



Leading the Way 2025 Tour

KING COUNTY REPORT

HIGHLIGHTING WHAT WORKS

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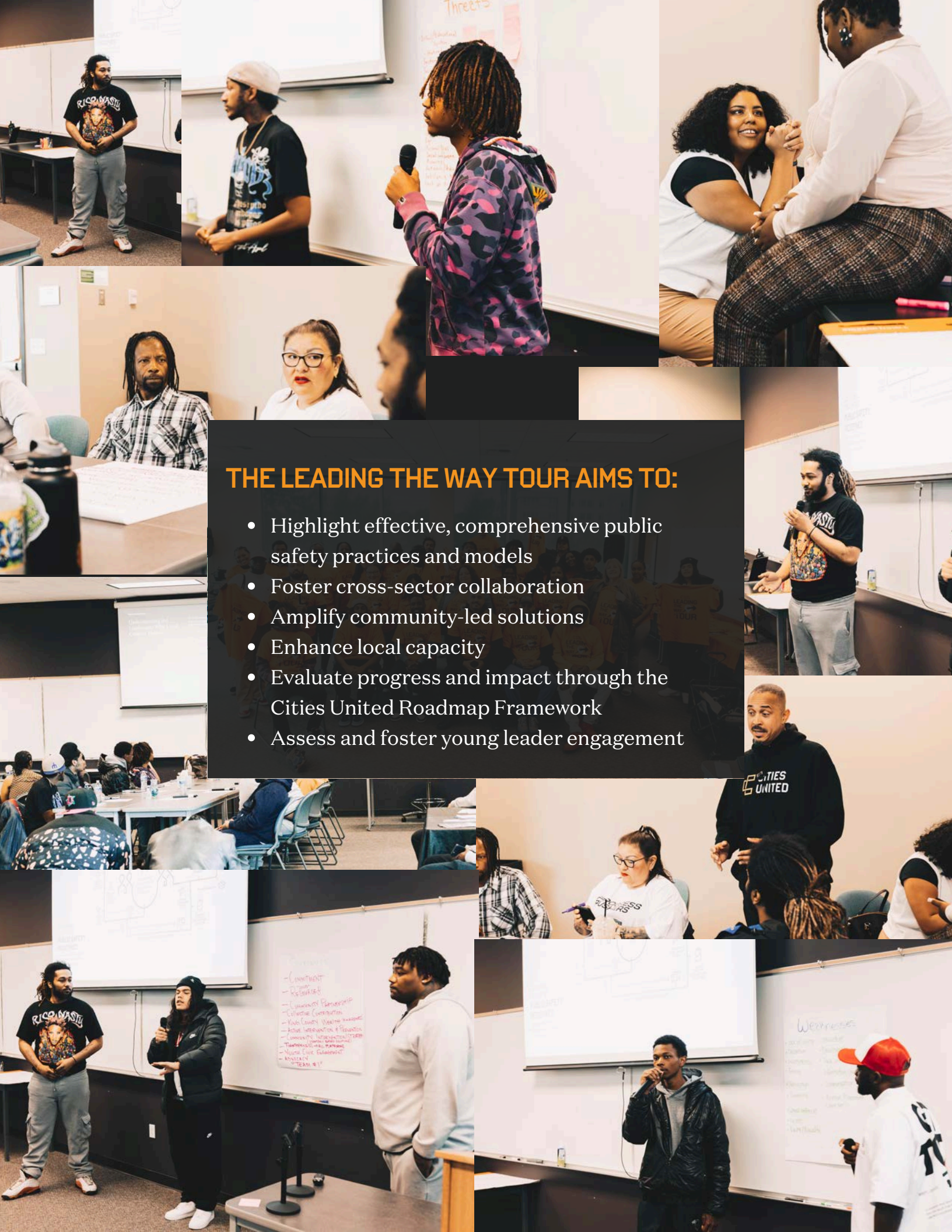
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THE LEADING THE WAY TOUR AIMS TO:

