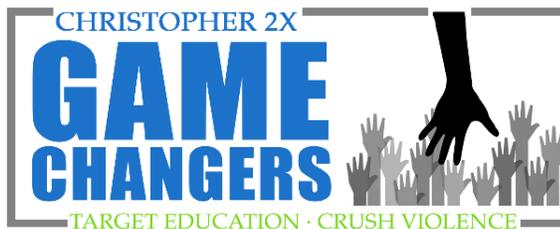


VIOLENCE

Impact on Children Learning



SHINING A LIGHT ON HOW GUN VIOLENCE IMPACTS KIDS



Kentucky Education Commissioner Dr. Wayne D. Lewis

“Children who grow up in violent neighborhoods seldom realize their way of life is not typical. Their lives may include regularly hearing gunshots through the night and sometimes during the day, losing friends, family, and neighbors to gun violence, and continually being fearful of becoming the victim of violent crime.

No parent wants that kind of life for their children, but that is what life looks like for children living in violent neighborhoods across the U.S., including children in some Louisville neighborhoods. The trauma they suffer is unlike anything children growing up in upper middle class or affluent neighborhoods could imagine. And the impact of that trauma, while often unrecognized, is significant; often impacting their ability to reach their learning potential at school.

Recognizing and responding to the trauma of students who experience violence has to be part of how we educate them. There is no way to reasonably expect students who have experienced such trauma to leave their fears, anxieties, and pain at home when they come to school. Instead, it is incumbent upon schools to help connect students with community resources as appropriate, and to do our absolute best to be sensitive to and accommodate students’ social and emotional needs as we work to meet their academic needs in schools.”



Jenny Benner, Senior Director-Child Development Center, Chestnut Street Family YMCA

“As an early childhood educator, it has become more common to see children who have been affected in some way by violence. Many of the children we serve are too young to verbalize their trauma or stress. Because of this, we have to ensure early childhood educators have the training and support needed to help these children build resilience. We focus heavily on a child’s social-emotional development and the first step is to make sure they feel safe and loved.

Once in a safe environment, they will open up to learn skills necessary to be successful in school and life. It is also important to teach problem-solving and how to resolve conflicts appropriately, using words. I believe this skill is lacking in some children and they are most likely to continue cycles of violence because that is all they know. This report shines a light on how important education is, even as early as infancy, and my hope is that this will start a dialogue about how we as a community can come together to serve children to our best ability!”



Jefferson Family Court Judge Derwin Webb

“When I was 15 years old, one of my good friends was accidentally shot and killed by a friend. A few years later, that same shooter was accidentally shot and killed by someone else. Today, we have kids killing kids — at random times — intentionally. Louisville, we are better than this. Guns have no names, bullets have no names, but our children do. So, I am asking you to please, please stop the violence. I started YOUNG Men’s Academy at Whitney Young Elementary, a mentorship program, to try to help, and I applaud this report and all efforts to

bring attention to the needs of kids exposed to violence, and to help them reach their potential.”



Dr. J. David Richardson, Chief of Surgery, University of Louisville Hospital

“Having been involved in the care of the injured for over 40 years, I applaud the current focus on the downstream effects of gun violence in our community. As trauma surgeons, our team focuses on the “victim” or injured. We analyze their care and outcomes through our quality review process, but we have few, if any, mechanisms for examining the effects on families, neighbors, or others in the community who are impacted by this violence. I have been particularly concerned about the children

who bear witness to these acts, even if they are not directly or physically injured. How can a growing, evolving, learning, adapting brain develop as we would desire in an atmosphere of uncertainty and fear? I have heard countless stories of the deleterious effects of these acts of violence and their negative impact on the culture and well-being of our neighborhoods. While it is cliché to state “our children are our future”, it is nonetheless true. The children who are exposed to gun violence in Louisville deserve better.”



Troy Pitcock, retired LMPD Major 2nd Division

“Gun violence has a horrifying impact on our youth. Witnessing it directly or the remnants of violence at police crime scenes are situations too many of our youth are exposed to, many times at such early ages. These situations have life lasting implications on children, at times creating a perception such violence is acceptable. A lack of parental support can enhance the believe to our youth that such actions are acceptable or even the proper method to deal with conflict.”

