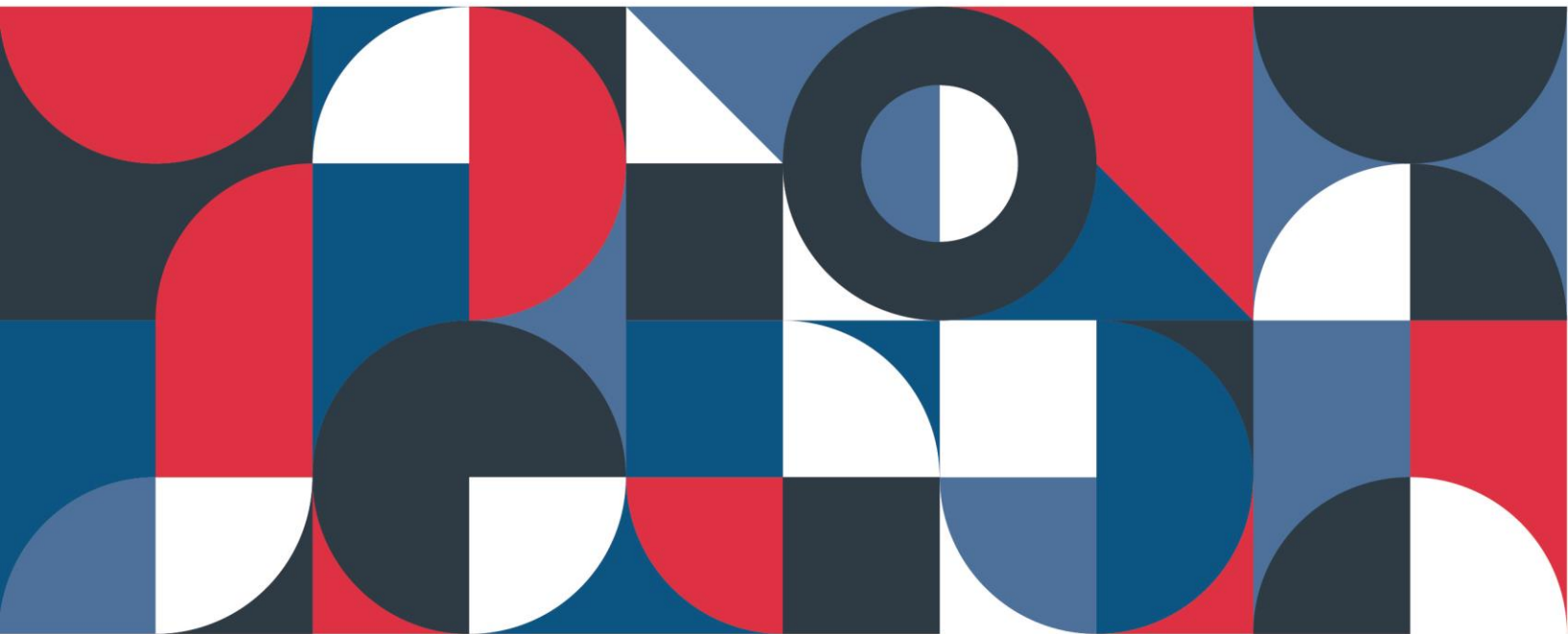


Landscape Scan

Grand Rapids Public Safety Initiatives, 1997–2022

JULY 2024



Dorothy A. Johnson Center
FOR PHILANTHROPY



Prepared For

A Just GR

Project Team

Aaron Yore-VanOosterhout, Ph.D., research manager
Emily Dorn Jex, M.S., data analyst
Jeff Williams, M.A., M.B.A., director, Community Data
and Research Lab

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Dorothy A. Johnson Center for Philanthropy

The Dorothy A. Johnson Center for Philanthropy at Grand Valley State University was established in 1992 with support from the W.K. Kellogg Foundation. Our mission is to be a global leader in helping individuals and organizations understand, strengthen, and advance philanthropy, resulting in a smart, adaptive sector that helps create strong, inclusive communities.

We put research to work with and for professionals across the country and the world. Through professional education offerings; research, evaluation, and consulting services; and bold thinking to advance the field, we support a philanthropic ecosystem defined by effective philanthropy, strong nonprofits, and informed community change.



Dorothy A. Johnson Center

FOR PHILANTHROPY

201 Front Ave SW, Suite 200 // Grand Rapids, MI 49504

616-331-7585 // icp@gvsu.edu // johnsoncenter.org

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Introduction

New public safety programs and initiatives — as well as the data that support or discredit them — do not arise in a vacuum. Each new public safety program builds upon prior policies and programs and is invariably a reaction to something: a study, a change in the national conversation, a highly publicized death.

The Aspen Institute’s Criminal Justice Reform Initiative is no different. In early 2022, the Aspen Institute convened A Just GR (then the Justice and Governance Partnership) in Grand Rapids, Michigan, with representatives from more than two dozen organizations in the fields of health care, education, housing, public safety, philanthropy, and civil rights advocacy, among others. (For a full list of participating organizations, see Appendix A.) A Just GR, at first facilitated by Public Agency at the West Michigan Center for Arts + Technology, is one part of a national initiative “to create shared visions for public safety and justice outcomes that are equity-centered, data-driven, and holistic. [...] Safer communities better understand the underlying factors that impact quality of life, while also including community voices that are typically left out of policymaking and investment decisions.” Specifically, A Just GR is built on the belief that greater data sharing — and community-led data collection and interpretation — can lead to new ways of imagining public safety. This data sharing is set to begin this year, in 2024. Before that work begins, the Aspen Institute sought a review of public safety initiatives undertaken in Grand Rapids in recent history, in the form of a landscape scan that will inform the work A Just GR will carry out in the future. Specifically, the Aspen Institute sought answers to the following questions:

- “What relevant initiatives or activities have happened in the past in Grand Rapids that can offer specific lessons and insights for the current A Just GR effort?”
- “For each that you identify, who was involved, what was the scope of the effort, what were its goals, what were primary successes and challenges, and what were the outcomes?”

Staff from the Community Data and Research Lab, the research arm of the Dorothy A. Johnson Center for Philanthropy at Grand Valley State University (Johnson Center), carried out this landscape scan by reviewing local newspaper archives and interviewing several practitioners and policymakers who have worked to increase public safety in Grand Rapids for decades. The resulting draft list of programs, initiatives, and studies from the last 25 years is found in Appendix B.

A Just GR collective thoughts and recommendations

In addition to conducting a landscape scan, Johnson Center staff facilitated several workgroup sessions with A Just GR participants and interviewed local experts on public safety initiatives. The section that follows presents research questions and workgroup participants' responses based on what they have witnessed in the past in Grand Rapids. It concludes with recommendations offered by the experts interviewed.

In what ways can the information and insights from the landscape scan inform and/or be applied to A Just GR's effort in Grand Rapids?

Workgroup participants pointed largely to issues of racial equity, transparency, and clarity in the work ahead. Here, racial equity reflected "diverse representation in leadership of the GR-JGP and engagement of community partners," as one participant wrote. Looking back on decades of community research and interventions led by people outside the neighborhoods in question, participants called for resident-led policy change in the future.

Transparency and clarity were also integral to maintain that diversity, according to participants. To build the trust necessary to welcome and include neighborhood residents, as well as the community-based organizations that serve them, one participant pointed to "better specificity around what governance means in a collaborative partnership. With nonprofits, city, and county — what does governance look like in this space that is aligned?" With "a clear focus and establishment of the objectives of the collective," added another participant, their organization's efforts on A Just GR can more easily be justified to stakeholders and "be folded into the already-in-progress work."

In other words, how is power distributed, and do neighborhood residents clearly understand their role in the process and find it meaningful? Unlike in past initiatives, where the primary decision-making — about policies and the resources to carry them out — largely occurred in spaces inaccessible to neighborhood residents, meaningful change can only come with greater transparency and "demonstrated access to power brokers," wrote one participant.

How will A Just GR address, incorporate, or relate to the constellation of existing related activities?