- Highlight effective, comprehensive public safety practices and models
- Foster cross-sector collaboration
- Amplify community-led solutions
- Enhance local capacity
- Evaluate progress and impact through the Cities United Roadmap Framework
- Assess and foster young leader engagement

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: KING COUNTY

From **June 24–26, 2025**, Cities United convened its Leading the Way Tour in **King County, Washington**. The three-day experience brought together young leaders, community-based organizations, public health leaders, government officials, and system stakeholders for relationship-building, shared learning, and strategy development. These sessions confirmed King County’s growing alignment around a **healing-centered, equity-driven vision for public safety**, and the need to move from promising initiatives to sustained, regional implementation.



What emerged in King County was not just potential, but readiness.

LEADING THE WAY TOUR PARTICIPANT

King County has laid important groundwork. **The Regional Office of Gun Violence Prevention (ROGVP)**, established in 2023, has become a central hub for coordination, evaluation, and investment. Community-based partners like **Community Passageways**, **Urban Family**, and the **Freedom Project** continue to lead direct intervention and peer support efforts. Recent initiatives such as the **100 Days of Action**, **Peace Camps**, and the **inaugural Voices of Hope and Healing summit** reflect growing energy across sectors and communities.

Still, persistent challenges remain: fragmented systems, limited data infrastructure, short-term funding cycles, and the underrepresentation of young leaders in strategy and governance. Participants emphasized that public safety must be redefined beyond just through reduced violence, but through **access to healing, opportunity, and community care**.

This report lifts up grounded strengths, identifies areas for continued investment, and presents **six actionable recommendations** supported by Cities United commitments. These include formalizing young leader leadership, strengthening implementation structures, improving data systems, advancing narrative change, and sustaining the CVI ecosystem through long-term investment.

What emerged clearly in King County is not just potential, but **readiness**. The next phase requires deepened alignment, shared ownership, and a countywide commitment to strategies that work for those most impacted. Cities United remains committed to walking alongside King County on this journey, co-creating a regional model for safety rooted in healing, equity, and accountability.

INTRODUCTION:

King County is Leading the Way Toward a Regional Approach

Cities United's **Leading the Way Tour** is a vehicle for advancing comprehensive, **community-driven public safety solutions**. Through each stop, the tour uplifts effective practices, strengthens local ecosystems, and fosters national learning across partner jurisdictions. **King County** (home to Seattle and over 2.2 million residents) stands out as a jurisdiction actively working to **redefine public safety** through regional coordination, bold county leadership, and deep investment in **violence intervention** and **healing-centered care**. The tour created space to learn, build trust, and support partnerships that can fuel sustainable, justice-centered transformation.

In King County, the tour built upon growing momentum across government and grassroots partners. This includes leadership from the **Regional Office of Gun Violence Prevention (ROGVP)**, launched in 2023 by County Executive Dow Constantine, and a trusted network of organizations like **Community Passageways**, Urban Family, Harborview Medical Center, and the Freedom Project. These partners are leading **community violence intervention, crisis response**, young leader engagement, and hospital-based efforts aligned with a public health framework.

Over the past several years, local and regional leaders have worked to align partners around a shared commitment to **equity, young leader voice**, and **healing-centered care**.

This approach lays the groundwork for a more coordinated public safety approach across King County.

King County is advancing a dynamic **regional movement** that connects infrastructure development with lived experience. Efforts like the **100 Days of Action** demonstrated how short-term coordination and investment can drive public engagement and CVI expansion. Yet in a landscape shaped by **structural inequities**, regional fragmentation, and **under-resourced frontline systems**, continued action is essential to realize the vision articulated by King County's young leaders, one rooted in **safety, healing, opportunity, and belonging**, as expressed during LTW sessions focused on lived experience and community voice.

This report reflects insights and strategies drawn from community dialogue with **young leaders**, local and regional community violence intervention practitioners and supporters including street outreach workers and government representatives from across King County. It aims to support King County's continued growth toward a fully implemented, **community-centered public safety ecosystem** with clear structures, sustained investment, and collaborative leadership at its core.



