

Overview

Led by a team with lived experience and high social capital in the streets, the Street Action Network connects directly with people involved in gangs and the street economy to amplify the power of their knowledge and stories, change narratives, and create sustainable solutions to address gun violence.

The Street Action Network is a cutting-edge effort to combine research, community action, and public policy. Building on groundbreaking participatory action research on the root causes of gun violence, the Street Action Network will leverage community safety research—conducted by and for people with lived experience in street networks—to deepen the Center’s nearly three decades of work to reduce gun violence.

The program is grounded in a recognition that the people and communities most affected by issues like gun violence, over-policing, and disinvestment are essential to finding solutions and building community safety.

“People closest to the problem are closest to the solution, but furthest from power and resources.”

– Glenn E. Martin, justice reform advocate

The Work

Across two large-scale research studies over the last six years, our team of researchers has conducted more than 430 in-depth interviews with young New Yorkers who carry guns. Leveraging their own experience with street networks and youth gun culture, these researchers were able to reach young adults who were inaccessible to (or even ignored by) much prior research.

In the most recent project, teams of researchers worked across four cities in the U.S. (reports forthcoming), with the Brooklyn-based report, “Two Battlefields: Opps, Cops, and NYC Youth Gun Culture,” published in summer 2023. This report uncovers the cultural and structural contexts of gun use in one Brooklyn neighborhood, and fills a significant gap in knowledge on gun violence among Black and Brown young adults, making our team one of the primary sources for such data in the country.

American culture changes quickly, and the streets change even faster. The Street Action Network will continuously leverage findings and build from the success of its participatory research projects to identify new areas to explore and new ideas to test the intersection of gun violence, street networks, and culture. This team is uniquely positioned to deeply partner with communities experiencing high levels of violence to help identify solutions and create sustainable change.

The Team

The Street Action Network is co-led by **Basaimé Spate** and **Javonte Alexander**. Both Spate and Alexander helped lead the large-scale research projects described above, including designing research questions; devising fieldwork safety strategies; recruiting participants; conducting interviews; supervising participatory action research teams; analyzing data; writing; and disseminating findings. They have appeared on countless panels, media interviews (WNYC/Gothamist, Inside City Hall with Errol Louis), webinars, and podcasts (Red, Blue, and Brady). They have also presented at national academic conferences, sharing their expertise drawn from a combination of their participatory action research work and their 15+ years of lived experience as gun violence survivors and members of street networks. Spate also served as a violence interrupter and outreach worker with Save Our Streets Brooklyn, a Cure Violence program, for five years. Alexander was that program's first participant.

Spate and Alexander are supported by **Dr. Elise White**, Interim Senior Director of Research and Policy. White's work focuses on qualitative research and ethnography with hard-to-reach populations, exploring their experiences with interpersonal, social, and historical trauma; the relationship of these to violence and the criminal legal system; and methods of resistance, resilience, and healing. White was a principal investigator on both the participatory action research youth gun studies with Spate and Alexander, as well as projects focusing on the experiences of adults in the sex trade, legal responses to human trafficking, and experiences of procedural justice at NYC's busiest criminal court.

Partners

New York State Senator Zellnor Myrie, New York City Public Advocate Jumaane Williams, National Collaborative on Gun Violence Research, Bloomberg American Health Initiative, Dr. Yasser Arafat Payne

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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