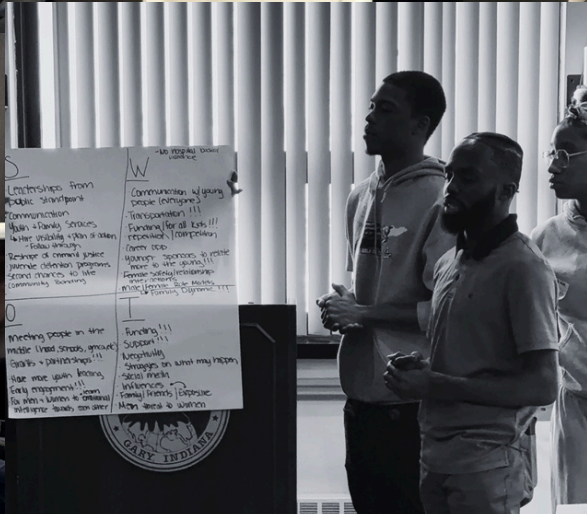


Leading the Way 2025-26 Tour

GARY REPORT

HIGHLIGHTING WHAT WORKS

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LETTER FROM CITIES UNITED EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR: **AN EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

Dear Gary Leaders, Partners, and Community,

On behalf of Cities United, I want to thank the City of Gary for welcoming our team with openness, honesty, and a deep commitment to young people, families, and community safety. Our time in Gary created space to listen, build relationships, understand the local story, and identify where Cities United can stand alongside the city as it continues advancing its public safety work.

Gary is a city with a powerful story. It is shaped by history, resilience, public service, and deep community pride. It is also a city actively telling a fuller story about itself, one that reflects not only what Gary has endured, but what Gary is building. Throughout the visit, we heard leaders, partners, and young people describe a city that is rebuilding, reconnecting, and preparing for what comes next.

What stood out most was the commitment already present across Gary. City leadership, public safety partners, community leaders, youth-serving organizations, and young leaders entered the conversation with a shared interest in expanding what safety can mean.

The conversations reflected an understanding that public safety is about belonging, healing, opportunity, trust, family stability, education, employment, and the ability for young people to see a future for themselves in their own city.

Gary's current moment aligns closely with **Phase I: Prepare to Plan** of the Cities United Roadmap. This is an active and important stage of the work. It is where jurisdictions strengthen relationships, clarify roles, build shared understanding, organize leadership, and prepare the conditions for a comprehensive public safety strategy.

Gary already has many of the elements needed for this next stage: political will, community knowledge, trusted relationships, youth voice, and a growing desire for coordinated action.

The recommendations in this report focus on building from those strengths.

They include strengthening the partnership between Gary and Cities United, clarifying the local engagement and coordination structure, creating a cross-sector leadership and community table, and centering youth voice and community engagement early in the planning process. These are foundational steps that can move Gary from shared momentum to shared structure, and from shared structure to long-term implementation.

Cities United is grateful for the opportunity to learn from Gary and to walk alongside the city in this next chapter. The work ahead is not about starting over. It is about building on what is already present, aligning it with intention, and supporting Gary as it continues advancing a comprehensive public safety ecosystem rooted in healing, care, opportunity, coordination, and community leadership.

Sincerely,

Anthony D. Smith
Executive Director, Cities United



INTRODUCTION

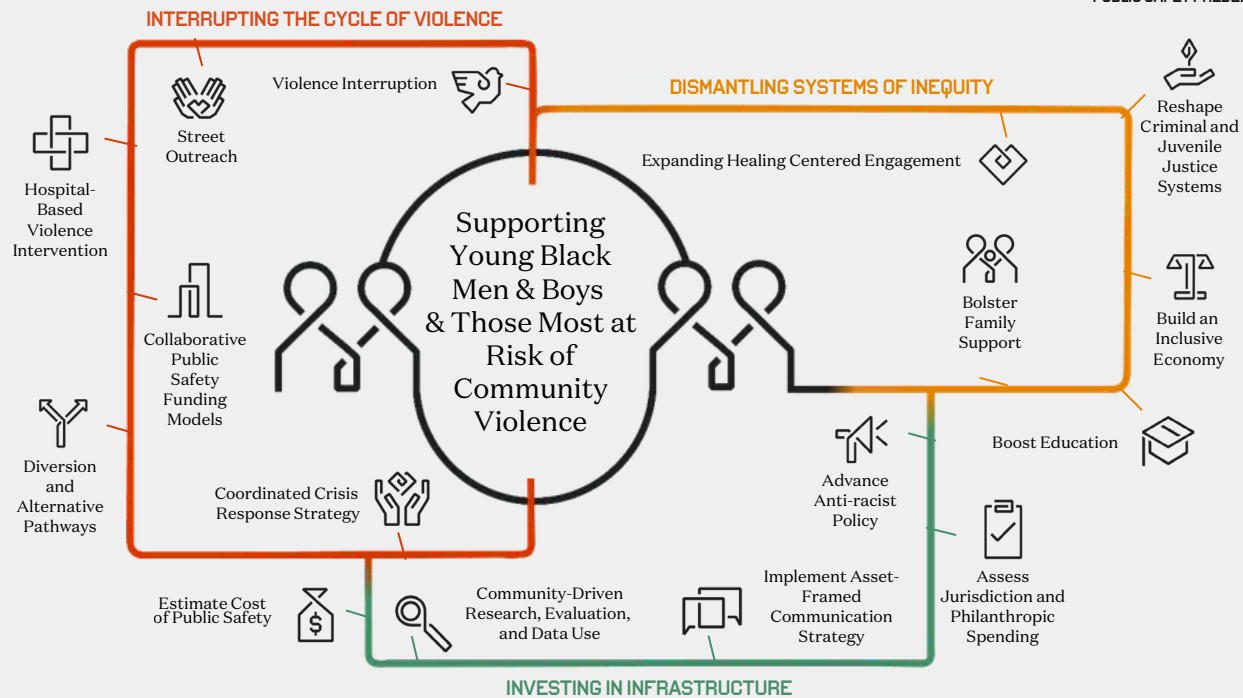
The Leading the Way Tour came to Gary to listen, learn, and better understand how the city is building out a comprehensive public safety ecosystem. The visit created space for Cities United to engage with local leaders, public safety partners, community stakeholders, and young people as Gary continues shaping its next phase of public safety work.

