

Community effort confronts gun violence

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for gang-affected Black kids.

"They were active in the late '80s and '90s when the guns first showed up," McFerrin said. "So I am on a mission to get small organizations the skills and professional development needed so they are built to last."

McFerrin anticipates it will take a much broader stroke with an array of agencies to combat gun violence today; efforts he said that cannot just be focused on young Black men and boys in gangs, but also on how gun violence affects girls as well as their families.

The Oregon Community Foundation has financially helped get the new community effort off the ground, McFerrin said, and it builds on the outreach made in the two educational programs McFerrin oversees in Portland, the Portland Opportunities Industrialization Center (POIC) and Rosemary Anderson High School, a Black community focused institution started by and named for his grandmother.

So far, 11 grassroots, Black-led organizations have joined the new Village group. Among them are African Youth and Community Organization (AYCO), which works with the African immigrant community, most of whom are from Somalia.

The Village will also be working with Fairbridge, the Salvation Army's female emergency shelter.

"Historically the focus has been on young men, but bringing in organizations like FaithBridge will help us work together across gender lines," McFerrin said. "Violence affects both males and females."

The Journeys Foundation, which has a long history of doing sporting activities and events for young kids to young adults will also be involved, and having "positive, structured athletic opportunities" will also help bring families together and strengthens communities, he said.

Another nonprofit involved is Going Home II, which goes into prisons and works with men who are incarcerated and to build social and emotional skills so when they come out they have a foundation so they don't go back.

But McFerrin's reach is even broader. He's brought in Portland leaders from the National Association of Minority Contractors to educate young people about building opportunities in the construction trades, and he's even involving the Oregon Department of Transportation, which has many big projects in the horizon that could lead to jobs for young people.

McFerrin said the Village is creating a "community channel" to keep information and potential solutions to gun violence flowing between organizations.

"This is a community effort and we hope to grow the Village in days and months to come, so the community is driving the solutions, getting the best thinking

and credible messengers on the ground to then drive the solutions," he said.

McFerrin's late grandmother Rosemary Anderson, executive director of POIC from 1974 to 2000, was known for her focus on helping Black kids who were kicked out of public schools for being associated with gangs, outreach that started in the 1980s.

"Ever since she made that decision, POIC has always focused on youth and young adults being impacted by gang and gun violence," he said.

The 11 nonprofits that will initially be involved in the Village have already had an orientation session, and the next step will be for them to complete an assessment and then receive training from Kelly Non-profit Consulting in areas to include board development, fundraising, reporting, marketing and communications.

"These are big issues for small organizations and we want them to be here for the long haul," McFerrin said.

Although POIC is the backbone of the Village, McFerrin said he hopes in the future to be able to hire an organization to do data collection and coordinate activities, but will first have to raise more money.

"We are looking for a backbone agency to really take this work up," he said.

McFerrin said Multnomah County's Department of Community Justice has already shown some interest and he hopes the city, the state and even the feds will consider giving financial support.

Mask Indoors and in Schools for Safety

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virus deaths occurred in unvaccinated Oregonians.

Multnomah County Public Health Director Jessica Guernsey said if people don't act, we can expect an exponential rise in cases, especially in pockets with low vaccinations.

"This could lead to preventable hospitalizations and even death," Guernsey said in a news release. "Masking is a step we can all take right now to keep businesses open and move ahead with our plans for the school year."

County health officials are particularly worried about the delta variant, which is roughly twice as contagious as earlier virus strains and may cause more severe illness.

"Vaccination remains the very best protection against this virus and its variants, so for anyone who can, don't wait. Get your shot," Guernsey said. "But we need a quick course correction to protect children and other people right now. And masks offer that protection."

--Associated Press contributed to this story.

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Anticipation is building for students to return to full-time and in-person school this fall. For kids and families, this can be a mix of stress, excitement and opportunity. Local school districts are updating their health and safety plans to serve the needs of their students and families. Learn how your district is preparing at Oregon.gov/readyschools.



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