

# LINC Commission Meeting

June 21, 2021



Task Force  
**FREEDOM** 

On June 15, LINC showed its appreciation with a luncheon for the Missouri National Guard and all the volunteers and staff that helped distribute the COVID-19 vaccine to over 20,000 residents since February.



# Local Investment Commission (LINC) Vision

## Our Shared Vision

A caring community that builds on its strengths to provide meaningful opportunities for children, families and individuals to achieve self-sufficiency, attain their highest potential, and contribute to the public good.

## Our Mission

To provide leadership and influence to engage the Kansas City Community in creating the best service delivery system to support and strengthen children, families and individuals, holding that system accountable, and changing public attitudes towards the system.

## Our Guiding Principles

1. **COMPREHENSIVENESS:** Provide ready access to a full array of effective services.
2. **PREVENTION:** Emphasize “front-end” services that enhance development and prevent problems, rather than “back-end” crisis intervention.
3. **OUTCOMES:** Measure system performance by improved outcomes for children and families, not simply by the number and kind of services delivered.
4. **INTENSITY:** Offering services to the needed degree and in the appropriate time.
5. **PARTICIPANT INVOLVEMENT:** Use the needs, concerns, and opinions of individuals who use the service delivery system to drive improvements in the operation of the system.
6. **NEIGHBORHOODS:** Decentralize services to the places where people live, wherever appropriate, and utilize services to strengthen neighborhood capacity.
7. **FLEXIBILITY AND RESPONSIVENESS:** Create a delivery system, including programs and reimbursement mechanisms, that are sufficiently flexible and adaptable to respond to the full spectrum of child, family and individual needs.
8. **COLLABORATION:** Connect public, private and community resources to create an integrated service delivery system.
9. **STRONG FAMILIES:** Work to strengthen families, especially the capacity of parents to support and nurture the development of their children.
10. **RESPECT AND DIGNITY:** Treat families, and the staff who work with them, in a respectful and dignified manner.
11. **INTERDEPENDENCE/MUTUAL RESPONSIBILITY:** Balance the need for individuals to be accountable and responsible with the obligation of community to enhance the welfare of all citizens.
12. **CULTURAL COMPETENCY:** Demonstrate the belief that diversity in the historical, cultural, religious and spiritual values of different groups is a source of great strength.
13. **CREATIVITY:** Encourage and allow participants and staff to think and act innovatively, to take risks, and to learn from their experiences and mistakes.
14. **COMPASSION:** Display an unconditional regard and a caring, non-judgmental attitude toward participants that recognizes their strengths and empowers them to meet their own needs.
15. **HONESTY:** Encourage and allow honesty among all people in the system.



Monday, June 21, 2021 | 4 – 5:30 pm  
Online Meeting

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## Agenda

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- I. Welcome and Announcements
- II. Approvals
  - a. **May 2021 minutes (motion)**
- III. Superintendent Reports
- IV. LINC Workforce
  - a. Safe to Serve
- V. COVID-19 Update
- VI. Caring Communities
  - a. Summer School
- VII. Adjournment



## THE LOCAL INVESTMENT COMMISSION – MAY 17, 2021

The Local Investment Commission met via Zoom. Cochair **Jack Craft** presided. Commissioners attending were:

Bob Bartman  
Tom Davis  
Aaron Deacon  
David Disney  
Mark Flaherty  
Rob Givens

Anita Gorman  
Tom Lewin  
Ken Powell  
Marge Randle  
David Ross

Executive Vice President **Janet Miles-Bartee** announced that Gayle is recovering in the hospital.

*A motion to approve the minutes of the April 19, 2021, LINC Commission meeting was approved unanimously.*

### Superintendents Reports

- **Yolanda Cargile**, Superintendent (Center School District), reported the district will hold graduation May 24 at Starlight Theater. On May 1 the district held a farewell to the old Indian Creek Elementary building where former students and staff shared memories. A video of the event was shown. In accordance with CDC guidance, masks will continue to be required in schools. This summer Center will offer credit recovery and enrichment as well as summer school.
- **Vivian Roper**, Superintendent (Lee A. Tolbert Academy) thanked LINC staff for helping with vaccinations. May 26 is the last day of school; K-8 recognition day will be held indoors, with a reception following outside. Masking will continue to be required for students and staff through summer school, and in fall until 80% of students are vaccinated; a virtual program will be offered in the fall for families who aren't ready to return to in-person school. Tolbert will offer in-person summer school, with LINC providing the Before & After School program.
- **Steve Morgan**, Assistant Superintendent (Fort Osage School District), reported the district's Envirothon team placed first in state, and will compete in an international (online) competition in August. This Friday 350 students will graduate in a ceremony at Children's Mercy Park. The district is strongly recommending, but not requiring, that students and staff wear masks in schools until county mandates have been lifted. The district will offer a variety of options for summer activities. The district will offer summer food projects serving breakfast, lunch and dinner at various locations this summer. Bond issue construction projects are under way.
- **Yaw Obeng**, Superintendent (Hickman Mills School District), reported the district held graduation last Thursday. Twelve district students have been awarded college scholarships of \$50,000 each. Smith-Hale students won math competitions through Prep KC. The district is developing a construction trades program and seeking community partners; the goal is to open in January 2022. The district is also seeking partners for micro-schools in arts and communications, business and finance, engineering and technology, and health and human services.
- **Christy Harrison**, Director of Extended Learning (Kansas City Public Schools) reported development of Blueprint 2030 is under way; phase 2 (goal setting, engaging stakeholders) is finished, and phase 3 is beginning. KC Scholars scholarships were awarded to 52 students, and 33 seniors received scholarships from the Hispanic Development Fund. Summer school for

grades K-8 will include a civics component in addition to academics, while all high schools will offer a traditional summer program. Graduation will be held June 3-4 at Arrowhead Stadium.

- **Dan Clemens**, Superintendent (North Kansas City School District), reported the district will continue with mask mandates through the end of the year in accordance with CDC and county guidelines. Graduation will be held at Hy-Vee Arena. Ninth graders will enroll in one of four pathway academies. The new Early Childhood Center will have space for 1,000 pre-K children.
- **Kevin Foster**, Executive Director (Genesis School), reported the last day of school is May 27. Eight-graders will have a drive-up graduation on May 24. Genesis will continue to observe Covid protocols. The school is finishing up the MAP test. Genesis will partner with Boys and Girls Clubs to offer a summer program. Aug. 24 is the first day of the new school year, and the school is planning to be in-person.

**Robin Gierer** reported that LINC's funding will remain at the Missouri Dept. of Elementary and Secondary Education, where the Commissioner of Education has given assurance that the department will support LINC's programs. **Jack Craft** reported that LINC made a successful effort to educate the department on our needs.

