

Hello, my name is Jacquelyn Santiago Nazario; I am the CEO of COMPASS Youth Collaborative, a nonprofit agency that works with youth living in a cycle of violence in the City of Hartford. At COMPASS, we develop transformative relations with the youth we serve; we provide them with the support and opportunities they need to become successful in education, employment, and life. Our team of case managers called Peacebuilders are on call 24 hours a day 7 days a week. We provide Cognitive Behavioral Theory (CBT) to change behavior over time, provide in house mental health services, and provide educational services from our Education Coordinators. Additionally, we provide them a safe place to fail and practice CBT through employment. Last, COMPASS responds to the hospitals to work with hospital teams and provide wrap around services to gun violence victims. COMPASS also responds to the community to deescalate violence and prevent retaliation.

Gun Violence is a public health issue and meets the definition of a disease; it is contagious; it spreads from person to person. Victims of gun violence are 59% more likely to become drivers of violence.

Like other contagious and epidemic health problems, gun violence deserves treatment, and it deserves to be studied in a public health context.

Today I am thinking of Taki, one of the young men COMPASS serves. At 20, Taki says he “has lost as many people to gun violence as years he has been alive.” Imagine being 20 years old and losing 20 people to gun violence.

89% of the youth we serve have experienced the death of a family member or close friend due to gun violence.

2021 was Hartford’s deadliest year in decades, and we have surpassed gun death totals from last year.

But gun violence isn’t just a body count. The trauma caused by gun violence doesn’t just affect the victims; it also affects their friends, family members, neighbors, and community.

When Taki first began working with COMPASS, he was disconnected from any positive role models; he had stopped going to school and had no visions of a future.

Working closely with the COMPASS team, Taki has begun to understand his trauma and how it impacts his life. COMPASS gave him a safe space where he could have moments of feeling free from harm. COMPASS also gave him the tools he needs to become successful at securing employment.

It hasn't been easy Taki, and it's never a straight line for our youth. But at COMPASS, we plan for the setbacks and use them as teaching moments.

Taki has taken the Security Guard Certification course and will have his "Guard Card" next month. He will be able to contribute financially to his family and be a role model to others in the community.

Every year COMPASS works with hundreds of young people just like Taki. Using Cognitive Behavior Theory, we provide them with life-saving tools that help them become ready to succeed in education, employment, and life.

At COMPASS, we know that community-based violence intervention programs work. By investing long term in strategies and partnerships that work, together we can build a community where our youth feel safe, live peacefully, and have the opportunity to reach their full potential.

Sincerely,



Jacquelyn Santiago Nazario