

"We're Family, We're Community"

Coney Island Residents and Stakeholders Talk About Community Safety

By Elise White, Tia Pooler, Javonte Alexander, Basaime Spate, and Hillary Gao



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Center for Justice Innovation
520 Eighth Avenue, 18th Floor
New York, New York 10018
646.386.3100 fax 212.397.0985
www.innovatingjustice.org

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For correspondence, please contact daar@innovatingjustice.org.

Introduction

Coney Island, Brooklyn, is famously home to New York City’s iconic boardwalk and amusement parks; it was a premiere national destination through the early 20th century. Like much of the rest of the city, Coney Island’s crime rates began to rise¹ in the 1970s due to a mixture of economic disinvestment and redlining practices, shifts in local economy, and the first of several drug epidemics. Following a peak in violent crime in the 1980s², the subsequent forty years have seen decreases³ in burglaries, robberies, gun violence, and open-air sex trade in Coney Island and across the city. Violence—largely between area gangs⁴—has been a persistent feature localized to areas surrounding the community’s nine public housing developments, including Coney Island Houses, Coney Island I (Site 1B), Coney Island I (Sites 4 & 5), Coney Island I (Site 8), Sea Rise Apartments, Gravesend Houses, Carey Gardens, Haber, and Surfside Gardens. Recent efforts to revitalize the community through an influx of private investment have included introduction of a minor league ballpark, expansions of the much-diminished amusement parks, and plans for increased mixed-use and affordable housing. There was also a recent failed effort to bring a casino to

¹ Judy Glave (September 2, 1990). “Coney Island Stages a Comeback,” *The Journal News*. <https://www.newspapers.com/article/the-journal-news-coney-island-stages-a-c/34116222/>.

² Craig Wolff (May 25, 1994). “Coney Island on the Edge; A Region's Venerable Magic Is Buffeted by Modern Times,” *The New York Times*.

<https://www.nytimes.com/1994/05/25/nyregion/coney-island-on-the-edge-a-region-s-venerable-magic-is-buffed-by-modern-times.html>.

³ Police Department, City of New York, 60th Precinct. CompStat Weekly Reporting. https://www.nyc.gov/assets/nypd/downloads/pdf/crime_statistics/cs-en-us-060pct.pdf.

⁴ U.S Attorney’s Office, Eastern District of New York (December 20, 2017). “Members of Coney Island Street Gang Indicted for Murder, Racketeering Conspiracy and Unlawful Use of Firearms.” <https://www.justice.gov/usao-edny/pr/members-coney-island-street-gang-indicted-murder-racketeering-conspiracy-and-unlawful>; Office of the Brooklyn District Attorney (February 5, 2025). “Fourteen Alleged 59 Brims/Bloodhound Brims Gang Members Charged in Conspiracy Indictment for Murder and Shootings in South Brooklyn.”

<https://www.brooklynda.org/2025/02/05/fourteen-alleged-59-brims-bloodhound-brims-gang-members-charged-in-conspiracy-indictment-for-murder-and-shootings-in-south-brooklyn/>.

the neighborhood⁵. However, differing visions within and for the community, the effects of Hurricane Sandy in 2012⁶, and the COVID-19 pandemic eight years later have meant limited traction for these various plans, uneven development, and limited consensus on how to move forward.

In addition to exposure to violence, institutional neglect and disparities in investment have led to other negative outcomes in Coney Island. The neighborhood fares worse than both the borough of Brooklyn and New York City as a whole on a range of economic, education, and health indicators. These include median household income, poverty and unemployment rates, the share of rental units located in New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA) public housing, elementary school absenteeism, and rates of expectant mothers receiving late or no prenatal care, preterm births, obesity, and hypertension.⁷ **Figures 1 and 2** draw on U.S. Census Bureau data to illustrate two of these indicators—median income and unemployment rate—in Coney Island relative to Brooklyn as a whole.

