Roca: Breaking the cycle of violence, arrest, and incarceration among Baltimore’s highest-risk youth

OVERVIEW

Program Basics

- Roca is a behavior change program that works with youth at the highest levels of risk to address trauma, reduce involvement in criminal activity, and increase employment.
- Participation in the program lasts approximately four years.
- The program’s model consists of "relentless" youth engagement, cognitive behavioral treatment, restorative justice exercises, work readiness training, and paid transitional employment.

How Does Roca Improve Economic Mobility?

- Roca offers its participants paid transitional employment, providing them with income stability and reducing their experience of extreme poverty. Research demonstrates that income stability is a critical foundation to longer-term upward economic mobility.
- The program’s transitional employment and job placement services provide participants with work experience and training, allowing them to build skills and position themselves for higher quality employment.
- Roca helps participants reduce their involvement with crime and violence, decreasing the likelihood of incarceration or re-incarceration. In preventing incarceration, Roca better positions participants to earn a steady income, complete education or workforce training programs, and access good jobs.

EVIDENCE LEVEL: PROMISING (THIRD-HIGHEST TIER)

Roca has demonstrated positive preliminary results in a randomized control trial currently being conducted by Abt Associates.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Target population</th>
<th>Program cost</th>
<th>Implementation locations</th>
<th>Dates active</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Individuals age 17-24 at the highest risk of incarceration</td>
<td>Approximately $6,338 per participant per year, $25,000 for full four-year programming</td>
<td>Baltimore, Chelsea, Boston, Springfield, Lynn, Holyoke; MA</td>
<td>1988 – present</td>
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Civic leadership in Baltimore recognized the need for evidence-based programs that worked with youth at the highest level of risk and served as an alternative to traditional policing strategies. Roca had demonstrated success for over 30 years in several sites in Massachusetts working with populations at the highest levels of risk, helping change behavior, reduce violence, and decrease incarceration.

The program is a four-year intervention focused on reducing violence and incarceration among youth at the highest levels of risk.

The program seeks to address trauma, encourage behavior change, reduce involvement in criminal activity, and increase employment.

Roca's stage-based approach includes “relentless” outreach to youth at the highest levels of risk, cognitive behavioral therapy, peacemaking circles, workplace training, and transitional employment.

Since 2018, Roca has provided services to over 200 young men in Baltimore who are out of school, unemployed, and unable or unwilling to participate in any other program.

Roca's arrival in Baltimore has galvanized a high degree of collaboration between the Baltimore Police Department, the Maryland Department of Probation and Parole, and the Maryland Department of Juvenile Services. These parties work together on a daily and weekly basis to help Roca identify and safely engage with young men at the highest levels of risk.

Roca's approach to behavior change, built on a cognitive behavioral therapy curriculum and "peacemaking" circles, has helped participants address extensive trauma, improve emotional regulation skills, increase work readiness, and decrease levels of criminal thinking.

In 2019, Roca launched the Roca Impact Institute, which provides training, intensive coaching, facilitated planning, and observation and feedback to direct service providers in other cities and states after recognizing the challenges of replicating their model in Baltimore.
Keys to Success

- Nearly $17 million in financial support from the City of Baltimore and local philanthropic partners provided Roca with a stable base of funding for its first four years of operation.
- Close partnerships with the Baltimore Police Department, Department of Juvenile Services, and Department of Probation and Parole have enabled Roca to reach young men at the highest levels of risk and provide them with a safe learning environment.
- Roca's "relentless" outreach—often engaging with an individual over ten times before they agree to participate—has allowed them to reach young men previously unserved by any other program.
- Roca's focus on helping young people address the trauma they have experienced is critical to the success of the program.
- Participants often drop out or relapse multiple times throughout their time in the program. Roca continues to engage with them until they have completed the full course of programming.
- Roca's commitment to transparency on all aspects of operations and effectiveness has built trust and support across all stakeholders.

TIMELINE

- **FREDDIE GRAY IS KILLED IN THE CUSTODY OF BALTIMORE POLICE**
  April 2015
  Freddie Gray's death at the hands of Baltimore Police leads to weeks of civil unrest. The event generates a public reckoning on police misconduct and Baltimore's lack of services for high-risk youth.

