ROCA BALTIMORE
WHO ARE THE YOUNG MEN FOR ROCA AND HOW DO WE MEET THEM?
Lessons from Year One

Roca Baltimore launched in July 2018. In the first year, we relentlessly reached out to about 300 young men and successfully engaged 95 intensively in programming.

The following are three key lessons of the year:
1. What we know about how many young men in Baltimore could be Roca eligible
2. How young people are referred to Roca
3. What it takes to find the young men

What we know about how many young men in Baltimore could be eligible for Roca

There are likely several thousand young men in Baltimore City who are at risk of either shooting someone or being shot themselves. These young men are actively involved in the streets as well as the criminal justice system in some way.

Young men between the ages of 18 and 24 represent the second highest group of both homicide and non-fatal shooting victims behind men age 25 or older. These high risk young men who are likely to be in prison or lose their lives to gun violence are precisely the individuals Roca seeks to serve.

How young people are referred to Roca

In the first year, our goal was to find 100 eligible Roca participants. 327 young men were referred to Roca, and we were successful in deeming 95 young men eligible and 186 ineligible for various reasons. Additionally, 46 were in the registration phase awaiting either eligibility or ineligibility, and another 30 were on the waiting list.

The primary referral source in Baltimore is the Baltimore Police Department followed by the Department of Juvenile Services, the Division of Parole and Probation and Safe Streets.

In the first year we developed a strategy to best pace the flow of referrals to intentionally make contact and follow-up with each young man. Additionally, we worked alongside our referring partners to educate them on what young men may be the best fit for the program and how best to collaborate.

Roca staff routinely meets with each referring partner individually and collectively, both on a monthly basis. We also developed a critical relationship with the police Intelligence officers who have been instrumental in assisting with locating young men at their homes and where they may hang out. These partnerships are ongoing and we continue to refine each process so that we can best serve the young men.

Based on our data from this first year, the most common reason for dismissal was long-term incarceration (33%), followed by incorrect contact information (23%). While we exhaust all available
resources to locate a young man, there are unfortunately times where we have no remaining options and must dismiss him due to lack of new information. Tragically, four young men were killed before Roca was able to make contact and begin engaging.

Other reasons for ineligibility included the young men engaging in other programs (13 men) as well as low risk level (19 men). We are very careful to not engage young people who may be too low risk or could succeed elsewhere. Finally, some of our referrals are outside the 16-24 age range; non-residents of Baltimore City; currently with open charges; or with too serious safety concerns.

What it takes to find the young men

It is important to understand that Roca is not a mandated program for these young men and most of them do not know they have been referred to us until initial contact is made by their youth worker. We are given a name, an address and sometimes phone numbers or photographs of a young man, and it is here that the relentless outreach begins. We determine if they are eligible within the first 90 days, or potentially longer if there are special circumstances. Once we deem a young man eligible for the program, he is “in,” whether or not he wants to be. It is here that the next step of our work begins—building transformational relationships that can change negative thinking and behaviors.

On average, it has taken 12 to 14 attempts before Roca’s staff is able to make initial contact with a young man. The process of finding a young man includes:

- Relentless outreach—repeatedly going to the address or addresses we are given by a referral partner to confirm whether the young man lives there. We regularly go to vacant homes or lots, store fronts and meet residents who do not know the young man we are looking for.
- Engaging with relatives, friends or spouses to try and make contact with a young man.
- Contacting the police district that referred a young man as well as those where he may live or hang out for updated contact information.
- Contacting the Department of Juvenile Services and the Division of Parole and Probation to determine if they are either known to them or they have updated contact information. We have also utilized this partnership to coordinate joint visits to make initial contact.
- Utilizing Maryland Case Search and VineLink to gather information about pending court matters, potential incarceration or additional addresses.
- Working with Safe Streets to determine if they are familiar with the young man.
- Asking young men who are actively involved with Roca if they know or associate with a young man we may have a difficult time locating.

In the first year, Roca staff made 13,538 efforts to engage the young men who have been referred and are participating in our program. This includes 6,378 actual contacts made (by phone or in person) with young men, 4,781 attempted contacts and 2,379 third party contacts with those who may know the young man.
Many of the young men referred to Roca do not want to actively engage in and participate in the program, as they are not ready for change. Roca staff works tirelessly to build trust with the young men and utilize intentional conversations, and Cognitive Behavioral Theory (CBT) to push for behavior change. One example of this involved a young man who was adamant that he would not participate in Roca’s Transitional Employment Program (Roca’s job preparedness program). For the first nine months with Roca, he watched his baby during the day and sold drugs on the corner at night. Roca staff were intentional and relentless in their efforts—Youth Workers, Educators and Directors used CBT and explored what this young man valued—which was his son. After 112 contact efforts, he made the decision to engage at Roca and begin working in the Transitional Employment Program.

Tragically there are some young men who we are not able to engage. In one such instance, a Youth Worker made ten unsuccessful attempts to contact a young man, only meeting his sister and grandmother. One of the first calls made by the young man’s family was to the Youth Worker—to let him know that the young man had been fatally shot and to thank him for his ongoing efforts.

**Up Next: Strategic and Systematic Referrals**

In the coming year, we will continue to work with our referral partners to think more strategically about the young men they are referring to Roca and the proper information we need in order to engage them. As our relationships with police districts continue to strengthen, we hope our referrals will be more on target. For example, in October, the Western District was experiencing a heightened level of violence, and the police immediately reached out to Roca to refer several of the individuals driving it. As it becomes clearer to partners who should be referred to Roca, we intend to identify processes and opportunities that will allow us to serve as many young men as possible.

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