



# ROCA BALTIMORE

## END OF YEAR REPORT, FISCAL YEAR 2023

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PERFORMANCE DATA AND PROGRAM OUTCOMES  
JULY 1, 2022 — JUNE 30, 2023



## WHAT WE'RE SEEING

Young people are at **acute, elevated risk** of gun violence.

- **Access to guns** and gun parts is ubiquitous (3D printed guns and kits).
- More young people are disaffected.
- It's easier than ever to hide **weapons** (gun clips, gun parts).
- More conflicts are escalating to gun violence.

Front-line **staff are now at higher risk** of experiencing gun violence.

**There is a dramatic need for sharpened focus and collaboration around safety in community violence intervention (CVI) work.**

## HOW WE'RE RESPONDING

Roca uses **Rewire CBT** to help young people break free from the impacts of trauma, slow down, breathe, and take an 8-12 second pause before a conflict ends in injury or death.

Roca is implementing sweeping operational updates to **safety protocols**.

- Added two new roles: Outreach & Safety Manager; Front Desk Security Attendant.
- Expanding and re-emphasizing safety checklists.
- Implementing safety checks before knocking on our participants' doors.

We are tightening **collaboration with our partners**.

- Having transparent conversations with police about new risks.
- Preventing pauses in collaboration during staff turnover.
- Expanding our After-Shooting Protocol (ASP) for non-fatal shooting victims and their families.

We are a **focused deterrence model** and a designated referral partner for the **Group Violence Reduction Strategy (GVRs)**.

## STEMMING THE TIDE OF VIOLENCE



**WE IDENTIFY AND FOCUS ON THE YOUNG PEOPLE MOST LIKELY TO SHOOT OR BE SHOT.**



**WE UTILIZE RELENTLESS OUTREACH TO ENGAGE THEM AND BUILD TRUST. WE NEVER GIVE UP.**

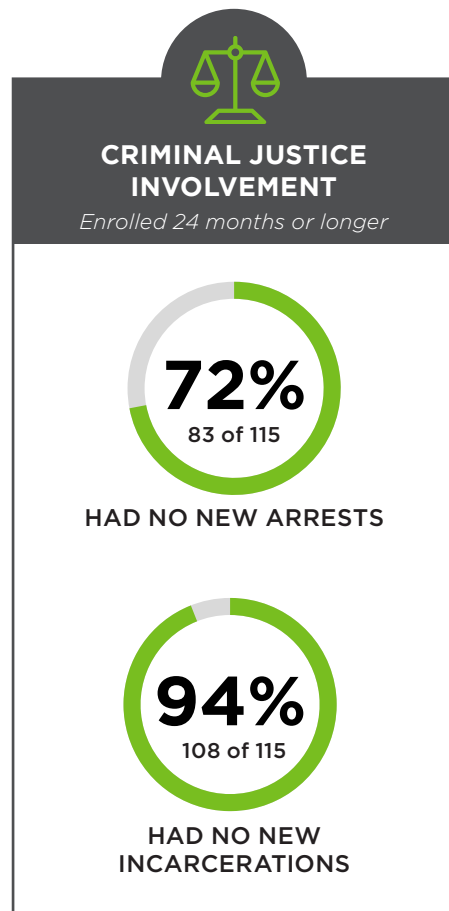


**OUR EVIDENCE-BASED MODEL IS ROOTED IN BRAIN SCIENCE TO HEAL TRAUMA AND PROVIDE THE SKILLS TO CHANGE BEHAVIOR.**

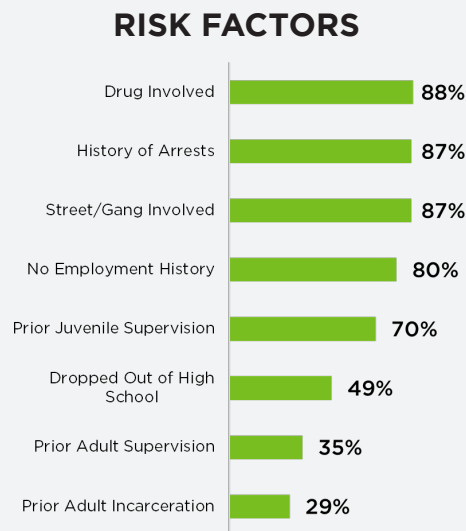
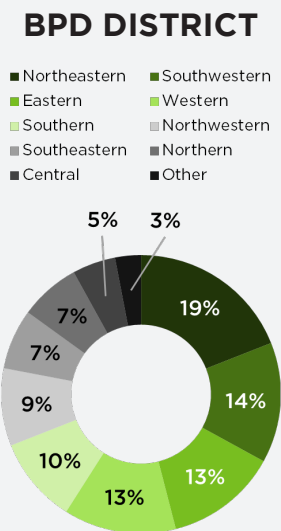
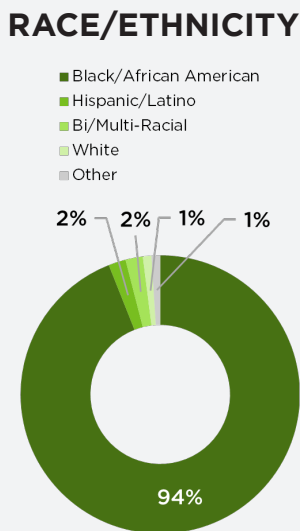
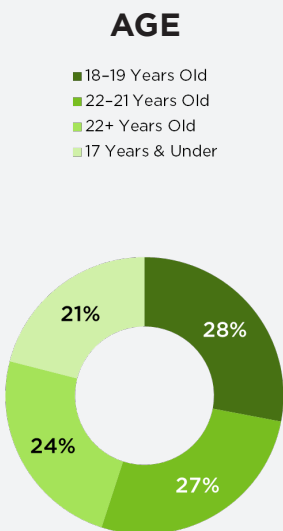


## IMPACT

IN FY 2023 WE SERVED **417** YOUNG PEOPLE IN BALTIMORE WITH AN **82%** RETENTION RATE (314 OF 417).