CHRISTOPHER 2X

“Education, starting in early childhood, is the key to ending gun violence and its devastating impact on kids learning.”



Imagine you're a mom at home watching a video with your kids and their playmates on a Saturday afternoon when all a sudden your home is being riddled with bullets from a high-caliber weapon.

Bullets through the walls, furniture, shattering the oven door, while you scramble to get the little ones on the floor, covered with your body, and under a bed, to keep them safe.

No imagination is needed. This happened to my daughter Heaven, a child development specialist, who was with six children, ages 1-7, when her home was hit with gunfire from an AK-47 in the middle of the afternoon last Dec. 1. Two neighboring apartments in the new Shepherd Square complex just east of downtown also were hit.

While thankfully no one was physically hurt, the trauma from exposure to such a violent act can interrupt a child's normal development and ability to learn in school.

My daughter's experience and a spike in gun violence last summer - with teens shooting automatic weapons out of stolen cars, kids as young as 13 charged with murder - made me want to shine a light on the impact of gun violence on children and their learning.

As a peace and justice advocate for nearly 20 years, I know my daughter's experience is not unique. In all parts of our city, citizens report hearing gunfire to police every day and gunshots have been heard outside my daughter's apartment multiple times since the day her home was splattered with bullets.

In the first nine months of this year, 65 of the 73 murders in Louisville Metro were from gunfire, and family and friends – including many young children – struggle with the losses. In all, 276 people were shot from January-September, more than 30 people a month.

Children suffer if they get hit by bullet, witness a shooting, lose someone close or live on edge because the crack of gunshots is as common as the chirping of a songbird. They often can't focus or learn in school. Some can't sleep and have nightmares. Some withdraw, others act out or retaliate and resort to violence themselves.

In sharing their stories on the following pages – some redemptive, some tragic – we can all have a better understanding of what this sick culture of gun violence is doing to our children and their ability to learn. We can all do a better job recognizing children who are suffering and providing help they need to succeed in school and reach their potential.

There are many people – teachers, police officers, counselors, therapists, physicians, nurses, others – doing amazing work to help victims and their families. But much more is needed. Here is my call to action as a start:

Parents/adults with children under your care: Talk to your child's teacher or school counselor if your child has been exposed to violence so they can be supportive and helpful. Don't assume your child is ok. Seek services for your child through the school or others such as their doctor if your family needs help.

Teachers: Know the symptoms of trauma in a child, which vary based on age and the individual child but include acting out, aggressive verbal or physical behavior, or withdrawal and not doing their work. Use school resources to link the child to professional evaluation and help.

Principals/administrators: Support teacher training at your schools, and make sure children in need receive evaluations and follow up treatment if needed.

I am deeply grateful to survivors of gun violence and others for sharing their stories. May God bless the victims, survivors and the angels in their lives who support them.

Christopher 2X
Executive Director
Christopher 2X Game Changers
www.2Xgamechangers.org

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Christopher 2X". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "C" and a stylized "2X" at the end.

DEVIN SESAY AND FAMILY

“I was supposed to go to Atherton with him this year. He was going to show me the bus stops and everything and it just kills me.”



Devin Sesay

Before June 13, he was excited about his upcoming freshman year at Atherton High School. He was also relieved because his big brother, Devin Sesay, a rising Atherton senior, would teach him the ropes at his new school.

The brothers would walk to the bus stop together every morning. On the first day, they would be sporting new shoes that Devin, a smart dresser, would find online.

***DEADLIEST MONTH OF 2019: JUNE**

15 homicides, the highest number of murders in any month in the past five years and more than twice the seven homicides in June 2018.

Everything changed on June 13 for the boy, 14, and his close extended family whose members first came to the United States 27 years ago to escape war-torn Liberia in West Africa.

On June 13, Devin was shot and died on Roselane Street in Smoketown, three doors down from the family's home. He was 17. Family members said Devin had been walking home late at night from playing basketball in nearby Shelby Park when shots were fired from a passing car.

Devin's family – his grandfather, mother and four brothers, his aunt and cousins – are dealing with devastating shock, grief and anger over his murder, while also coping with other major life adjustments.

A few weeks after Devin's murder, his mother, grandfather and brothers moved to a brick ranch house and new school district 13 miles away in southern Jefferson County.