Gary's visit reflected a city with strong local assets and a clear desire to deepen coordination. Across conversations, participants described public safety in expansive terms: the ability to move through daily life without fear, the presence of opportunity for young people, the importance of community voice, and the need for residents to feel connected to the systems and supports around them. Participants emphasized that public safety is not simply a person, department, or institution. It is something residents should be able to experience in their homes, neighborhoods, schools, and public spaces.

This framing aligns with Public Safety Redefined, Cities United's framework for building comprehensive public safety ecosystems. Public Safety Redefined moves beyond a narrow understanding of safety as enforcement or crisis response. It centers the conditions that allow communities, especially young Black men and boys and those most impacted by violence, to be safe, healthy, and hopeful. It is rooted in healing, accountability, community power, opportunity, and coordinated action.

This report does not attempt to offer a full assessment of every part of Gary's public safety ecosystem. Instead, it captures what was heard during this early engagement, identifies the city's current Roadmap position, and offers focused recommendations to support Gary as it prepares for a coordinated planning process.

COMPREHENSIVE PUBLIC SAFETY ECOSYSTEM



FULLY IMPLEMENTED STRATEGY

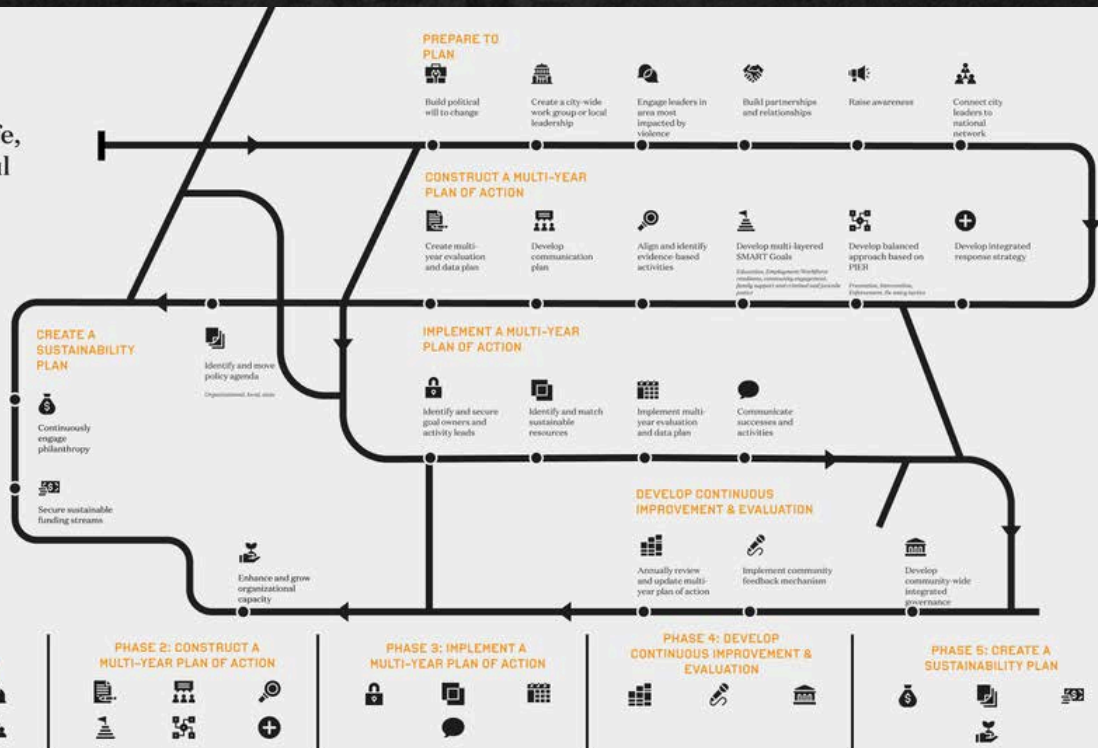


TRADITIONAL PUBLIC SAFETY FIRST RESPONDERS



Roadmap to safe, healthy, hopeful communities

CITY ASSESSING
PEER NETWORK BUILDING
ACTION PLANNING PROCESS
NATIONAL MOVEMENT BUILDING
ONGOING SUPPORT



UNDERSTANDING THE LOCAL LANDSCAPE

Gary's emerging comprehensive public safety landscape is shaped by legacy, resilience, and forward motion. Local leaders described a city whose story has too often been defined from the outside by population loss, disinvestment, blight, and violence. They also described a city actively rebuilding its future through new investment, public leadership, community relationships, and a strong commitment to execution.