## POPULATIONS SERVED



## Important Note Regarding Confidentiality

This report includes sensitive details related to participants. We are sharing this information with you, as a project funder or partner, to provide a comprehensive understanding of the challenges our young people have and continue to experience. To honor their and their families' privacy, prior written approval from Roca is required to share details regarding young people and/or their families with individuals outside of your organization. Please submit such requests to Anisha Thomas at [Anisha\\_Thomas@rocainc.com](mailto:Anisha_Thomas@rocainc.com). Thank you for your consideration.

## INTRODUCTION

The ubiquity of guns and gun access, the increase in shootings, and the accumulating impacts of trauma are increasingly threatening the safety and stability of our young people in Baltimore.

Without thoughtful community violence intervention (CVI)—with an ever-increasing focus on safety, brain science, and collaboration with the police—the violence we see in Baltimore and across the nation will only mushroom into further crises. We are in the midst of a sea change. The level of violence in the country demands that Roca and other CVI programs and community partners respond swiftly, smartly, and safely to upgrade procedures.

As Roca Maryland moves into its sixth year of operation in Baltimore City, with further expansion into Baltimore County, our work has never been more hyper-focused on safety. **The overwhelming majority of young people we work with are at acute-elevated risk of being the victims or perpetrators of gun violence. We must urgently locate them and engage with them so they can begin their change process.**

Our youth workers, our front-line staff, must also be safe so that we can continue to work with young people at the center of the violence. Rather than simply sending staff into neighborhoods to knock on doors, we have operationalized how we work with the Baltimore City and Baltimore County Police Departments and other criminal justice partners to ensure it is safe enough for staff to do so.

In FY 2023, we continued to refine our focus around safety and vigilance in three key areas: **operational changes, collaboration with partners, and use of cognitive behavioral theory (CBT) with young people.**

## Operational Changes

We are not the police, we are community violence intervention workers. Nonetheless, we see an increasing need for critical incident thinking and an air-traffic-controller level of attention to multiple moving pieces in order to prevent bloodshed among young people. And as such, we have made sweeping changes in the way we operate:

- Our new **Outreach & Safety Manager** is the first point of contact for every referral in Baltimore City and Baltimore County. When we receive a referral, we must immediately triage any safety concerns, mitigate any up-front risk, and communicate with referral partners before making contact with young people. This is a critical function of our

work, and while we were previously able to divide its responsibilities, that is no longer possible. Having a single individual receive the initial information streamlines the process considerably.

- A **Front Desk Security Attendant** is now the first person anyone meets when they come to the building. The attendant searches for weapons, does routine checks of the entire space, identifies and reports any potential issues or hazards, and is present at weekly staff meetings to report out to the entire team. (This approach has also been adopted at other Roca sites outside Maryland. While the levels of violence may be different, the reality is that it only takes one gun and one bullet to do harm to or kill someone. That is a risk that Roca simply will not take.)
- Our **use of checklists** is critical in keeping staff and young people safe. Checklists are widely used in high-hazard or high-risk industries to greatly reduce the chance for critical errors by ensuring all steps are followed properly. They not only keep us safe but also inform how we can innovate or adapt should the landscape of violence change. We cannot simply have protocols for the sake of them existing; we must constantly review them and make appropriate changes.

## Work with Partners

To think that Roca or any CVI program could work alone with young people at the center of violence would be both inaccurate and dangerous. We cannot understate how critical collaboration with Baltimore City and Baltimore County is to Roca's work, not only in terms of maintaining safety but in how quickly we are able to mitigate risk and begin outreach to young people. We have fully operationalized how we regularly engage with partners across all aspects of the criminal justice system:

- Through our **ongoing relationships with the Baltimore City and Baltimore County Police Departments**, we are having transparent conversations about the potential risks of having staff in certain neighborhoods at a point in time, how best to engage with young people who may have been the victims of gun violence, and what it looks like to change the narrative of police and community relationships.
- We learned an important lesson in Baltimore City: while it is important to have relationships with individuals at partner organizations, the work cannot stop when those individuals are transferred to other roles. **Instead of having ad-hoc relationships within partner organizations and agencies, we have requested that work with Roca be an explicitly stated part of each role** (e.g., a Major is to meet with Roca and provide referrals for young people in need of service). This prevents lapses where Roca is not in communication with a point person or not receiving referrals.
- In partnership with the Mayor's Office of Neighborhood Safety and Engagement, **Roca has been designated as the referral partner for all 16-24-year-olds deemed in need of services through the Group Violence Reduction Strategy (GVRs)**. While a significant number of these referrals are already enrolled in Roca, we have been able to engage several new young people through this process. Roca's assessment hits all the points of a focused deterrence model such as GVRs: working with young people at acute-elevated risk of gun violence; working alongside and receiving referrals from criminal justice systems; and offering full wrap-around services and a CBT-based approach.

## Grounded in Cognitive Behavioral Theory (CBT)

We know that we are racing a clock. Our young people's traumas are acute, complex, and chronic. Because of this they are in survival-mode, a constant state of fear. Many of them think that no one in their lives can or will truly keep them safe, so they take safety into their own hands by carrying a weapon. Whether they intend to actually use the weapon doesn't matter—by carrying it in the first place they are now more likely to become a victim or perpetrator of gun violence.