Executive Vice President **Janet Miles-Bartee** reported that over 20,000 vaccines have been given at the Morning Star vaccination clinic. Gov. Parson visited the clinic and was pleased with what he saw and the results we've achieved. Miles-Bartee will meet with **Gov. Parson** on June 1 to convey LINC's support and concerns. A video on the effort was shown.

Deputy Director **Brent Schondelmeyer** reported the USDA will provide a summer food program benefiting 30 million children over the summer. The benefit is available to students who are on free and reduced lunch and to children under age six who are on food stamps. The program is based on a demonstration project that LINC participated in starting in 2011. An NPR interview with U.S. Secretary of Agriculture **Tom Vilsack** was played.

Miles-Bartee reported LINC will continue to support districts and families by offering a summer Before & After School program. A video on the return of students to the in-person Before & After School program in KCPS was shown.

Schondelmeyer reported LINC has provided \$66,000 worth of assistance to renters who have past-due balances with area water, electric, and gas utilities. LINC is planning to establish Morning Star as a utility assistance site. LINC staff **Bryan Shepard** reported that accessing utility assistance is a complicated process requiring lots of documentation; site coordinators are making referrals, and LINC and LINCWorks staff are assisting with the application process.

Craft reported that June 21 is the next scheduled meeting. **David Disney** and **Ken Powell** will assume leadership at that meeting.

The meeting was adjourned.

Published on *The National Law Review* (<http://www.natlawreview.com>)

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# The Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) Says Employers Can Mandate COVID-19 Vaccines

Article By:  
Scott I. Unger

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The [EEOC](#) stated that employers can now order their employees to receive the COVID-19 vaccination shot, provided that they comply with the reasonable accommodation provisions of the American with Disabilities Act (ADA), religious exceptions, and other laws.

The justification for allowing employers to mandate vaccinations is based upon the logical and strong premise that unvaccinated employees present a “direct threat” to others in the workplace. It is likely the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) will promulgate COVID-19, related health and safety rules that employers are required to adhere to. Currently, OSHA is relying on the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) for guidance pertaining to vaccinated and unvaccinated employees. I believe OSHA will weigh in shortly, and I recommend that employers bookmark [OSHA’s website](#) and check it fairly often for additional guidance. I also recommend regularly checking with your state and local government for additional updates.

Before requiring your employees be vaccinated, you should be aware that an “employee who does not get vaccinated due to a disability (covered by the ADA), or a sincerely held religious belief, practice, or observance (covered by Title VII) may be entitled to a reasonable accommodation that does not pose an undue hardship on the operation of the employer’s business.” The EEOC recommended the following “reasonable accommodations” for employees who cannot get vaccinated: masking, working at a social distance from coworkers or non-employees, working modified shifts, getting periodic tests for COVID-19, teleworking, or reassigning the employee.

Employees cannot cite their societal, political, economic philosophies, as well as personal preferences as a reason not to get vaccinated if their employer mandates vaccinations.

Employers must also consider state and local employment laws which may not permit vaccination mandates. New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania and other states have state anti-discrimination laws. Typically, state-based anti-discrimination laws were enacted to supplement federal laws. While, I believe some, if not most states will follow the EEOC (allowing employers to mandate vaccinations), it is extremely likely that some states will not follow suit. This is why I am recommending that most employers consider educational programs and non-coercive incentives over vaccination mandates.

Employers may offer incentives to their employees who receive COVID-19 vaccines and voluntarily documentation of the same, but under certain circumstances. Any “incentive (which includes both rewards and penalties) may not be so substantial as to be coercive.” Employers are required to keep vaccination information confidential pursuant to the ADA.

Finally, employers may provide employees and their family members with information to educate them about the benefits of getting vaccinated and to address common questions and concerns. Check with your company’s health insurance provider, it may offer resources that will provide accurate, and helpful information to your employees.

# Court upholds Houston hospital's mandatory COVID-19 vaccine policy: 'Every employment includes limits on the worker's behavior'

June 14, 2021

By [Andrew Keshner](#)

**The case was the first of several lawsuits on mandatory workplace vaccination moving to resolution, observers say**

A Texas hospital system's mandatory COVID-19 vaccination policy for employees can stand after a federal judge on Saturday dismissed a closely watched lawsuit from workers refusing to get the shot.

Southern District of Texas Judge Lynn Hughes made his decision days after [Houston Methodist Hospital suspended 178 workers for not getting vaccinated](#) by a June 7 deadline.

The hospital system's policies were not coercion against staff, Hughes said. They were a choice the hospital system made "to keep staff, patients, and their families safer."

The 117 suing workers, including plaintiff Jennifer Bridges, a nurse for almost seven years at the hospital system, had their own choices to make, the judge said. Bridges and other plaintiffs had every right to accept or refuse the vaccine. "If she refuses, she will simply need to work somewhere else," the decision said.

Hughes wrote that employers could impose consequences for noncompliance on all sorts of rules, far beyond vaccination.

"If a worker refuses an assignment, changed office, earlier start time, or other directive, he may be properly fired. Every employment includes limits on the worker's behavior in exchange for his remuneration. That is all part of the bargain."

Suspended workers could be fired if they are still not vaccinated following a two-week unpaid suspension, said court papers filed ahead of the ruling.

Houston Methodist said it was "pleased and reassured" by the judge's ruling. "We can now put this behind us and continue our focus on unparalleled safety, quality, service and innovation," Dr. Marc Boom, the president and CEO of the hospital system with approximately 26,000 employees, said in a statement.

But Jared Woodfill, the lawyer for the suing workers, vowed to appeal the case all the way up to the Supreme Court. "This is just one battle in a larger war to protect the rights of employees ... All of my clients continue to be committed to fighting this unjust policy."

Woodfill said many of his clients contracted COVID-19 while treating patients during the pandemic. “As a thank you for their service and sacrifice, Methodist Hospital awards them a pink slip and sentences them to bankruptcy,” he said.

There are a handful of other pending lawsuits where workers are challenging their employer’s COVID-19 vaccination politics. But observers have said the Houston Methodist case was [moving the quickest to a decision](#) on a topic [filled with open legal questions and charged emotions](#).

Houston Methodist “is forcing its employees to be human ‘guinea pigs’ as a condition for continued employment,” the lawsuit alleged. Hughes singled out the “human guinea pig” phrase and said the workers’ lawsuit was written in a “press release style.”

Though lawsuit devoted most of its attention to the argument that the COVID-19 vaccines were allegedly “experimental and dangerous,” the judge said that claim was “false” — and it was also “irrelevant” to the litigation.