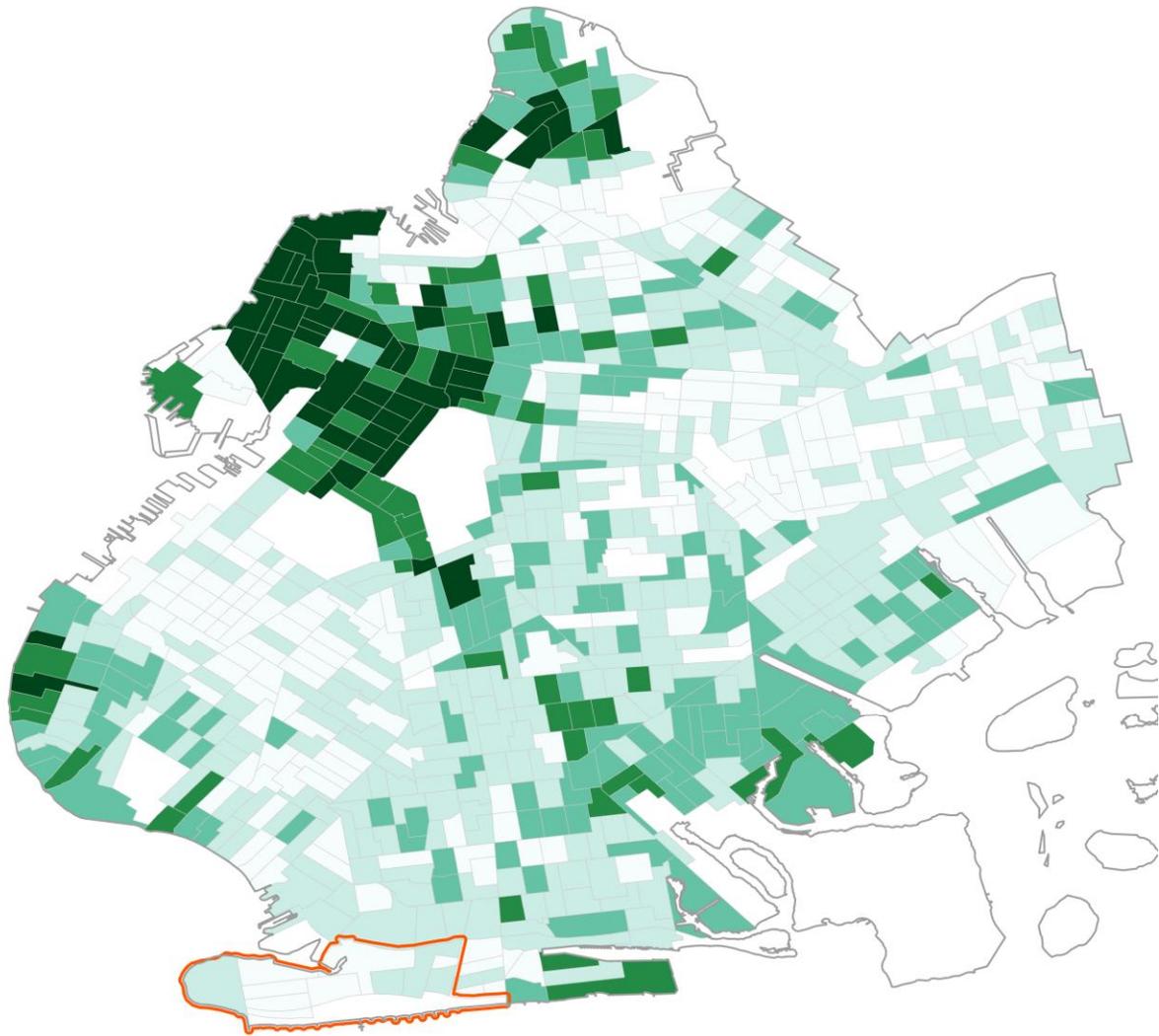
⁵ Dana Rubinstein and Nicole Hong (November 22, 2022). “Coney Island Has a Bit of Everything. Does It Need a Casino?” *The New York Times*.

<https://www.nytimes.com/2022/11/22/nyregion/coney-island-casino.html>; Kirstyn Brendlen (September 29, 2025). “Committee Officially Rejects Proposed Coney Island Casino” *Brooklyn Paper*. <https://www.brooklynpaper.com/cac-officially-rejects-coney-island-casino/>.

⁶ New York Housing Conference, Community Impact Gallery (N.D.). New York City Housing Authority Plan for Coney Island Houses. <https://thenyh.org/projects/coney-island-houses/>.

⁷ NYC Community Health Profiles (N.D.). <https://a816-health.nyc.gov/hdi/profiles/>; NYU Furman Center (N.D.), Coney Island Neighborhood Profile. <https://furmancenter.org/neighborhoods/view/coney-island>. Both these sources compile data from multiple sources, including the U.S. Census Bureau’s American Community Survey 5-year estimates and New York City government statistics.

Figure 1. Coney Island Residents Face Low Incomes Relative to Many Other Brooklyn Neighborhoods