OVERVIEW & BACKGROUND

King County's Evolving Approach to Public Safety

Redefining public safety in King County means moving beyond enforcement-led responses and toward a comprehensive, **community-centered ecosystem rooted in healing, opportunity, and equity**. The region has long faced challenges related to **structural inequities, racial disparities, and uneven access to safety infrastructure**. South King County particularly is where violence has been most concentrated and where communities of color, especially Black residents, have experienced the greatest harm.

In response, King County has taken key steps to reshape its public safety landscape. In 2023, the County Executive established the **Regional Office of Gun Violence Prevention (ROGVP)**, positioning it within Public Health–Seattle & King County. The ROGVP was tasked with coordinating a **public health approach to community violence**, addressing root causes while expanding access to **trauma-informed, community-led supports**.

A MAJOR EARLY INITIATIVE WAS THE 100 DAYS OF ACTION, WHICH INCLUDED:

- Hiring and training 28 CVI staff across multiple organizations
- Hosting Peace Camps for youth engaged in or vulnerable to violence
- Expanding hospital-based violence intervention efforts
- Launching crisis response teams and public education campaigns
- Distributing 5,000 firearm lockboxes and gathering over 1 million digital engagements

These efforts signaled a broader regional shift from fragmented strategies to **coordinated, cross-sector collaboration**. Community-based organizations such as **Community Passageways, Urban Family**, and the **Freedom Project** have emerged as critical anchors, working alongside systems leaders to advance **CVI models, peer support, and justice alternatives**.

At the same time, King County has made progress in building **infrastructure to sustain this work**. The ROGVP is developing a **provider portal** to address service fragmentation and is collaborating with local and state agencies to advocate for policy change, including **Medicaid reimbursement for CVI services**.

Still, gaps remain. Stakeholders cited the need for **stronger narrative alignment, increased funding stability,** and more **formal structures** to sustain cross-jurisdictional coordination.

Building on both the historical legacy of inequity and today's momentum for change, King County is poised to advance a **long-term public safety strategy that centers those most impacted.** This means strengthening systems of support, reimagining roles for government and community alike, and investing in leadership from within affected neighborhoods.

CURRENT EFFORTS INCLUDE:

- Regional coordination through the ROGVP
- Hospital-Based Violence Intervention at Harborview Medical Center
- Community-Led CVI and Peer Outreach
- Peace Camps, Mentorship & Youth Development
- Crisis Response & Firearm Safety Campaigns
- Data-Informed Strategy & Policy Advocacy
- Multilingual Public Engagement & Community Surveys
- Short-Term CVI Grants and Infrastructure Investment



OVER 1 MILLION DIGITAL ENGAGEMENTS DURING THE 100 DAYS OF ACTION.

A new level of public visibility and awareness.

Together, these efforts represent King County's commitment to **redefining safety through connection, care, and shared accountability,** laying the foundation for a comprehensive, multi-year public safety plan.



“I didn’t think anyone cared... but they showed up again. And again. That changed things.”

A Young Person’s Turning Point

MOMENT THAT MATTERED

Navigating trust-building with a young person in South King County is rarely straightforward. **Many young leaders stand at a crossroads: on one side, the familiarity of high-risk behavior shaped by cycles of harm; on the other, the uncertainty of change burdened by broken systems and deep mistrust.** One young man, recently unhoused and deeply impacted by community violence, had **lost faith in every institution meant to support him.** But when **outreach workers from a local CVI program showed up (not just once, but consistently)** he began to see that transformation wasn’t just possible, it was worth believing in.