Beyond efforts to address racial equity, transparency, and clarity, workgroup participants offered several specific ways to include the work already being done in Grand Rapids neighborhoods.

Some participants called for outreach to faith-based communities and organizations, which have not yet been represented on A Just GR. In many neighborhoods, churches, mosques, and other religious institutions are often the foundation for community. Inviting their leaders to join A Just GR creates a path to include the work these communities already do to address public safety.

Other participants pointed to compensation for A Just GR activities. Many organizations lack the capacity to take on unfunded work, and maintaining equitable representation in the partnership will require significant funding for all participants: both to pay for participants' time and to demonstrate to others that participants' insights and activities are valued.

Perhaps most significantly, however, participants said there must be some evidence of forward progress, some clear and public demonstration that all participating organizations and institutions are committed to policy reform (in this case, “justice reinvestment”). As one participant asked, “[w]hat low-hanging fruit objectives can be met in the short-term” to show momentum? Without this movement, many participants said, it will be difficult to convince other organizations to join A Just GR and/or convince them that this effort is different from previous stalled initiatives.

How will the implementation approach for A Just GR’s effort a) address the most significant challenges or gaps, b) build upon or further activate the biggest assets, and c) lean into the greatest opportunities towards safety and justice for all?

The challenges that face A Just GR are numerous, and for many workgroup participants, these feel insurmountable. Nevertheless, there are several commitments A Just GR can make that will allow the work to take the next step.

Broadly, some of the principal challenges that workgroup participants identified include an unwillingness by people in power to confront systemic racism; a system of social service provision centered on crisis management and staffed by people outside city neighborhoods; and the recent experience of previous, similar failed efforts in the city.

According to several workgroup participants, for example, “Black-/Brown-led organizations” have been intentionally underfunded in west Michigan, resulting in few people of color in leadership positions throughout Grand Rapids. Building full trust among the few organizations led by people of color and among neighborhood residents will be impossible without a public reckoning of the racism — both historical and in the present — that has marginalized entire communities.

Other workgroup participants pointed to a vast network (“6,000+ nonprofit organizations in WM”) of private social service providers that has been built around the status quo of crisis management: emergency shelters, meal providers, reentry resources, etc. Perhaps even more so than public institutions such as the police, correctional facilities, etc., it will take a great deal of time and effort to shift an entire industry of decentralized private providers (what some critics call the “non-profit industrial complex”) away from their current models, staffing, and services. This is made yet more complicated by the fact that, for many people in marginalized communities, nonprofit work is sometimes the only avenue of employment when criminal records, restrictions of probation or parole, and other barriers prevent access to many jobs.

Of course, even public institutions are fracturing and no longer serve the community as they once did. As one workgroup participant wrote, the “[f]ragmentation of school communities (shrinking public school footprint, growing charters, schools of choice) mean that school communities have less cohesiveness than they used to and will have less in the future.”

Most immediately, A Just GR faces the challenge of history. As can be seen in this landscape scan, it is simply the latest in a long string of similar initiatives that establish a years-long timeline for institutional-data collection and incremental policy change, and it faces a “general cynicism towards big data projects and their results,” according to one participant.

How can A Just GR's work be different? Several workgroup participants and others interviewed for this landscape scan offered recommendations.

- First, it is essential to recognize and incorporate the work already done in the very communities A Just GR is attempting to improve. One expert pointed out a “rich history” of Black/African American men trying to create connections to young men in their neighborhoods — young men who are experiencing the same stresses and difficulties that they were experiencing a generation ago. Ignoring this work, for example, would sideline a nascent community.
- Second, another expert counseled that “prevention is the hardest thing to sell,” and that change will take time. A Just GR needs to guard against the expectation among city leaders and other institutional actors that meaningful change can happen quickly, in a year or two. Counter-narratives about neighborhood deficits are long-entrenched — indeed, since Black/African American people began making communities in Grand Rapids in the early 20th century.
- In the same vein, the institutions and organizations driving this work must make a long-term commitment to that slow process of change and have the resources to effectively follow through, wrote one workgroup participant. These resources must include permanent funding, whether from the philanthropy sector or from government.
- Finally, institutional data must be available to all. This “allows for a more complete narrative of what’s really going on,” said an expert. “It allows more people to see it. It allows for a different definition of success.” Our current system is “designed not to work for certain people,” this expert continued, and only by exposing data and revealing how it is crafted will A Just GR make progress.

Appendix A: Organizations participating in A Just GR

The following organizations were participating in A Just GR at the time of publication of this report:

61st District Court	Dorothy A. Johnson Center for Philanthropy at Grand Valley State University
ACLU of Michigan	Kate and Richard Wolters Foundation
Bank of America	Kent Co. Board of Commissioners
Baxter Neighborhood Association	Kent Co. Health Department
Catherine's Health Center	Kent Co. Michigan DHHS
Cherry Health	Kent Co. Office of Community Corrections
City of Grand Rapids	Kent Co. Prosecutor's Office
Coalition to End Homelessness	Kent Co. Sheriff's Office
Corewell Health	Kent School Services Network (KSSN)
Dwelling Place	LINC UP
Essential Needs Task Force	Michigan House of Representatives
Family Promise	Network180
Grand Rapids Bar Association	Pine Rest Christian Mental Health Services
Grand Rapids Area Chamber of Commerce	Urban Core Collective
Grand Rapids Police Department	West Michigan Center for Arts + Technology
Grand Rapids Public Schools	Women's Resource Center
Grand Rapids Urban League	YWCA West Central Michigan
Greater Grand Rapids NAACP	

Appendix B: Landscape scan

The following list of programs was built from a list of public safety and other programs submitted in the City of Grand Rapids' application to join the Aspen Institute's Criminal Justice Reform Initiative. Johnson Center staff searched the publication archives of the *Grand Rapids Press*, the *Grand Rapids Business Journal*, and *MLive* from the past 25 years to supplement this original list. In addition, Johnson Center staff interviewed four experts from city government, GRPD, and the nonprofit community to learn context around key programs.

The list of programs, initiatives, and studies listed here represent a first draft of all the work conducted to improve public safety in Grand Rapids over the last 25 years.¹ There are undoubtedly many more we have missed, and much more information about each program that participants can share. For this reason, we recommend posting the following as a working document in an online forum, to allow continual updating by all members of A Just GR.

The following programs are grouped thematically (and then chronologically) into the following seven categories: Partnerships, Crisis Management Diversions, Incarceration Diversion and Restorative Justice, During Incarceration, Reentry Support, Other Efforts, and Studies. Programs that seem to be currently operating are denoted by [blue text](#) and an *.

Partnerships

Grand Rapids Weed & Seed

The U.S. Department of Justice began piloting "Operation Weed and Seed" in 1991, in a dual effort at "weeding out" criminals" from select neighborhoods and seeding those same neighborhoods with crime prevention services. Grand Rapids organizations and agencies — including the Grand Rapids Police Department, Grand Valley State University, and area businesses and social service providers — adopted this program in 2005. By 2010, the program operated locally as a nonprofit, Grand Rapids Weed & Seed, but the operation appears to have ceased when federal funding disappeared in 2011.

Task Force on Drug Policy Reform

In 1997, Grand Rapids Mayor John Logie established a 99-member Task Force on Drug Policy Reform, calling for a "round table of experts in medicine, treatment, law enforcement, and drug policy" to enter into serious debate about drug and alcohol enforcement, treatment and prevention with the objective of evaluating current and future policies." Dr. Frederick Deane chaired the task force. In a 1998 report (quoted here), it issued six recommendations.

- "Repeal mandatory sentencing; restore judicial discretion to the sentencing process; re-establish the priorities of the criminal justice system to focus on major traffickers; reserve the most serious penalties for sales to minors or where violence occurs in the drug trade; provide sentencing alternatives to non-violent offenders to reintegrate them into society; increase the percentage of minorities on the police force to match the demographics of the community; expand community

¹ For easier reading, we have omitted citations and references in this list. All references are available upon request.

officers' interaction with residents; increase the taxes on alcohol, beer and wine to finance prevention and treatment programs.”