City leadership framed Gary as a place of possibility. The Mayor described the city as a “blank canvas of opportunity,” pointing to new residents, building activity, blight elimination efforts, and economic development as part of a story that has not always been fully told. That narrative matters. How Gary is understood by residents, young people, funders, regional partners, and institutions shapes confidence, participation, investment, and belief in what is possible.

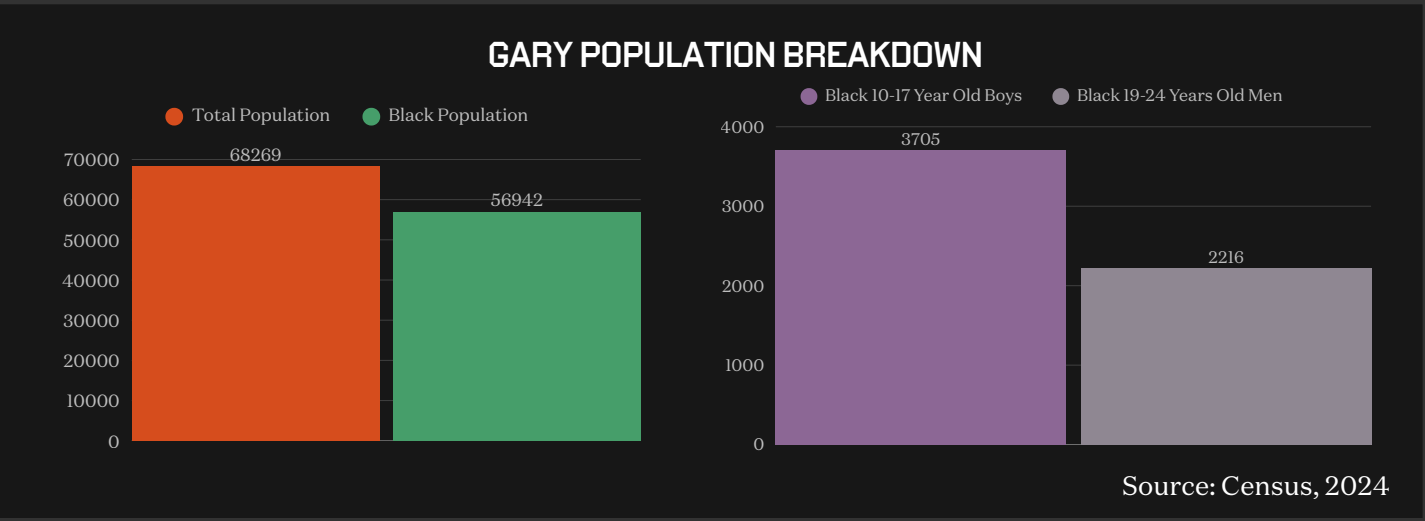


MOMENT THAT MATTERED

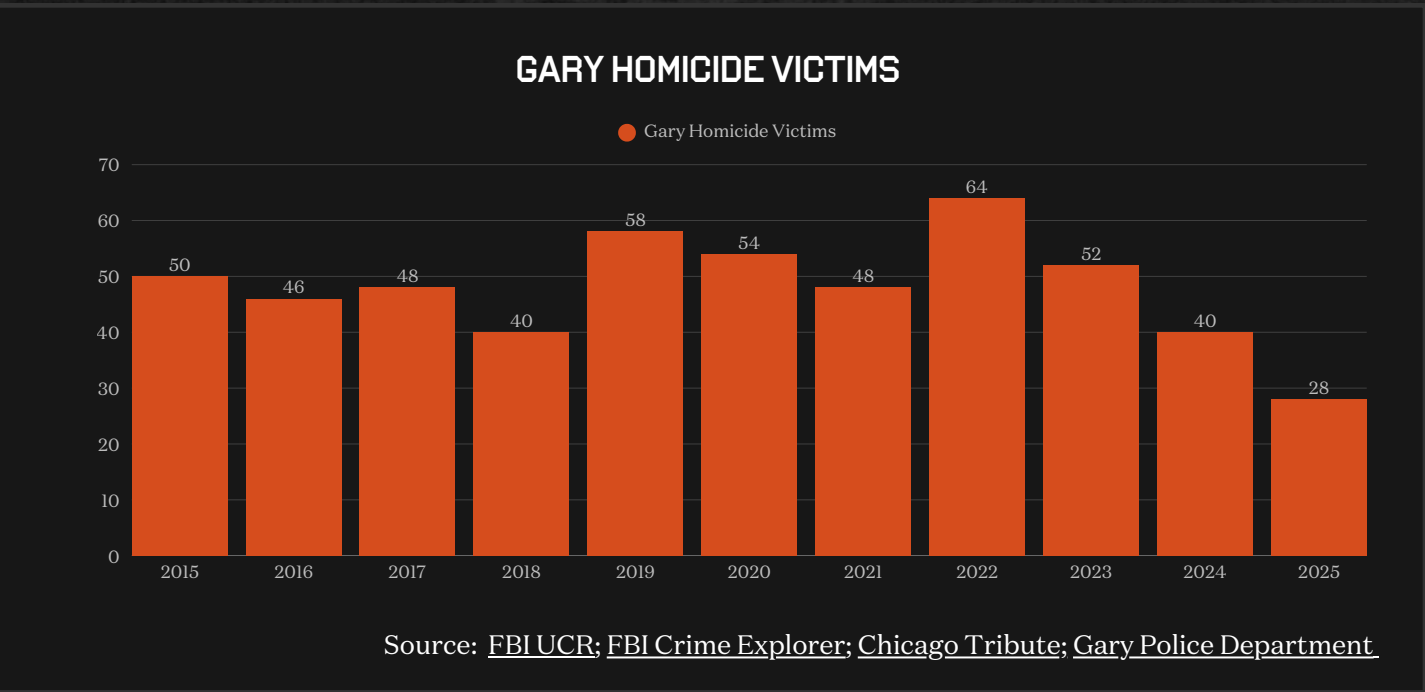
“You see blight, you see a lack of hope. I see a blank canvas of opportunity.”