Through the support of **Peace Camp staff and mentors**, he found a path toward stability. He joined a peer leadership circle, received a housing referral, and eventually began **volunteering with youth outreach.** **His journey echoes that of many in King County: trust isn’t built in a day. But it can start with one.**

KING COUNTY SNAPSHOT: PUBLIC SAFETY REDEFINED

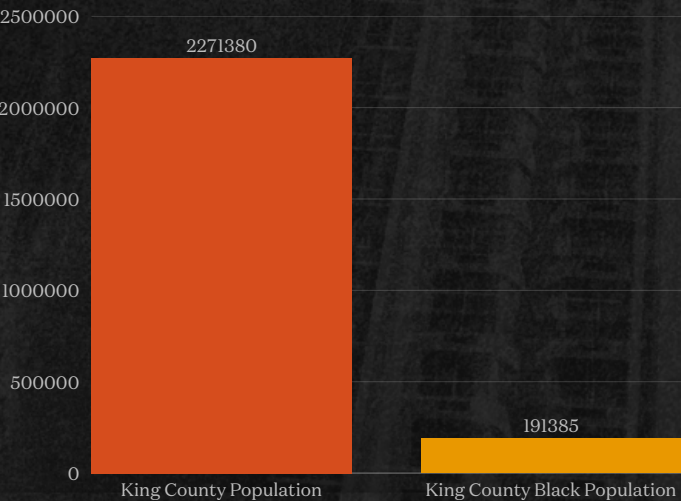
Redefining public safety in King County means confronting longstanding disparities in **safety, opportunity, and well-being**, particularly for **Black and Brown youth and communities in South King County**. As violence has become increasingly concentrated in specific neighborhoods and among high-risk populations, local leaders have begun to shift their approach. Rather than relying solely on enforcement-based strategies, King County is embracing a **comprehensive, community-centered model** aligned with the **Cities United Public Safety Redefined Framework**. This model is anchored in three key pillars: interrupting the cycle of violence, dismantling systems of inequity, and investing in infrastructure.



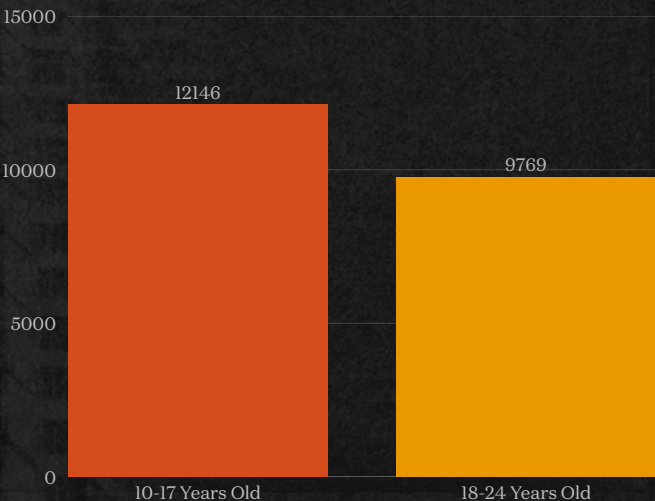
KING COUNTY BY THE NUMBERS

- Population:** 2.2 million+
- Youth Demographics:** 13% of the population are youth ages 10–24
- Homicides:** 127 in 2023, disproportionately impacting Black residents
- Firearm Death Rates:** Increased by 16% between 2018 and 2022
- Unemployment:** Up to 36% for youth in some high-risk areas
- Key Challenge Areas:** South King County and parts of Seattle