Their level of **acute-elevated risk** demands immediate and intentional work with them. At Roca, our approach is distinct. Data, outcomes, and evaluation show how successful Roca's approach has been thus far in Baltimore City and Baltimore County. What is missing is why this intervention works:

- There are few times when the brain is able to actively and substantially change; one of those periods is between the ages of 16 to 24, a critical time of neuroplasticity where the brain is open to change and learning new behaviors. As such, **our work is rooted in brain science and adolescent brain development research, using CBT to help young people change.**
- **CBT helps young people break free from the impacts of trauma, slow down, breathe, and take an 8-12 second pause before a conflict ends in injury or death.** We have found that you cannot yell at a young person, tell them about your past life in the streets, or pay them to change. You have to offer them the tools to actually change. Our fully mobile set of Rewire CBT skills are the foundation of every conversation with a young person. Rewire CBT is designed to help young people change the unhelpful cycles of thoughts, feelings, and actions that keep them stuck in survival mode.
- **Rather than *telling* young people to stop carrying weapons or retaliating with violence, we ask them *why they think they have to*.** Transformational relationships build a foundation of trust and emotional safety that allows us to have direct and intentional conversations about what is driving their behaviors. Before they can see that change is possible, young people need help understanding the thoughts, feelings, and behaviors they cycle through when they feel threatened.
- As personally invested as we may become in the lives of our young people, we are very **careful not to make it about *what we want for them*. Instead, we support *what they tell us they want for themselves* and then relentlessly challenge them to *act in line with those values*.** If they tell us that being a good father means being home every night for bedtime, then we must challenge their behaviors if we see them on the corner with a gun at bedtime. They have to be held accountable in a safe way that promotes positive behavior change.

**This fiscal year, Roca Baltimore served 417 young people, 341 of whom were still active at the close of the quarter (82% retention).**

It continues to be a privilege to do this work in Maryland, and we are hopeful that we will positively impact the lives of many more young people in Baltimore City and Baltimore County. The following pages provide data and additional information about our work in FY 2023.



## PARTICIPANT REFERRALS, ELIGIBILITY, AND TERMINATION

From July 2022 through June 2023, we received 228 referrals of young people to our program. One hundred seventy-three (60%) were from the Baltimore Police Department, with the remaining 115 referrals coming from other community sources or walk-ins (Figure 1).

One hundred twenty-one young people were deemed ineligible for Roca services this fiscal year, of which the majority were incarcerated at the time of their referral (Figure 2).

This fiscal year, 417 young people were eligible for programming, 341 of whom were still active at the close of the quarter (82% of those eligible).

Of the 417 young people served this year, 76 young men were dismissed from Roca. The majority of these dismissals were due to extended incarceration (Figure 3).

At the close of the quarter, 61 young men were still being assessed for Roca eligibility.

FIGURE 1: **BALTIMORE REFERRAL SOURCES**

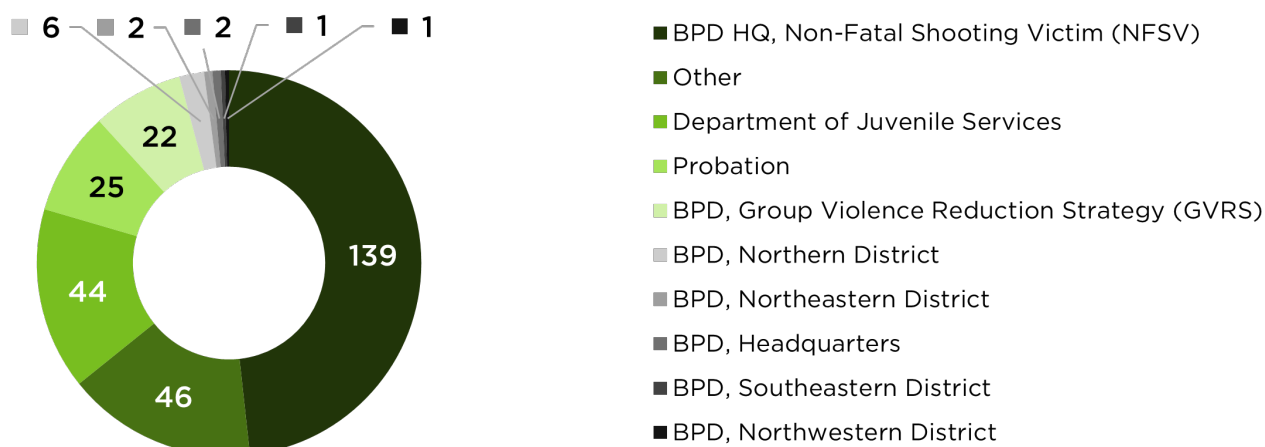


FIGURE 2: **INELIGIBILITY REASONS**

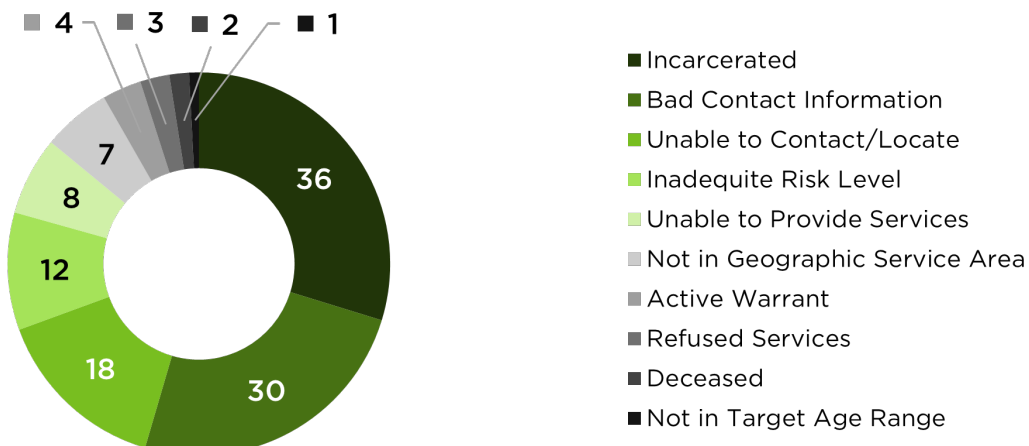
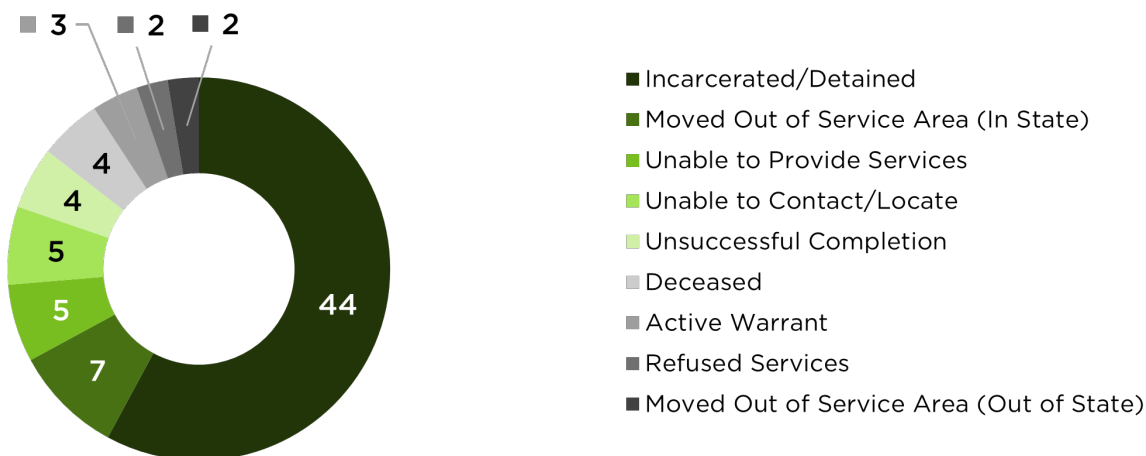