This reflection captured one of the strongest themes from the visit: Gary is working to shift the public narrative from decline to possibility while grounding that shift in visible action, investment, and renewed leadership.

Gary’s demographic data underscores the importance of centering young Black men and boys in comprehensive public safety planning. The data identifies a total population of 68,269 residents, with 56,942 Black residents, representing 83.4% of the city’s population. It also identifies 3,705 Black boys ages 10 to 17 and 2,216 Black men ages 18 to 24.

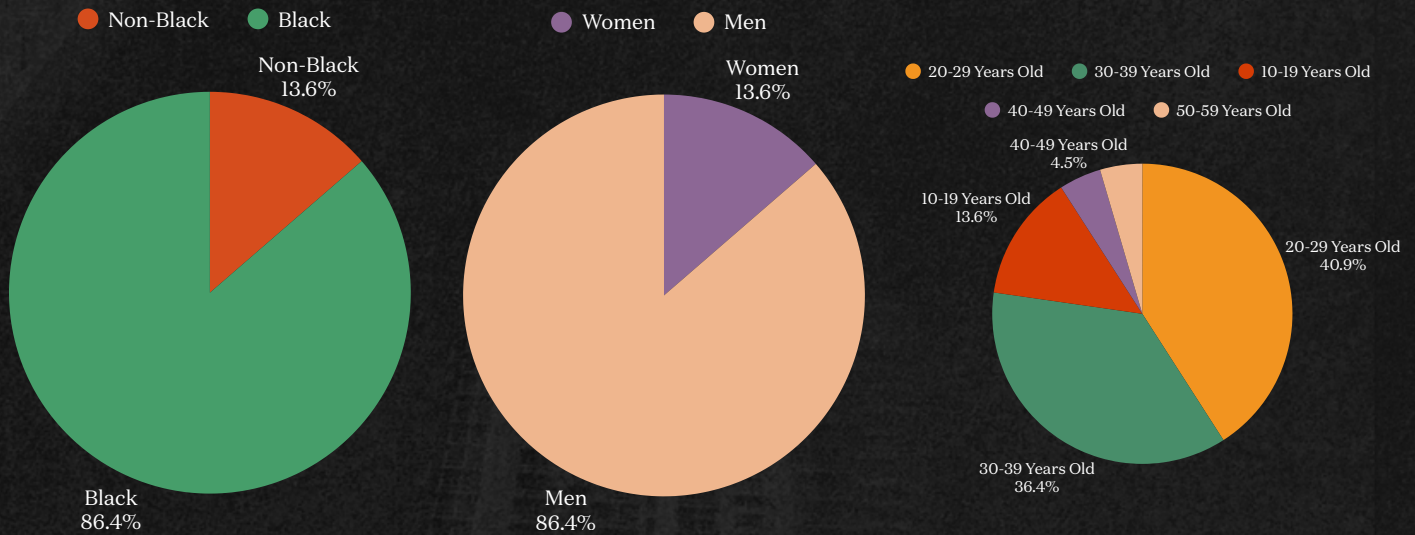


Gary’s community violence trend reflects progress. In 2025, the city recorded 28 homicides, the lowest number shown in the available 2015 to 2025 data. This reduction deserves to be recognized as meaningful. The next stage is to examine what Gary is already doing, where local efforts are gaining traction, and how partners can coordinate around the practices and conditions that are contributing to safer outcomes.



The 2025 homicide data also clarifies where focused attention is needed. In 2025, 86.4% of homicide victims were Black, 86.4% were men, 40.9% were ages 20 to 29, and 13.6% were ages 10 to 19 ([FBI Crime Explorer](#)). These patterns show that the burden of violence is not evenly distributed. Gary’s next phase of planning should keep young Black men, boys, and families closest to violence at the center of strategy, resources, and decision-making.