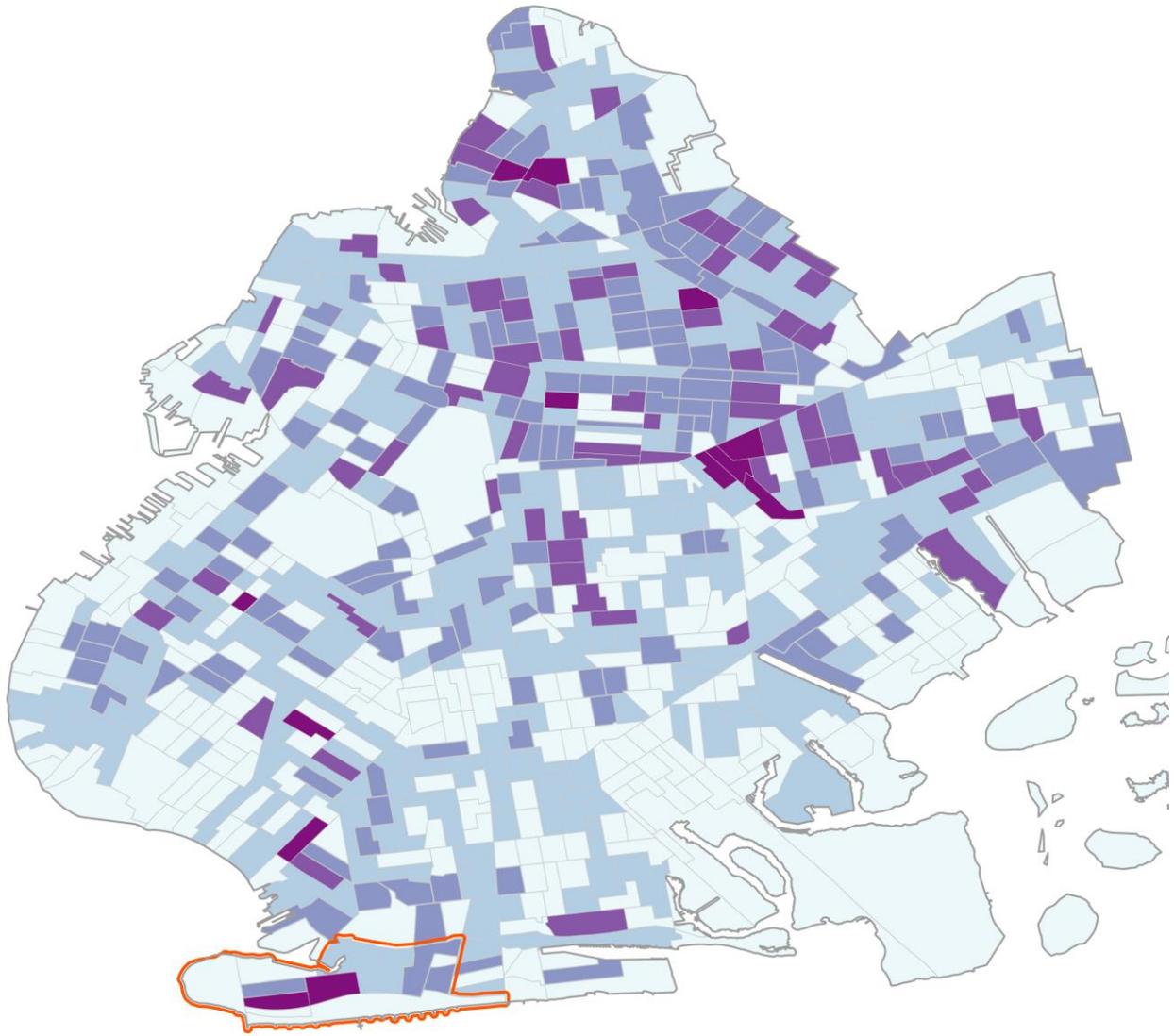


Source: US Census Bureau,
American Community Survey

Household Median Income (in Dollars)

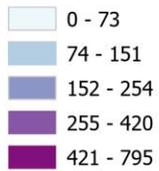
- \$21,691 - \$70,313
- \$70,313 - \$104,583
- \$104,583 - \$147,830
- \$147,830 - \$205,875
- \$205,875 and more

Figure 2. Coney Island Residents Face High Unemployment Relative to Many Other Brooklyn Neighborhoods



Source: US Census Bureau,
American Community Survey

Number of people who are unemployed



Center Program Participants Residing in Coney Island

The Center for Justice Innovation (the Center) operates multiple project sites in Northeast and Northwest Brooklyn (in the Downtown Brooklyn, East New York/Brownsville and Red Hook areas), running numerous programs that strengthen local community justice. Center program participants live throughout Brooklyn, including a significant number in Coney Island: while the neighborhood is home to approximately 2% of the borough's population, according to 2024 data, 3% of Brooklyn residents participating in Center programs live there. That is, while representing a very small percentage of the overall population, Coney Island's density of Center participants is around 50% higher than the Brooklyn average. In particular, the Center's pretrial Supervised Release and Alternatives to Incarceration programs serve a significant number of Coney Island residents.⁸

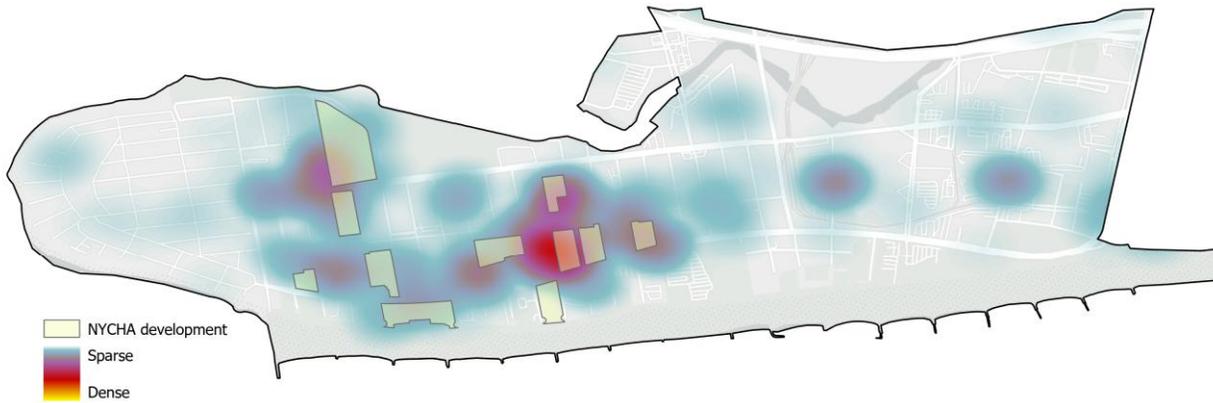
Identifying Center participants with Coney Island addresses provides some insight into both the residential distribution and the assessed needs of community residents involved in the criminal legal system. In visualizing the data, we see that many program participants reside in or near the community's public housing developments (**Figure 3**).