“I was afraid for the boys,” said their mother, Maima Karneh, 41, a certified nurse assistant who works nights at the Home of the Innocents, not far from Smoketown.

Her boys and other children often hung out at their home, inside playing video games, outside on the porch or nearby throwing a football or shooting hoops.

She liked having them around the house where they'd lived for 10 years, she said, because it meant they weren't on the street. She enforced stern rules, checked on her boys often by phone and Devin had never been in any trouble, she said.

Ten days after Devin's murder, another shooting solidified her decision to move. On June 23, Tyrese Garvin, 20, was shot almost directly across the street from where her son was killed. Garvin had been visiting his newborn twins at University Hospital. He died five days later in the same hospital where his twins were being treated. Three juveniles including a 14-year-old were charged with his murder.



Tyrese Garvin

"There was no way we were going to stay," Karneh said.

She and Devin knew Garvin, who was a senior when Devin was a freshman at Atherton and Garvin attended Devin's memorial service, a few days before he was murdered.

In their new home, Devin's portrait hangs in the living room near the front door and his brother at times stares at it. "It reminds me of how many good days we had," he said. "I was supposed to go to Atherton with him this year. He was supposed to show me the bus stops and everything and it just kills me." Instead his brother is gone, he's in a new neighborhood and attending Moore High School, and he said it doesn't feel right.



Devin's family and friends, in shirts bearing his image at a remembrance at an Atherton High School football game.

The school alerted his mother to concerns about him focusing and his grief and he and family members are receiving counseling. Two other younger brothers, 11 and 13, are attending Moore Middle School and said they are doing their best to live up to Devin's memory.

Devin's four brothers – the oldest is 21 - and a 10-year-old cousin were at home when Devin was killed and some of them heard the shots.

Karneh's 14-year-old son called her at work to report hearing gunfire and that Devin was not home. When Devin did not respond to her texts, "I knew it was him," she said.

Her sister, Sietta Karneh, said the family wants to keep Devin's memory alive. He was an outgoing, athletic, fun teenager with a slew of friends who have taken his death hard, posting remembrances on social media, his aunt said. She and her sister have raised their kids as one family. "I also lost a son," she said about Devin. "I can't get over how close to home he was when they took his life.... I can't get over this nightmare."

A FAMILY HUNKERS DOWN

“We hear gunshots constantly in our neighborhood”

Near 22nd and Oak streets in West Louisville, a 12-year-old boy and his 13-year old sister decided to stay inside during the summer because they were afraid they’d get shot if they ventured outdoors.

Their parents don’t want their names revealed. “We are so close to it. We’re a stone’s throw away from it in either direction,” their father said about the gun violence.

Their mother, who remembers a safe environment when she was growing up in the neighborhood, said they hear gunshots two or three times a month at least, usually at night. She said they stay inside, and don’t go near the windows.

“You hear it so much you get used to it. You hope the gunshots don’t affect your family.” When news reports spotlight a deadly shooting in areas where she has family “you think my brother lives down there. I hope it wasn’t him. You tend to tense up when you hear things like that.”

HOMICIDES BY POLICE DISTRICT

Jan.-Sept.. 2019

1st District – 12

2nd District – 25

3rd District – 11

4th District – 13

5th District – 3

6th District – 5

7th District – 2

8th District – 2

Total: 73

Their children are keenly aware, too. They know about gunshot deaths not far from their home during the summer, and a video on social media of teens with guns touting an “east vs west” rivalry with random gun violence.

“It’s messed up,” the boy said.