The hospital has defended its policies, saying mandatory employee vaccination was critical for patient and worker safety. The policy included exemptions on religious and medical grounds.

As of Saturday, 53.9% of America’s adult population were fully vaccinated and 64.3% received at least one dose, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

The suing workers noted the Pfizer **PFE, -0.57%** -BioNTech **BNTX, -7.59%** vaccine, as well as the Moderna **MRNA, -4.00%** and Johnson & Johnson **JNJ, -0.37%** vaccine are publicly available because the Food and Drug Administration granted emergency use authorization to the drugs.

In the eyes of the workers, the statute on this type of FDA authorization said workers had the right to refuse taking the vaccine.

The workers had it wrong because those particular provisions didn’t give them an opening to sue, Hughes said. Besides, Hughes noted, the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission has said employers [can require vaccination](#).



# On your marks! LINC's summer session takes off

June 14, 2021

By Joe Robertson/LINC Writer

There's a serious side to summer after-school programs now. There's increased attention to academic skills coming out of the pandemic. And an awareness of children's social and emotional well-being after so much separation and so many families still hurting.

But this is still summer.

And LINC's not going to let kids down now.

So here we go, with the pent-up energy of LINC students unleashed in the Fitness 4 Ever team-racing program in the gym at Millennium at Santa Fe Elementary in Hickman Mills.

"We want it to feel like camp," said Millennium LINC Caring Communities Coordinator Jene Counts, who's planning tie-dye T-shirt fun and crafts in the days ahead. "We want to do those things kids like . . . but we still want to get those academics in there."

In many ways, summer has come like a wave of freedom with all the in-person games and gatherings back in play. But like the masks that continue to be worn, the pandemic's effects linger.

LINC's Topping Elementary Caring Communities summer program in the North Kansas City School District and the school's daytime summer school had to move to Maplewood Elementary while Topping's roof gets repairs.

It was important that Topping's students and their families got to keep their community together at the alternate site, said LINC Topping Site Coordinator Lindsay Bosse.

"Our goal is to continue building those relationships, helping families however we can in the summertime," she said. "It's important Topping came over to Maplewood because otherwise these families wouldn't have care for the summer."

Summer school was in full swing in the Center, Hickman Mills, and North Kansas City school districts and Lee A. Tolbert charter school the week of June 7 — and LINC was ready. Grandview begins its summer school the week of June 14, and Kansas City Public Schools begin June 21. In all, LINC will be running programs at 15 sites.

On this recent hot June afternoon, the Topping kids played inside, decorating raw potatoes with markers, pipe cleaners and stick-on eyeballs to create characters for their own "Tater Family."

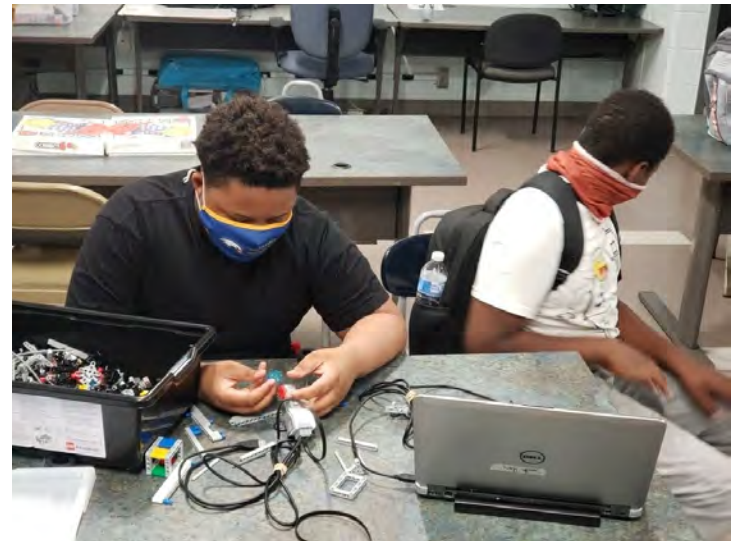
It was fun, but the kids even caught on to the lesson plan of examining pros and cons of different personality traits.

Some "social-emotional learning," Bosse said.

Eight-year-old Gregory's potato — a mustachioed, yellow-pipe-cleaner-head-band-wearing creation that Gregory called



Relay teams in the Fitness 4 Ever program are poised to run at LINC's Caring Communities summer session at Millennium at Santa Fe Elementary School in Hickman Mills.



Lego robot construction under way at LINC's summer session at Smith-Hale Middle School in Hickman Mills.

“Evil Tater” — represented a personality “that someone could choose to be,” he said, “. . . but I would not choose to be that.”

He noted the many somewhat-sketchy “Tater” personalities under construction in the room, recognizing a lot of “things you don’t have to be.”

Ariah, 9, seemed to capture the complexity of personalities, creating a version of a “Dic-tater” potato “because of the way I’m bossy,” she said. “But it’s also a nice tater.”

“We’re learning how people are different, and they think different, they look different and they sound different,” she said. “It means to me everybody is different in special ways.”

A lot of the work this summer will be giving children, and all their differences, chances to explore that big common experience they shared in living through the pandemic.

At Lee A. Tolbert Community Academy charter school, LINC’s Caring Communities team spent part of the first week of summer school preparing their students to be writers.

It will be one of the ways LINC intends to help the students open up their thoughts and feelings of the past year, said Lee A. Tolbert LINC Caring Communities Coordinator Kelley Harden.

“We are going to do a lot of self-care,” Harden said. And the writing — “focusing on journaling” — will be part of that.

“With the kids coming back from the pandemic, they’re getting into the routine and we are noticing that the children have a lot to say,” Harden said. “So we are allowing them to talk, journal, write and express what is going on with them while we’re supporting them.”

Eight-year-old Perris is up for it.

“We have to write 10 sentences every day,” he said, listing that daily expectation matter-of-factly in the middle of a list of after-school summer experiences at Tolbert.

“We do activities, math, lots of fun stuff,” he said. “We go on trips. We get to see our friends . . . we get to draw. We learn . . .”

This is what the summer of Covid recovery looks like.

“We are happy to have all the kids back,” Harden said. “They’re busier than ever. So that means we’re busier than ever.”



*Children get their writing assignment after school at the LINC Caring Communities program at Lee A. Tolbert Community Academy.*



*LINC Topping Caring Communities students show off their “Tater family” creations in a fun exploration of character and personality types.*

# LINC, Morning Star clinic partners bid bittersweet goodbye to Missouri National Guard

June 16, 2021

By Joe Robertson/LINC Writer



*Members of the Missouri National Guard lead the line as LINC staff serves lunch at a celebration lunch June 15 at Morning Star Missionary Baptist Church's Youth and Family Life Center.*

Just like the entire vaccination mission itself, the send-off party for the Missouri National Guard was overwhelming.