Further, analysis of the intake needs assessments of the Center's pretrial Supervised Release Program indicates that participants residing in Coney Island have needs related to employment, substance use, housing, and mental health (**Table 1**).⁹

⁸ Center programs with mapped participant address data include Alternatives to Incarceration (ATI), other court diversion programs, the pretrial Supervised Release Program, programs supporting people with family court and housing matters, youth programming, and victims support.

⁹ The Center serves as the certified pretrial services provider in two of New York City's counties: Kings (Brooklyn) and Richmond (Staten Island). Participants in the Supervised Release Program complete a needs assessment at intake to identify and address barriers to court attendance. Needs assessment "flags" inform participants' service plans and guide case managers in connecting them to individualized community resources and services.

Figure 3. Density of 2024 Center Program Participant Addresses in Coney Island



Source: Center for Justice Innovation. (2025). Justice Center Application and Salesforces databases. [Data file].

Table 1. Percent of Coney Island-Based Supervised Release Participants Flagging for Needs at Assessment (2024)*

| | |
|---------------|-----|
| Employment | 41% |
| Substance Use | 31% |
| Housing | 28% |
| Mental Health | 24% |

*Participants can flag for more than one need.

Source: Center for Justice Innovation. (2025). Justice Center Application database. [Data file].

Project Background

In response to these historical issues and local context, in mid-2025, New York State Senator Jessica Scarcella-Spanton secured funding for the Center to conduct a community justice and safety landscape analysis of the Coney Island community. The project’s goal was to create a more nuanced portrait of existing resources and strengths, current community justice and

safety issues, and outstanding gaps and needs that are core to building increased health and well-being for all Coney Island residents, according to residents and representatives of local service organizations and institutions. .

Methods

There were three primary data sources for this project: 1) participant data from the Center's programs (reported above); 2) focus groups with community residents; and 3) interviews with community stakeholders. Interview participant lists were designed by the Center's research and government relations teams, with generous guidance from Senator Scarcella-Spanton's office and local leadership. The project was approved by the Center's Institutional Review Board.

Program staff collect participant home address data at intake for individuals engaged in Center programming; this information is stored securely within centralized case management systems. At an individual level, home address information is utilized for program correspondence and enables connection to appropriate local community-based services and resources. At the aggregate level, Center leadership can visualize address clusters and distributions to inform planning and programming. Center participant home address data included in this report focus on the borough of Brooklyn and the Coney Island community in particular; data include all individual engagements in 2024 where the information could be extracted, geocoded, and analyzed using GIS software.

Center researchers conducted three focus groups during September 2025 with a total of 40 participants (10 seniors and 30 youth). Focus groups were in person at local community organizations and took between 45 and 90 minutes. Participants were recruited through four local youth-serving organizations, local senior centers, and participant word-of-mouth. All

participants received a meal and \$40 cash afterward as a thank you for their time and insight. Researchers conducted the groups in English. Focus groups explored participants' perceptions of community safety and justice, specific areas of greater/lesser safety and what makes that the case, strategies for keeping themselves safe, and perceptions of what additional resources and support the community might need to experience greater safety and well-being.

Finally, researchers conducted nine interviews with stakeholders from local service organizations, churches, and nonprofits. Participating stakeholder organizations included Brighter Stars of the Future, Coney Island Cathedral, Coney Island Community Revitalization Corporation, Coney Island Sharks Education Sports Program, NYC Inc., New Destiny Housing, Operation H.O.O.D., the Trauma Recovery Center, and Urban Community Services. Interviews explored participants' perceptions of Coney Island's existing institutional resources and infrastructure, community safety needs and drivers of those needs, barriers and challenges to addressing those needs, and what additional resources and supports the community might need to experience greater safety and well-being.

Interviews and focus groups were either recorded with permission and transcribed, or notes were taken by hand. To synthesize interviewee feedback, we conducted a grounded thematic analysis of interview transcripts and notes. We started with the domains established in the interview protocols before looking for common themes within these broad categories. For this report, all qualitative results are aggregated across interviewees and focus group participants. These analyses are supplemented with New York Police Department (NYPD) data accessed through New York City's Open Data portal.

Having presented some insights from the Center’s participant program data, this report now summarizes the major themes from the focus groups and interviews, concluding with suggestions for future community justice programming in Coney Island.

Safety

The focus groups and interviews opened with a series of questions about signs of a safe community, participants’ primary safety concerns, locations considered safe and unsafe, and strategies participants use to keep themselves safe.

“The Whole Thing is Not Safe”

When asked about safety, participants almost exclusively understood this as meaning physical safety, referencing sexual harassment, menacing, physical fights and altercations, robberies, and shootings. Participants also identified issues of homelessness, mental illness, and addiction as safety and well-being issues in the community.