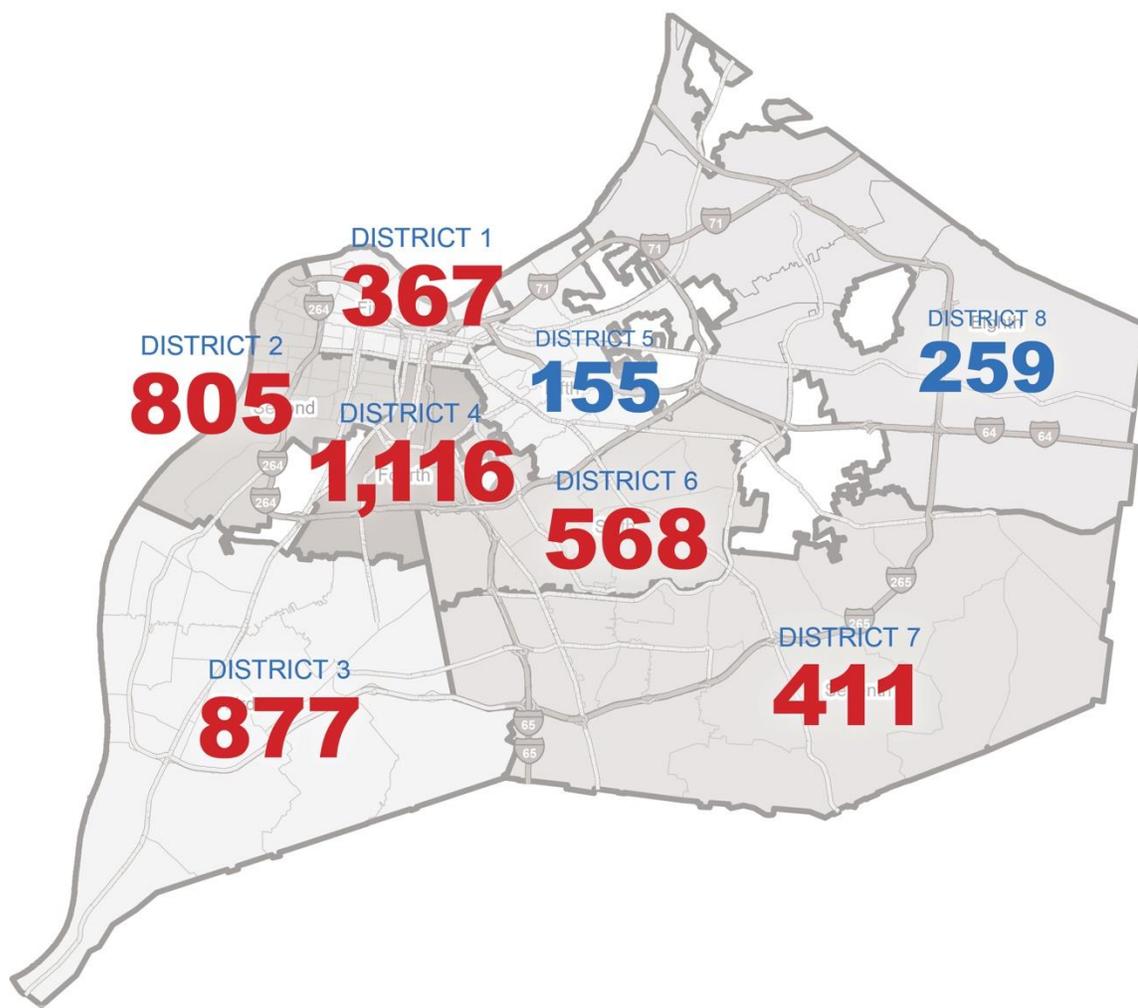
He said he began staying inside their house in early July after he was outside with friends in the early evening and a car pulled up on their street with a gun pointing out the window. He ran to his backyard and said after that, “I decided on my own not to go out.”

His sister said she thinks “the world’s just getting violent.” She didn’t go outside “because the west and the east was doing a shootout.” She said she learned about it through a video on Facebook.

Their parents said they don't call police because they don't think there is much the police can do, although they wish there were more routine police patrols visible on their streets. Police respond to gunfire, but without adequate information they are unable to make an arrest, their father said.

"You don't want to keep your kids locked in," their mother said. "You are scared for their safety, too. You don't know what to do."

Citizen reports of hearing gunshots over 18 months, from Jan. 1, 2018 -June 2019, totaled 4,558, from every Louisville Metro police district.



DIONTAE “TAY” REED

“I have trust issues. I don’t trust people easily. Wherever I go I’m always looking.”

At 18, Diontae “Tay” Reed seems happy, with a playful sense of humor and a lot to be proud of - good grades, a diploma from Ballard High School, a future full of possibilities including college.

He’s come a long way from age 13 when he was shot in the back, underwent surgery and spent 11 days in the hospital. His homes have been shot up four different times, and he knows more people who have been shot or killed than he can count on both hands.