- Importantly, many of these subrecommendations sprang from a stated understanding that, while most drug crimes likely occurred in white suburbs, most drug law enforcement occurred in the region the Grand Rapids Police Department designated the “Charlie Sector,” i.e., “the area bounded by Hall Street SE and Fulton Street NE).” The reason for this was because, as the task force report claimed, residents demanded it. “It is generally accepted that overt drug transactions occur regularly in lower socioeconomic areas. Such blatant disregard for the law prompts law-abiding citizens to demand more police action. As a result, there are many more ‘stops’ (i.e., lawful searches of citizens) in the Charlie Sector of Grand Rapids than in other sectors.”
- “Establish a drug court [modeled after the court established in Dade County, Florida, and in Kalamazoo, Michigan]; Provide education throughout justice system to ensure identification of Alcohol and Other Drug (AOD) abusers; expand intake testing for alcohol and other drugs; recommend/offer treatment to offenders who test positive for alcohol and others [sic] drugs at the time of arrest and during incarceration.” Furthermore, the report suggested the Community Corrections Advisory Board should be designated the “advisory entity for fiscal and administrative coordination of the drug court system.”
- “Develop a residential treatment program for incarcerated offenders; establish a minimum security facility; ensure that existing residential programs provide sufficient capacity for the necessary support and structure associated with strictly supervised aftercare programs; provide treatment programs for substance addicted inmates; identify offenders who should be directed away from prison into an alternative programs [sic] via the drug court system; expand existing educational programs provided to individuals during their incarcerations.”
- “Implement a Harm Reduction program for needle exchange; establish a fixed site to provide testing and health care services; include a component for mobile outreach to ensure contact in targeted areas.”
- “Allow physicians to dispense or prescribe maintenance drugs to addicts; increase recognition for the specialty practice of addictions medicine; transfer aspects of the drug problem from the law enforcement/penal system to the public health system.”
- “[D]evelop a public health approach to the problems associated with high rates of drug abuse and addiction. This must clearly emphasize prevention at the elementary school, high school and adult levels: a comprehensive prevention program must extend across all domains, utilizing widespread community collaboration and partnerships.”

NB: the task force’s report also called for promoting “the development and use of ‘Community Asset Maps.’”

STOP IT: Community Violence Initiative

From the Johnson Center archives: “On Jan. 18, 2013, the community involvement initiative Stop It! gathered more than 1,000 community members at Messiah Missionary Baptist Church in Grand Rapids, Michigan, to discuss responses to a recent increase in violent crime in the city. Following that meeting, clergy members

and other community leaders led eight community dialogues about six topics at various neighborhood locations.”

The following questions were asked of attendees:

- “What is the impact of violence in our community? (for example: children, older adults, parents, churches, businesses, others.)
- “What is triggering community violence?
- “How does this level of violence compare to other years?
- “What solutions have you tried or would like to try?
- “If you could do one thing about the issue when you leave today, what would you do?”

In addition, “three interventions were mentioned. The first program was a gang intervention and prevention program, which lost funding because there were no immediate results. The second was a service center open until 3 am. She did not explain why the program is no longer available. A third topic brought up in this area was the funding for ‘Michigan Mile.’ In one of the breakout sessions, one older African American woman asked if the same people were calling shots to get money in the community. The moderator did not answer the question and tried to move on to another participant. Another person stood up and explained, ‘A mistake was made on Michigan Mile and the money was not spent on other parts of town.’ ”

NB: Then GRPD chief Kevin Belk mentioned a card that discussed appropriate interactions with police, developed together with the ACLU, but said these cards were not widely distributed. This was likely some version of a “know your rights” card.

Kent School-Justice Partnership*

The Kent School-Justice Partnership was established by mandate from Gov. Rick Snyder in 2013, and comprised “representatives from the courts, the schools, law enforcement, prosecutors, the Department of Health and Human Services, the Kent School Services Network, Community Mental Health, and the restorative justice community as well as from the Grand Valley State University Johnson Center for Philanthropy data center,” the Community Data and Research Lab. Chaired by Judge Kathleen Feeney, the partnership ultimately resulted in the creation of the Truancy Court (see details below).

Safe Alliances for Everyone (SAFE) Task Force*

Former mayor George Heartwell established the Safe Alliances for Everyone (SAFE) Task Force in May 2014, in response to “escalating violence in some of our neighborhoods — violence resulting from petty street crime and frequently involving the use of illegally-owned firearms.” The task force was led by a Grand Rapids city commissioner, and included community members representing a variety of organizations: Baxter Neighborhood Center, Eastown Community Association, Grand Rapids Community College, the Steelcase Foundation, Grand Valley State University, Grand Rapids Police Department, Network180, Our Community’s Children, Grand Rapids Public Schools, LINC, Spectrum Health, the Hispanic Center of West Michigan, and the Michigan Office of Urban Initiatives. Although the task force delivered a “final report” in March 2015, this group is active to the present and is currently led by City Commissioner Milinda Ysasi.

Broadly, the task force worked toward four goals:

- Align and share information on what exists regarding neighborhood violence
- Support programs based on valid research to fill existing gaps
- Advocate for community empowerment and voice
- Promote city policy through recommendation

According to the 2015 report, “the SAFE Taskforce agreed upon guidelines for achieving the aforementioned goals including reviewing past reports and activities produced at the local and national level, invited speakers and guests from local and state agencies, continued consideration of ‘best practices’ programs at the public, parochial and private levels of community investment, discussion of existing programs and program gaps within the city of Grand Rapids, the inclusion of alternative community voices and perspectives at the neighborhood level, and a review of Calls for Police Service Data (CFS) across the City of Grand Rapids. Through consideration of these different data points the SAFE Taskforce will promote city policy recommendations to city officials.”

Some specific next steps:

- “The GRPS commitment to a cultural shift in discipline outcomes has resulted in the training of five GRPS staff members in restorative justice practices through the International Institute for Restorative Practices in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania. The five newly certified Restorative Practices trainers have trained an additional forty-four staff member including social workers, security officers, principals and teachers. Thus far approximately 725 students have participated in some form of restorative practices. Future plans include using trained community volunteers to serve as Restorative Discipline practitioners across GRPS K-12 schools.”

NB: “What became quite evident during taskforce discussions is the importance of neighborhood-based organizations as community hubs for interaction and decision-making with local government on issues ranging from safe streets to area-specific planning strategies and housing code enforcement. Neighborhood Associations offer residents opportunities to cooperate with city leadership, as well as to challenge them, on issues of common interest. Including opportunities to cooperate with city leadership, as well as to challenge them, on issues of common interest. Including neighborhood association representatives at the table during city-wide policy discussions on all initiatives and programs that affect those areas are imperative to success.”

Community Owns Safety

In late 2021, the Michigan Justice Fund provided grants to two Grand Rapids-based coalitions. According to its 2021 annual report, these grants sought, respectively, to “reduce the reliance on the justice system” and support “public education efforts and development of alternatives to current budgetary priorities in Grand Rapids.” **The first grant gave \$175,000 to the Aspen Institute to develop the Grand Rapids Justice and Governance Partnership, which has commissioned this landscape scan.**

The second grant provided \$80,000 to LINC UP Nonprofit Housing Corp., which established the Community Owns Safety Coalition along with the Urban Core Collective, NAACP of Greater Grand Rapids, and the ACLU of

Michigan. News reports in 2022 noted the coalition had since expanded to include other organizations such as the Hispanic Center of West Michigan, West Michigan Farmers of Color Land Fund, and Black Wall Street GR. In 2021, the coalition launched a campaign to:

- “Inform the Grand Rapids Community of how the City of Grand Rapids sets its spending and budget priorities
- “Create the opportunity for the community to weigh-in on setting spending and budget priorities
- “Develop a widely-shared definition of Public Safety that is rooted in community voice.”

