



# VNAAC

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## **Understanding Gun Violence Amongst New American Youth Project Progress Report- January 2023**

The Vermont New American Advisory Council (VNAAC) was established in early 2020 as a coalition of New American leaders striving to increase civic engagement, dismantle barriers to a sense of belonging, and expand opportunities for New American communities to thrive socially, culturally, and economically in Vermont. VNAAC is made up of an ethnically, culturally, and linguistically diverse group of New American leaders who work in many sectors across Vermont. Members include, but are not limited to, elected officials, program directors and managers, health care providers, educators, and business owners. For more information about VNAAC and its members please visit [www.vnaac.org](http://www.vnaac.org).

### **Problem Statement**

In recent months, the City of Burlington has been shaken by tragedies that resulted in several New American youth losing their lives due to violence. These tragedies negatively impacted the families of victims and the Burlington community at large. We recognise that this is a systemic issue that requires systemic solutions thus time and capacity to achieve them.

Gun violence and youth gang mentality among New American youth are complex and culturally sensitive issues. To address them, it requires a different approach regarding the engagement and participation of New American communities. The Vermont New American Advisory Council's (VNAAC) leadership team, composed of several New American group leaders, has a collective impact approach that can successfully bring New American communities and city organizations together to achieve the following goals:

- Come to a common understanding of the root causes of the problem,
- Create a safe place to start the healing and rebuilding of trust, and
- Shape a fairer and more inclusive public safety and protection system in the City of Burlington.

### **Come to a common understanding of the root causes of the problem**

Since mid-December VNAAC conducted three focus groups with New American leaders in Vermont, convened community meetings with the Somali Bantu Association, the Congolese



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Association and the Nepali community. Over 100 people attended the 3 community meetings geared toward coming to a common understanding of the root causes of gun violence amongst New American youth. Several other community gatherings with different community groups are being planned in the coming month.

### **Create a safe place to start the healing and rebuilding of trust**

VNAAC has identified an African American psychotherapist and Burlington resident with experience providing therapy to New Americans. In collaboration with community leaders, VNAAC identified 10 parents from different households most affected by the recent gun violence spikes in Burlington to participate in 8-10 group therapy sessions. Also, as part of this goal, VNAAC will create a Restorative Justice Circle for the youth involved in collaboration with families and the Community Justice Center of Burlington.

### **Shape a fairer and more inclusive public safety and protection system in the City of Burlington**

VNAAC is currently working on rebuilding trust between minority communities and several city and state institutions by following up on sensitive issues that were raised during the community meetings. VNAAC will develop a report at the end of this project which will include specific recommendations for the City of Burlington and State of Vermont to implement. This will include recommendations focused on police, health systems, schools and state agencies with a goal of building a more welcoming and safe state for all New American Vermonters.

This project is partially funded by the City of Burlington and the Pomerleau family. For a more detailed update around the project progress report, please join the City of Burlington's Racial Equity Inclusion and Belonging Committee on 1/17/2023 at 5:00 pm at City Hall.