“I knew about the violence in my neighborhood at a young age,” he said. “I have trust issues. I don’t trust people easily so wherever I go I’m always looking.”

89%

of the 73 murder victims, 65 people, in the first nine months of 2019 were killed by gunfire, the highest percentage of homicides by gunfire for a comparable time period in the past five years.

Now he’s the first person in his family to have graduated from high school, months after he and his family – his mother and a younger sister - were evicted from their home in the Portland neighborhood. He is staying with a friend’s family while his mother and sister are living apart with relatives. He takes the bus from the apartment where he is living in the Portland neighborhood to Mall St. Matthews and back for his part-time job at a shoe store.

Diontae wonders if he’s ready for college, and he’s deeply worried about how he would pay for tuition, but he is exploring options as he also dreams of having a driver’s license and a car someday.

He credits his mother, who “was always on me” for keeping him on the right track, off the streets and focused on school. He also credits Ballard High School teachers and a special tutor for helping him achieve. “I always made teachers laugh,” he said with a smile, and “they became friends to me.” He can tick off the names of several he admired.



Reed in 2015 on a follow-up appointment with his surgeon, Dr. Brian Harbrecht

HOMICIDES

2014: **55**

2015: **80**

2016: **118**

2017: **102**

2018: **80**

Jan.- Sept., 2019:

73

Number of homicides in Louisville in the first nine months of 2019, an increase of nearly 20 percent compared to the first nine months of 2018 when 61 murders were committed.

72.6%

53, of the 73 homicide victims in the first nine months of 2019 were black, compared to 63% for the same time period in 2018.

32%

of the victims, 25 killed, were under age 25, with eight victims 11-17 years old. One victim was under age 11.

He attended Shawnee Academy his freshman year but pursued a transfer to Ballard with the help of his mother. "I felt like if I had stayed at that school I wouldn't have learned anything," because teachers spent so much time trying to control the classroom, he said.

His cousin had been doing well at Ballard, had a tutor, and he thought that formula would also work for him, and it did.

"I'm seeing I'm getting good grades," he said. "I do not want to go home and be on the streets and do something that could get me killed."

His two older brothers, 23 and 22, chose a "way different path." When he was shot four years ago, he was running away from a fight his brothers got into with another group of boys. When asked why he thought his homes had been shot up in the past, he responded, "my brothers." While he's close to them, "I could never ask them what they're doing."

While in the hospital, recovering from surgery and a collapsed lung, he was angry but told relatives and friends who visited him that he didn't want any more violence, no retaliation. He said he would have liked to have seen whoever shot him go to jail but no arrests were made.

He participated in the Christopher 2X "Hood2Hood" anti-violence campaign, preaching non-violence door-to-door and in neighborhoods and remains active in anti-violence and community service programs.

"The violence going on now is terrible, crazy," he said. "People don't even want to go outside because of what is going on."

KI'ANTHONY TYUS AND HIS GRANDMOTHER ERNESTINE "TINA" TYUS

“He was so joyful and after he got shot I saw the joy go out of my baby.”



Tina Tyus has a comfortable home in West Louisville where photos of grandchildren she has raised are on display or within easy reach.

There's Ki'Anthony as an infant along with one of the last pictures of him, at the family's Thanksgiving gathering last year, a lanky teenager smiling next to a proud grandmother who "had him since he came into this world."

Their world, from the time Ki'Anthony was 9, has been devastated by gun violence.

At age 9, Ki'Anthony was shot by a stray bullet while playing basketball in a park and suffered a debilitating leg injury. Four years later, on Dec. 22, 2018, he died when the stolen Lexus SUV he was riding in crashed into a utility pole on Fern Valley Road after a police chase. Four other juveniles in the car including the driver survived.

His family is grappling with the circumstances of his death and does not understand how or why he ended up in the stolen car.

Known as "Lil King," playful and fun to be around, Ki'Anthony was a symbol of resilience in a media spotlight during anti-violence efforts after he was shot. He was an active participant in a Christopher 2X "Hood2Hood" antiviolence movement. He visited other gunshot victims in the hospital to offer encouragement and comfort.

He also struggled with his wounds, both emotional and physical, and navigated among peers who were not always good influences.