Campaigns in subsequent years have called for community action to further these goals.²

CURE Violence*

Beginning in November 2021, the City of Grand Rapids adopted the international Cure Violence program, which “utilizes carefully selected and trained workers — trusted members of the communities we serve — to interrupt the contagion using a three-prong approach:

- Detecting and interrupting the transmission of violence – anticipate where violence may occur and intervene before it erupts.
- Changing the behavior of the highest potential transmitters – identify those at highest risk for violence and work to change their behavior.
- Changing community norms – influence social norms to discourage the use of violence.”

In this model, the City’s Office of Oversight and Public Accountability works together with the Grand Rapids Urban League to implement the program in select neighborhoods. According to the City’s website, the first “target area” is the intersection of Franklin and Division in Grand Rapids’s Third Ward.

D.I.C.E. — Data-Informed Community Engagement*

In July 2022, the Grand Rapids Police Department piloted the D.I.C.E. program. As Chief Eric Winstrom explained during a presentation, the department will first use crime data to target a particular area of the city. However, “[t]he next move isn’t deploy our resources there. The next move is to meet with community. And find out what we can offer community,” such as through collaborations with neighborhood associations and other community-based organizations. Other distinct, but related, programs include **Drive for Success**, which partners GRPD with Boys & Girls Clubs to develop safe driving skills, and **Clergy on Patrol**, in which “faith leaders are paired with officers to build bridges in community,” according to a 2022 GRPD update.

² It should be noted that these organizations’ advocacy efforts in 2020 — immediately after George Floyd, a Black man, was murdered by a white police officer in Minneapolis, Minnesota — inspired the city-led initiative [Participatory Budgeting Grand Rapids](#) (PBGR). PBGR is not inherently designed to address public safety and thus falls outside the scope of this landscape scan, but the impulse driving it is the same: the desire to make municipal budgeting more accountable and transparent to the public.

Crisis Management Diversions

Eviction Prevention Program and Eviction Diversion Initiative*

The 61st District Court has participated in at least two programs designed to reduce home evictions.

The first, the Eviction Prevention Program, was a three-year pilot from 2018–2020 that paid for dedicated staff time within the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services and the Salvation Army. The program’s purpose was to “head off needless dislocation and credit damage in cases where eviction could be avoided,” according to a final evaluation report published in 2020. Salvation Army staff would intercept tenant defendants at the court and, if they met program requirements, help them find other funding sources to cover housing debt. Meanwhile, judges would offer a “stipulation,” or conditional dismissal, to offer the tenant time to gather the necessary funds.

In summer 2022, the 61st District Court received a grant to fund two temporary staff positions, to “reach out to landlords and tenants involved in eviction filings and connect the parties to needed community resources.” According to a news report, the funding comes from “part of a \$10 million grant from the National Center for State Courts (NCSC) and the Wells Fargo Foundation,” and can be extended for up to two years. In the article, the court administrator explained that the Eviction Prevention Program “only gives people money to pay back rent and stop proceedings. While critical, [Administrator Tanya Todd] says the same landlords and tenants often returned for another proceeding. ‘This new initiative, the EDI, the eviction diversion initiative, is more about taking it a step further to say, ‘What can we do to help you have some continuity and consistency in your payments, so you don’t end up back where you are?’”

Restorative Practices and School-Wide Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS)*

Grand Rapids Public Schools, the largest public school district in the city and region, has been integrating Restorative Practices and school-wide Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) in recent years to provide students and staff options for preventing and handling student disciplinary issues. (This is likely the program referred to in the 2015 SAFE Task Force report.) Ongoing professional development for staff and trainings for parents have been implemented to support both efforts. This is largely the result of a package of state laws that took effect in summer 2017, which “require schools to consider certain circumstances like a student’s age and disciplinary history before issuing suspensions or expulsions. In addition, the laws require schools to consider an approach called ‘restorative practices’ (RP) as a disciplinary alternative for serious offenses, and they encourage schools to consider RP for lesser offenses, including bullying.” Certain GRPS schools, such as Riverside Middle School, have implemented RP even earlier.

Incarceration Diversion and Restorative Justice

Community Outreach Court

Although it is unclear if the Community Outreach Court, or “Street Court,” still operates today, a judge, court clerk, and probation officer would operate out of Mel Trotter Ministries emergency shelter once a month as of 2015. According to an article in the Grand Rapids Press, the program began in 2014 at the request of then-judicial clerk Heather Pelletier and principally addressed misdemeanors such as trespassing, public

intoxication, etc. — crimes associated with homelessness and that typically involved fines. “Street court comes up with different solutions that allow the guilty to work off their costs and fines in ways that benefit themselves and the community,” continued the article. In addition, defendants were paired with social workers from area emergency shelters. The program was funded through a grant, although neither the funder nor the amount was specified in the article.

The Kent County Sheriff’s Honor Camp

The Kent County Sheriff’s Honor Camp housed young men (ages 17–18) from at least the 1960s through 2010 “who showed good behavior. It kept them out of jail, and allowed them to work and study.” According to an MLive article from 2010, youth incarcerated there “can study, work on the farm and take part in community projects, such as cleaning up after festivals or helping after a storm. They work with the Road Commission, fix up old bikes for kids, or work around the camp if they have special skills, such as carpentry.”

According to a Grand Rapids Press article published in 1999, “education has been a cornerstone of the honor camp experience for more than two decades.” The GED program at the camp was mandatory at that time, and involved “hours of studying, practice tests and one-on-one tutoring” as well as punitive measures such as revoking phone privileges, all led by a Grand Rapids Public Schools teacher. According to the article, by early June 1999, “the GEDs earned at the honor camp so far this year account for one-eighth of all the certificates handed out by Grand Rapids Public Schools.”

Restorative Justice Coalition of West Michigan

Among other advocacy activities, the Restorative Justice Coalition of West Michigan convened prosecutors, juvenile probation staff, and dispute resolution experts in Grand Rapids and Kent County to develop alternatives to incarceration for youth who commit offenses. In 2018, for example, the coalition assisted in developing a pilot program for youth who committed certain offenses to provide restitution to victims in other ways, such as service. It is unclear if the coalition still operates today.

17th Circuit Court Specialty Courts and Other Programs*

According to its 2021 Annual Report (the most recent report available), Kent County’s 17th Circuit Court offered the following specialty courts: Treatment and Support Court (TASC), Youthful Sex Offender Treatment Program, D.E.T.O.U.R.S. Girls Program, Truancy Court, Drug Court, Sobriety Court, Veterans’ Court, Specialized Business Court, and the Juvenile Mental Health Court (JTASC). Although the 2021 report does not specify when each of these programs started, other sources suggest they were all founded within the past decade.

The Circuit Court has also maintained a **Family Division** since 2003, in accordance with state legislation enacted the year before. According to that legislation, the Family Division is intended to provide “more efficient and effective services to families and individual,” with jurisdiction over divorce proceedings, cases involving juveniles, child custody, etc. Judges participating in this division are meant to be trained for this assignment, and develop “sufficient judicial expertise in family law to properly serve the interests of the families and children whose cases are assigned to that judge.”

- The **Treatment and Support Court (TASC)** is a specialized court docket for certain adult defendants with mental illnesses, including those with a co-occurring substance use disorder, that substitutes a problem-solving model for traditional court processing and to eliminate future engagement with the

legal system. Although not specified in the 2021 annual report, it is likely this program began in 2018 — the county won a grant in 2017 to “...to study the potential benefits of creating a specialized program for mentally ill defendants.” The study determined whether the implementation of a mental health court in Kent County would “...reduce recidivism, enhance public safety and improve outcomes for those suffering from mental illness.” As early as 2008, Michigan Partners in Crisis, a “statewide coalition of judges, police, social service officials and others,” called for broad adoption of mental health courts across the state.