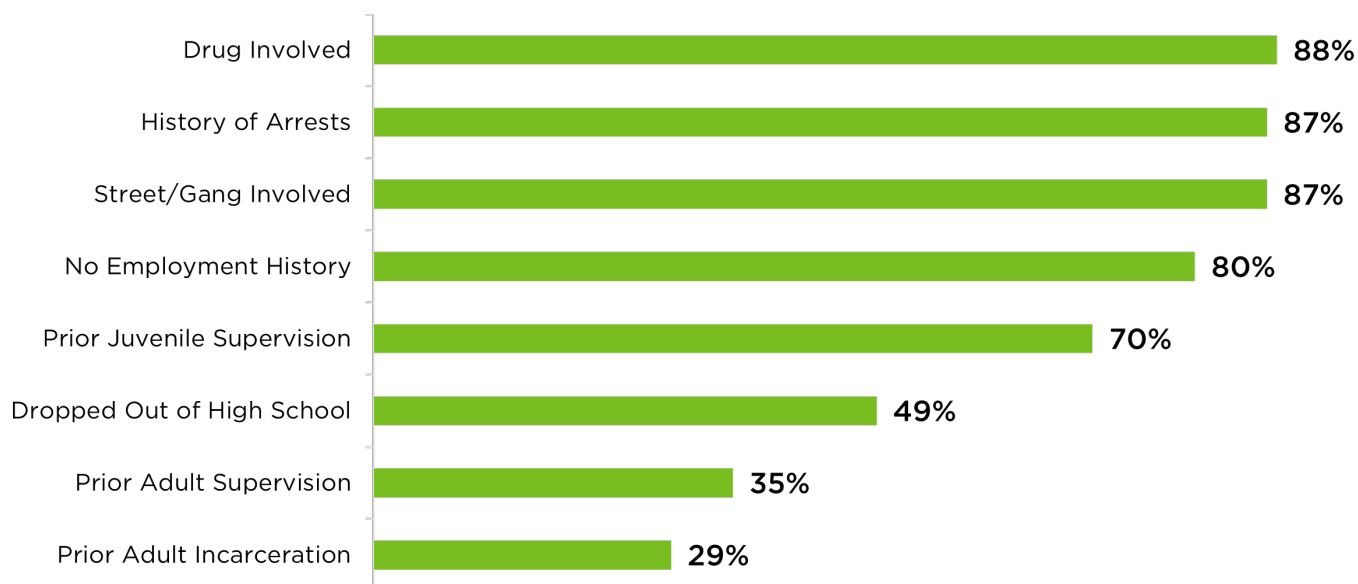
FIGURE 3: **DISMISSAL REASONS FOR ELIGIBLE PARTICIPANTS**



## PARTICIPANT CHARACTERISTICS

Roca's Intervention Model is designed for young people who are the center of urban violence, often both as perpetrators and victims. These are young people involved with the criminal justice system; involved with guns, gangs, and drugs; and who have experienced high levels of trauma. They may have also dropped out of school; have no formal or sustained employment history; or may have tried other programs but were unsuccessful or have not attended programs at all. Figure 4 highlights some of these risk factors identified at intake for the 417 participants we served.

FIGURE 4: **RISK FACTORS (N=417)**





## Basic Demographics (N=417)

Roca remains committed to serving young men throughout Baltimore City. Figure 5 shows the breakdown of the districts in which each participant resides.

As seen in Figure 6, most of Roca's participants identify as Black/African American (94%), while the remaining 6% identify as Hispanic/Latino, Bi/Multi-Racial, White, or other.

Roca Baltimore focuses on serving young people who are between the ages of 16-24 at the time of their referral. Figure 7 illustrates the age at referral distribution.