His gun shot injury put him in the hospital for several days. He had multiple surgeries in the aftermath followed by months of physical therapy. He had a rod in his leg for a year and a bullet was left there permanently because of the damage it could cause if it was removed.

385

Number of people shot in Louisville in 2017, an average of 32 people each month.

The boy who loved to play football and basketball “wasn’t able to play any sport and that devastated him. He had to basically start all over again walking,” his grandmother said. He was “angry, very angry.”

He began disobeying rules in her home, and feared getting shot again, she said. His grades suffered, and she said a contributing factor was his assignment to a middle school far away from home that required a long commute on two buses each morning and afternoon while he was using a walker because of his leg injury. He acted out, she said, so he could be sent to another school.

355

Number of people shot in Louisville in 2018, an average of nearly 30 people each month.

His two sisters – 11 and 16 – also have been impacted. Neither are doing well in school, and “they are just hurt,” she said.

A happy time was last Thanksgiving, a few weeks before Ki’Anthony died, and she had made his favorite foods including a strawberry cake for the large annual family gathering in her home. “He was jumping around here, dancing.”

276

Number of people shot in Louisville in the first nine months of 2019, an average of more than 30 people a month.

At Thanksgiving, she told Ki’Anthony she would buy him a purple suit for Easter like the ones he saw and admired at a gospel program they had attended, “not knowing I had to bury him before Easter. He died on my mother’s birthday. It just eats me up.”

JAMIE DENTON WITH HER SON ROBERT LEACHMAN

“It’s a lifetime thing. Every day’s a struggle. Every day’s a challenge.”

Jamie Denton chokes up talking about the impact her son’s violent death has had on his three younger brothers and how she’s struggled.



Robert Leachman, 20, died on Aug. 2, 2017, from multiple gunshot wounds at Parkway Place Apartments two weeks before he was to start nursing school. The family believes the shooting stemmed from an earlier argument on a basketball court.

Jamie’s three other sons, who were 9, 11 and 16 at the time, were close to their brother and their behaviors all changed in different ways after his death.

“It took something out of them,” she said.

Before the death of their brother, they were good students with good grades, she said. Afterward, her 16-year-old “shut himself off” and didn’t go out, was scared to take TARC and had to have a ride with someone to go anywhere. He no longer wanted to attend Ballard and instead now attends Jefferson County High School.

The 11-year-old became out of control in school, not listening, but now is doing better, she said. The 9-year-old withdrew but also began writing rap songs about his brother and at the end of the school year he chose the topic “Stop the Violence” for a project.

She and her children have all had counseling and their public schools have been helpful but her children “are hurt and stressed and looking at me, they see more stress because they are worrying about me,” she said.

1,616

Number of times in the first six months of 2019 that an electronic gunfire detection system alerted police to shots fired in an area totaling six square miles, an average of nine times a day, 269 times a month.

The system called Shotspotter operates in parts of the 1st, 2nd and 4th police districts in West Louisville, and Smoketown and Old Louisville just east and south of downtown.

They moved after the shooting, she said, and now feel safe in their neighborhood but not safe enough to visit a nearby park. Her older son warned her to stop walking in the park because of a gang that frequents there. "So, I don't go to that park," she said.

A few weeks after her son was killed, when she was still in her old home on Madison Street north of Broadway, during a neighborhood cookout on Labor Day weekend, shooters fired bullets at homes including hers and shot up cars. "We were terrified," she said.

"I switched up my house and I switched up my car. I had to, to survive."

In the aftermath of her son's death, her health declined, and she suffered a heart attack at age 39 last spring.

"Kids will keep you strong because they know what you're going through. They want to see you the same."

Murders from gun fire are a "totally different" level of dying than by other means. "It's the cruelest thing, that a person can die of that."

STEVONTE WOOD

“You don’t have to be directly affected by the bullet”

Stevonte Wood, 23, earned a college degree in three years, has a fulltime job as a security officer, and is recently married – a happy, fulfilling life that was highly unlikely 10 years ago.



Stevonte was 13 when he witnessed a horrendous act of violence, the shooting deaths of his mother and older brother after an argument on a basketball court at his family’s Shively apartment complex. After that terrible day, for Stevonte, “things really took a turn.”