- **AS VIOLENCE SPIKES, TALKS ARE INITIATED WITH ROCA**
  April - May 2015
  Violence rises dramatically in the aftermath of Freddie Gray's death. Roca is identified as a promising strategy by Baltimore civic leadership because of its independently proven results for high-risk youth. Roca begins a due diligence process to assess feasibility of a Baltimore expansion.

- **CATHERINE PUGH IS ELECTED MAYOR OF BALTIMORE**
  November 2016
  Catherine Pugh, former majority leader of the Maryland Senate, wins Baltimore's 2016 mayoral election. The race is largely shaped by the continued impact of Freddie Gray's death and persistently high rates of violent crime.

- **ROCA PRESENTS TO MAYOR-ELECT PUGH'S TRANSITION TEAM**
  December 2016
  Molly Baldwin, founder and CEO of Roca, presents the Roca model to a joint meeting of the Mayor's education and public safety transition teams. After the presentation, the Mayor-elect's team agrees on the need for a program like Roca in Baltimore.

- **ROCA CONDUCTS OUTREACH ACROSS BALTIMORE**
  Throughout 2017
  Roca meets with public sector leaders, philanthropies, nonprofits, community-based organizations, and others across Baltimore. Roca leadership attempts to explain the organization's model, build relationships, and describe how the program serves a different population than existing service providers.
ROCA FINEALIZES FOUR-YEAR OPERATING PLAN, SAFETY AND RISK MITIGATION STRATEGIES, AND STAFF TRAINING
June 2018
Roca national leadership spends the month of June training initial staff members in all aspects of the Intervention Model, including Roca’s CBT approach, youth outreach strategies, relationship building skills. Nearly every interaction with youth is tracked in the organization’s performance-based management system.

ROCA RECEIVES ITS FIRST ROUND OF REFERRALS
June 2018
Roca receives its first round of 142 referrals from the Baltimore Police Department, the Department of Juvenile Services, and the Department of Probation and Parole. Going forward, Roca meets with partners on a weekly basis to review existing referrals, accept new referrals, and update partners on the status of each individual referred.

ROCA BALTIMORE LAUNCHES OPERATIONS
July 2018
Staff members begin conducting outreach to engage young men most at risk of perpetrating or being victims of violence. Work begins in two specific police districts, but work quickly expands to encompass the entire city.

ROCA FINALIZES PARTNERSHIPS WITH JUSTICE SYSTEM PARTNERS
January–March 2018
Roca worked with the Baltimore Police Department, the Department of Probation and Parole, and the Department of Juvenile Services for approximately three months to develop plans for referrals, create data-sharing agreements, and build trust to ensure open lines of communication.

ROCA BEGINS HIRING INITIAL BALTIMORE STAFF
March–May 2018
Kurtis Palermo, Assistant Director of Roca’s office in Springfield, MA, becomes the director of Roca’s new Baltimore office. He and the Roca national team begin hiring initial staff in Baltimore. JT Timpson, previously with Baltimore’s Safe Streets program, is the first senior-level hire.

ROCA AND PARTNERS AGREE ON SHARED BENCHMARKS AND TARGET OUTCOMES
April 2018
Roca works with City Hall, the Baltimore Police Department, and other partners to create shared short- and long-term benchmarks and target outcomes. Partners also develop protocol to ensure consistent communication and reporting.

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MAYOR PUGH, BALTIMORE PHILANTHROPIC COMMUNITY, AND ROCA COME TO FOUR-YEAR FUNDING AGREEMENT
December 2017
The City of Baltimore and its partners commit to at least $17 million over four years, and Roca agrees to launch. Ultimately, the City contributes $4 million to the program, along with a $2.2 million commitment in contracts for transitional work. Three foundations, the Annie E. Casey Foundation, the Abell Foundation, and the Harry and Jeanette Weinberg Foundation, commit nearly $5 million. Corporate donors are rallied by Mayor Pugh, eventually contributing $7 million in total and exceeding the initial $17 million goal.

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Baltimore has long struggled with poverty, joblessness, and crime. For years, attempts to improve economic opportunity and reduce violence have shaped local politics. Despite some promising efforts over the years, few initiatives have been able to generate lasting improvements in public safety citywide.