FIGURE 5: **BPD DISTRICT LOCATION**

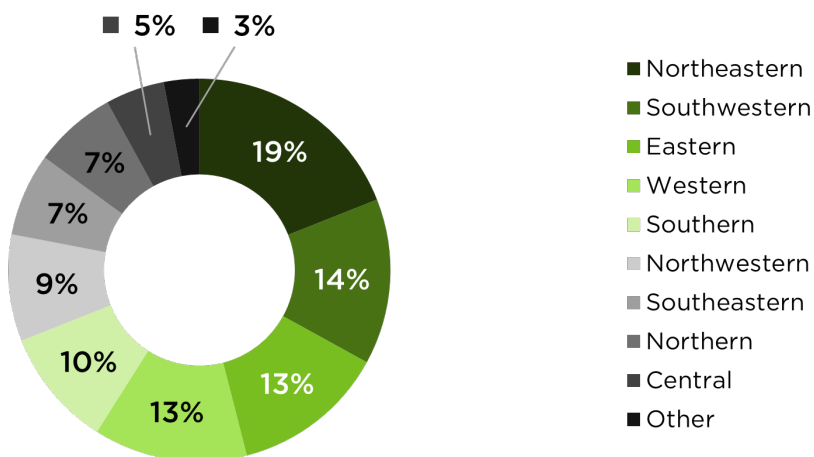


FIGURE 6: **RACE/EHNICITY**

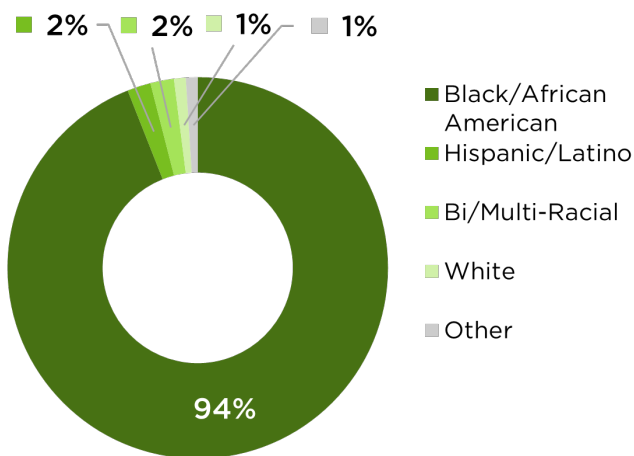
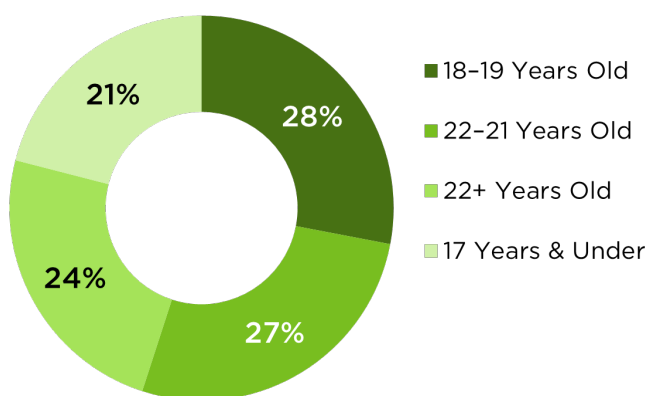


FIGURE 7: **AGE RANGE**



## CREATING SAFETY AND STABILITY

A young person's behavior change process depends heavily on the foundation of trust built with Roca staff. Our staff are relentless in their outreach throughout Baltimore and are unconditionally supportive of the young people we serve.

The transformational relationships we build help the young people begin their healing process and move toward positive changes that set them up for long-term success.

We are intentional in our focus on the physical safety of staff and young people in Baltimore City and Baltimore County. The level of violence in Baltimore City is unacceptable and does not stop at the Baltimore County line. We have been forced to shift and adapt multiple times over the last year as it pertains to outreach, running Transitional Employment work crews, and bringing young people from both programs together.

We continue to work alongside the Baltimore City and Baltimore County Police Departments, the Department of Juvenile Services, and as the Department of Parole and Probation to assess and triage daily safety issues happening in the communities where we work.

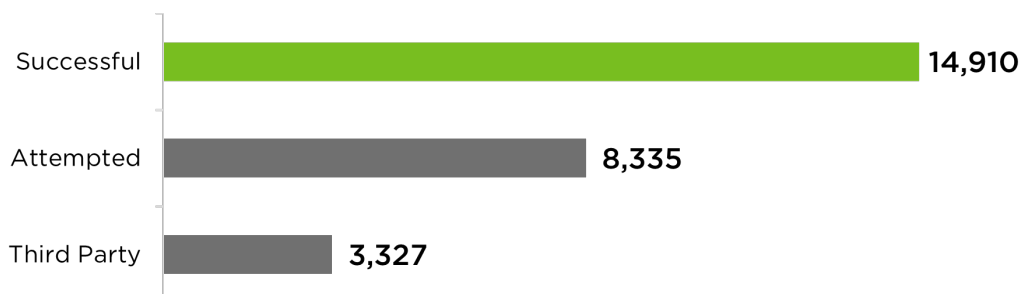
This fiscal year, staff made a total of 26,572 efforts to engage young men, both during the enrollment process and during program engagement.

This includes successful, attempted, and third-party contacts as seen in Figure 8.

FIGURE 8: FY 2023 CONTACTS

**26,572**  
TOTAL EFFORTS

**14,910**  
SUCCESSFUL  
CONTACTS



## TEACH LIFE SAVING SKILLS

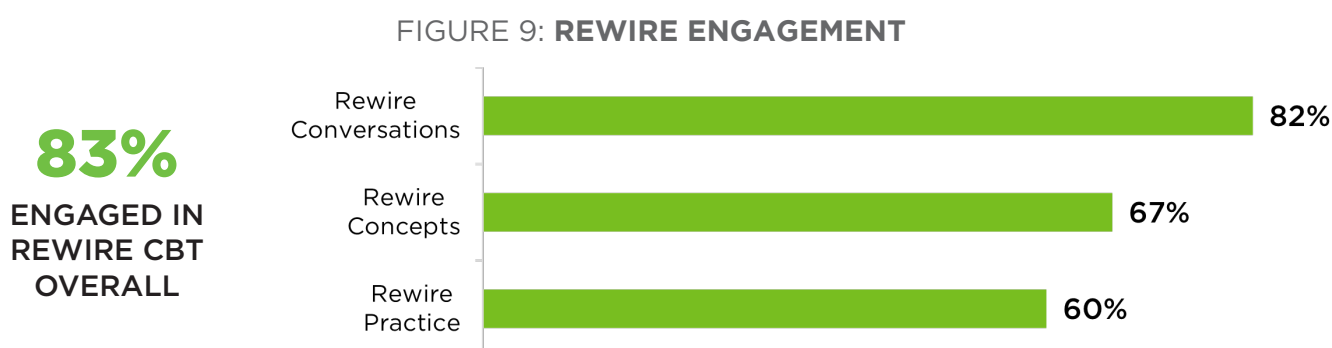
Rewire CBT is a simple, relatable, and fully mobile version of Cognitive Behavioral Theory (CBT) that young people can engage with under almost any circumstances. Roca staff are given the tools to teach CBT skills, work through difficult situations, and present real-time examples of how to use CBT.

