

Providing Stable Housing to Prevent Gun Violence

Delaware State Housing Authority

Special Needs Housing: Housing for Persons with Special Needs

HFA Staff Contact

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Providing Stable Housing to Prevent Gun Violence

In recent years, the city of Wilmington, Delaware faced a growing gun violence problem, including a 45 percent jump in shootings from 2011 to 2013. This was analyzed by the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) in an epidemiological study of gun violence in the City. At the start of his administration in 2017, Governor John Carney created a [Family Services Cabinet Council](#) (FSCC) to focus on improving state services and outcomes, especially affecting children and youth and families who are interacting with multiple state systems. As the Council and Administration refined their goals, several pilot projects were developed. One of these has been a Group Violence Intervention (GVI) project, based on the National Network for Safe Communities' Group Violence Intervention (GVI) model. First launched in Boston in the 1990s as "Operation Ceasefire," the GVI model has repeatedly demonstrated that violence can be dramatically reduced when a partnership of community members, law enforcement, and social service providers directly engages with the small and active number of people involved in group crime.

In July of 2019, Delaware officials launched a GVI program intended to help high-risk individuals living in Wilmington avoid involvement in the criminal justice system, keep them safe, stabilize their lives, and create accountability for violence. The GVI brought together a number of partner agencies, including Delaware State Housing Authority (DSHA), Delaware Department of Health and Social Services (DHSS), Delaware Department of Correction (DOC), and Delaware Department of Services for Children, Youth & Their Families (DSCYF) to provide supportive services and case management, with centralized leadership under the helm of former Wilmington Police Chief Bobby Cummings. As the GVI began engaging with previous offenders of gun crimes in Wilmington, one of the key factors identified as an obstacle to success in the program was the inability to find stable, affordable housing. Recognizing the importance of stable housing to prevent crime in the city, in December of 2019, DSHA set aside 10 housing vouchers for GVI participants through our State Rental Assistance Program. GVI participants receive two years of rental assistance with the voucher and are also provided supportive services and case management through our partnership with DHSS. The first 10 vouchers were set up as a pilot program, and DSHA hopes to receive additional financial assistance from the state to expand the program in the future.

An Innovative and Cost-Effective Initiative

Including housing assistance in a project targeting the reduction of group violence is itself innovative. GVI program leadership recognized immediately, especially through their lead case managers who had extensive housing experience, that a safe, stable place to live was absolutely critical to success as it is a vital support to all the other actions that help participants change their lives and succeed – rebuilding positive family relationships, continuing education, securing and maintaining employment. Since GVI emerged as a priority of the Family Services Cabinet Council, this unique structure ensured all agencies were at the table and finding ways to support the project and participants.

When we were assessing how we could provide housing opportunities for participants in the GVI program, we turned to one of the programs we already used for vulnerable populations. The State

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Rental Assistance Program (SRAP) was created in 2012 to help low-income individuals in need of affordable housing and supportive services to live safely and independently in the community. DSHA receives referrals for SRAP from DHSS and DSCYF. The program is intended to help a few different populations, including individuals exiting long-term care facilities and nursing homes; individuals at risk of being admitted to or requiring services from a state-supported institution; young people exiting foster care; and families for whom the lack of affordable housing is a barrier to reunification.

With the flexibility of the SRAP program, DSHA was able to set aside vouchers to be used by GVI participants. This meant the vouchers were available for GVI participants almost immediately. If we had to create a new housing assistance program specifically for GVI participants, we likely would not have been able to assist them as quickly.

Demonstrating Measurable Benefits to HFA Targeted Customers

As of June 2020, 22 individuals are participating in the GVI program and receiving case management services. Eight of those participants have received a housing voucher from DSHA. Below is a sampling of the successes we've seen thus far with the GVI program:

- **Dante C.:** Dante is a former gang member who had been previously incarcerated and suffered a gunshot wound at a young age. When he was released from prison in 2019, Dante had nowhere to live and was facing homelessness. At 21 years old, Dante is now a successful participant in the GVI program. He is receiving 24 months of intensive case management from DHSS and housing assistance from DSHA through an SRAP voucher. DSHA is also working with Dante to help set him on the path to homeownership. In just a few months participating in the GVI program, Dante is enrolled in college with an internship in real estate and has opened a bank account – two things he likely would not have been able to accomplish without the support of the GVI program and the stable housing provided by DSHA.
- **Dayonia B.:** Dayonia has experienced homelessness for the majority of her life. She helped raise her four siblings and was unable to complete high school because of family obligations and her family's constant homelessness. As a young girl, Dayonia found herself pulled into the crime occurring around her in Wilmington. She became the victim of a shooting and was incarcerated many times before she turned 18. Her father recently passed away, her mother and sister are both homeless, and her younger brother is currently in prison. Despite all of these obstacles, Dayonia is successfully participating in the GVI program. She has received a housing voucher from DSHA, participates in intensive case management with DHSS, is employed, and is planning to enroll in adult education classes to earn her GED. Without the GVI program and the housing voucher provided by DSHA, Dayonia would likely have recidivated and faced incarceration yet again.

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- **Kirk F.:** Kirk lost both of his parents at a young age and quickly had to learn how survive on his own. This led to his involvement in the gun violence and other crime within Wilmington. He was incarcerated for a time and found himself homeless when he left prison due to lack of employment, family support, and a multitude of other factors. Kirk did not let this stop him, however, and he has since made the decision to build himself back up one step at a time. Through his participation in the GVI program, Kirk received a housing voucher from DSHA, is active in intensive case management with DHSS and is currently employed at a local museum. Kirk lives with his girlfriend and is helping to raise his stepson. He hopes to buy a home one day with the help of DSHA.