Through the late 2000s and early 2010s, Baltimore was generally seen as making meaningful progress in improving public safety. From the late 1990s through the early 2000s, the city consistently experienced over 2,200 violent crimes per 100,000 residents, among the highest rates in the nation. Rates of violent crime trended downward to a low of 1,338 violent crimes per 100,000 residents in 2014.

This momentum was turned upside-down in April 2015, when 25-year-old Freddie Gray was killed at the hands of Baltimore Police. The incident fueled widespread civil unrest and exposed significant misconduct in the Baltimore Police Department.

Violent crime increased dramatically in the aftermath. The city’s homicide rate increased by 64 percent in a single year, going from 33.8 homicides per 100,000 residents in 2014 to 55.4 homicides per 100,000 residents in 2015. The city experienced its highest-ever homicide rate in 2017 (343 homicides, 57.8 homicides per 100,000 residents), only to see a higher homicide rate in 2019 (348 homicides, 58.6 homicides per 100,000 residents).

As violence in Baltimore rose, it became increasingly clear that the city needed to adopt new crime reduction strategies that went beyond traditional policing tactics. The city had previously implemented Safe Streets, an evidence-based violence interruption model, but the consensus was that the most at-risk youth needed services that went beyond dispute de-escalation. After all, the vast majority of violent offenses in Baltimore were being committed by a small number of young men, many of whom had previously come into contact with the justice system. Rather than arresting and incarcerating the same group of people over and over again, leaders in Baltimore began to seek programming that would break the cycle of violence, arrest, and incarceration, and instead help young people change their behavior and find a more positive path.

“The persistent level of violence being experienced in the City demanded that we think about new approaches to the problem,” said Drew Vetter, then-Director of the Baltimore Mayor’s Office of Criminal Justice. “Baltimore was in the midst of a crisis of violent crime. There was turmoil within the Police Department and a broadly shared recognition that more focused strategies were needed. We knew that we couldn’t rely on policing alone to improve public safety in the city. Improving policing...
is important, but we knew that non-policing-oriented approaches had to be part of the solution as well. We observed how other cities were experiencing success with such strategies that improved public safety and directly supported the lives of young men."

By this point in 2015, Roca had previously built relationships with city, state, and philanthropic leaders—their initial contact with local leadership had occurred during Martin O’Malley’s gubernatorial administration. In the ensuing years, evidence of Roca’s effectiveness had only grown stronger. So as violence rapidly increased after Freddie Gray’s death, they were immediately identified by leaders in Baltimore as a promising partner.

After Freddie Gray’s death, the organization was first approached by Patrick McCarthy, President of the Casey Foundation. Soon thereafter, the Maryland Governor’s Office for Children, led by Arlene Lee, also began to advocate for Roca’s expansion to Baltimore. Other major players in Baltimore’s philanthropic community, the Abell Foundation and the Weinberg Foundation, also quickly came aboard. By early 2016, local philanthropy and state government were unified in their support for Roca replicating in Baltimore.

With momentum building, Roca leadership recognized that it needed to build stronger buy-in among one of its most important constituencies—the state and local justice system. The organization had hosted an initial delegation of justice system leaders during O’Malley’s time as Governor, but in November 2016, it hosted a second group of senior officials from the Baltimore Police Department, the Department of Probation and Parole, and the Department of Juvenile Services. City and state officials approached the visit to Massachusetts with skepticism but came away as supporters of Roca’s approach and advocates for its replication in Baltimore.

"At first, I thought that Roca was all talk...But once we got there and we met the team, I could see how comfortable the young men were inside the Roca building."

- Major Byron Conaway, Southern District Commander, Baltimore Police Department

"At first, I thought that Roca was all talk," said Major Byron Conaway, Southern District Commander of the Baltimore Police Department and one of the officials who visited Roca’s Massachusetts sites. "I thought it was going to be another program that we were going to shove money at that would never work, particularly because it’s from another place. But once we got there and we met the team, I could see how comfortable the young men were inside the Roca building. I could see how much energy the staff were putting towards the program. And I could see that Molly and her staff were really in touch with what was going on with these young men."