GARY HOMICIDE VICTIMS (2025)

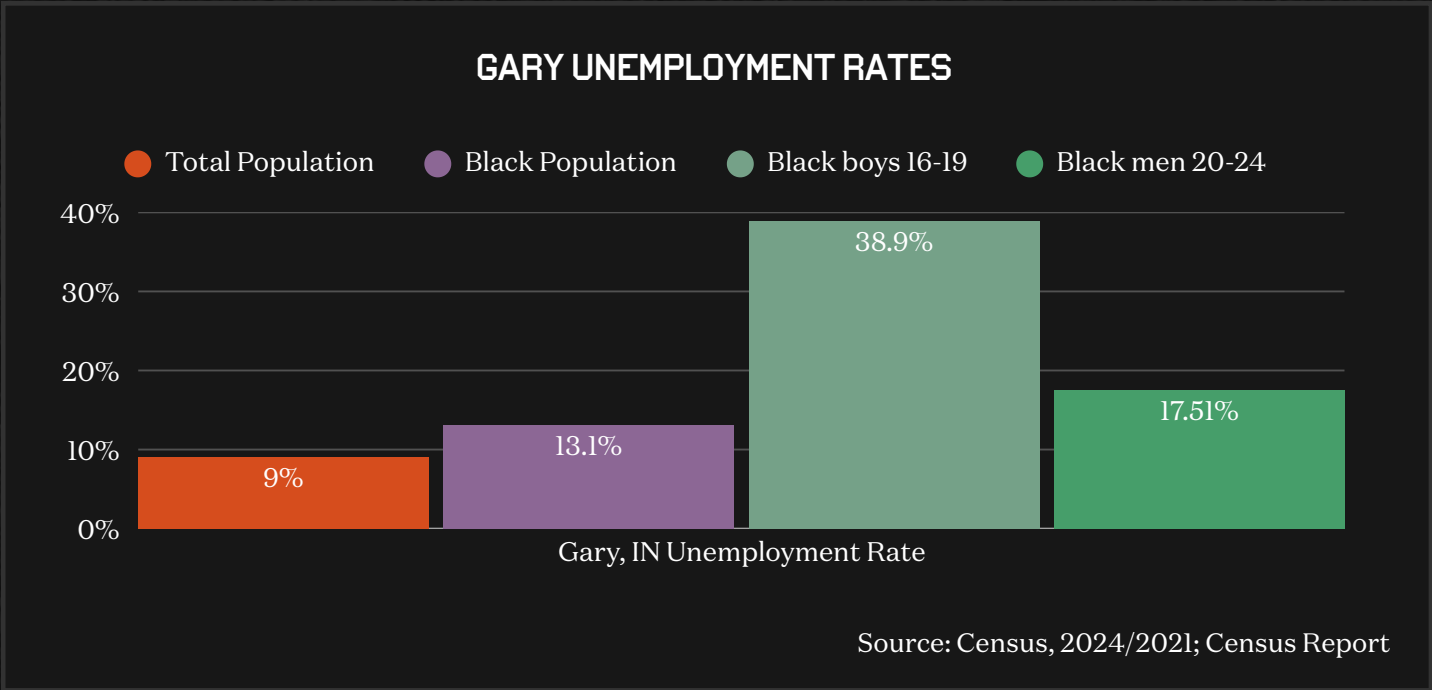


Education and employment also surfaced as core safety issues during the visit. The school data shows significant variation across Gary’s 2025 Black graduation rates. Some schools showed high Black graduation rates, including 97.37% at 21st Century Charter School of Gary and 82.35% at Gary Lighthouse Charter School. Other schools reflected deeper opportunity gaps, including 59.65% at West Side Leadership Academy, 27.78% at Gary Virtual Academy, 24.19% at Gary Middle College, and 4.76% at Excel Center Gary.

Young leaders added important context to these numbers. They questioned whether some data reflected their lived experience, named differences across schools, and connected education outcomes to opportunity, preparation, and employment. Their reflections show why Gary’s planning process should combine data with youth and community interpretation, especially when examining outcomes for Black students most directly connected to the city’s broader safety, opportunity, and equity goals.

2025 Federal Graduation Rate Data	Black	Female	Male	Total
Gary Virtual Academy	27.78%	40.00%	27.27%	33.33%
West Side Leadership Academy	59.65%	62.58%	54.55%	58.68%
21st Century Charter School of Gary	97.37%	100.00%	93.94%	97.62%
Excel Center - Gary	4.76%	11.76%	0.00%	6.45%
Gary Lighthouse Charter School	82.35%	82.00%	82.93%	82.42%
Gary Middle College	24.19%	20.69%	26.83%	24.29%

Employment data adds another layer to the safety conversation. Gary’s total unemployment rate was listed at 9%, compared with 13.1% for the Black population. The rate was significantly higher for young Black male residents, including 38.9% for Black boys ages 16 to 19 and 17.51% for Black men ages 20 to 24. Young leaders connected these numbers to practical barriers: limited awareness of job opportunities, the need for resume and job readiness support, education gaps, adult competition in the labor market, and the importance of early work experience.





MOMENT THAT MATTERED

“Do they have an opportunity to get a job? Do they know how to go about getting a job?”

This question moved the conversation from unemployment as a statistic to employment as a pathway. It underscored the importance of communication, preparation, and early access to opportunity as part of Gary’s broader safety strategy.

Taken together, Gary’s local landscape points to a clear opportunity: build on existing leadership, community relationships, young leader insight, and community violence reduction progress to prepare a coordinated public safety strategy rooted in Public Safety Redefined.