POPULATION



BLACK MEN/BOYS AGES 10-24



Interrupting the Cycle of Violence

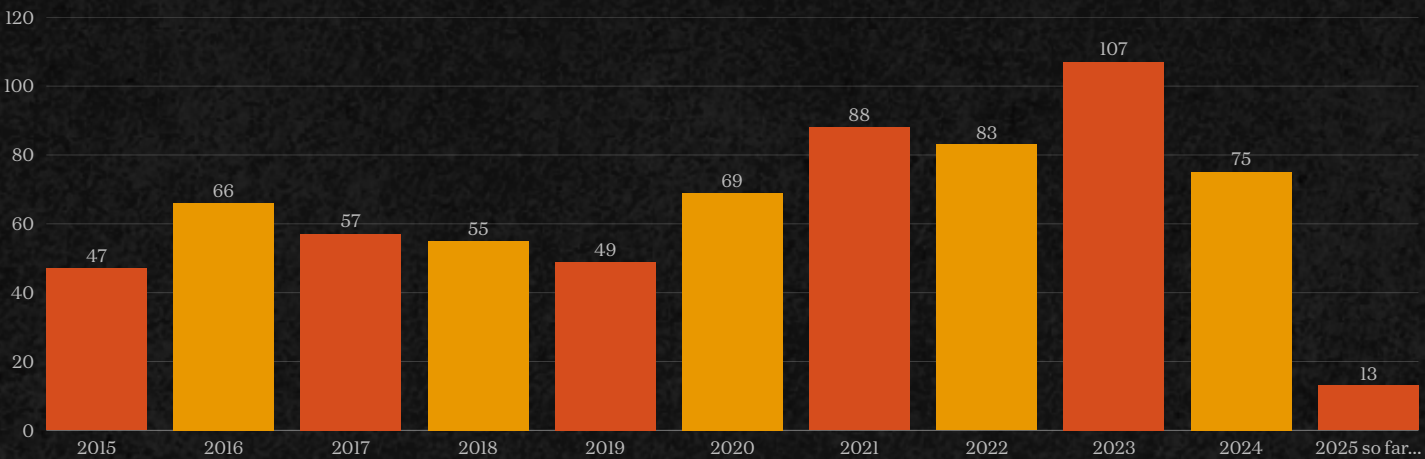
King County is **scaling direct strategies** to reduce immediate risk for those most impacted by violence. Through the **100 Days of Action**, **28 community violence intervention (CVI) staff** were hired across the region to support crisis response, lead **Peace Camps for high-risk youth**, and build trust through sustained outreach. **Hospital-based interventions at Harborview Medical Center** reached **181 gun violence survivors in 2024**, offering trauma-informed care and connections to services. Trusted community-based organizations such as **Community Passageways** and **Urban Family** continue to lead street-level engagement. The county also launched a firearm safety initiative that distributed **5,000 lockboxes** and paired education campaigns with harm reduction strategies.

Number of people “At Highest Risk” of being directly impacted by gun violence

2,271

(0.1% of population)

KING COUNTY HOMICIDES



	Number of violent crimes	Violent crime rate per 100,000 residents	Murder Rate per 100,000 residents
County	9,432	415	6
State	27,909	357	5
Country	1,253,813	374	6

Source: King County Prosecuting Attorney Office, Crime Strategies Unit, FBIUCR, and Neighborhood Scout

Dismantling Systems of Inequity

Alongside direct intervention, King County is working to uproot the systems that perpetuate harm. Public investment in grassroots organizations is being used to expand trauma-informed reentry supports, young leader mentorship, and outreach in shelters and detention facilities. A multilingual community survey distributed in nine languages helped elevate the perspectives of residents often left out of policy conversations, including East African, Latino/a, and LGBTQIA+ communities.

9 LANGUAGES. 1 SHARED PURPOSE.

Multilingual engagement is elevating underrepresented voices.

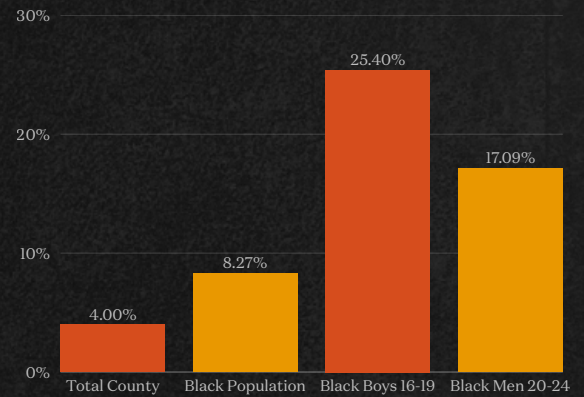
Recognizing the need to support frontline workers, the county also launched **wellness programs and healing retreats** for CVI staff, aiming to reduce burnout and secondary trauma.