He was on a grieving, trauma-filled downward spiral marked by anger, bad conduct and failing grades. Family support, counseling, caring teachers, others in his life – and his own hard work and determination – helped Stevonte rebound.

Before the shootings, he had been a good student, making A’s and Bs, which he credited in part to his mother who “made me book heavy.” His father worked long days, taking two buses to and from their home to his construction job.

After the shootings, Stevonte was deeply troubled and struggling. He was still living in the apartment where his mother and brother were killed, and he had trouble focusing and sleeping. When he did sleep he often had nightmares. He argued with his father, who had been injured in the shootings and was grieving. (They now have a close relationship).

Angry and withdrawn, he failed 9th grade. He went to school but had trouble concentrating. “I was there but I wasn’t there. I was constantly thinking about what happened.” He wanted to communicate but he said he didn’t know how; his words were angry, and he said he felt “a lot of self-hatred.” He worried about his father’s safety and that someone might retaliate against his family in another act of violence.

From Butler High School he was sent to Western High School to repeat 9th grade, which turned out to be blessing, he said.

Counseling helped him manage his grief, overcome his anger and detachment so he could focus on schoolwork, he said, and teachers encouraged him while holding him responsible. A turning point came when one told him he didn't want to fail the same grade twice, that would "not be good, trust me."

"I started listening in class, participating and my grades climbed up."

4,558

Number of times citizens reported hearing gunfire to Louisville Metro Police in 18 months, from Jan., 2018-June, 2019, over 200 times a month.

He was motivated to make up for failing at Butler. "The people I was surrounded by were well-rounded people. Once I put myself around people who wanted me to succeed, that was one heck of an opportunity. I didn't want to miss out on it."

With good grades, he pursued advanced placement classes in his junior year at Western and started racking up college credits through courses taught through Jefferson Community Technical College. When Stevonte received his high school diploma in 2015 he had 31

college credits toward his degree from the University of Louisville, which he earned in 2018.

His decision to major in criminal justice was influenced by the good relations he had with police officers after his mother and brother were murdered. "I began to idolize the good police and those who interact with the community," he said. Police were kind to his family and checked on them, he said, and he thought he could be like them and help people.

He has shared his story with other survivors of gun violence to offer hope and encourages awareness of the signs of trauma in children.

Anger, withdrawal, depression are key signs, he said. Schools and parents also need to be connected. "When you get that disconnect, that's when you start losing kids. We need to find who these kids are and take the time to understand their situation and help them to the best of our abilities."

JERRON JONES
LICENSED PROFESSIONAL COUNSELOR ASSOCIATE



Kids suffering from trauma often have “a hard time developing relationships” and “an inability to regulate emotions”

As a behavioral therapist, Jerron Jones spends much of his time trying to help families and children suffering from trauma resulting from exposure to violence.

The symptoms of trauma in children vary based on age and the individual child but a “huge sign” is an inability to develop a relationship with an adult and show respect for

“Early exposure to extremely fearful events affects the developing brain, particularly in those areas involved in emotions and learning.....For young children who perceive the world as a threatening place, a wide range of conditions can trigger anxious behaviors that then impair their ability to learn and to interact socially with others.”

the teacher, Jones said. Children in those situations, he said, often lack a consistent, nurturing adult in their lives.

A lot of kids lack confidence and self-esteem and don't hear encouraging words or praise for what they do well and the strengths they have, he said, and “that leaves them without a skill set to build on.”

Jones advises adults in their lives to celebrate them with compliments and praise for their efforts.

Children should also be comforted by adults who remain calm and patient even though the circumstances can be difficult, he said. Listening to them and showing an interest in what they like to do, he said, as well as working with them and sharing new ideas can help them build self-esteem.

Source: National Scientific Council on the Developing Child (2010). Persistent Fear and Anxiety Can Affect Young Children's Learning and Development: Working Paper No. 9

<http://www.developingchild.net>

Parents and teachers should be aware of signs of trauma, and seek help when needed, he said, but often parents don't feel comfortable revealing upsetting circumstances that may be a root cause of a child's trauma. Building trust and showing integrity, he said, goes a long way in addressing a traumatized child's needs.

Jones cites the following age-related symptoms children may have in response to a traumatic event or series of events including exposure to gun violence:

Five and under: May be irritable, fussy or difficult to get calmed down. They may be easily started or show behaviors common in younger children such as thumb sucking. Clingy behavior and frequent tantrums may also be present, and they may talk or act out a traumatic event.