More than 100 people gathered on the Guard's last day, June 15, to celebrate the work they did with a host of community partners to deliver more than 30,000 Covid-19 vaccines — most of them with LINC at the Morning Star Missionary Baptist Church's community center, serving underserved and vulnerable neighborhoods of east Kansas City.

"I didn't expect such a big event," said Sgt. First Class Mitch Mason of the Missouri Army National Guard. But nor did he expect "so many resources from all around the Kansas City area" to shape such a life-saving mission when the guard was deployed to Kansas City in late January.

Many members of the different partners came to the celebration luncheon — Morning Star's staff, LINC, Kansas City Fire Department Chief Donna Lake and paramedics, Church of Scientology volunteers, Kansas City Police Department officials, school partners and the Truman Medical Centers team that initially launched the Morning Star vaccination clinic.

"I'd never been around something like that before," Mason said. "It's a team that got built. So many selfless people."

One of the luncheon's visitors was Jim Nunnally, a community leader and retired public health administrator who helped rally the community — especially the predominantly Black neighborhoods that had suffered disproportionately from the pandemic — to get vaccinated.

He gestured back to Morning Star's big room, set up for a party, that had served as the main vaccination center.

“What happened here,” he said, “is the best thing in the history of public health.”

LINC Executive Vice President Janet Miles-Bartee addressed the crowd at what she said was “a bittersweet moment.”

The men and women of the Guard “made this an amazing experience,” she said. “They have become our family and our friends.”

Many people were recognized for their contributions, including the Morning Star staff that “made it happen . . . whatever we asked them for,” Miles-Bartee said.

And the Kansas City Fire Department, which sent paramedics to the clinic to help increase its capacity as the number of daily vaccinations peaked at 400 to 500 a day in March.

There were the Church of Scientology volunteers, of whom Miles-Bartee said, “I’ve never seen a group of people work so hard.”

Kansas City Police Major Kari Thompson was there as part of the police support that came from the East Patrol Division station across the street. Center School District Superintendent Yolanda Cargile was there. Cargile and Kansas City Public Schools Superintendent Mark Bedell got their vaccines at Morning Star, being videoed as they did so to help encourage more people to get their shots.

The Truman Medical Centers’ vaccination team returned to celebrate. TMC had worked with Morning Star to set up the church’s community center as a vaccination site. And it gave Morning Star Pastor Rev. John Modest Miles the idea to team up with LINC — Janet Miles-Bartee is his daughter — and get Gov. Mike Parson to send in the National Guard to carry the mission on.

While the members of the National Guard came from all over Missouri, many of them will not be too far away. Like family, they may be dropping in from time to time — including Mason.

Mason figures he and his wife and two boys will be back on a Sunday morning soon, coming down from their home about an hour away in Savannah, Mo.

“I want to come see Pastor preach,” he said.



Members of Truman Medical Centers’ team pose with LINC Executive Vice President Janet Miles-Bartee with posters tallying some of the services distributed at Morning Star Missionary Baptist Church.

# Missouri National Guard's unforgettable Covid-19 vaccination mission: 'Task Force Freedom'

May 27, 2021

By Joe Robertson/LINC Writer



*Sgt. Patrick Nwanguzo and Specialist Crystal Baddoo of the Missouri Army National Guard process Covid-19 vaccination information at the Morning Star/LINC vaccination clinic in Kansas City.*

Seems that memorable military operations just have to have a code name.

Somewhere along the way, the Missouri National Guardsmen who gathered from all across the state to battle Covid-19 at 27th and Prospect in East Kansas City came up with their own.

The name captured the joy they saw — sometimes with tears — when they vaccinated a grandparent who hadn't seen grandchildren for more than a year, or a Vietnam vet who had passed Covid's winter with no visitors, or a couple yearning to visit friends again.

And it captured their pride: *Task Force Freedom*.

From the moment they had been thrown together, the camo-clad women and men realized the responsibility weighing on them, said Capt. Tony Rich.

"We were stewards of the vaccine," he said. They came as if to the rescue of people whose "lives were on hold," reaching out purposefully to the predominantly Black neighborhoods with the greatest health risks, and to people who were most vulnerable to the threat of Covid.

The pandemic is a generational experience of national distress, Rich said — one that future generations will hear of and wonder about and ask of their elders: "What did you do?"

These members of the Missouri Air and Army National Guard left their jobs — a financial advisor from St. Louis, a welder from Savannah, Mo., an EMT from Columbia, an electrician from Lee's Summit, a housing property manager from Kansas City, others from

Springfield, Branson, Lebanon.

Some spent weeks at a time away from family — a father of two sons, a mother of three, husbands missing wives, wives missing husbands.

They came because Task Force Freedom was freeing lives.

*Saving lives.*

### **Zero Dark Thirty**

Just what it was they'd gotten themselves into wasn't clear that first day. Mid January. Two medics and six support personnel, sitting around a lunch table at a Northland Kansas City Denny's.

This was not like the obviously dramatic orders some had gotten in the past: helicoptering over Hurricane Harvey flood waters to pluck marooned families from their rooftops, or supporting police forces and paramedics in the Ferguson, Mo., civil unrest, or that of former full-time Guardsman Medic Jeromy Eslinger of Knob Noster, who served an extra tour in Iraq as a medical support on military convoys in a harrowing world of roadside bombs.

Here, said Medic Josh King, who would join the work in April, "we were fighting something invisible."

Orders from Gov. Mike Parson deployed that first crew to Kansas City with a working plan to dispense vaccines with the Kansas City Health Department.

The mission was scattered at first, said Medic Mitch Mason, a welder from Savannah, Mo., particularly that first day when the original eight sat a bit out of sorts at that lunch "that Eslinger and I paid for."

They worked a series of community sites as initial vaccine supplies came on board, until a night-time phone call set their course to 27th and Prospect.

"It was zero-dark-thirty," Rich said. He was being assigned to head urban-focused operations in both Kansas City and St. Louis, and word from the governor's office was that he needed to "call Pastor Miles."

The Rev. John Modest Miles of Morning Star Missionary Baptist Church had just worked with the city to host a temporary vaccination clinic with Truman Medical Centers at the church's Youth and Family Life Center. Now he saw an opportunity to work with the Local Investment Commission (LINC), a non-profit citizen-driven collaborative, to support a permanent operation.

Right from that first call with Pastor Miles, Rich said, he knew the work ahead would be special — an experience that, in the end, he would call his most rewarding in 14 years with the Guard.