Investing in Infrastructure

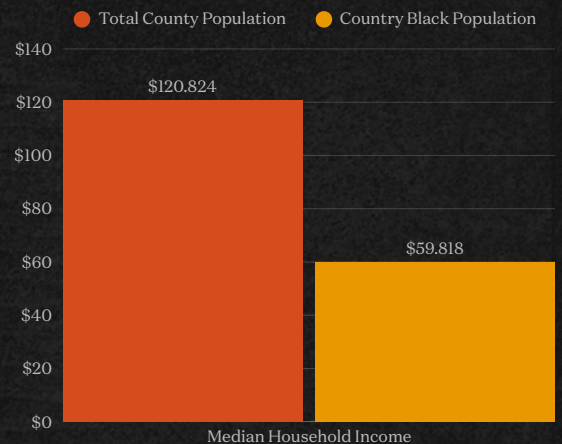
The **Regional Office of Gun Violence Prevention (ROGVP)**, launched in 2023, now serves as the central hub for strategic planning, coordination, and evaluation. A **CVI provider portal** is in development to improve referrals and reduce fragmentation. The county has awarded over **\$1 million in short-term grants** to grassroots CVI groups and committed **\$250,000 to bolster hospital-based intervention**. These investments are supported by a **cross-sector legislative agenda** focused on Medicaid reimbursement, firearm policy reform, and dedicated CVI funding. Narrative change efforts are also underway to better align public understanding with the values of equity, healing, and prevention.

King County is building a public safety ecosystem grounded in **care, collaboration, and community expertise**. By linking real-time needs with long-term strategy, the county is redefining what safety means, and ensuring it works for those most impacted.

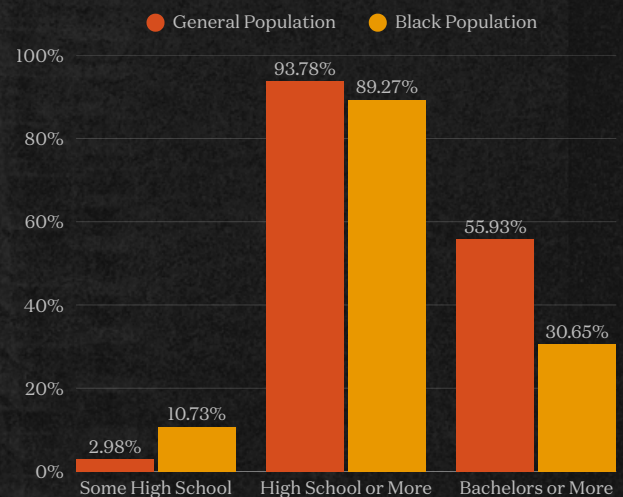
UNEMPLOYMENT RATE



MEDIAN HOUSEHOLD INCOME



EDUCATION LEVEL



Source: Census, 2023/2021

UNDERSTANDING THE LOCAL LANDSCAPE: KING COUNTY

The Leading the Way Tour stop in King County revealed that the jurisdiction is in the midst of an important transition **from promising groundwork to the pursuit of formalized, community-led safety systems**. Through dialogue with young leaders, community stakeholders, public health representatives, outreach workers, and local and regional elected and appointed officials and representatives, participants surfaced a mix of strengths, structural challenges, and opportunities for deeper alignment and investment.

GROUNDED STRENGTHS

King County benefits from a number of foundational strengths that can support long-term transformation. The presence of the **Regional Office of Gun Violence Prevention (ROGVP)** has created a central hub for strategy, coordination, and investment. Participants frequently cited its value in bringing together stakeholders from across government and community sectors. Community-based organizations like Community Passageways, Urban Family, and the Freedom Project anchor the county's CVI ecosystem with deep credibility and strong neighborhood ties. During the LTW visit, young people shared how programs like Peace Camps and "Voices of Brilliance" provided spaces of safety, healing, and leadership development. Hospital-based interventions at Harborview Medical Center further enhance the ecosystem, offering trauma-informed care and acting as critical points of re-engagement.