- Later, in 2020, **JTASC** was created to support youth with emotional health challenges who are also involved in the juvenile justice system. A team consisting of court staff, a clinician, and network community health providers works together to help youth improve their emotional health, school performance, and general well-being, and to eliminate future engagement with the legal system.
- The **Adolescent Sex Offender Treatment Program** “provides assessment and treatment services to juvenile sex offenders, ages 8–17.” Sixty-one youth were referred to the program in 2021, and 48 completed treatment.
- In March 2017, the 17th Circuit Court established a **Girls Court** to address the “growing trend” of female juvenile delinquency and provide young defendants and their parents with a “community-based support system” that includes trauma-informed care. The program can accommodate 12 defendants at one time, who “must be willing to work with a mentor and attend therapy.” Parents were requisite partners in the program and were required to attend their own support group. Other program components included college tours, “a dinner to teach etiquette,” and “other cultural events,” according to a 2017 Grand Rapids Press article.
- The **Truancy Court** was also established in 2017, and both establishes a uniform definition for chronic absenteeism across the county and works together with the 17th Circuit Court’s Crisis Intervention Program (see details below) and Network180 to assist students and their parents to maintain school attendance.
- Also from the 2021 report, “the **Court Appointed Special Advocate Program (CASA)** is a program using carefully screened and specially trained volunteers appointed by the Judge to advocate for the best interests of abused and neglected children in child protective proceedings. The role of the CASA volunteer as an independent voice for the children is to investigate, facilitate, monitor and advocate on behalf of children until they are in a safe, permanent home. The CASA volunteer has only one case at a time and remains with the children throughout the case until it is discharged by the Court.”
- “The **Crisis Intervention Program** is a short-term family counseling program for families with youth between the ages of 12–17 who have run away from home, are truant from school or have other related school problems, are experiencing family conflicts due to adolescent development issues, are beyond parental control, and/or commit minor law violations. The Crisis Intervention Program also provides assistance in the filing of petitions for the emancipation of minors.”
- “The **Young Delinquent Intervention Program** is a home-based service (including counseling, mentoring, and pro-social activities) to children and their parents of young offenders 11 years and younger who have broken the law.”

- The **Consent Calendar**, which aims to “to reduce recidivism by diverting low risk juvenile offenders from the formal court docket [...] is a diversion program provided by court rule that allows for the informal processing of appropriate cases. Consent calendar cases are typically placed under informal supervision of the Court for approximately 90 days.”
- “**Community probation** is a unique and non-traditional way of providing decentralized and personalized court supervision to juveniles and their families that reside in a specific sector of the city (or metropolitan area) served by community policing.”
- Other programs include **pretrial supervised release with electronic monitoring, community service, work crew** (“a structured, labor-intensive form of community service for the more habitual, problematic adult offender”), **diversion**, and **juvenile electronic home monitoring**.
- Also from the 2021 report, “**Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR)** offers the parties a timely and affordable alternative to settle disputes and, thereby, avoid costly litigation. Kent County started a formalized ADR program in 1990 with Civil Case Mediation, which later became known as Case Evaluation. Court rules allow for parties to be ordered into facilitative mediation. Kent County implemented its court-ordered domestic relations mediation and civil mediation programs in 2004.”
- Finally, the mission of **Friend of the Court** is “to serve the court and the families of Kent County to ensure children are supported, both financially and emotionally.” It does this through a variety of programs, including a “health care unit” (“to enforce court orders to maintain health care insurance [...] and] to enforce court orders related to uninsured health care expenses”); a parenting time unit; the “Resources for Parents Program,” established in 2016, in which “case managers [...] actively partner with potential employers and placement agencies to assist payers who struggle to comply with their support order”; the “The Early Engagement Program,” established in 2017, which aims to “provide information about the Friend of the Court to clients who have not had contact with the office previously to:
 - Break down barriers to communication.
 - Provide accurate information and clarify expectations.
 - Provide early access to the [Resources for Parents Program].
 - Provide information about the availability of facilitated parenting time when appropriate.
 - Ensure that all provisions of the support order are understood.”

The Friend of the Court also maintains a **Citizen Advisory Committee (CAC)**, which “was created by the legislature to assist citizens and the FOC office with issues concerning office operations and employees. Although having a CAC was initially mandatory, the legislature eliminated this requirement and currently only two counties statewide have one, Macomb and Kent. Minutes from its meetings are submitted to the County Board, while sub-committees review actual grievances. There were no grievances filed directly with the CAC in 2020; however, all 10 grievances received by the FOC were forwarded to the CAC for their review. Of note, the CAC agreed fully with the response of the FOC on 10 grievances.”

61st District Drug Court*

The 61st District Drug Court, established in 1999 with a \$300,000 federal grant, is “a comprehensive treatment program for non-violent defendants that uses a team approach to supervision.” This voluntary program requires at least one year of substance abuse treatment, as well as other counseling, job readiness, and educational programming as assigned. In a 1999 article in the Grand Rapids Press, the court was expected to cost \$400,000 annually, and the Kent County Board of Commissioners was considering funding up to “half of the local share.” (The Sobriety Court, which was added in 2003, functions similarly for cases involving alcohol abuse, and the Veterans’ Treatment Court — established in June 2015 — applies only to those who have served in a branch of the U.S. Armed Forces. According to the court website, the Veterans’ court has had a 91.7% success rate between 2015 and Feb. 2022, although it does not define “success.”

The Alano Club of Kent County*

The Alano Club of Kent County is a nonprofit organization that currently offers 14 programs for people who suffer from addiction to alcohol and other substances, and from mental illness (e.g., Alcoholics Anonymous, Food Addicts in Recovery, Narcotics Anonymous, Double Trouble in Recovery, etc.). Several programs also cater to family members of people with addiction. It was founded in 1952 and, according to its website, it receives some participants through referrals by the “Kent County Court System.” It is unclear if these referrals come through the OCC.

Alternative Directions*

Alternative Directions, a private residential community corrections program in Grand Rapids, which offers people who commit certain crimes an opportunity to perform community service and pay restitution instead of serving time in a correctional facility. While housed at the 60-bed facility, residents receive case management and job readiness services, cognitive behavioral treatment, and GED preparation.

Arbor Circle*

Arbor Circle, one of the largest providers of mental health counseling and substance abuse treatment in West Michigan, which provides relapse prevention, peer coaching, and case management services for the OCC. Other counseling providers that work with the OCC include New Visions Counseling, Family Outreach Center, Grand Rapids Counseling, Berghuis Psychological Services, and Catholic Charities West Michigan.

Crisis Intervention Team*

The Grand Rapids Police Department (GRPD) is partnering with Network180 Kent County Community Mental Health Authority, a local mental health service, to directly support the department’s Crisis Intervention team with social workers. These staff will be solely dedicated to calls of crisis in the city of Grand Rapids and form a co-response team with officers. According to a Wood TV news article from Oct. 2022, the program is grant-funded. (NB: It is unclear if this team is a recent iteration of an earlier crisis intervention team; a 2017 article in the Grand Rapids Press mentioned a “crisis-intervention team, involving criminal-justice officials and social-service agencies,” that was developing a training program.)

Homeless Outreach Team (HOT)*

According to the city’s website, “[i]n April 2020, the City of Grand Rapids developed the Homeless Outreach Team (HOT) to respond to emergency needs including isolation, health and safety issues, and COVID

mitigation within the homeless community.” The HOT pairs Grand Rapids Police Department officers, firefighters, and mental health specialists and social workers from Network180 to respond to emergency calls involving people experiencing homelessness six days a week, from 6:00am to 6:00pm. Beyond that, according to a 2022 article, “the work is about building relationships and trust and being a resource, such as helping someone navigate the treatment system.” As the article continued, “[t]he responsibilities of the team include providing education on city ordinances, diverting people from jail and emergency departments when it is the better option, connecting people with services and addressing safety and health concerns in encampments. They also include coaching people through substance abuse and mental health issues and helping them get treatment as well as assisting city departments, organizations and businesses with issues related to people experiencing homelessness.” According to the HOT supervisor, Fire Department Capt. Mike Waldron, the program has diverted more than 200 people from jail and hospital emergency departments, “and referred dozens more to substance use and mental health treatment in 2021.”