The fallout from Freddie Gray’s death continued to animate Baltimore’s politics through the city’s 2016 mayoral election, which was ultimately won by former Maryland Senate Majority Leader Catherine Pugh. By the time Mayor Pugh entered office in January of 2017, she had become a vocal champion of implementing new strategies to reduce violence and create opportunities for high-risk youth.

With the support of senior leaders in her administration, buy-in from key members of the state and local justice system, and the backing of the three largest foundations in the city, Mayor Pugh became a strong advocate of Roca’s expansion to Baltimore. "We had a strong base of support for Roca in the Mayor’s office," said Vetter of the Mayor’s Office of Criminal Justice. "Philanthropic and corporate partners were poised to partner with the City to help get the program started. We saw the success Roca was experiencing in Massachusetts and set a goal to replicate that success in Baltimore."
Roca began in Chelsea, Massachusetts, in 1988. Its flagship program targets young men between the ages of 16 and 24 who are most likely to engage in or fall victim to violence. These young men are often on probation, on parole, or recovering from a recent act of violence. They almost never have a high school diploma or a GED, rarely have consistent work history, and have been unable or unwilling to engage in programming elsewhere.

"We 100 percent focus on the young people who are at the center of urban violence," said Molly Baldwin, founder and CEO of Roca. "These individuals are not going to go to a job training program. They are not going to show up at a youth center. You can't pay them to go to a college-readiness program."

Roca's focus on this segment of the population stems from its theory of change, which asserts that engaging the highest-risk individuals with positive relationships and intensive behavior change programming can break community cycles of poverty, incarceration, and violence. Roca's intervention model is rooted in four main pillars:

- Creating safety and stability for young men at the highest levels of risk through relentless outreach and the building of trusting, transformational relationships with program staff.
- Teaching life-saving skills, like a cognitive behavioral curriculum developed in partnership with Massachusetts General Hospital, that helps participants address their trauma, change their behavior, and take greater control over their lives.
- Providing life skills and work readiness training to participants and allowing them to practice these skills in safe, non-judgmental spaces.
- Engaging and changing local systems to help reduce violence and improve relationships between community members and justice institutions.

Every individual's participation in Roca is phased. Once a young person has been referred to Roca and the organization makes the decision to pursue them, it often takes over 10 interactions before that individual is enrolled. The assertiveness of Roca's approach to outreach initially struck JT Timpson, Director of Youth Work and Crisis Intervention at Roca Baltimore, as a bad idea. "Having been born and raised here, when I first started to work for Roca, that was one of the methods I questioned the most," he said. "In this city, you don't just go knocking on people's doors, basically harassing them, stopping them without their permission. That sort of thing can get you hurt."
But the methodical nature of Roca’s outreach strategy allayed Timpson’s concerns. “It was actually the exact opposite of what I expected,” he said. “The model is structured in a way where we are often bridging the gaps with families first, before we even come into contact with young people. Initially, family members will sometimes cover for their young person or help them avoid us. But as we go back to the house over and over again, families see how committed we are to helping their son. All of a sudden, the doors start opening, and people start being receptive.”

Once a young person is engaged, they participate in a range of programming, including CBT training, restorative justice exercises, life skills courses, and other pre-vocational training. The core objective is to help young men begin to address their trauma. “Fundamentally, this program is about behavior change,” said Baldwin of Roca. “It’s about understanding trauma. It’s about giving young people the skills to recognize that what they think, feel, and do are different. Once they develop that skill, they regain their agency.”

“Once a participant has demonstrated progress on these fronts, they are placed on a transitional work crew, often performing jobs like street cleaning, landscaping, or shoveling snow. “Our transitional work is a behavior change accelerator,” said Kurtis Palermo, Director of Roca Baltimore. “The vast majority of our guys have never been in a work setting. They’re learning the basic routine of going to work every single day. You only learn how to work by going to work.” After an individual has consistently demonstrated positive performance in their transitional work, they are placed into unsubsidized employment.

The entire process is expected to take four years, with two years of more intensive programming and support, and two years of steady follow-up. Individuals are expected to fail or “relapse” multiple times throughout their participation. Only in exceptional circumstances are individuals not permitted to re-enroll.