King County also demonstrated its capacity to convene cross-sector voices and center community experience through events like the inaugural "Voices of Hope and Healing" Summit on Crime Survivors. The summit brought together survivors, youth, community partners, faith leaders, system actors, and elected officials to discuss strategies for prevention, healing, and policy change. The event reinforced the importance of uplifting survivor voices, addressing systemic harm, and advancing **community-based solutions**. It marked a pivotal step toward normalizing survivor-centered engagement and lifting up the role of **healing in public safety**.

PERSISTENT CHALLENGES

Despite this solid foundation, stakeholders identified a number of **persistent barriers** to scaling impact. Coordination across agencies and organizations remains fragmented, with few formal mechanisms for shared strategy or performance tracking. **Young people**, while regularly involved in programming, are not yet fully embedded in planning and governance. This was a disconnect highlighted throughout youth reflections. **Data infrastructure** is another major gap: the absence of shared, real-time information limits both accountability and learning. Participants also named inconsistencies in **public messaging**, making it harder to build shared understanding and trust in CVI approaches. Finally, stakeholders emphasized the **vulnerability created by short-term funding cycles**, which place pressure on organizations and inhibit long-term planning.

EMERGING MOMENTUM

Encouragingly, King County is experiencing several areas of **positive momentum**. The **100 Days of Action** served as a galvanizing initiative, raising awareness and broadening support for CVI efforts. Investments in **healing retreats and wellness programming** for frontline staff were welcomed as signs of deeper attention to sustainability. **Multilingual engagement**, including surveys distributed in nine languages, is helping to elevate underrepresented voices in policy conversations. The **Voices of Hope and Healing Summit** further signaled a shift toward collaborative leadership grounded in healing and community trust. And the early development of a **joint legislative agenda** reflects growing alignment around regional priorities, including firearm regulation, funding infrastructure, and Medicaid reimbursement.

STRATEGIC CONSIDERATIONS

To sustain and build on this momentum, several **strategic shifts** are needed. First, King County must **formalize youth leadership** in planning, decision-making, and accountability structures. Second, a **centralized implementation or steering group** could strengthen regional alignment and guide execution of shared goals. Third, investment in **real-time, disaggregated data tools** is essential for system learning and continuous improvement. Fourth, a **coordinated narrative and communications strategy** is needed to build cross-sector buy-in and strengthen community trust. Lastly, **sustainable, blended investment**—drawing from public, philanthropic, and private sources will be critical to advancing and institutionalizing the work.

King County has a strong foundation and visible commitment to redefining public safety. What is needed now is the **infrastructure, alignment, and accountability** to carry its safety vision into long-term implementation.

RECOMMENDATIONS & CITIES UNITED COMMITMENTS

King County stands at a critical juncture—possessing the infrastructure, leadership, and lived experience to drive regional public safety transformation. The following recommendations reflect priorities raised by stakeholders throughout the Leading the Way Tour stop, including during session debriefs, pre-assessment responses, and on-the-ground reflections. Each is paired with a specific Cities United commitment to support forward movement.

1. Codify and Operationalize a Shared Regional Vision for Public Safety

Finalize a countywide public safety vision and multi-year implementation plan that reflects community priorities and aligns city, county, and regional partners. The upcoming 2025 Executive election presents a strategic opportunity to embed public safety as a cross-jurisdictional priority.

Cities United Commitment: Facilitate structured visioning sessions with system leaders, CBOs, and youth to co-develop a regional safety narrative and roadmap framework. Provide peer learning from other jurisdictions that have completed similar planning processes.

2. Formalize Youth Leadership in Public Safety Strategy

Move beyond young leader participation in programming to create formal roles in planning, accountability, and governance—such as young leader advisory boards, compensated strategy fellows, or co-chair positions.