The team launched the operation at Morning Star in early February when vaccinations were still available only to people over 65 and people with special health risks. Within days, outreach by the church, LINC and the Guard was bringing in larger crowds, and soon, as more people were allowed to get vaccinated, the numbers went up to 300 to 500 a day.

The Guard dispatched more personnel to the site, peaking at 27, and the Kansas City Fire Department sent paramedics to further build the capacity. The Church of Scientology sent volunteers to tend to customers in the post-vaccination waiting rooms.

Mason remembers a day in March when more than 700 residents came through for vaccines. He was required to file several daily reports and was late that day. A text from command asked about the delay.

"I took a picture with my phone," Mason said, sending it back by text so they could see the crowd, with a simple message: "Busy."

Mason, a welder who's also in business school, missed his wife and two boys, 8 and 4, back in Savannah, some 70 miles away. He could grab an occasional trip home during the week but spent weeknights in a hotel, usually going home only on weekends.

But this was an important mission "right in my backyard," he said.

"What makes me proud of the work we do is just seeing the relief on people's faces when they get their vaccine," he said, "and



*Sgt. Medic Jeromy Eslinger of the Missouri Army National Guard gives a Covid-19 vaccination to Opal Saunders of Kansas City at the Morning Star/LINC vaccination clinic.*

being able to talk to people and hearing their stories and hear them say, 'I get to go see my grandma' . . . because I got the vaccine."

Many times they helped nervous customers find confidence to get vaccinated, and to take that reassurance home to others. By late May, the Morning Star operation had delivered more than 22,000 vaccinations.

## On the Road Again

"Hey Crystal!"

A staffer at the Guinotte Manor housing community recognized Specialist Crystal Baddoo from her days when she was a property manager with the Kansas City Housing Authority and gave her a hearty greeting — though now she was dressed in camouflage.

"When did you join the Army?"

Baddoo, a property manager, is one of the National Guard vaccination team members who live in Kansas City, so her work out of Morning Star often meant serving family, friends and neighbors.

When the Guard began expanding its work, sending vaccination teams from Morning Star to housing communities, businesses and community centers, she began setting up trips to her familiar Kansas City Housing Authority sites to connect with more of the hard-to-reach households.

"This has been a great experience for me, and one of the reasons is because this is my home," Baddoo said. "Being able to vaccinate people in my community has been one of the greatest accomplishments I have been a part of . . . doing good, one person at a time."

It's been a bit of fun, she said, when some friends "see me in uniform for the first time."

This was the Guard's Morning Star Outbound team's mission, to go to homebound residents and to seek out deeper pockets of the city, bringing convenience to people like maintenance worker Cyjuan Anderson who got a Johnson and Johnson vaccination at Guinotte May 24.

"I work two jobs — a day-night custodian," he said. "I hadn't had the chance."

Anderson had strung up the specially made banner that morning outside the housing community's main office building to promote the visiting vaccine operation. It was time, he decided, to get past his reluctance.

"It's here. They're giving it out," he said "It will give me a clear conscience."

One of the homebound calls came from a woman whose frail mother was in her late 80s. Technical Sgt. Medic Carrie Neville made the house call with the KC Fire Department and soon found out from the daughter that the woman before them had survived the Holocaust when as a young girl her family was forced out of Poland into a German concentration camp.

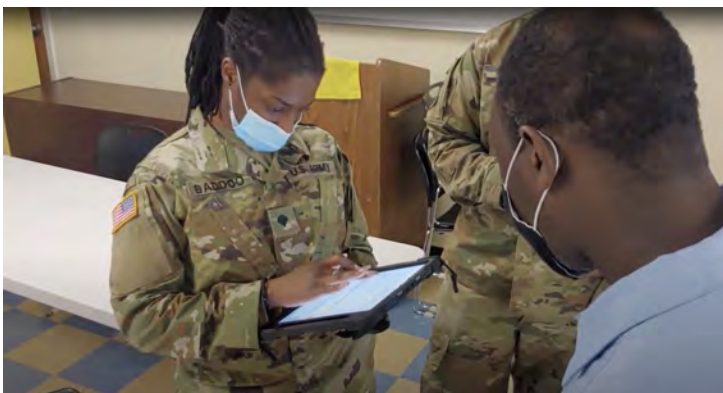
Neville is an emergency medical technician from Columbia, wife and mother of three children between 15 and 20 years old. It's a lot to leave behind, "but I haven't regretted it," she said. She'll always remember the Holocaust survivor, who had survived the worst of the world's terror, and now Covid too.

## Final salute

It was 2006 when Eslinger answered the call to go to Iraq, imagining he'd engage in tense but fulfilling work, only to spend the year in safe offices while he knew, because of a medic shortage, that some convoys were rolling across dangerous terrain without proper medical support.



Missouri Army National Guard Medic Mitch Mason vaccinates a patron at the Morning Star/LINC clinic.



Missouri Army National Guard Specialist Crystal Baddoo prepares a client for vaccination in an Outbound team's visit to Guinotte Manor housing community in Kansas City.

So he volunteered for a second year, joining an infantry unit, taking the medic's seat on military vehicles, thinking that service under the threat of bombs and sniper fire would define his Guard career.

But it was here, home in Missouri, that it happened most of all.

"Pretty nice feeling," he said, "doing more for the community," a feeling he said hit him "right off the bat." Preserving good health, even lives, "here, for civilians, alongside civilians."

On May 13, Col. Mike Belardo, the Guard's statewide task force commander, came to visit the Kansas City clinic, to recognize the work of the team, hand out coin medals and reflect on their mission.

"I'm a big believer in leadership through servanthood," he said. "You made it work, (connecting with) homebound, refugees, non-English speakers — all the populations we were trying to reach."

After the ceremony, he spoke of the collaboration with the church, with LINC, with the neighborhood and a rippling wave of good.

"This is so much more than vaccinations," he said. "This is community building. This small drop of water that is Morning Star will go through this community for years."

May 13 was also Capt. Rich's last day of service. He was originally scheduled to end his duty in March but extended his time by two months to help carry on the clinic's mission.

He said goodbye to this team of "so many different personalities." In the five months (now going on six) since they've been "on orders," they shared news of family weddings, promotions, pet adoptions, birthdays and "all sorts of life events," Rich said.

And then there are the relationships with their community partners, "forged and built here . . . that I hope will continue for a lifetime."

In ceremony, they sent Rich off with a final salute, but they were just as well saluting each other and themselves and the thousands who came through the clinic baring their arms to join this unifying, unforgettable mission.