The reality is that without learning to regulate their emotions, these young people will not be successful in employment, housing, harm reduction, or their relationships. As they learn CBT, young people begin to slow down their reactive behavior and become more intentional in how they respond to stressors. Instead of acting emotionally when triggered by their traumas, they learn to pause and use a CBT skill to disrupt negative thoughts, feelings, and behaviors. This is how young people develop agency and take control of their lives.

CBT integrated into every part of our work with young people; not just on the Roca premises, but in the community and on work crews. Young people engage in Rewire CBT in three different ways:

1. **Rewire Concepts (Knowledge Transfer):** Learning CBT concepts through formal lessons.
2. **Rewire Practice (Applying Knowledge):** Applying CBT concepts in real-time situations or in reflection.
3. **Rewire Conversations (Reinforcing Concepts and Practice):** Intentional conversations with young people where a staff integrate CBT throughout the interaction.

Figure 9 details participants' engagement in Rewire CBT by type of interaction.



## PRACTICE SKILLS, RELAPSE, AND REPEAT (INTENSIVE SERVICES ONLY)

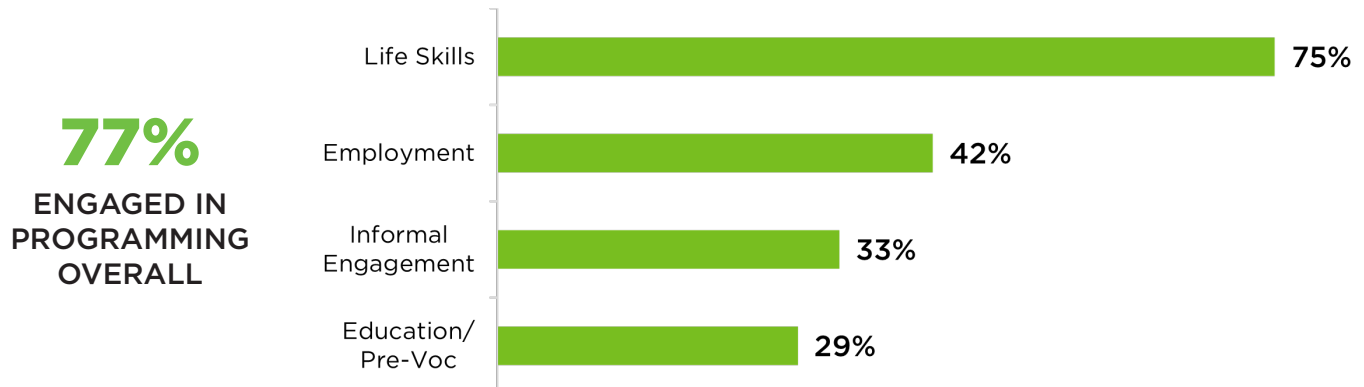
At Roca, we create safe opportunities for young people to engage in employment, education, parenting, harm reduction, and life skills programming—all through a CBT lens. We show them how what they think, feel, and do are separate but can impact one another, whether they're at work, home, or with their peers.

Helping young people identify and address their trauma safely is critical for their physical, emotional, and mental wellbeing. We don't wait for young people to be "ready", instead we have set up stage-based programming where relapse is treated as a valuable learning experience.

Of the 371 young people who have been enrolled for less than two years and are receiving intensive services, 77% participated in our various forms of programming: education/pre-vocational, employment, engagement (informal programming), and life skills (Figure 10).



FIGURE 10: **PROGRAMMING ENGAGEMENT DURING INTENSIVE SERVICES (N = 371)**



## TRANSITIONAL EMPLOYMENT PROGRAM

**THIS FISCAL YEAR, 83 YOUNG PEOPLE PARTICIPATED IN THE TRANSITIONAL EMPLOYMENT PROGRAM (TEP) FOR A TOTAL OF 17,214 HOURS WORKED.**

One of the most significant changes at Roca over the last year has been the purchase of our building at 880 Park Avenue in Baltimore City. This created a new demand for TEP to staff a building crew for daily cleaning, maintenance, and small projects. This not only ensures that the facilities are kept in good working order, but also allows the young people to learn and develop a new set of skills unrelated to the landscaping work we usually offer.

Additionally, in early spring 2023 our crews began work in Essex, MD as part of the Baltimore County expansion. This work includes beautification at area parks, playgrounds, and municipal buildings.

In another significant development for TEP, Roca received a grant from the Maryland Department of Housing and Community Development through the Community Safety Works initiative for a work crew to operate exclusively in Southeast Baltimore. We have completed site visits and agreed upon the scope of work for this project.

## INTERIM OUTCOMES

For our interim outcomes, we focus on cognitive behavioral health, employment, and criminal justice/recidivism. Because Roca has rolling enrollment, we only analyze participants in these outcomes once they have reached 18, 21, and 24 months of enrollment, respectively. We want to ensure that they've spent enough time in the model for positive behavior change to take root.