Gun Violence Gun violence was by far the dominant community safety concern that surfaced across interviews and focus groups. Participants in all focus groups expressed the sense that gun violence could occur anywhere at any time, with “people shooting for no reason.” Many participants described hearing about recent shootings, being in public spaces with individuals known to have shot other community residents, witnessing shootings, and having family members who had been shot. A recent shooting outside a local donut shop was referenced repeatedly, with participants flagging its location on the commercial strip of Mermaid Avenue, its occurrence on a weekday afternoon, and its lack of visible effect on the community as noteworthy and concerning. Seniors and some stakeholders felt that shootings had increased after COVID-19 and articulated a belief that gun violence is currently “much worse. It’s like they just do it to see what they can get away with.”

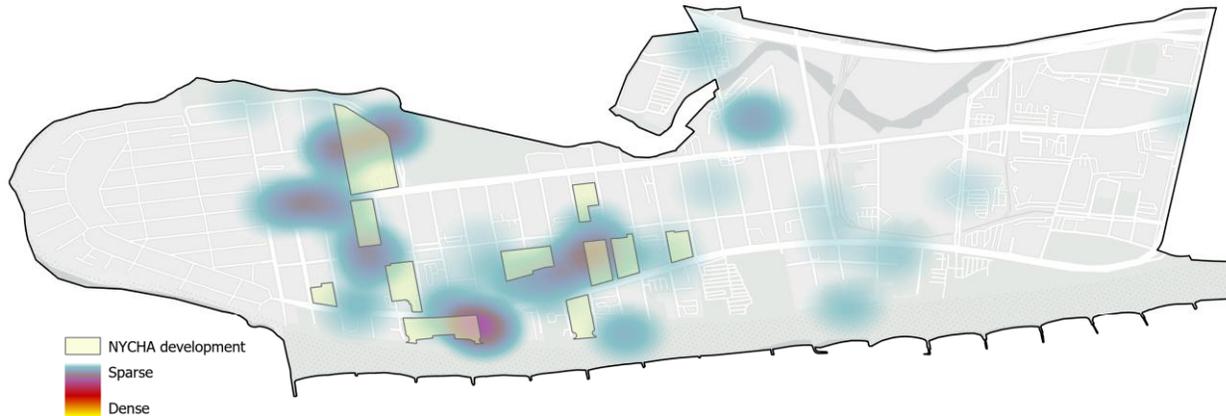
Some of this gun violence was described as the result of specific beefs between blocks or housing developments. As one participant explained:

In Coney Island, the violence usually only happens between the people that are involved. And even though we don't want any violence at all, because the violence is only between the people that are involved, Coney Island can get a lot of spurts of 90, 100, 200 days without any violence because people are looking for who they're looking for. And if they don't find those people, then there's no violence.

Gravesend Houses and Carey Gardens—informally known as “Scary Gardens”—were the two locations interviewees identified as having the most active current beef within Coney Island. Coney Island Houses reportedly also experiences heightened levels of violence, and Marlboro Houses (located in the adjacent community of Gravesend) was mentioned as an additional locus of local violence. These observations are borne out by clusters of reported shooting incidents (**Figure 4**). Multiple immediate drivers of this violence were seen to be gambling disputes, disagreements over drug dealing turf, and generational beef. In these latter cases, participants noted that beef between developments had generated geographical affiliation and associations but meant youth often “don’t know what the hell they’re fighting for.” This phenomenon was specifically identified by numerous stakeholders as a “mindset” that needs to be addressed as a central component of any gun violence prevention strategy. Additional drivers of the gun violence that participants discussed are detailed further below.

Unsafe Locations While seniors did not express concern about being intentional targets of development-related gun violence, building safety presented additional concerns to them, and to all participants. One participant described getting maced in their building elevator, and several stakeholders identified as a major safety concern seniors feeling scared to walk in the

Figure 4. Density of Shooting Incidents Reported in Coney Island, 2019-2024



Source: Police Department (NYPD). *NYPD Shooting Incident Data (Historic)* [Data file]. NYC Open Data. Available at: <https://opendata.cityofnewyork.us/>

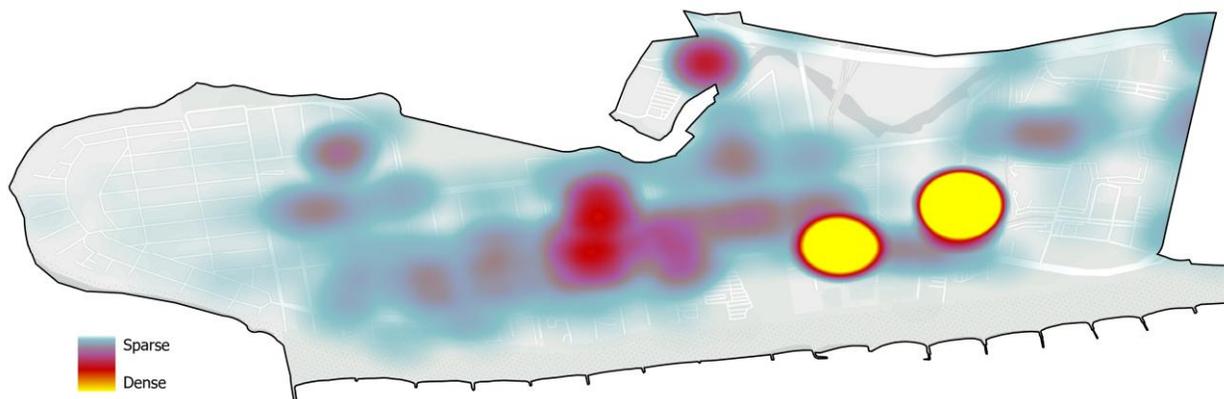
hallways of housing developments due to young men in the hallways, fearing robbery or burglary. This cluster of issues was predominantly described as focused in the center of the island, “where the trouble is” and where seniors are particularly vulnerable due to lack of resources (e.g., proximate senior centers).