Cities United Commitment: Support design and rollout of a comprehensive public safety model. Offer national peer exchanges, leadership development, and communications training for emerging young leaders.

3. Establish a Coordinated Implementation and Governance Structure

Create a cross-agency, community-informed steering committee or implementation body to align roles, guide priorities, and manage accountability across the ecosystem.

Cities United Commitment: Provide technical assistance and planning support to co-design a governance structure. Offer templates, decision-making tools, and facilitation to ensure shared ownership and community legitimacy.

RECOMMENDATIONS & CITIES UNITED COMMITMENTS

4. Expand and Institutionalize Data Infrastructure

Invest in real-time, disaggregated data systems that can track referrals, service outcomes, and population-level trends. Ensure community access to evaluation findings and use data to inform continuous learning.

Cities United Commitment: Partner with data and evaluation experts to help scope a shared metrics system and build local capacity to collect and interpret data. Facilitate learning sessions with other CU partners developing similar tools.

5. Develop and Deploy a Countywide Public Safety Narrative Strategy

Launch a coordinated communications and storytelling campaign to promote healing-centered public safety strategies, lift up frontline work, and address misinformation and stigma.

Cities United Commitment: Collaborate with local partners to co-create message guidance, identify trusted messengers, and align communications across sectors.

6. Sustain and Expand the CVI Ecosystem with Long-Term Funding

Move from short-term, piecemeal funding to a sustainable investment strategy for community-based organizations and system-aligned programs. Support infrastructure, staffing, and wellness.

Cities United Commitment: Assist with fundraising strategy development, identify potential philanthropic and federal opportunities, and provide grant writing and backbone infrastructure support.



CALL TO ACTION

Aligning Vision, Deepening Commitment

King County is building on a foundation of **bold leadership**, survivor-centered engagement, and grassroots vision. The conversations, reflections, and strategies shared during the Leading the Way Tour affirmed the region’s potential to model what a healing-centered, equity-rooted public safety ecosystem can look like. But momentum is not enough.

The next chapter requires coordination, clarity, and commitment. Young leaders and frontline workers have made clear what safety looks and feels like - now those visions must be operationalized through shared structures, sustainable investments, and trusted governance. Institutions must move beyond temporary initiatives toward long-term accountability. Community-rooted organizations must be supported not just with grants, but with infrastructure and voice. And young people, so often at the frontlines of violence and healing—must be integrated as co-leaders in the process.

The Leading the Way Tour made visible the **urgency, and the readiness**, across King County. What’s needed now is aligned action: a unified vision, a **durable plan**, and resourced partnerships that deliver safety, healing, and opportunity where they’re needed most.

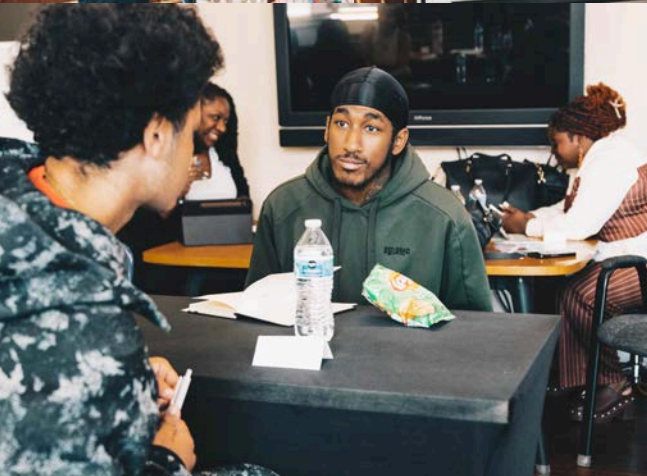
Cities United remains committed to walking alongside King County in this next phase—supporting strategy, deepening relationships, and helping to ensure that safety is no longer siloed, reactive, or inequitable, but **owned, shared, and community-defined**.



NOW IS THE TIME TO TURN READINESS INTO REALITY.

— Cities United







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