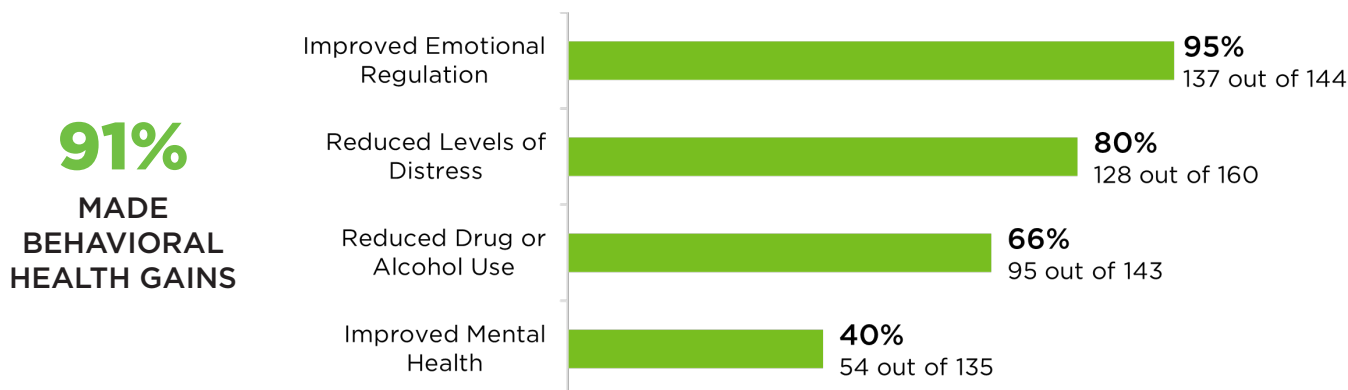
After a young person completes our program, we work with external evaluators to review their recidivism and employment outcomes using administrative data.

## Cognitive Behavioral Health

At intake and every six months thereafter, our participants complete a self-reported questionnaire designed to assess multiple aspects of cognitive and behavioral health. Among participants who have been actively enrolled for at least 18 months, we look for improvements in emotional regulation, mental health (specifically surrounding post-traumatic stress disorder and depression), reduced levels of distress, and reduced drug/alcohol use.

Figure 11 documents our preliminary findings in these categories, noting that we can only measure progress for those who have completed a baseline and follow-up assessment for each of these scales. Overall, 155 out of 170, or 91% of participants enrolled 18 months made at least one cognitive behavioral gain.

FIGURE 11: **COGNITIVE-BEHAVIORAL GAINS**



## Employment

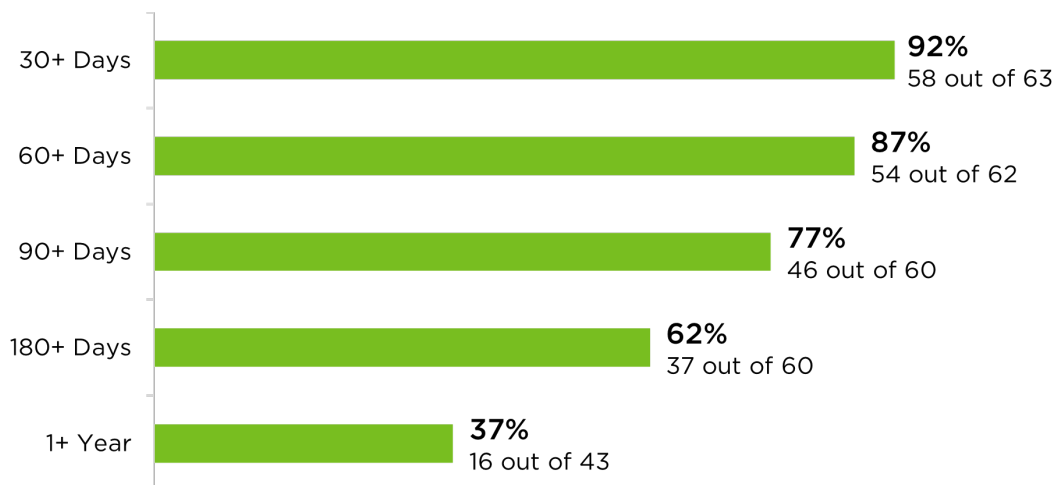
Of the 137 participants who have been enrolled for 21 months or longer, 66 (48%) secured unsubsidized employment this year. Thirty-four (52%) of these 66 participants remained employed by the end of the year, and on average, these young men are earning \$14.46 an hour. Overall, 92% of our young people who obtained an unsubsidized job were able to retain their employment for 30 days or longer.

Note that, when observing retention, Roca focuses only on the number of young people who had the opportunity to retain employment for 30, 60, 90, or 180 days. (For example, if a participant was placed 60 days ago, he is not included in the group being measured for 90 or 180 day retention, but only for 30 and 60 days.)

Figure 12 shows a detailed breakdown of retention.

FIGURE 12: **EMPLOYMENT RETENTION**

**92%**  
RETAINED  
EMPLOYMENT FOR  
30+ DAYS



## Criminal Justice

At the end of the fiscal year, 115 participants had been actively enrolled in Roca for 24 months or longer. Eighty three, or 72% of these young men were not arrested and 108, or 94% were not incarcerated after meeting the 24-month enrollment mark.

FIGURE 13: **ARRESTS AND INCARCERATIONS**



## PARTICIPANT PROFILE

In April 2022, Gerald was the victim of a shooting in West Baltimore. The next month he started at Roca, referred as part of Baltimore City's Group Violence Reduction Strategy (GVRS).

There was significant concern for Gerald's safety and his peer network, and the potential for retaliation and further violence. Our initial attempts to locate Gerald were mostly unsuccessful; every address was incorrect, leading to vacant homes or buildings we could not gain access to. The only contact we were able to manage was a few text messages and brief phone calls. It wasn't until the end of September, four full months after his referral, that Roca was finally able to locate Gerald and complete his eligibility and enrollment paperwork—and even then, he was not receptive to receiving Roca's services.

Gerald's Youth Worker continued to be relentless in his efforts to connect, build trust, and develop a relationship. Gerald responded by skipping meetings and ignoring his Youth Worker's



phone calls. He didn't want to change his lifestyle, no matter how dangerous it was. None of this is uncommon when Roca is beginning to build relationships with individuals at the center of Baltimore's violence.