All focus groups identified Mermaid Avenue as being unsafe, primarily because of the numbers of “guys sit[ting] in front of” the stores. Seniors described being scared to go into stores due to experiences of violence they had experienced or witnessed. Mermaid Avenue between 16th and 17th Streets was identified as feeling particularly unsafe by some youth participants, in part because of a recent shooting that happened nearby and because of another unidentified store across from the laundromat “where everyone hangs outside of.” Mermaid and Surf Avenues were also referenced by several participants as locations where they had unsettling encounters (including, when specified at all, between 22nd and 24th Streets). These locations were cited as places where residents with “a substance use struggle, or some other mental health struggle” often congregate, and “were out there fending for

themselves.” Participants expressed desire for additional services to support the needs of these community members.

Figure 5, below, is a heat map visualizing “hot spots” for arrests in the community, showing areas of greater arrest activity around the intersections of Stillwell and Surf Avenues (Luna Park Houses), and Mermaid Avenue and West 23rd/24th Streets (Carey Gardens Houses).

Figure 5. Density of All Coney Island Arrests, 2024



Source: Police Department (NYPD). *NYPD Arrests Data (Historic)* [Data file]. NYC Open Data. Available at: <https://opendata.cityofnewyork.us/>

On balance, youth were less concerned than seniors about walking on Mermaid Avenue because of its higher concentration of people. Surf Avenue, by contrast, was described by several youth as isolated—“quiet as hell”—and having poor lighting, putting them on edge and leading them to avoid using it as a walking route as much as possible.

There were a few additional locations participants mentioned as sites of unsafety. Train stations came up both because they are locations for potential crimes of opportunity against tourists (e.g., pickpocketing) that might spill over to local residents and because of efforts to

protect tourists through the presence of visible, armed law enforcement. “If they feel like they need to put armed security inside of a train station, that means it’s unsafe.” Several stakeholders also named area schools—with no specific institutions named—as locations of “vicious fights” and areas where youth felt threatened and unsafe and with little recourse.

For violent felony offense charges specifically, arrests are concentrated in the area between Neptune Avenue to the north and Surf Avenue to the south; and Stillwell Avenue to the west and Ocean Parkway to the east (**Figure 6**).

Figure 6. Density of Coney Island Arrests on Violent Felony Charges, 2024



Source: Police Department (NYPD). *NYPD Arrests Data (Historic)* [Data set]. NYC Open Data. Available at: <https://opendata.cityofnewyork.us/>

Unsafe Times of Day Researchers asked about specific times of day that might be more or less safe than others. Many participants mentioned nighttime as a time they avoid being out. Youth explained that “as soon the sun goes down, I want to be close to home” and that they dislike being outside “when it’s super dark.” Seniors also reported preferring to be inside by evening, and in fact some described a local practice of seniors preferring to schedule their activities in the morning so that they can also avoid afternoon during and after school

dismissal. The sense among those participants was that shootings could happen any time—“morning, daytime and they have no regards for anybody because they go right by the schools. They’re shooting in the time the kids are getting out of school, and you got to worry about that.”

Police and Surveillance Participants were conflicted about police and the implications of their role in community safety. Youth, seniors, and stakeholders all described police presence/response as desirable in some cases, particularly when they felt vulnerable (e.g., mental health crisis situations, fights at community gatherings, after shootings). However, this was nearly always coupled with fear about potential harm to residents at the hands of the police, either through direct action or inaction. Seniors expressed a sentiment of being caught between feeling threatened or unsafe around some young men but “afraid to call the police because they come there, and whoever you calling the police on might end up getting killed.” Residents of all ages expressed little trust in police correctly performing their jobs, including due to lack of local, cultural knowledge: “It feels like [they’re] doing nothing just because [they’re] not seeing [the whole] situation.”

Several participants also described inconsistent police presence as problematic; this inconsistent presence was associated both with seasons “because of summer detail, it's more [police] visibility so that's when people tend to feel the safest but during the cold months it's nothing” and specific streets. Surf Avenue and the boardwalk were identified as having more police presence, whereas on Mermaid and Neptune Avenues, “there’s really none.” While police visibility was discussed as having a positive effect on some residents’ feelings of safety, some participants expressed skepticism of the actual deterrent effects: “If these guys gonna do something, they're not afraid of the cops. They go ahead and do it. They don't care.”

Finally, some residents expressed concern about “games” played by specific officers at local precincts, including “a couple of white shirts that everybody is aware of at this police department,” indicating the notoriety of a few high-ranking officers among community residents.