Partnerships with the police and the justice system are an essential component of Roca’s strategy and daily operations, and the program will not expand to a new location without full buy-in from these parties. Before launching in a new location, Roca works with the local Police Department to solidify information-sharing agreements, create referral processes, and establish safety and crisis-mitigation protocols. Police provide guidance on the specific young men Roca might consider pursuing and critical information on the landscape of recent violence, personal disputes, gang rivalries, or other tensions that are affecting Roca’s participants. This police information shapes Roca’s operations on a daily basis.

Partnerships with city agencies and private employers are also important drivers of Roca’s success. The transitional work that Roca’s participants engage in is completed via contracts for Departments of Public Works, Parks and Recreation, Transportation, etc. And the organization’s relationships with private employers ensure that once individuals have gone through Roca’s full program, they are easily able to find an unsubsidized job.
Allocating the Funding

- Funding Roca's Baltimore expansion began with a commitment of nearly $5 million from three philanthropies: the Annie E. Casey Foundation, the Abell Foundation, and the Harry and Jeanette Weinberg Foundation.
- All three foundations made financial support of Roca conditional on the public sector’s commitment to funding the program as well.
- City of Baltimore and its partners commit to a total of $13 million over four years.

"The data we saw on Roca was very compelling."
- Drew Vetter, former Director of Mayor’s Office of Criminal Justice, City of Baltimore

Roca conditioned its expansion to Baltimore on a commitment of at least $10 million in funding over four years, and for the public sector to financially support the effort. Without this duration and level of funding, and without meaningful buy-in from the public sector, Roca felt they would not be able to fully establish themselves, demonstrate their effectiveness, and meaningfully improve the lives of the young people they serve.

Roca’s ability to negotiate these terms stemmed from the strong outcomes they had demonstrated working with this exact population over the course of 30 years in Massachusetts. "In all of our interactions with Roca, they would lead with the data," said Vetter of the Mayor’s Office. "That was extremely helpful. We tried to bring a data orientation to all of the strategies—policing and policing alternatives—that we embraced. And the data we saw on Roca was very compelling."

The civic push to assemble funding for Roca began soon after Freddie Gray’s death in April of 2015. The Casey Foundation, the Abell Foundation, and the Weinberg Foundation aligned quickly, pledging $5 million in support on the condition that the City of Baltimore provide funding as well.

Mayor Pugh took office in January of 2017 and quickly came to support Roca's expansion, committing to a total of $13 million in funding over four years. Originally, the State of Maryland had expressed interest in funding the program through an outcomes-based contract, but the agreement between the city and the state fell through.

Without the support of the state, Mayor Pugh began to rally support from the broader corporate and philanthropic community in Baltimore. In mid-December, she hosted a fundraising breakfast with the Greater Baltimore Committee, a collection of the city's most influential business leaders. The Mayor successfully pitched the need for the program and raised a total of $7 million from corporate donors.

By mid-December, Roca and the City had come to a final four-year agreement. The city would contribute $4 million in funding and commit to $2.2 million in contracts for transitional work. The Casey Foundation, the Abell Foundation, and the Weinberg Foundation, would contribute a total of $4.9 million. And corporate partners would contribute $7 million, with the largest contributions coming from Whiting-Turner, Baltimore Gas and Electric, T. Rowe Price, Brown Capital Management, and Johns Hopkins University.

To Tim Regan, CEO of Whiting-Turner, much of Roca’s appeal was that it helped public agencies work together more effectively and generate better results. "One thing that attracted me to Roca was their ability to pull bureaucracies together. You’ve got the police, you’ve got the corrections system, you’ve got juvenile services—all of them should be working together, but oftentimes, the lines of communication break down. It’s powerful to have a non-government entity that can jump in there and help everyone glue things together.”
Over the course of 2017, Baldwin and other Roca leaders had met with over 100 individuals from organizations working with youth in Baltimore, attempting to build relationships and articulate the ways that Roca provided a different kind of service to a higher-risk segment of the population than any other program in the city. "We went to see everybody," said Baldwin. "Little players, big players; we wanted to listen. Some people were very supportive, they got it right away. And some people weren't."