A Collaborative Effort

DSHA is just one partner in the GVI initiative. Other key agencies include DHSS, DSCYF, DOC and local and state law enforcement agencies. For the housing voucher piece of the program, we work most closely with DHSS who provide case management to all of the GVI participants receiving an SRAP voucher. The program would not be successful without this continued support from our partners. We can easily provide a voucher to someone in need, but the case management and regular interaction they receive from DHSS will give them an opportunity to succeed both while on the program and upon completion.

A Replicable Program

The GVI model has been used across dozens of cities, including Chicago, Oakland, Cincinnati, Detroit and New Orleans, and the National Network for Safe Communities provides an implementation guide for officials seeking to implement the GVI in their jurisdiction. The program is replicable in virtually any small or large city as long as the partner organizations are committed to helping the program succeed. As for the housing voucher model implemented by DSHA in 2019, this program is also very replicable by other cities and states. Using a similar existing voucher program, other jurisdictions could easily implement a program to provide stable housing for participants in a GVI program in their city or state.

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Visual Aids

Group Violence Intervention

8 GVI Members Permanently Housed through DSHA
Ages 18-29
3 Selected Stories:

GVI Member Dante C.



Dante was identified as an individual or group member that has the propensity to engage in violent activities, such a shooting or being a victim of a shooting due to group involvement.

Dante is a single adult with no children. Dante had a very difficult life with the absence of his father, struggling and challenges that his mother endured as a single parent, and the plight and hardships of his community. He has been incarcerated and also shot at a very young age. Once Dante was released from prison, he was unfortunately homeless because of his prior convictions that precluded him from dwelling in his mother’s income-based residency, due to section eight voucher policy and procedures stipulations.

Barriers and Needs Assessment for Dante C.

Services Needed	Services Received
Housing	DSHA 24 voucher program Goal: Home Ownership
Probation and Parole	Active (positive)

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Employment	Currently employed through the State of Delaware
Education	Enrollment in college, in addition to an internship with realty and housing
Food Benefits & Medicaid	Currently active
Mentorship	Receiving mentorship
Transformative Change	In process due to Covid-19, delayed
Cognitive Behavioral Therapy	Exercise and fitness programs
24-Month Intensive Case Management	Currently active
Family Reunification Services and Support	Building a relationship with his father, but it is a healing process
Banking and Credit Building	Completed
Budget Management for Housing and Life Sustainability	Active

GVI Member Dayonia B.

Dayonia was identified as an individual or group member that has the propensity to engage in violent activities, such a shooting or being a victim of a shooting due to group involvement.

Dayonia is one adult with no children, however, she was instrumental in raising her entire household which consisted of one parent and four children. Unfortunately, her mother was also surviving and struggling, yet working numerous jobs to maintain. Dayonia was unable to complete high school due to uncertainties set before her, in addition to her family’s constant homelessness.

Dayonia has experienced homelessness for the duration of her life as a child and as a young adult. Dayonia was the victim of a shooting and incarcerated many times as a young adult and minor. She also recently lost her father due to a chronic illness. Currently, Dayonia’s mother and sister are both homeless, in addition to her younger brother being incarcerated presently.

Barriers and Needs Assessment for Dayonia B.

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Services Needed	Services Received
Housing	DSHA 24 voucher program Goal: Home Ownership
Probation and Parole	Completed successfully
Employment	Currently Employed
Education	Will enroll in James Grove Adult Education
Food Benefits & Medicaid	Currently active
Mentorship	Receiving mentorship
Transformative Change	In process due to Covid-19, delayed
Cognitive Behavioral Therapy	Delaware Substance Abuse and Mental Health Active
24-Month Intensive Case Management	Currently active
Family Reunification Services and Support	Mother and sister are currently working and being temporarily housed through our outreach partners
Banking and Credit Building	In progress
Budget Management for Housing and Life Sustainability	Active

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GVI Member Kirk F.



In this photo, GVI participant Kirk F. receives employment training as part of the program.

Kirk was identified as an individual or group member that has the propensity to engage in violent activities, such a shooting or being a victim of a shooting due to group involvement.

There are two adults and one child. Kirk lives with his girlfriend, and he currently has the responsibility to raise his stepson. However, while growing up, he did not have any positive or influential leaders available. Kirk lost both parents at a young age and has never fully healed from the pain he experienced from his loss. He quickly had to survive within his community, but unfortunately made bad decisions. Kirk was incarcerated, but he decided to build himself back up one step at a time. Kirk was homeless post incarceration due to lack of employment, family support, and a host of other determining factors.

Barriers and Needs Assessment for Kirk F.

Services Needed	Services Received
Housing	DSHA 24 voucher program Goal: Home Ownership
Employment	Currently employed by Delaware Children’s Museum
Probation and Parole	Successful Completed

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Education	Pending
Food Benefits & Medicaid	Currently active
Mentorship	Receiving mentorship
Transformative Change	In process due to Covid-19, delayed
Cognitive Behavioral Therapy	Exercise and fitness programs
24-Month Intensive Case Management	Currently active
Family Reunification Services and Support	ReManned Program active (Forgiveness and Fatherhood program)
Banking and Credit Building	Completed
Budget Management for Housing and Life Sustainability	Active

Other DSHA housing voucher recipients participating in the GVI program:

Janisha S.



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Marquise A.