Strategies for Keeping Safe At base, participants’ wishes for a more positive relationship with police were rooted in a desire to have a reliable mechanism for ensuring their and their families’ safety. Other strategies participants described included most frequently being on guard, and being “always aware of my surroundings.” Young women in particular explained that, rather than use Surf or Mermaid Avenues to walk home, “if it’s at a certain time, I will just walk on the boardwalk. I’m like, I can see all sides. I’m not worried about someone just sneaking up.” Several strategies participants described contributed to increased social isolation, whether that was the practice mentioned earlier of staying home at night, “right outside the building” after dark, or limiting engagement with other community members by “just keep focusing on where you going. Don’t look at nothing else.” Some youth also described the necessity of making sure they were visible and could not be mistaken for other people who might have active beef: “If I’m by myself at nighttime, no hoodies, I just got to let my face be known.” Finally, participants described the importance of navigating the community in numbers at night, whether with friends or family, and of staying in contact with family about their whereabouts: “Constant contact, knowing that they are going to be where they going to be.”

Local Organizations and Elders The organizations most frequently cited as directly contributing to community safety in the community included Operation H.O.O.D. (a Cure Violence¹⁰ adaptation), Urban Community Services (a multi-service organization), the

¹⁰ Cure Violence: <https://cvg.org/>

Trauma Recovery Center (a trauma-focused mental health clinic), the Coney Island Anti-Violence Project (an anti-violence coalition), and Brighter Stars of the Future (a youth development organization). Stakeholders listed numerous other programs and organizations as providing important resources for Coney Island youth in particular, such as the Coney Island Sharks Education Sports Program, Coney Island Cathedral, NIA Cornerstone, Coney Island Youth Alive, and Liberation Diploma Plus High School. Organizations were generally understood to be in one of two categories: those connected with “big-budget non-profits” and more grassroots, “resident-led” organizations. Additionally, elders like those known as “the Mother Teresa of Coney Island” and “the grandfather of Coney Island” were identified by several participants as pillars of the community and important for organizations to seek out and engage in community justice efforts.

Signs of a Safe Community Participants struggled to identify aspects of the community that conveyed safety, aside from their homes and organizations they were connected with. Most agreed that a safe community is one where residents feel connected and engaged with “positive energy. Respect. Respect among the community.” Many participants further defined a safe community as one where people are not afraid to be outside, including at public convenings. Many recalled events like summer concerts, block parties, or community basketball tournaments where “everybody came together to watch the basketball game. Everybody put their beef aside. It makes me feel better seeing stuff like that.”

Justice

When asked about community justice and injustice in Coney Island, participant responses were much broader in scope, but generally centered around two major themes: equality and accountability.

“Person Got Served Justice and That's a Step Forward”

Nearly all participants highlighted uneven development and distribution of resources across Coney Island. In the context of the criminal legal system, this included clearance rates for homicides and feeling like justice equated to accountability within the criminal legal system: “Say if you removed somebody with gun violence, but then like the person or whoever that they get arrested for it, like that's peace ... You don't got to worry about him.” Conversely, participants described struggling with resolution and healing in cases where accountability through the criminal legal system had not occurred: “you can't heal without the situation being rectified.” A sense of unequally applied justice permeated these discussions in nearly all focus groups and interviews. One participant observed:

Some communities, when the majority is lighter, the police, the ambulance they shoot over there real quick. When it's a Black community, they're damn near dead before they get there. Even it out—come to the Black community just as fast as you come to the white community.

“If You’re a Working-Class Single Mom with Multiple Kids You Typically Don’t Go to Brunch”

This sense of unevenly distributed resources extended beyond the criminal legal system and its partners for participants in conversations about justice and injustice. In particular, all participants expressed challenges related to generational poverty and uneven economic development, sharing the perception that most of the investment in infrastructure and other kinds of “improvement” projects in the area are focused on the locations frequented by tourists (e.g., the boardwalk and amusement parks), and increasingly on new housing developments with rents that far surpass what long-time residents are able to pay. Likewise,

new amenities are more aligned with those newer residents' cultural interests (e.g., coffee shops, high-end restaurants). Many participants expressed a wish for more intentional development that is connected to the cultural history of the community and its long-time residents, and which takes their needs into consideration. Affordable, high-quality grocery stores topped this list, with one participant lamenting the closing of a local hardware store while liquor stores and cannabis dispensaries remain in operation.

Participants pointed out the virtuous circle of local business, employment, and community safety. Such businesses “help the community when you got businesses that people respect, that hire ... There’s not any businesses [like that] around here.” This, for some focus group participants, demonstrated injustices in lending practices. “Let's go back to the application process. You [go] to the bank, you want a loan. You put down that you're Black you might not get that loan unless you got funding in the background. It takes a whole army and a family to keep that business.” Limited employment and entrepreneurial options within Coney Island create, for many participants, a direct link between “multi-generational trauma, when parents are juggling three minimum wage jobs they’re barely in the home,” and violence:

When children and youth do not get the support and supervision they need, they tend to follow the crowd. People experience a sense of belonging because I don’t feel that in the home because I barely see [my parents]. That leads to gang affiliation, which bleeds into the violence we see.