"Roca served a unique niche. It serves the young people that systems and programs often fail or fail to reach. For those young people, this can literally be a life-and-death matter."
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Despite Baldwin's efforts, after the announcement of the City's agreement with Roca, backlash from some local nonprofits was intense. Much of this frustration was fueled by fears that the funding for Roca would mean less funding for others. As one philanthropic leader in Baltimore put it, "A lot of nonprofit leaders who work with youth and young adults were like, 'Hey, I'm from here. I've been here for years. I'm scraping by, begging for $50,000, and you're raising millions of dollars for this program that serves this small number of young people.'" Many of these fears were alleviated by pledges from the local philanthropic community that funding would not be reduced for other organizations, but some bitterness still remains.

Fundamentally, local leaders' willingness to provide Roca with significant funding boiled down to the evidence it had demonstrated in serving a group of young people that nobody else served. "Roca served a unique niche," said Thomasina Hiers, Vice President of the Center for Civic Sites and Community Change at the Annie E. Casey Foundation. "It serves the young people that systems and programs often fail or fail to reach. For those young people, this can literally be a life-and-death matter."

### Implementing the Plan

- Roca commits months of work to developing partnerships and protocols with local justice system partners.
- Initial staffing team is hired locally and receives a full month of training on the delivery of Roca's CBT approach and intervention model.
- Roca's staff begins conducting relentless outreach to at-risk youth and delivering intervention model.
- Roca meets regularly with representatives from the Mayor's Office, the Police, and other justice system partners to discuss operations and progress.

Once Roca had come to an agreement with the City of Baltimore, it immediately began working with justice system partners to develop referral protocols, data sharing agreements, reporting standards, and safety procedures. This process took three months, lasting from January through March 2018. From there, Roca directed its energies toward staffing the Baltimore office. Kurtis Palermo, who had previously served as the Assistant Director of Roca in Springfield, MA, moved to Maryland to become Baltimore’s inaugural co-director. He hired the initial staff between March and June of 2018. A particularly critical hire was JT Timpson, who had previously worked with Safe Streets Baltimore, a violence interruption program overseen by the Mayor’s Office of Criminal Justice. Timpson was well-known and well-respected across Baltimore, and his hiring helped Roca gain the trust of other local actors.
"We've learned over time that the key is our participants' relationship with the staff," said Baldwin. "We are about behavior change. We are not about lecturing kids. We're not about scaring kids. So we've got to have a staff that wants to learn, is ready to be supervised, and is eager to grow. It's a lot to ask of people, and it's hard work. We needed to find a team that was ready to lean into all of that."

Once the Baltimore office had been staffed, Roca's national leadership provided the new team with a full month of training in cognitive behavioral theory and other aspects of the intervention model. Around this time, Roca received its first round of referrals, 142 names from the Baltimore Police Department, Department of Probation and Parole, and Department of Juvenile Services. Soon thereafter, Roca staff were on the streets, conducting their first rounds of relentless outreach to Baltimore's most at-risk young men.

After Roca Baltimore was up and running, staff began to meet justice system partners (both individually and collectively) on a regular basis. Staff are in constant communication with Intelligence officers at the Baltimore Police Department, who help locate potential participants and keep Roca up to date on any and all safety concerns.

These safety concerns are at the center of Roca's daily operations. "You cannot have a program working with young men at the center of violence without first creating an opportunity for them to come into a safe space," said Palermo of Roca Baltimore. "For each participant, we create a safety profile which details where they can go, where they can't go, and who they can be around. It's a living document that we are constantly updating and using our intel, both internally and externally, to make sure we're keeping staff and young people safe."

As Baldwin puts it: "The safety issues are the hardest part of our operations. They are intensely localized. It's a pretty sophisticated puzzle to put together, building trust and then collecting intelligence from young people, from staff, the police, and other partners. But we've got to stay on it every day, and we've got to do it right. Otherwise, people could get killed."