Office of Community Corrections (OCC)*

Kent County maintains an Office of Community Corrections (OCC), with funding from the Michigan Department of Corrections, which “seeks to limit state prison commitments for County offenders and protect public safety by diverting low risk, non-violent felony offenders into rehabilitative programming.” The organizations and programs the OCC works with include many of the following.

During Incarceration

Inside-Out Prison Exchange Program and Grand Valley State University Bellamy Creek Program*

The Inside-Out Prison Exchange Program, offered to Grand Valley State University (GVSU) students and people incarcerated at the Michigan Reformatory, was a one-semester, non-accredited course designed to “emphasize collaboration and dialogue between ‘inside’ and ‘outside’ students, encouraging them to take leadership in addressing crime, justice, and other relevant social issues.” GVSU first offered the program in 2009, joining a broader, international initiative that began in 1997. Between 2009 and 2020, the GVSU chapter of the program has educated more than 200 incarcerated students. However, beginning in spring 2020, the Inside-Out Prison Exchange Program was paused when the Michigan Reformatory closed to visitors during the COVID-19 pandemic. Visiting restrictions were never lifted and the Michigan Reformatory closed in October 2022.

Instead of reestablishing the Inside-Out program at another correctional facility, GVSU will expand its curriculum and enroll an inaugural cohort of about 20 students in the Bellamy Creek Program in fall 2024. This five-year program will confer a Bachelor of Science degree in Public and Nonprofit Administration to students incarcerated at the Bellamy Creek Correctional Facility in Ionia, Michigan. The program curriculum blends the liberal arts with practical skills, covering a broad range from the fundamentals of writing to marketing, political science to community organizing. Some of the topics covered include:

- Civic engagement and service-learning
- Local politics and administration
- Organization theory and dynamics

- Public budgeting and finance administration

The program is supported with funding from federal, state, and private sources, and is delivered at no cost to students.

Legislative Priority Agenda for Public Safety

The City Commission adopted a legislative priority agenda in May 2021 that outlined specific priorities related to public safety policies and investments, emphasizing “responsible criminal justice reform; investment in safe neighborhoods and police relationships; support for decriminalizing low level offenses and allowing appearance tickets to be issued in lieu of arrests for non-violent offenses; and support for the George Floyd Justice in Policing Act.”

Mental Health Access Center

In 2003, a man who suffered from schizophrenia died in custody at the jail. After three years of advocacy by his sister, the Grand Rapids Police Department, Kent County Sheriff’s Department, and Network180 collaborated in a pilot program at the Mental Health Access Center in 2006. According to a Grand Rapids Press article, “the program posts a Kent County sheriff’s deputy at the Lake Drive site from 3 to 9 p.m. five days a week to take custody of mentally ill clients brought there. That makes it easier for police to take someone they have arrested to the mental health facility instead of directly to jail.” In addition, “local law enforcement gain training working with the mentally ill.”

- Although the mental health program is not specified, a 2010 article in the Grand Rapids Business Journal cited funding problems for a program at the jail that had been developed with Network180. According to the article, then Attorney General Mike Cox ruled that state funding was unavailable for this type of programming. Although there was sufficient funding to continue the program through the remainder of 2010, the lost funding source left the program’s future in doubt.

Michigan Joint Task Force on Jail and Pretrial Incarceration

In 2019, the Grand Rapids Area Chamber of Commerce issued a statement on behalf of its members supporting the formation of the Michigan Joint Task Force on Jail and Pretrial Incarceration. This task force, which included former Kent County Commissioner Jim Talen, produced recommendations that ultimately led to the 2021 adoption of a package of 20 bills. These laws seek to reduce jail incarceration in the state.

Calvin Prison Initiative*

The Calvin Prison Initiative, a collaborative program from Calvin University and Calvin Theological Seminary in Grand Rapids, offers a faith-based liberal arts education to people incarcerated within the Richard A. Handlon Correctional Facility in nearby Ionia, Michigan. About 90 students are currently enrolled in the program, which confers a Bachelor of Arts in Faith and Community Leadership to graduates. The first cohort began in 2015.

Family Outreach Center*

In an attempt to reduce recidivism by people who suffer from mental health problems, in 1994, the Family Outreach Center won a bid to offer services to people incarcerated at the jail who suffered from mental illness, and a 48-bed unit was opened to house participants in the program. The unit was staffed 80 hours a week along with a part-time psychiatrist. In addition, custody staff received some training in “mental health techniques,” according to a Grand Rapids Press article. Alternative Directions (see description elsewhere) would serve people following their release. “The team approach will be used to coordinate services in jail and beyond,” said the article, “including evaluation, continuation of prior care, and counseling.” The initiative was funded by a \$1 million grant from the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services and administered by Kent County Community Mental Health.

Although it is unclear what prompted this program’s creation, numerous studies pointed to the high numbers of incarcerated people with some form of mental illness at the Kent County jail, including a 1998 study by Wayne State University that found that 45% of people incarcerated at the jail had some form of mental illness, and a 1999 study by the Michigan Department of Community Mental Health that put that number higher, at 51%.

Juvenile Justice Vision 20/20*

Juvenile Justice Vision 20/20 is a volunteer professional organization based at Grand Valley State University’s Pew Campus in Grand Rapids and seeks to “improv[e] outcomes for youth, families, and communities through improvements in the juvenile justice systems.” Together, Michigan court administrators, university faculty, and social service providers develop legislation to improve the treatment and outcomes of court-involved youth, offer professional training, and guide data collection and data sharing among state agencies.

Kent County Correctional Facility Programming*

The Kent County Correctional Facility offers instruction both for incarcerated students hoping to complete their high school diploma and for others who are eligible to pursue their General Education Development (GED) certificate. In a 2012 article in the Grand Rapids Press, however, a jail administrator cited the dwindling number of educators available to teach the GED program. From 1999-2001, about 10 teachers from Grand Rapids Public Schools taught at the jail. (It is unclear how these teachers were divided between the diploma and GED programs.) In 2012, however, only one part-time educator from the OCC was available for the GED program and one full-time GRPS teacher, a tutor, and two advocates were available for the diploma program. According to the article, “[n]o one has ever completed high school via the jail program, according to records, even though that’s where the bulk of the teacher support is aimed.” It is unclear how this program is now run, a decade later. (See above for GED program at Kent County Honor Camp.) (NB: In 2008, Kent County began a study with Allegan and Kalamazoo counties to determine the feasibility and cost-savings of a regional jail. Pennsylvania-based nonprofit CRS Inc. carried out the research for \$95,360 total, split among the three counties.)

- In 1993, Grand Rapids Public Schools won a grant to begin the **Jail Life Skills Project** at the correctional facility. The program, which served people ages 17 to 39 and serving sentences of at least 90 days, taught topics including “anger management, nutrition, and AIDS.” According to an article in the Grand Rapids Press, “a key component is assigning a contact person to the inmate after he or she is out. [...] That person can provide advice or resources, but the most important function is providing support.”

- Also at the jail, the **Kent County Literacy Council**, a nonprofit reading program provider, began offering a tutoring program in 1999 to people who were incarcerated at the jail for at least six months. According to a Grand Rapids Press article, the program seemed to be offered at no cost to the student, was designed for adult learners, and included study materials, assessments, a “personal tutoring plan,” and other support. A brief search of the council’s website today does not list any services for incarcerated people, however.
- The **Batterers Intervention Program** began in January 2002 with a grant from the Blue Cross/Blue Shield Foundation of Michigan, and involved assistance from Project Rehab, the YWCA, and DeVos Children’s Hospital. This anti-domestic violence initiative aimed to stop recidivism by people who committed domestic violence that landed them in jail. It was a voluntary, three-week-long program available to 12 participants at a time, who could speak English and had a sentence of at least 30 days. The program was set to run until June 2002, at which point the program would be assessed. Although a Grand Rapids Press article mentioned the possibility of expanding this program to include women who were incarcerated for domestic violence, it is unclear if this happened, or if the original program continued beyond June 2002.
- Around 2011, the **National Institute of Corrections** piloted a re-entry program at the Kent County Jail, offering programs on “avoiding substance abuse, job readiness, high school equivalency completion, job readiness training, social skills and problem solving.” The programs were designed to reduce recidivism of “short-term repeat offenders.” Although little detail is offered in a 2017 article, Capt. Clint Thorne, who oversaw operations at the jail, explained that funding was in short supply and the jail often partnered with local organizations.