Accessible, well-kept, affordable space was another recurrent theme. This included a lack of affordable housing for seniors, whom participants described as increasingly among the unhoused population and with few available options. Participants also highlighted the need for regulation of the community’s many public housing developments, because:

If you ever walk around, [the housing developments are] not properly secured or monitored with the levels of safety there should be. No locks on the doors, no cameras to even review if there ever was an incident. And the maintenance is very poor. It's an alarming situation, because the people living in these buildings—it plays an enormous part on their psyches. I'm living in an environment that's uplifting or an environment that's degrading. It gives you a level of confidence to be able to perform or develop and grow in life. [When the conditions are like this,] it's stifling.

The other place this theme emerged was the lack of services for youth, particularly locations where they can physically go after traditional school hours. Many participants noted this as both a need and an injustice, and another direct contributor to violence and stress in the community, describing situations where they had nothing to offer youth in crisis. Without such facilities, stakeholders are making do with what they have: “There's times I get in my car and see young kids at midnight and get them, get them something to eat, and take them home. You can't grab every kid but at least you know that I'm out here [until] 12 at night.”

Coney Island's Greatest Strength

Underlying all discussions of Coney Island's strengths, challenges, existing resources, and needs was a repeated observation about its size and close-knit nature. The area was repeatedly described as “a family,” with long-time connections and many generational relationships. Many felt that this is the community's potential superpower, which could be leveraged into coordinated responses: “Coney Island has something unique—being so small—if we had a magic wand we could outperform and be a role model for many other communities.”

However, nearly all also described it instead as a “divided community” with a history of “different chapters,” some of which have resulted in disagreements over priorities (e.g., the recent debate over bringing a casino to the community) that turned “really, really nasty ... It’s to our own detriment ... Part of it is historical and thinking about ways Black communities have been disempowered.” In addition to structural inequities, many stakeholders identified challenges resulting from existing organizational leadership not being in alignment about approach due to cultural differences (e.g., due to race, ethnicity, or community of origin) and “ego.” Some participants also described a history of “unsavory leaders and politicians.” As one participant explained,

A lot of times people will come into low-income communities and turn people against each other. With elected officials, heads of organizations that say one thing and do another. And then they leave. They have an agenda, they need to get a grant or get funding, it’s a cycle and then they move on.

This history and lack of alignment between organizations doing similar work was a commonly cited issue related to addressing community justice. Additionally, even when there is alignment in mission or approach, many participants described a lack of awareness about different organizations’ available services, eligibility criteria, operating hours, and referral mechanisms: “We’re all supposed to find solutions, work to find holistic solutions to these problems but we’re not connecting.”

Recommendations

Several recommendations emerged from focus groups and interviews, clustered into clear themes:

Opportunities for Genuine Connection and Healing While many participants identified divisions and a history of fighting within the community, in every session participants voiced a desire for the community to come together and start to work through differences. “We need to heal from each other. We have to stop hating.” This included youth with beef, victims and perpetrators of gun violence, seniors and youth, and service providers. “Everybody come together, have a conversation with each other.” Another participant, similarly describing the need for authentic conversation and listening, offered:

My thing now is letting young people tell their stories, their needs and their wants. Youth are so smart and it’s a time when older people can really sit back and let our youth take the lead. That’s what some of them want to do but don’t because they don’t know how to do it or who to trust. If we let them really see what they’re doing to put people in harm’s way or harming the community—they need to be able to see the bigger picture and paint it for themselves rather than having adults paint it and hand it to them.

Improved Infrastructure Participants wished for simple, concrete safety solutions like increasing the number or brightness of streetlights on Surf Avenue, adding cameras to the boardwalk, and making basic improvements within the public housing developments (e.g., locking outer doors, cameras inside buildings, basic internal repairs). “It might stop a lot of gun violence. No fighting, everybody got a more comfortable environment.”

Increased Capacity for Service Provision Recommendations clustered around the need for provision of emergency mental health services to respond to what participants observed is an increasing volume of general unmet mental health crises among community residents in public spaces. In addition, participants stressed the importance of literally meeting people “where they are at” through such means as mobile crisis vans and trauma-

informed mental health professionals stationed within public housing developments. Finally, more culturally responsive services were recommended, including the need for Cantonese-speaking clinicians and 24/7 youth services and facilities.

How can these programs find a way to reach out, find, engage, and make their programs appealing to young people? Talking and doing are two different things. There's a gap between help people need, the help that is available, and is the help that is available responsive to the needs, accessible, culturally responsive, etc.

Increased Knowledge of Existing Services In several cases, participants expressed the feeling that the community has a number of programs that could serve local residents, but that not enough community members or other programs know about the programs' areas of focus and eligibility requirements. Participants shared that, historically, different organizations made efforts to catalogue programs and create increased linkages between them. However, they do not see such a responsibility currently resting with any particular agency and stated that resurrecting this practice would increase service provision and uptake in the community.

Affordable Basic Needs Participants identified increased access to businesses and organizations that support baseline functioning of a healthy community as a core community justice recommendation. Food access emerged as a primary concern, including grocery stores with healthy and reasonably priced food, as well as more food pantries and locations where children in particular are able to obtain healthy meals without stigma or shame. Affordable housing, particularly for seniors, was also discussed as an area of primary concern among focus group participants and stakeholders. Affordable childcare and/or after-school activities

was another issue many participants spoke about being crucial for youth from infancy through high school.

Based on feedback from Coney Island residents and stakeholders, attention to these recommendations has the potential to build on existing community assets and improve feelings of safety, justice, and well-being in Coney Island.