But at Roca it isn't just Youth Workers who builds transformational relationships; the whole staff works together to create safety and stability for young people. In Gerald's case, the breakthrough came from wrap-around services offered by other Roca staff members: signing him up for SNAP benefits, helping him complete a Driver Improvement Program with the DMV, and helping stabilize his living situation.

Often, young people don't trust Roca initially because other adults or programs in their lives have lacked consistency or failed to meet their needs. Roca's assistance and relentless follow-through was the proof Gerald needed that we weren't going anywhere. Finally, Gerald began to open up and became more willing to engage with his Youth Worker.

As Gerald's relationship with his Youth Worker grew stronger, he agreed to participate in a healing circle where he could connect with his peers and address the trauma of being a shooting victim.

Gerald's willingness to learn and use Rewire CBT really stood out. One of his favorite CBT skills was "Move It", which taught him the importance of doing small things on a daily basis to improve his mood. While learning the skill "Act on Your Values", he told his Youth Worker what being a good father meant to him, and the behaviors he would have to practice to be one. These small conversations over time slowly grew into a new set of habits for Gerald. Instead of being on the corner in West Baltimore every night, he was home putting his daughter to sleep. When he didn't want to get up for work, he would play a favorite song and read his daughter a book, and that would give him a new outlook on the day.

Like all Roca participants, Gerald's behavior change journey included setbacks: being terminated from TEP, housing issues that threatened to leave him without a safe place to live, and overarching safety concerns stemming from his past behaviors and lifestyle. But with every obstacle that he faces, Gerald seeks advice and guidance not only from his Youth Worker but the entire Roca team.

## **BALTIMORE COUNTY EXPANSION**

In January 2023, Roca officially began outreach into Eastern Baltimore County, including the areas of Essex and Dundalk, MD. We launched this satellite program at the request of the Baltimore County Executive, Baltimore County Police Department and the Department of Juvenile Services, as an extension of our work in Baltimore City.

Staff include a Baltimore County Program Manager, a Youth Worker, and one designated Transitional Employment Program work crew. Additionally, we are actively seeking a physical location in order to best serve the young people separately from our site in Baltimore City.

So far we have received referrals for 23 young people. Twelve (52%) of these referrals were from the Department of Juvenile Services; the remaining 11 young people were referred from the After Shooting Protocol, Probation, and other community partners. Of the 23 referrals, 8 were found ineligible, 9 are eligible for the Roca program, and we are still assessing 6 young people.

As part of the expansion we have been intentional in meeting with community partners, regularly

checking in with the Baltimore County Police Department as well as the Office of the Baltimore County Executive.

Additionally, the Roca Impact Institute completed multiple CBT Rewire4 trainings with members of the Baltimore County Police Department, the Office of the Baltimore County Executive, and the Baltimore County Program Manager.

## **AFTER SHOOTING PROTOCOL**

Roca Maryland's After Shooting Protocol (ASP) is a crisis intervention that responds to non-fatal shooting victims (NFSV) and their families to stabilize them, mitigate risk, and prevent further gun-violence. The ASP coordinates with hospital partners and local government agencies to provide tangible resources and support to NFSVs. Roca is in regular contact with hospital staff, and we have a standing weekly meeting to discuss and case manage every 16-24-year-old young man who has been shot and may fit Roca's eligibility and enrollment criteria.

NSFVs are at acute and elevated risk, so it is critical that we respond with urgency. Deploying staff as quickly as possible (when we are able to do so safely) allows us to potentially prevent further incidents of gun violence.

During the second quarter of the fiscal year, the After Shooting Protocol was updated to include two service tracks for NFSVs: a Low-Risk track for young people who are not quite eligible for Roca but still in need of victim's services; and a High-Risk track for those who require victim's services along with a year of crisis intervention and Roca's full intervention model.

This fiscal year, we have received a total of 139 referrals through the ASP. Overall, the team was able to successfully contact 45% (62) of these referrals. Seventy three were deemed ineligible, 46 eligible, 5 will receive victims' services only, and 15 are still being assessed for Roca eligibility. Overall, we served 210 non-fatal shooting victims this fiscal year.

In addition to those referred to Roca through the ASP, 12 other eligible participants were shot this fiscal year. Tragically, 3 succumbed to their injuries.

## **PERFORMANCE BASED MANAGEMENT**

This fiscal year, we launched a new and improved participant feedback process and survey in order to better understand our participants' barriers to participation and how they respond to CBT; gain insight into their needs; and identify opportunities for improvement.

We began by convening a committee composed of staff from all Roca departments to redesign the survey questions. Abt Associates, our evaluation partner, reviewed the first draft of the revised survey, which was then piloted to a small group of participants who provided feedback. After the final draft was reviewed by Roca's executive team, it was implemented throughout January and February, and then reviewed again by the evaluation team for trends and key findings. The evaluation team then met with participant focus groups from each site to gain more context and insight into the key findings and our original learning objectives. At the close of the fiscal year, we were finalizing our analysis and compiling our learnings.

At our Baltimore site, 156 young men participated in the new survey.

**WHEN ASKED, 97% OF PARTICIPANTS SAID THEY TRUST AT LEAST ONE STAFF MEMBER.**

This is no small feat for young people who have been traumatized and let down again and again. Our participants stated that the consistency of staff, lack of judgement, and willingness to put in the time and effort for them, helped to build trust.

Participants also appreciated the many program and employment opportunities available to them through Roca.

**72% OF RESPONDENTS STATED THAT ROCA HELPED THEM TO SET GOALS AND WORK TOWARD ACHIEVING THEM.**

When asked about goal setting specifically, some participants said they wanted better future but the path to that future felt daunting. Others stated that they had a difficult time envisioning a better future for themselves, but the encouragement they received from staff helped them see a way forward.