*Missouri Air National Guard Technical Sgt. Medic Carrie Neville vaccinates a visitor at the Morning Star/LINC clinic.*



*Members of the Missouri Air and Army National Guard salute Capt. Tony Rich at the Morning Star/LINC vaccination clinic on his last day of service with the Guard, May 13. Rich had extended his service by two months to remain on the vaccination mission.*



# 'This means everything to me'; LINC Morning Star clinic connects families to utility bill assistance

June 10, 2021

By Joe Robertson/LINC Writer



That first day was only meant to open a crack in the door to the vast numbers of debt-burdened Kansas City renters they knew were crowding on the other side.

But word gets out.

Just like that, the “soft launch” of LINC’s clinic for people applying for assistance with past-due utility bills was swarmed.

Staff at the May 19 clinic, which was jointly organized by utility companies, city services and LINC at Morning Star Missionary Baptist Church’s Youth and Family Life Center, scrambled to help many dozens of people who came carrying bills with past-due balances of hundreds, even thousands of dollars.

“With everything being so stressful,” said On’Rea Knox-Lewis, “having past bills, not knowing how you’re going to get to your next job, or what job you’re going to have, this gives me some type of relief.”

She was one of more than 80 Kansas Citians who came to the clinic at 27th and Prospect seeking help with a complicated online process to apply for a piece of the \$25 billion in federal funds — including \$30 million for the KC area — dedicated to help people battered by the pandemic’s economic blows.

In all, the clinic processed applications for more than \$118,000 worth of past-due utility bills — some \$1,500 per person — giving hope to people like Knox-Lewis, who said she can breathe a little and “just take a moment to get myself back together.”

In many cases, filing the applications allowed applicants to get their utilities turned back on, or staved off cut-off notices while the applications are pending.

Staff with LINC and sister organization LINCWorks have been training with the Mid-America Assistance Coalition and utilities

Evergry, Spire and KC Water to help process a backlog of more than 2,000 applications for assistance in Kansas City under the federal Emergency Rental Assistance Program (ERAP).

“The actual application process was hard for those who didn’t have electronic resources,” said Celeste Tucker, KC Water manager of credit and collections, who helped organize the clinic. “So we wanted to do our part for the community and be on site to assist with . . . or even complete those applications.”

LINC and the utility companies are preparing to hold more clinics at Morning Star, arranging an appointment schedule to bring more people in to make assistance applications throughout the summer.

Meanwhile, as of June 9 the Morning Star clinic has processed more than \$200,000 in past due bills, helping more than 130 households.

Paula Canty, who came to the first clinic with her 17-month-old daughter, was one of those households.

“For a lot of people who’ve been affected especially by Covid,” she said, “and having to take a reduction in hours, especially with child care being so expensive, this really, really helps.”

“I’m so appreciative of it,” she said.

At the clinic, several workers with laptop computers helped input customer information. The Kansas City Department of Housing and Community Development was on hand to help with applications for rental assistance.

The process is difficult. Applicants must gather several documents including identification, proof of income, lease agreements and utility bills and be able to upload them. The application is a dozen screen pages long with over 35 questions. The relief funds apply only to past-due bills accrued during the pandemic, or since April 2020.

LINC and LINCWorks’ processors assist many customers in completing the application, and then the staff work with utility companies and their databases to verify accounts, debts and eligibility.

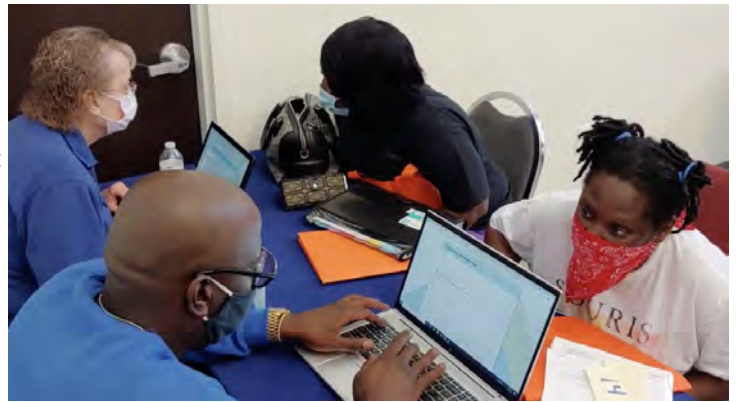
One of the customers from the May 19 clinic, while waiting for the process to be completed, had his electricity cut off several days later. But LINC staff were able to expedite the application, and his power was restored within an hour.

Moratoriums against utility shutoffs during the pandemic were mostly lifted in May. Eviction moratoriums are also lifting, and Kansas City’s social services providers are anticipating another wave of distressed calls for help.

The Morning Star clinic is powering up to speed many Kansas Citians toward relief.

“This means everything to me,” said clinic customer Louis Eason. “I’m getting big help. They are patient with us, and I feel good about the outcome.

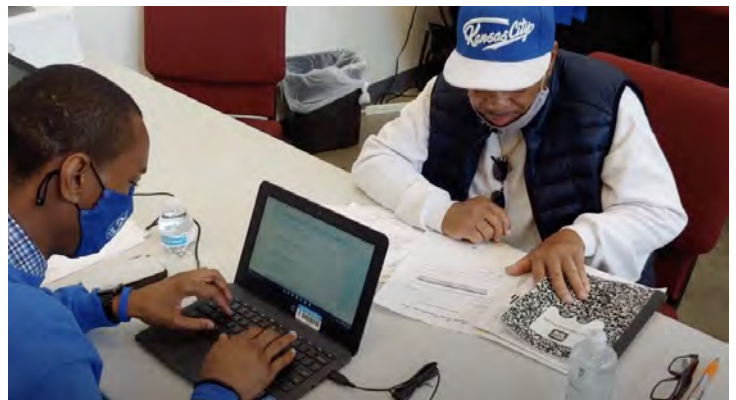
“I’m getting my bills paid.”



*On’Rea Knox-Lewis, in the red bandana, gets help from LINC staff in making her ERAP application. “I can take just a moment to get myself back together,” she said.*



*An overflow crowd came for help making ERAP applications at the soft launch of the Morning Star utility assistance clinic with LINC and Kansas City utility companies May 19.*



*Louis Eason, right, gets help from LINC processing his ERAP application. “This means everything to me,” he said.*

# LINC remembers 15-year-old Terrell Bell, lost in gun violence

June 11, 2021

By Joe Robertson/LINC Writer



LINC Caring Communities Site Coordinator Bryan Geddes, left, leads a “Family Feud” game with Terrell Bell, wearing red shorts, at Smith-Hale Middle School in April 2019. Bell, 15, was slain by a gunshot June 8, 2021, in Sycamore Park in Ruskin Heights.

One more time, Terrell Bell came looking for LINC’s Bryan Geddes, “chipper as usual,” Geddes said.