Data and How to Use It:

The data should not only be used to describe the problem. It should be used to guide decisions, target resources, and help Gary understand where young people and families need the most support. The homicide, education, and employment data point to the need for a coordinated strategy that connects violence prevention, school engagement, workforce access, mentoring, healing supports, and family stability.

Gary’s next step should be to review the data with community members and young people so that numbers are paired with lived experience. This will help ensure the strategy reflects both what the data shows and what residents know to be true.

Roadmap Assessment: Gary's Position in Phase 1: Prepare to Plan

Gary is well-positioned in Phase 1: Prepare to Plan of Cities United's Roadmap. This phase is a readiness and alignment phase where jurisdictions organize the people, relationships, information, and structures needed to build a comprehensive public safety strategy.

Gary demonstrates several important Phase 1 indicators. Political will is present. The visit included city leadership, public safety leadership, community leaders, youth-serving partners, and young people. The recommendations prepared after the visit note strong buy-in from the Mayor, Chief of Staff, Chief of Police, community leaders, and young people, and identify political will, trust, and alignment as critical to long-term success.

Gary also has trusted local relationships and community-rooted leadership. The engagement brought together young people, community leaders, city staff, juvenile justice stakeholders, public safety officials, and service providers. Those relationships are foundational to Public Safety Redefined because comprehensive public safety ecosystems require cross-sector collaboration, healing-centered practice, community trust, youth voice, and coordinated infrastructure.

Young people are already contributing to the city's learning and planning environment. They challenged assumptions, gave context to the data, identified barriers to employment, and explained how environment, opportunity, and adult modeling shape young people's choices. Their engagement is a strength. It shows that young people are ready to shape the city's safety priorities, not simply respond to decisions made elsewhere.

Gary's next Roadmap opportunity is to bring these readiness conditions into clearer alignment. The visit surfaced many of the ingredients needed for a comprehensive public safety ecosystem: leadership commitment, public safety partnership, community relationships, youth engagement, local knowledge, and emerging momentum. Phase 1 gives Gary the space to organize those strengths into a shared planning structure before advancing into a multi-year plan of action.

Gary is not starting from scratch. The visit made clear that the city already has important building blocks in place: leadership buy-in, trusted community voices, young people willing to speak honestly, and public safety partners who recognize that safety cannot sit with one department alone. Cities United's role in Phase 1 is to help Gary organize and coordinate those existing assets into a clearer structure for action. The opportunity now is to move from conversation to coordination by aligning people, priorities, roles, and decision-making processes in ways that make the work real, measurable, and sustainable.

Gary's Roadmap Position: Phase 1: Prepare to Plan

Gary's current opportunity is to organize existing assets into a shared planning structure by strengthening partnership, clarifying coordination roles, convening cross-sector leaders, and centering youth and community voice early.

Grounded Strengths

Gary's strengths are rooted in leadership, community knowledge, public safety partnership, and young leader voices. Across the visit, participants demonstrated a shared understanding that a comprehensive public safety ecosystem is not the responsibility of one agency or sector alone. Safety was discussed as something residents should experience in their homes, neighborhoods, schools, and public spaces, and as something tied to healing, opportunity, trust, and connection.

City leadership brought a clear sense of direction and urgency. The Mayor described Gary as having vision, growing partnerships, and increasing resources, while also naming execution as the next stage of work. That framing reflects a city preparing to move from possibility to coordinated action.