Ages 6-12 may have trouble paying attention or be withdrawn. Their performance may decline in school. They may be in trouble at school or home, fearful, sad or want to be left alone.

Teenagers may refuse to follow rules, talk back more often, talk about the event or deny it happened, withdraw, engage in risky behaviors, change sleeping or eating patterns, have nightmares and may turn to drugs or alcohol.

Professional help should be considered, he said, if symptoms persist, get worse or the child's symptom are extreme and unresponsive to attempts to help.

NYREE CLAYTON-TAYLOR
2019 KENTUCKY ELEMENTARY SCHOOL
TEACHER OF THE YEAR



“If a student doesn’t feel safe and secure in your classroom they are not going to perform. You have to teach the whole child.”

Teaching predominately African American students in West Louisville, NyRee Clayton-Taylor recognized symptoms of suffering - anger and lashing out, or withdrawal and not doing the work. Kids would tell her about an uncle who was shot, a father lost to gun

violence, parents in prison. Some couldn’t find words to express themselves.

In a nationally represented survey, 8.2 percent of all children, from age 2-17, were reported to have witnessed gun violence or heard gunshots in their communities. Youth ages 14-17 had the highest exposure at nearly 17 percent.

So, Clayton-Taylor, a resource teacher at Wheatley Elementary School, created a curriculum around their joys in life, their interests, their culture. Her energy, creativity and impact earned her recognition as the 2919 Kentucky Elementary School Teacher of the Year.

“Academics will not happen if a student is not healed,” she said. “I decided to infuse academics with healing so they could get it at one time.”

Source: Finkelhor D, Turner HA, Shattuck A, Hamby SL. Prevalence of Childhood Exposure to Violence, Crime, and Abuse: Results from the National Survey of Children’s Exposure to Violence. JAMA Pediatr. 2015;169(8):746–754. doi:10.1001/jamapediatrics.2015.0676

<https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jamapediatrics/fullarticle/2344705>

Her solution was to use hip hop, the popular music genre especially among African American youth, as a primary teaching tool, along with rap, graffiti artwork, and books about African American history and culture to help children focus, write, create, work in teams, and solve problems, all beneficial lifelong skills.

A study published in 2019 of 640 children ages 2-17 in urban areas of Philadelphia and Boston and in rural eastern Tennessee, found that 41% had seen gun violence or heard gunshots, and 32% had been exposed in the previous year. Among exposed youth, 50% took protective action to keep themselves safe and 58% reported being very or extremely afraid, sad or upset as a result of the indirect gun violence.

Source: Mitchell, K. J., Jones, L. M., Turner, H. A., Beseler, C. L., Hamby, S., & Wade, R. (2019). Understanding the Impact of Seeing Gun Violence and Hearing Gunshots in Public Places: Findings from the Youth Firearm Risk and Safety Study. Journal of Interpersonal Violence.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0886260519853393>

“I had to bring in hip hop. It was a must so that they could have a narrative that was their own,” said Clayton-Taylor, now in her 20th year of teaching.

“The hip hop and the books related to them. It was a game changer in my classroom.”

Students walked on a red carpet into the writing lab she taught at Wheatley, like they might at a televised music awards show.

Children want to talk about what is happening in their community including gun violence and “I don’t move away from that.” Last year students produced a project entitled “Using the Power of Music to Fight Gun Violence.”

Clayton-Taylor, who grew up in West Louisville, said her background made her aware of the kinds of challenges facing her students. “I knew what was going on.”

She is optimistic for her students but worries about students who do not have a consistent nurturing adult in their lives. She praises Jefferson County Public Schools for providing mental health counselors in schools and supports more teacher training to address diverse student populations.

Teachers have a full plate and “kids dealing with trauma are very needy,” she said. “We have to provide a way for students to understand their resilience.”

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Crime statistics in this report are from the Louisville Metropolitan Police Department Uniform Crime Report dated Oct. 9, 2019, the LMPD Gunshot Report from Jan. 1-Sept. 30, 2019, and in response to open records requests. Numbers of shootings reflect homicides by gunfire and non-fatal criminal shootings.