*How’s your summer treating you? What are your plans? Come see me!*

That was Monday, June 7 — just a short conversation outside Geddes’s Ruskin High School office. They were going to talk again soon, same as they did back at Smith-Hale Middle School, where Geddes also serves as Caring Communities Coordinator, and where Terrell was one of the students who frequently took Geddes up on his offer to share lunch in his office. “Just to talk about life,” Geddes said.

But by mid-afternoon Tuesday, June 8, police responding to a report of a shooting found Terrell dying from a gunshot wound in nearby Sycamore Park. He was 15.

Now Kansas City’s struggle with gun violence bears down on the Hickman Mills School District community and on the many of the LINC staff and students Terrell knew.

Those casual lunches and the standing invitation to LINC’s open-door offices often became mentoring sessions — meaningful time together that now feels like it has slipped away.

“It’s disheartening, all this potential,” Geddes said. “He touched so many people. We all were rooting for him. You speak so much encouragement, breathe in the positive, so many great things into him, and his life was cut short.”

Terrell was tall and strong, a football player at Ruskin High School. Now a sophomore, he had already graduated from LINC's program, which goes through the ninth grade. But he frequently came by to visit the LINC staff he'd known since elementary school.

"He always loved his LINC people," said Jene Counts, the LINC Caring Communities Coordinator who was in charge of Terrell's LINC program at the now-closed Symington Elementary School.

"He had a lot of support from his teachers and his LINC staff."

Terrell was "always energetic," Counts said. He was an extrovert. "He loved to crack jokes."

The police investigation is ongoing, but Terrell's family is grieving over what his mother said in interviews appears to have been a fight that turned fatal. Police reported Thursday, June 10, that a juvenile had been arrested and charged in connection with Terrell's death.

"It's just sad," Counts said, "that it came down to gun violence. Because of a decision someone made in a situation, two families are suffering."

Terrell had two younger siblings on his mother's side, and four younger siblings on his father's side. He played basketball for LINC's team at Symington, and was a drummer on LINC's raucous drum line at Smith-Hale.

"We were always a listening ear," Geddes said. "An encouraging voice."

"He was a great kid."

# This has to change in Kansas City: ‘There’s pride in retaliation’ for teen shootings

By Toriano Porter

June 14, 2021 05:00 AM

Terrell Bell wasn’t the first teen gunned down in south Kansas City. Hopefully, he’ll be the last. Threats of retaliation for the 15-year-old’s death were real.

After Bell was shot to death last week, moments after exiting a school bus, another [teen was arrested](#) in connection with the fatal shooting. And residents of a south Kansas City community were left to wonder if the [murder of Bell, a Hickman Mills School District student](#), was a harbinger of things to come. Violence traditionally rises in the summer.

Authorities have not released a motive for the shooting. Police in Kansas City must remain vigilant. Payback was a strong possibility, community leaders said.

“There is pride in retaliation,” said Hickman Mills [school board member Cecil Wattree](#), a licensed master social worker. “But it shouldn’t be.”

Surveillance video showed three suspects chasing after Terrell on a street near Sycamore Park, his mother, Janae Drake, [told reporters Friday](#). The pursuit ended with Terrell mortally wounded.

No one can imagine how this mother felt having witnessed the last moments of her child’s life on video.

“I’m hurt,” Drake said. “I lost my only son.”

The 15-year-old suspected of killing Terrell was charged in juvenile court with second-degree murder, a class A felony. He was in custody last week at the Jackson County Juvenile Detention Center, according to a spokesperson for the Jackson County Circuit Court. The adult certification process is underway. The juvenile was arrested and taken into custody Thursday.

## Talk of revenge began immediately after shooting

Life is forever changed for the teen suspect if it is proven he is responsible for killing Terrell. What can be done to prevent further violence?

After the shooting, a Kansas City Police Department spokeswoman said the South Patrol division and gang analysts would focus on preventing retaliation. But talk of revenge began immediately after Tuesday’s shooting, community leaders say. They want to interrupt those plans by speaking with the teens’ associates.

Marva Moses operates [Hope Hangout](#), a Jackson County COMBAT tax-funded community program for young people in south KC. She first met Terrell when he was 10.

Over the years, the relationship between the two grew. Terrell was a frequent visitor, Moses said. He was respectful and protective of his family, she said. Terrell suited up to play football for the first time as an eighth grade student last fall.

“We were on to big things,” Moses said.

Like the countless other teens Moses has mentored, she noticed a shift in Terrell’s demeanor when he turned 14. Moses wasn’t too concerned. Most boys that age try to assert themselves in the Ruskin Heights neighborhood where Bell took his last breath, she said.

The young man was gunned down moments after he stepped off a school bus near Sycamore Park. Moses had just left the [Hilltop Residential Center](#) for troubled youth when she learned of the tragedy.

“We’ve lost another one,” a resource officer for the Hickman Mills School District told Moses.

Additional funding could help expand the program, Moses said. Some of Kansas City Mayor Quinton Lucas’ initiatives for youth are an option as well. But donations to Hope Hangout are needed.

Moses was executive producer for a short film featuring [two students navigating life as teens](#) in south Kansas City. After a game of pickup basketball at a local park, the pair leave in opposite directions. One young man goes about his business enjoying the day. The other teen is shown buying a gun at Sycamore Park.

As the video progresses, the first kid is seen at a local water park, presumably doing what teens do in the summer: having fun. He ends the day with a quick visit to a convenience store for a sports beverage. Meanwhile, the other teen used the gun he illegally purchased to rob the same store.

The four-minute clip was based on real-life experiences of children growing up in the area. It was dedicated to Tyson White, a former Hickman Mills student-athlete who died after he was shot in the back during a botched robbery attempt in 2018. White, one of [three Hickman Mills students killed](#) that year, was 18 at the time of his death.

### **Hickman Mills students need conflict resolution**

The neighborhood where Terrell died is predominately Black. Resources are scarce. Investment is limited, as are opportunities to escape poverty. Residents aren't a monolith. Most make it to high school graduation and beyond. It's hard to remain hopeful, though. A child was murdered in broad daylight.

"For every kid struggling here, there is a kid moving through here smoothly," Moses said. "It's the same community but there are different experiences."

Disinvestment in south Kansas City has presented numerous community challenges. Hickman Mills is the only public school district in the area. A high mobility rate has dogged the unaccredited district for years. Pockets of poverty exist and there are very few sustainable jobs to help families thrive.

That is a deadly brew. Police, school officials and the community have to continue to work together to dilute volatile situations before more children end up dead. Wattree characterized a community suffering from generational trauma. Conflict resolution and coping skills among teens are rarely displayed. The cognitive ability to discern between right and wrong takes years to develop.

