A core component of the Roca model is what we call “Engaged Institutions”. This is a deliberate relationship development and work strategy to enhance critical partnerships to intervene with and support young people, to strengthen each organization/institution’s capacity to work together and wrap around young people for public safety, and to promote systemic change. Some institutions include police, probation officers, and judges.

The following are key lessons of the year:

1. The importance of collaboration
2. The importance of working with the police—and not against them
3. The importance of coordinating with Safe Streets

The importance of collaboration

Why collaborate? Because here in Baltimore, inaction is fatal. The police department cannot be the sole agency responsible for reducing the murder rate. The lack of coordination and communication among criminal justice partners has been striking. Unfortunately, this is often found in cities where the murder rate is high. In order to reduce urban violence, it is essential that all criminal justice agencies—police, prosecutors, probation officers, juvenile and criminal justice systems, defense bar, etc.—jointly focus on and coordinate around those individuals driving the violence. This is one of the findings the Police Executive Research Forum discussed in their report, “Reducing Gun Violence: What Works, and What Can Be Done Now.”

Roca Baltimore’s work in this area included:

- Continued work with referral partners, both monthly and individual meetings;
- Work with Safe Streets;
- Work with Detention;
- Launching the Young Adult & Criminal Justice Group focusing first on establishing and piloting an after shooting protocol;
- Extensive planning and coordination with the Mayor’s Office of Criminal Justice;
- Work with Police including coordination regarding young people and following up to shootings; deliberate meetings with more police; and
- Restorative Justice Circle Training and Healing Work with partners and police;

We are working closely with the Mayor’s Office of Criminal Justice related to both the young men we are serving and on overall strategies to reduce violent crime. This includes identifying and developing solutions to gaps within and between agencies serving our target population. Roca also provides support on a larger scale by sharing best practices and bringing in subject matter experts to Baltimore. We shared and discussed the strategies in Thomas Abt’s new book, *Bleeding Out: The Devastating Consequences of*
Urban Violence – and a Bold New Plan for Peace in the Streets. The book provides a clear, effective strategy for how to reduce homicides and shootings in a city such as ours.

Some examples of instances where information sharing was critical this year include:

- When there is a safety situation (such as the young man being the target of a shooting) and how best to manage that;
- Ensuring adult pre-trial detention is aware of a juvenile detention warrant from another county to ensure that a difficult to locate young man is not released before it can be served; otherwise, he will disappear back into the wind knowing the warrant is still open; and
- Sharing social media posts of a young man with guns or a dispute brewing.

We are so excited and honored to work with our juvenile and criminal justice partners. During this first year, every partner consistently expressed interest in and demonstrates a willingness to collaborate more.

**Why is it essential to work closely with police?**

Given the challenges of the Baltimore Police Department over the past few years and the approach by most organizations that provide extensive outreach and intervention, the methodology and commitment of Roca to work with the police may seem counter-intuitive. However, we have learned over the years that police often know more about the young people we serve than anyone else. Tragically, police witness the death of way too many young people and are there to respond to non-fatal shootings by the hundreds.

It has been a priority for Roca to have a close working relationship with the Baltimore Police Department since the planning phase of the work. From the start, a growing group of Baltimore Police has been our primary partner. They have been open to learning, they are the lead referral partner, they are open to coordinate with Roca and others, and they are extremely supportive of the work.

The police are the best source for identifying and locating the hang out areas of the young men who are driving the violence. They often have essential intelligence when a young man's life is threatened that is crucial for us and other criminal justice partners to know in order to try and keep the young man safe.

We have experienced a high level of commitment throughout from the police department. Those we are working with understand that the violence in Baltimore cannot be solved merely by arresting people. They have sincere concern for the human lives that are being lost to the streets, not just the numbers that accumulate as part of the homicide tally. At the start of outreach, one of the Majors called in a high level drug dealer who is a driver of violence in his district to talk with him about Roca, how concerned he was that the young man was going to end up dead or in prison and to plead with him to engage with our program. An Officer who we have worked with closely from the beginning and refers us the young men who are deep in street life, told us even if the program only helped one of these really high risk young men, it would all be worth it.
**Why is coordinating with Safe Streets critical?**

Baltimore is uniquely situated as the only city with both a Cure Violence replication through Safe Streets and a Roca site. Safe Streets sites are identifying and mediating disputes between high risk young men in their communities, but many of those individuals are in need of ongoing, long-term behavior change. Through partnering, Safe Streets can refer those young men to Roca for services. Safe Streets also has workers at some of the hospitals and can quickly refer and assist us with meeting shooting victims in need of our services before they are released.

Safe Streets’ workers know their communities very well. When we are having difficulty finding a young man, they can be pivotal in helping us locate them. They can also be valuable resources when a conflict arises between one of our young men and a non-Roca participant in order to help broker peace.

**What’s Next?**

Some of the things we are working on to strengthen this engaging institution work include:

- Developing an after shooting response protocol with criminal justice partners and community partners;
- Further engaging partners in the restorative justice practice of peacemaking circles with Roca staff and young men;
- Continuing to deliberately meet with additional police throughout the department in an effort to further the work; and,
- Working with the partners to learn and implement evidence based practices.

We are grateful to the young people, staff and partners with whom we have had the opportunity to work in this first year, and look forward to deepening our impact in Baltimore. For further detail about this topic, please visit [www.rocainc.com](http://www.rocainc.com) or contact Leyla Layman at Leyla.Layman@rocainc.com to obtain a copy of our quarterly reports.