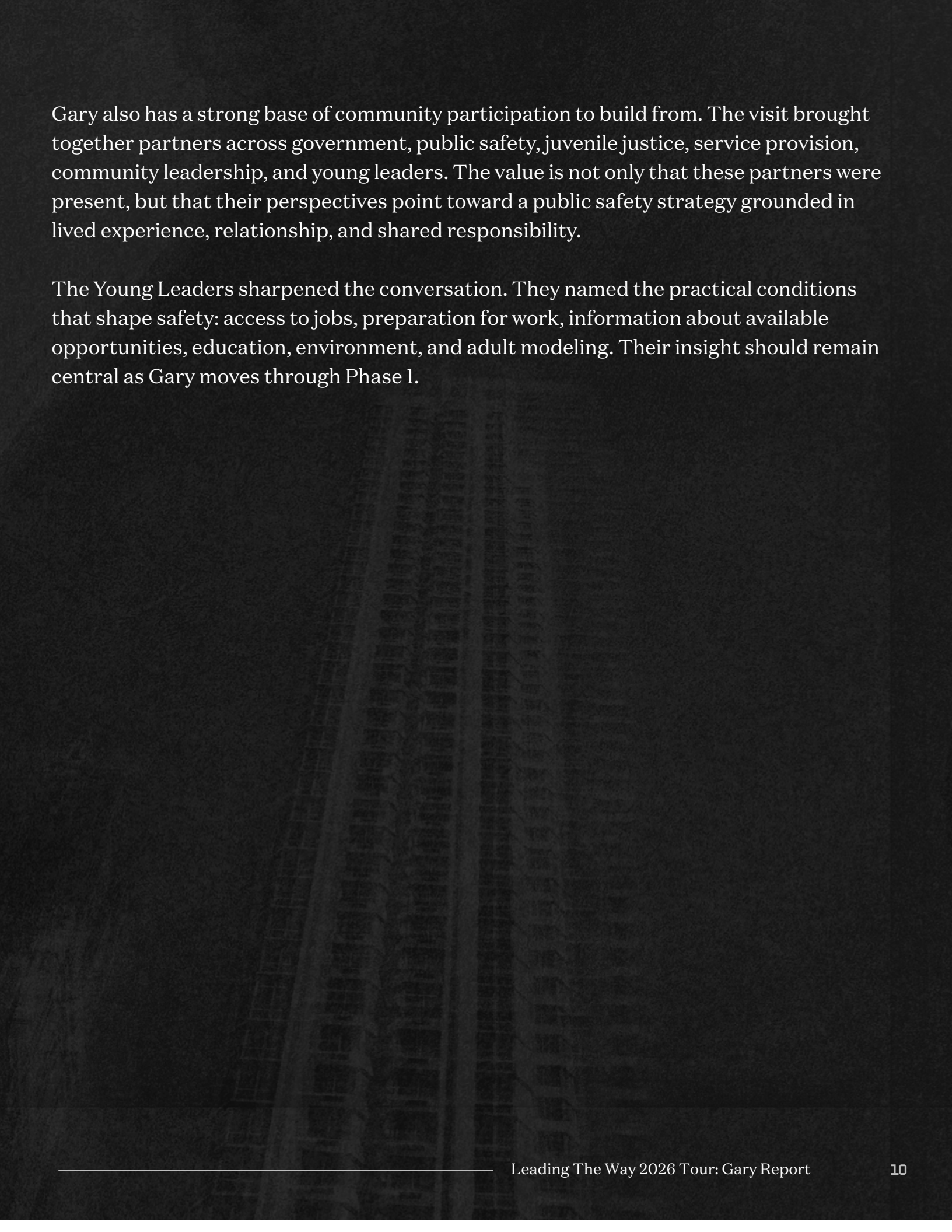
Public safety leadership also reflected openness to a broader approach. Gary's Chief of Police noted that people often believe public safety challenges should be led by police, but that police should be supporting the broader situation. This perspective creates meaningful alignment with Public Safety Redefined, where traditional public safety partners are part of a larger ecosystem that includes community, schools, families, service providers, credible messengers, and young people.



MOMENT THAT MATTERED

“What’s public safety without the public?”

This reflection captured a central strength in Gary: local leaders understand that the people closest to community conditions must have voice, ownership, and a meaningful role in shaping solutions.



Gary also has a strong base of community participation to build from. The visit brought together partners across government, public safety, juvenile justice, service provision, community leadership, and young leaders. The value is not only that these partners were present, but that their perspectives point toward a public safety strategy grounded in lived experience, relationship, and shared responsibility.

The Young Leaders sharpened the conversation. They named the practical conditions that shape safety: access to jobs, preparation for work, information about available opportunities, education, environment, and adult modeling. Their insight should remain central as Gary moves through Phase 1.



EMERGING MOMENTUM

Gary's momentum is visible in the decline in homicides, the city's evolving public narrative, and the willingness of local partners and young people to engage in a broader safety conversation.

The decline to 28 homicides in 2025 from 64 in 2022 is a meaningful marker of progress. It should be treated as a signal worth studying, not a conclusion that the work is finished. Gary's next phase creates an opportunity to identify what is working, understand where progress is strongest, and organize partners around the conditions that can sustain further reductions.

Gary is also working to tell a fuller story about its future. City leadership described new residents, increased building permits, new construction, blight elimination, and economic development activity as evidence of visible change. This matters because a stronger public narrative can reinforce resident confidence, attract aligned partners, and support young people in seeing Gary as a place where their future can take shape.

The visit also showed readiness for continued engagement. Young people brought honest insight. Community partners brought local knowledge. Public safety and city leaders brought a willingness to think beyond traditional response. Together, these conditions create a strong foundation for Phase I planning.

Gary's momentum gives Cities United and local partners a strong foundation for the next stage of work: turning participation into structure, structure into shared planning, and shared planning into long-term implementation.

RECOMMENDATIONS & OPPORTUNITIES FOR CITIES UNITED SUPPORT

1. STRENGTHEN THE PARTNERSHIP BETWEEN GARY AND CITIES UNITED

The Leading the Way visit showed strong buy-in from the Mayor, Chief of Staff, Chief of Police, community leaders, and young people. Building political will, trust, and alignment early is critical to long-term success and implementation.

Gary and Cities United should formalize a partnership structure that includes regular strategy and implementation check-ins, shared priorities, and coordinated communication aligned with the Public Safety Redefined framework and Roadmap process.

2. CLARIFY THE LOCAL ENGAGEMENT AND COORDINATION STRUCTURE.

The visit surfaced the importance of trusted local relationship-building, resident engagement, and stakeholder navigation. Clarifying how this local engagement work aligns with Cities United will help avoid duplication, strengthen coordination, and ensure community engagement efforts remain connected to the broader ecosystem strategy.

Gary and Cities United should establish a coordinated engagement structure where trusted local connectors continue leading relationship-building and resident engagement, while Cities United supports strategy facilitation, ecosystem development, technical assistance, and long-term implementation support. Clear communication pathways and shared accountability should be established moving forward.