Most young people in the district do not walk away from a confrontation, Wattree said.

"When you face danger on a daily basis, there are three options: fight, flight or freeze," he said. "Our kids don't freeze or run. They fight."

A multi-pronged solution to reduce violence is the key, said [Steve Williams, pastor at Saint Luke's United Methodist Church](#), and president of the [Hickman Mills Community Alliance](#), an anti-violence coalition. The alliance works with KCPD's South Patrol and other groups to offer solutions. Volunteers with a willingness to serve are needed to teach life skills classes, Williams said.

Mentoring programs such as Becoming Men, introduced by Lucas and in which Terrell Bell was a participant, are a good starting point. After Terrell's untimely passing, is the anti-violence work worth the effort?

"We cannot allow this amount of violence to numb us from finding solutions," Williams said. "If we accept violence as normal, then it becomes normal and we don't want that."

Amen. Terrell Bell and his family are owed at least that.



*The last photo of Janae Drake, right, with her son Terrell Bell was taken on June 6, 2021, at Worlds of Fun. Bell was fatally shot two days later. SUBMITTED PHOTO*

# The way out of violence: Give youthful courage and grace the reins

By Joe Robertson



Photo from *The Kansas City Star* by John Sleezer

*The Education Policy Fellowship Program (EPFP™) [is a nationally recognized fellowship program](#) that since 1964 has engaged a diverse and collaborative community of strategic leaders to promote equitable education policy. As part of the program, EPFP fellows were asked to write a policy paper. Joe Robertson is a member of the EPFP Class of 2021 and a LINC staff member.*

I spent the last two years in a 34-year journalism career wedged in the deepest pain of Kansas City's violence.

My primary task was [telling the stories of homicide victims](#) for *The Kansas City Star*. I sat with parents at kitchen tables looking through pictures. I stood on porches with friends, listening, building each life's unique narrative. I attended funerals. I visited graves. It was important, life-affirming work.

And, each time, I stood helpless with the families at the terminus of violence's relentless cycle.

A career change has since led me back to the work of schools and community building which I witnessed for a large part of my journalism career as an education reporter. Now that I'm part of the [Local Investment Commission's](#) team in Kansas City, I'm working alongside the passionate people at LINC and their school and neighborhood partners — standing not at the end, but in the vibrant heart of life's cycles where there is a chance to reset the course of violence.

I believe we all know who truly has to make this happen — and it's not us.

As a place-holder name, I'm calling for a new generation of "peace ambassadors."

But I expect that the young people who are going to lead us — tweens, teenagers and 20-somethings — will give this campaign their own name. Their own power.

We have our role. We need to engage young people in the work of peace. We need to stoke their confidence and layer skills on top of their innate spirit for justice that they can deploy when they are outside of the authority figures in schools and churches — in their own circles, where real influence plays.

There are ways we can support the work of ambitious people like Marva Moses, who is changing the lives of teens at the [Hope Hangout](#), emboldening a youthful array of violence “interrupters” in Hickman Mills.

We can apply the wisdom gained in research by people like Tufts University Medical School professor Robert Sege and Bezos Family Foundation science officer Ellen Galinsky, who tell us how children darkened by trauma can rise with hope and courage when *they* are the change-makers, when *they* are given the open door to engage their community.

They take action. And action heals.

“When you see the results of what you do,” Sege said, “the sense of engagement is powerful.”

“We know it can work,” says Dr. Lateshia Woodley, executive director of student support for the Kansas City Public Schools. As a principal in Georgia, her school trained teams of student community health workers to be positive influencers.

At KCPS, the district is building capacity with its staff and with students for restorative justice practices. She agrees that with sustained focus and resources we absolutely can prepare young people to take this mission community wide.

Their message can take down violence the way the youth-powered anti-smoking campaign took down tobacco.

Here’s the reality: The Kansas City community is staring down a long, hard road.

Dr. Rex Archer, the longtime director of the Kansas City Health Department, once sketched an x and a y axis for me while describing our abiding public health problem of violence.

The horizontal line, marking the justice system, stretched from punishment and revenge on the left to restorative justice on the right. The vertical line, marking how individuals react to violence, stretched from non-violent conflict resolution at the top to violence, fear and intimidation at the bottom.

Too many young people, Archer said, especially young men, grow up in the dangerous quadrant of anger and revenge. Violence, he said, clusters and spreads like a disease.

The “other devil,” says Moses in Hickman Mills, is social media. People fire up anger and jealousy. Taunting posts “draw you out,” she said, and your “followers” goad retaliation.

The deadliest ingredient, of course, is the shocking availability of guns.

We are overrun, and that is why, University of Missouri-Kansas City Criminal Justice Professor Ken Novak [suggested in The Kansas City Star](#), we should be “thinking of the next generation.”

“Not to completely give up at this point,” he said, “but the best time to plant a tree is 10 years ago. The second-best time is today.”

The first step, Moses says, is to help every child see the “gem” that they are. “If I don’t feel personhood in myself,” she said, “I don’t see personhood in others.”

At the outset, we can turn to the trusted youth in our communities and bring them in alongside the work of adults in our various missions for peace. We can raise up those leaders to give voice to the work that other young people will hear.



But this campaign has to pass from us into their hands. Young people don't realize their power when adults shelter them and tell them what to do, Sege and Galinsky say.

"Let them come up with a plan," Galinsky said. Let them build and lead a citywide campaign. Believe that every child has an innate and unlimited capacity of human spirit.

Our children grow up inside that first circle of grownups in their lives, Moses said. And that circle is often fractured — love shadowed by fear, peace laced with anger. And guns. That insidious netherworld of guns within their reach.

But in his or her heart, Moses said, every young person "really wants a safe option."

"We seldom offer it to them."

Young people need to believe in safe choices. We need them to be able to stand courageously and gracefully in that space where life's frictions electrify hot youthful emotion. We need them when it really matters — when we're not there.

In our schools, our community groups, our leadership councils and our homes, we need to promote children, teens and young adults to this daring work. Give them choice. Give them power. Give them love.



# 2021 Summer Programs

District	Location	Before & After Summer School
Center	Boone Elem.	June 7–25
Grandview	Conn-West Elem.	June 14–25
Hickman Mills	Ervin Elem.	June 7–July 2
	Millennium @ Santa Fe Elem.	
	Smith-Hale Middle.	
Kansas City	Banneker Elem.	June 21–July 23
	Foreign Language Academy	
	Hale Cook Elem.	
	James Elem.	
	King Elem.	
	Melcher Elem.	
	Phillips Elem.	
Wheatley Elem.		
North Kansas City	Topping Elem. @ Maplewood	June 1–July 16
Charter	Tolbert Academy	June 6–July 16

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