Once a young man has been deemed eligible for Roca, he is "in," regardless of whether he wants to be. Youth workers do everything they can to track down the young man—repeatedly visiting the address for the young man provided by the referral partner; engaging with family members, spouses, partners, and friends; cross-checking the information they have received with data from other referral partners; working with other organizations like Safe Streets to gain any additional intelligence on the young man's whereabouts; and drawing upon the knowledge of current participants to see if they can help find him.

Between July 2018 and July 2019, youth workers made 13,538 attempts to engage young men who had been referred and were eligible for the program. Between July 2019 and March 2020, it made 10,601 attempts. Since July 2019, 165 young men were referred to Roca, 104 coming from the Baltimore Police Department and the remaining 61 coming from other justice system and community partners. In FY2020, 60 young men had advanced to transitional employment programming.
generally keeping his "ear to the streets" to ensure that Roca's safety protocols are completely up to date. All staff members also underwent additional, intensive training to ensure that safety protocols were maintained across the organization.

Second, Roca Baltimore observed that issues at home were often preventing young men from joining the program. An additional staffer was brought on to help solve these problems. "In Baltimore, so many families are so torn and broken," said Timpson of Roca. "We created a position for a community and family support specialist. So now, if we go to a house and the lights are off, or if the family has received an eviction notice, they need food stamps, you name it—whatever barriers exist for the family that prevent the young person from being successful, we try to address that."

Roca also came to realize that the degree of trauma that Baltimore youth have suffered exceeds what they have witnessed in other locations, often making for slower progress for participants. Roca has responded by adding new layers of staffing to administer cognitive behavioral therapy and ensuring that mental health services are available to participants. "The level of poverty and violence is beyond anything we have in Massachusetts," said Baldwin of Roca. "The magnitude of it all in Baltimore is just different. Things are just really raw all of the time for so many people."

Roca tracks data on nearly every aspect of its operations on a daily basis. These include measures on referrals and eligibility, contacts and program enrollments, program engagement, and participant performance, among others. Staff members track every interaction they have with prospects and participants. Individual and summary data is shared with all partners across city and state government on a weekly and monthly basis, and all parties received detailed quarterly updates on larger program trends.

In addition to collecting and evaluating data in-house, Roca Baltimore is currently undergoing an external evaluation by MDRC.

"The level of poverty and violence is beyond anything we have in Massachusetts. The magnitude of it all in Baltimore is just different."

– Molly Baldwin, founder and CEO of Roca

After over two years of operations, Roca has adapted its approach in Baltimore in several ways. First, it quickly became clear that the intensity and frequency of violence in Baltimore would demand a greater focus on participant and staff safety. An additional intervention specialist was hired to assist in tracking down the most difficult to reach individuals, addressing any of the immediate safety concerns that frequently arise over the course of a day, and generally keeping his "ear to the streets" to ensure that Roca's safety protocols are completely up to date. All staff members also underwent additional, intensive training to ensure that safety protocols were maintained across the organization.

Second, Roca Baltimore observed that issues at home were often preventing young men from joining the program. An additional staffer was brought on to help solve these problems. "In Baltimore, so many families are so torn and broken," said Timpson of Roca. "We created a position for a community and family support specialist. So now, if we go to a house and the lights are off, or if the family has received an eviction notice, they need food stamps, you name it—whatever barriers exist for the family that prevent the young person from being successful, we try to address that."

Roca also came to realize that the degree of trauma that Baltimore youth have suffered exceeds what they have witnessed in other locations, often making for slower progress for participants. Roca has responded by adding new layers of staffing to administer cognitive behavioral therapy and ensuring that mental health services are available to participants. "The level of poverty and violence is beyond anything we have in Massachusetts," said Baldwin of Roca. "The magnitude of it all in Baltimore is just different. Things are just really raw all of the time for so many people."
RESOURCES

- “Roca 101” video
- Roca Baltimore Gates Foundation video feature
- Roca Baltimore featured in Vice News
- Roca’s 2020 Annual Report
- Roca Baltimore Referral Protocol
- Roca Baltimore’s “Ideal Partnerships With Police” Guidance
- Roca’s Engaged Institutions Strategy
- Roca’s Safety Landscape Guidance
- Roca Replication Timeline
- Roca PowerPoint Presentation to Civic Leaders in Baltimore

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THE ECONOMIC MOBILITY CATALOG

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