For this work to move from planning to implementation, Gary will need a clearly identified local lead or backbone partner responsible for helping coordinate communication, track progress, and keep partners aligned. This does not mean one person or agency owns public safety alone, but it does mean the city needs a clear point of coordination to help move the work forward with consistency and accountability.

3. CREATE A CROSS-SECTOR LEADERSHIP AND COMMUNITY TABLE.

Comprehensive public safety requires alignment across systems and communities. The visit reinforced the need for stronger coordination between government, schools, law enforcement, youth leaders, community organizations, credible messengers, and community stakeholders.

Gary should convene a local leadership table that includes the Mayor's Office, Chief of Police, city youth and family leadership, schools, community organizations, credible messengers, young leaders, and community stakeholders to guide planning, collaboration, and implementation efforts moving forward.

4. CENTER YOUNG LEADER AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT EARLY IN THE PLANNING PROCESS.

The young leaders' conversation highlighted the importance of creating intentional spaces where youth feel heard, valued, and connected to decision-making. Their lived experiences should shape the city's public safety priorities from the beginning.

Gary should develop ongoing young leader engagement structures and community listening opportunities that allow residents and young leaders to remain actively involved throughout the planning process. Engagement efforts should be trauma-informed, community-centered, and tied directly to future action planning and implementation.

The young leaders in Gary did more than participate in the conversation. They helped interpret the data, named gaps in opportunity, and gave real context around jobs, school, environment, and adult support. Their role should not end with the Leading the Way visit. Gary should create an ongoing youth engagement structure that allows young people to advise, inform, and help shape public safety priorities moving forward.

This could include a youth advisory group, regular listening sessions, youth-led data conversations, or paid opportunities for young people to support outreach, storytelling, and community engagement.

5. DEVELOP A CLEAR IMPLEMENTATION AND ACCOUNTABILITY STRUCTURE.

Gary has the momentum and relationships needed to move this work forward, but the next phase will require clear ownership, timelines, and follow-through. The city and Cities United should identify who is responsible for each priority area, how progress will be tracked, and what short-term wins can be achieved in the first 90 to 120 days.

This structure should include a shared workplan, meeting cadence, progress tracker, and regular check-ins between Gary leadership, community partners, young leaders, and Cities United. This will help ensure that the work does not remain a report or a conversation, but becomes a coordinated strategy with visible action and shared accountability.

HOW CITIES UNITED CAN SUPPORT

Cities United can support Gary by helping facilitate the Phase I planning process, supporting the development of a cross-sector table, helping organize youth and community engagement, providing tools for work-planning and accountability, and aligning Gary's local priorities with the Public Safety Redefined framework.

Cities United's role should be to walk alongside Gary, support structure and strategy, and help the city build a public safety ecosystem that is locally owned, community-centered, and focused on young Black men and boys most impacted by violence.

IMMEDIATE NEXT STEPS:

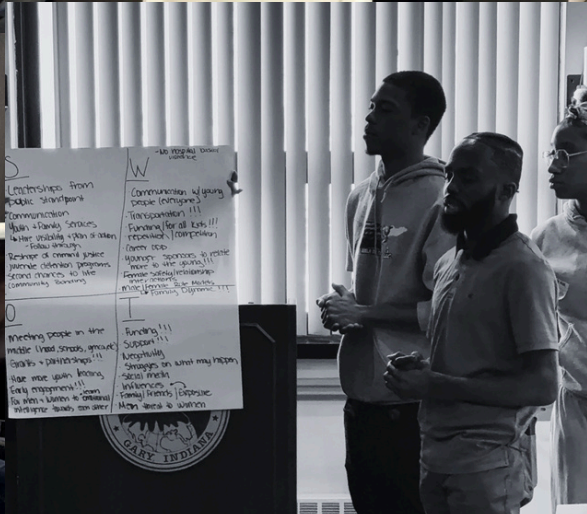
1. Confirm Gary's local point of contact and Cities United engagement lead.
2. Schedule a follow-up strategy meeting with the Mayor's Office, Chief of Police, community leaders, and young leaders.
3. Identify members for the cross-sector leadership and community table.
4. Create a 90- to 120-day work-plan connected to the report recommendations.
5. Develop a youth engagement structure that continues beyond the LTW visit.
6. Establish a progress tracker and regular check-in cadence with Cities United.

Conclusion:

Gary's Leading the Way visit revealed a city with strong assets, committed leadership, trusted relationships, engaged young people, and meaningful momentum. The city is already telling a fuller story about itself, one rooted not only in what Gary has endured, but in what Gary is building.

Gary's position in Phase 1: Prepare to Plan offers a clear and constructive path forward. This phase is about organizing existing strengths into a shared structure for future action. It gives Gary and Cities United the opportunity to formalize partnership, clarify engagement roles, convene cross-sector leaders, and center youth and community voice before moving into a fuller planning process.

The opportunity ahead is to turn momentum into infrastructure and narrative change into systems change. **Gary has already begun shifting how people see the city, but the next step is making sure that shift is matched with structure, coordination, and action.** With the right planning foundation, aligned partners at the table, young people centered from the beginning, and clear accountability moving forward, Gary can continue building a comprehensive public safety ecosystem rooted in Public Safety Redefined, one that supports young Black men and boys, strengthens families, advances healing and opportunity, and builds a safer, healthier, and more hopeful future for the entire community.





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