Reentry Support

Criminal Justice Chaplaincy

The Criminal Justice Chaplaincy (established in the late 1970s and merged with 70x7 Life Recovery in the late 2010s) held as its mission “to restore returning citizens to the community through Christ’s teaching, love and compassion,” and “provide supportive services that assist individuals returning from incarceration and those affected by their actions, decisions, and plans, to overcome barriers, address needs, and become productive in their community.” Programs included Take Charge (ongoing at Calvin Christian Reformed Church in Eastown), “a twelve-week class designed for women offenders, women ex-offenders, women struggling with substance abuse and women in other types of transition. It provides life skills education and a support group (with case management if needed) to allow members to take charge of their lives in a positive fashion. Professionals provide interactive workshops on topics such as: self-esteem, substance abuse, personal finances, spirituality, anger management, effective communication, parenting skills, physical and spiritual health, nutrition, positive relationships and domestic violence. People who have conquered addiction problems provide motivation through the telling of their stories. Childcare and transportation are provided to enable the members to attend all sessions.” Other programs include Reentry Fellowship, held at Oakdale Park Christian Reformed Church in Oakdale, Horticultural Therapy Program, Bicycle Program, Moral Reconation Therapy, and the Son to a Father parenting program.

70x7 Life Recovery*

In addition, many Grand Rapids faith-based programs offer reentry support and transitional housing to people recently released from prison. 70x7 Life Recovery, for example, offers professional and personal mentoring and employment assistance to recently released people, as well as support groups for families of incarcerated people. More than 175 people completed the jobs readiness program at 70x7 Life Recovery in 2019 alone. Other organizations offering similar services include Alpha Prison Ministries and New Hope Baptist Church.

CLEAR (Coalition, Leadership, Education, Advocacy, and Rehabilitation) Program*

GRPD's CLEAR (Coalition, Leadership, Education, Advocacy, and Rehabilitation) Program provides support for those reentering the community through mentoring and guidance from law enforcement service providers.

The Delta Project*

Beginning in 2017, the Delta Project was formed “to [amplify] the stories of students caught in the cycle of incarceration,” and currently offers four programs for young men involved in the carceral system.

- The **Conversations Video Project** offers young men “the opportunity to produce and shoot a video production of an interview with a community member.” More broadly, according to the Delta Project website, this provides youth “a rare opportunity to look beyond their present circumstances and envision what they can truly become — recognizing that they are not at-risk, but instead at-potential.”
- **Boys to Men-tors** is a support group for youth ages 15–18, where they meet for four hours, once a week, to “explore topics that help them learn to articulate their thoughts and feelings and better understand themselves and their relationships with family and friends. Intentionally designed activities help participants recognize personal strengths, enhance social skills, learn how to cope with stressful and pressured situations, and build resiliency.”
- Like the Conversations Video Project, **Future Skills – Digital Editing and Storytelling** teaches youth how to use Adobe software to share their stories.
- The **Young Father's Initiative, or Y-Fi**, “uses an evidence-informed intervention curriculum, entitled Son to a Father (STAF), that deconstructs traditional ideals of masculinity, sexual risk-taking, and parenting, while fostering protective factors to reduce teen pregnancy.”

Expungement Fairs*

Even before Michigan passed the Clean Slate Act in fall 2020 to make it easier for people to have their criminal records cleared from public view, organizations like **The Black and Brown Cannabis Guild** and the **NAACP of Greater Grand Rapids** have collaborated with partners across the city to host expungement fairs. At these events, volunteers provide 1:1 support through pro bono services from attorneys and notaries, as well as offering free fingerprinting and background checks.

New Beginnings*

The Women's Resource Center offers the New Beginnings reentry program to assist women incarcerated at the Kent County Correctional Facility. In partnership with the Kent County Department of Corrections,

incarcerated women receive services before their release, centered on employment, case management, life skills development, mentoring, and connection to resources for housing, education, health care, and other areas. New Beginnings has served nearly 400 women since the program began in 2013, and in 2021 Women's Resource Center received a \$200,000 grant from the Michigan Justice Fund to expand the program to two correctional facilities in adjoining counties.

Realism is Loyalty*

In 2013, JD Chapman founded Realism is Loyalty to support “the highest-risk male youthful demographic in an effort to mentor them from a relatable, meet-you-where-you-are approach, with the expected outcome of identifying self-worth and self-empowerment.” Programs include:

- **Real Talk – Community**, “a curriculum-based, open platform where individuals ages 13-17 meet on a weekly basis and openly discuss the issues and/or barriers that they face. Relatable dialogue is created and guided to encourage conversation among participants that allows them to develop their own solutions to the challenges they face, utilizing a Solution Focused and Cognitive Behavioral Therapy approach.” **Real Talk – Residential** offers similar programming inside the Kent County Juvenile Detention Residential Unit, while **Real Talk – Juvenile Detention** offers programming to the general population.
- According to the program website, **Hand-Up Services** “allows us to partner with residents, agencies, organizations, and community partners. We partner to fulfill a need of assistance for minor tasks while duly providing an environment for selected individuals to perform community services, as a designated number of ‘community investment’ is required of all Realism Is Loyalty participants. We also partner with local probation departments to provide sites in the community that individuals live in can reap the benefits of those services and instill a sense of pride and equity in their neighborhoods.”
- The **Each One, Teach One Intensive Mentoring Program** is a “one-year stipend-based program facilitated in three 12-week trimesters,” where “mentors implement a collective-building, wholistic, personal empowerment program informed by:
 - Cognitive Behavioral
 - Dialectical Behavioral, and
 - Solution Focused Interventions that are trauma informed.”

Reentry Project Now*

Goodwill Industries of Greater Grand Rapids offers workforce development services for currently incarcerated individuals and those recently released. In 2019 Goodwill received \$1.5 million in federal funding for ProjectNow, a multi-year initiative to provide job placement and retention services to formerly incarcerated citizens in high growth sectors of advanced manufacturing, construction, information technology, hospitality, and transportation.

Other Efforts

Operation Safe Streets

In 2016, in response to an unusually high rate of gun-related incidents in Grand Rapids, the Grand Rapids Police Department deployed around 20 officers over one weekend in November in order to dramatically increase law enforcement presence in southeast side neighborhoods. According to one police captain heading the operation, “[t]hey’re going to be talking to these citizens, imploring on them for a little bit of help here with the recent shootings.” In addition, officers made dozens of traffic stops and arrests. Although then-Chief David Rahinsky later stated, “I have no doubt that the increased staffing significantly impacted the decrease in gun related violence over the weekend,” it is unclear whether the operation continued.

End the Contract campaign

In summer 2018, advocacy groups GR Rapid Response to ICE and Movimiento Cosecha GR launched the End the Contract campaign to encourage the Kent County Sheriff’s Office to terminate a contract with the federal agency U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE). Under the terms of this contract — which was first signed in 2012 — if ICE learned that an individual without legal status in the United States was being held at the Kent County Jail in connection with a crime, the agency could issue an immigration detainer. With this detainer in place, the Sheriff’s Office would continue to detain that individual for up to 48 hours beyond when it was otherwise legally allowed to do so. Although not new, these detainers generated controversy during the early years of the Donald Trump presidency due to increased attention on immigration.

After months of protests and appearances before the Kent County Board of Commissioners — including public comments from the ACLU of Michigan and the Michigan Immigrant Rights Center — the End the Contract campaign picked up momentum when U.S. citizen and Marine veteran Jilmar Ramos-Gomez was mistakenly detained under the ICE contract. Ramos-Gomez’s detention made national news and resulted in a \$190,000 settlement with the city. Roughly one month following Ramos-Gomez’s detention, the Kent County Sheriff’s Office changed its policy to require ICE to produce a judicial warrant before it would detain individuals without legal status. Then, in summer 2019, ICE announced it would not seek to renew its contract with the Sheriff’s Office, set to expire that fall.

Office of Oversight and Public Accountability (OPA)*

In August 2019, the City of Grand Rapids established the Office of Oversight and Public Accountability (OPA) to serve as the Executive Office liaison between the community and public safety departments. According to the city’s website, “Civilian Oversight is an essential tool that helps to:

- Protect civil rights
- Support effective policing
- Build bridges between public safety and community
- Increase confidence in police
- Manage risks
- Ensure greater accountability

“OPA works to create mutual trust and respect between our public safety departments and the community we serve.” The OPA’s programs include a **Know Your Rights Program**, **Civil Rights Youth Academy**, and **Community Informed Law Enforcement Training**.

In 2021, the OPA released the “**City of Grand Rapids Public Safety Alignment and Governance Report**,” an evaluation of Grand Rapids’s numerous public safety boards, commissions, task forces, and other civilian bodies. These bodies include the Civilian Appeal Board, Community Relations Commission, Police Chief Advisory Team, Public Safety Committee, and the SAFE Taskforce. Ultimately, the goal of this evaluation was “to ensure that our public safety boards are well aligned and that the systems work in a way that complement each other and promote safety, transparency, accountability, and equity.” The evaluation found the need for greater transparency of board activities, among other recommendations.

Driver’s Licenses for All*

Since at least 2020, several advocacy groups have urged the Michigan legislature to permit all state residents, regardless of immigration status, to obtain driver’s licenses. This had been Michigan’s policy until 2008, when then Attorney General Mike Cox restricted licenses to those residents who could prove U.S. citizenship. Local advocates — including members of Movimiento Cosecha, Drive Michigan Forward, and We the People — have approached municipal governments across West Michigan to adopt resolutions in support of favorable legislation. They argue that, without driver’s licenses, residents without legal status live in constant fear of being arrested and/or separated from family members simply by driving to work, dropping their children off at school, driving to the supermarket, or any other daily task in a region without adequate public transportation. To date, the Michigan legislature has not acted to undo the 2008 policy change.

Affordable Housing Fund*

In fall 2021, the City of Grand Rapids approved a fund to address rising housing costs in the area. Starting with just under \$1 million and with a goal of \$25 million by 2025, funds would be set up to help finance affordable housing projects and help cover the costs of home repairs for low-income residents. Recognizing the connection between affordable housing and stable employment, funds were also to be used to help train and give financial assistance to organizations led by people who are Black, Indigenous, People of Color (BIPOC), or women. Connecting public and philanthropic leaders, the fund is being managed by the Grand Rapids Community Foundation.

Housing Stability Alliance*

The Housing Stability Alliance is a group of nearly one hundred individuals and organizations from all sectors working together to improve outcomes for children and families dealing with housing insecurity. A framework has been developed to create an equitable housing system with a targeted focus on Black and Latinx children and families who are disproportionately impacted by housing insecurity. While backbone organization **KConnect** carried the work from 2018 to 2020, a new backbone organization — **Housing Kent** — was established in February 2022.

Plaza Roosevelt*

Plaza Roosevelt is the culmination of a multi-year, cross-sector collaboration among private, public, and nonprofit organizations to provide affordable housing, health, education, and economic opportunities to the

residents of Roosevelt Park. A neighborhood threatened by displacement, Roosevelt Park is a racially and ethnically diverse neighborhood where most residents identify as Black/African American and/or Hispanic/Latino/a/x.

Arts Organizations*

Organizations like **Grandville Avenue Arts and Humanities (GAAH)** and **The Diatribe** have been leveraging the arts for neighborhood revitalization in Grand Rapids.

- GAAH “uses a framework that is inclusive and respectful of Indigenous wisdom and voices” to operate the Cook Arts Center and the Cook Library Center — two facilities for neighbors who live in Roosevelt Park, a neighborhood that also has the highest population density of youth in the city of Grand Rapids.
- In summer 2021, the Diatribe, a poetry and performing arts education group led by POC/LGBTQ+ community members, launched the 49507 Project. Paired with youth programming about gentrification and housing discrimination, the project brought in artists to design and install seven outdoor murals within the 49507 ZIP code using input from business owners, nonprofit organizations, local faith communities, and residents.

Systems Change Collaborative*

Representing a community-based participatory research approach for public health, the Systems Change Collaborative in the Roosevelt Park neighborhood is a shift toward equity principles focused on community-driven investment and community-evaluated success in health. It features a portfolio of investments in cross-sector work with deeper community engagement, co-created community solutions responding to neighborhood-defined priorities, and systems change. At last update, the collaborative was still developing, with proposed collaboration building on the community-based participatory research of Calvin University’s Nursing Department, a public health focus from the Kent County Health Department, and the collective missions of each of the three major health systems in Grand Rapids. No further update could be found at time of print, however.

TalentFirst*

TalentFirst — formerly Talent 2025 — is an economic development initiative led by employers to increase economic mobility and expand participation in the labor force. Their two priority focus areas are currently Workforce Diversity and Inclusion and Early Literacy, and the initiative

Ready by Five Early Childhood Millage*

Ready by Five Early Childhood Millage provides sustained funding through property tax collected specifically for early childhood programming, with estimated projections of \$5.7 million a year from 2019–2024.

Studies

The following is not an exhaustive list of studies on criminal justice activities in the Grand Rapids area. Each of these were conducted at the behest of institutional actors — none seem to have been exclusively or primarily led by smaller organizations or community residents.

Traffic Stop Racial Profiling Studies

Pennsylvania-based Lamberth Consulting has conducted two racial profiling studies of GRPD traffic stops in the last two decades: one from 2002–03, and another in 2013–15. The earlier study encompassed eight months of data collected by the GRPD between 1 Aug. 2000 and 31 July 2001, comprising about 32,000 traffic stops. The results of that study — which cost the city around \$115,000 — were published in the Grand Rapids Press in May 2004 and cited little evidence of racial profiling in officers' traffic stops.

In contrast, the study conducted a little more than a decade later found significant evidence of racial profiling, where Black motorists were roughly twice as likely to be stopped by the police as white drivers. Specifically, “[i]n the 2004 study that was done, the ‘overall’ odds ratio for Black motorists was 1.4,” that is, Black drivers were 1.4 times more likely to be stopped by the police than white drivers in certain areas of the city. That study allowed for a margin of error up to a 1.5 odds ratio. However, “[i]n the combined 2013-2014 data the ‘overall’ odds ratio had risen to 1.85 and by 2015, it increased to 2.00.” Black and Hispanic/Latina/o drivers were also searched at rates much higher than would be expected given the number of Black and Hispanic/Latina/o drivers on the road, according to the study. “Black drivers are over searched with odds ratios for consent searches ranging from 1.91 in 2015 to 2.69 in 2013. When probable cause searches are the variable of interest, the odds ratios range from 2.54 for 2015 to 3.97 in 2013. In contrast, the odds ratios for consent and probable cause searches of White motorists are well below the rates that would be expected based upon their presence among the drivers who have been stopped. Hispanic motorists are searched at very nearly the rates at which they are stopped and female motorists are searched at well below the rates at which they are stopped.”

Police Staffing Study

Chicago-based firm Hillard Heintze (now Jensen Hughes) conducted a \$100,000 study of the Grand Rapids Police Department in 2018–2019, as the department transitioned between Chief David Rahinsky and Eric Payne. As one former city commissioner recalls, the study was conducted in part out of concern that other, similar-sized metropolitan areas were being placed under consent decrees following officer-involved killings, such as Cleveland, Ohio, and Ferguson, Missouri. The commission felt it did not have adequate data to evaluate the police department's requests for funding for more officers, different types of weaponry, etc., according to the former commissioner.

Hillard Heintze issued at least a dozen recommendations, but media reports from April 2019 — when the report was issued — highlighted the firm's suggestion that the number of officers was sufficient, and the department could instead hire civilian staff to relieve administrative burdens.