

Civic Coalition to Save Lives

www.savephillylives.org

October 2024

Q&A with Rev. David W. Brown

How has your previous experience prepared you for this role?

It feels like a lifetime of experiences has prepared me for this. Surviving a drive-by shooting, where I was the intended target but the gun didn't fire, changed my path. That moment gave me a second chance. It made me realize I had so much more to live for - and informs the work I do now. My experience running businesses and organizations in Philadelphia and being deeply involved in the community—along with the fact that I'm a father and new grandfather—makes this work personal and fuels my passion to make a difference.

How does your lived experience influence your leadership in the Coalition?

I understand the challenges these organizations face because I've been in the trenches. I've had to figure out how to do important work with little to no resources, and that's why I feel called to lead this effort. My personal encounters with gun violence—starting from when I was 13 and continuing throughout my life—drive my determination to make a difference. It's not just a job; it's a calling that I'm deeply connected to.

How are you approaching your new role? What is your focus?

Over the next six months, I'll focus on listening, especially to key partners, and supporting the Coalition's strategic goals. The Office of Public Safety is going to be a critical relationship for us. We've had conversations with the police commissioner, and we're in ongoing dialogue about the direction we want to take to support Mayor Parker's Prevention-Intervention-Enforcement approach to community safety.

I've been learning the overall landscape, and the more we can build bridges within those lanes and strengthen intervention work, the greater impact we can achieve together.

What do you see as the Coalition's biggest challenge moving forward?

One challenge is that gun violence is a dynamic and persistent issue, which means our role in addressing it will need to be flexible and adaptive. When we started, the Coalition was in a different place than where it is now. I don't see this as a challenge but more as a strategic necessity—we need to be able to adapt based on the needs of the community and how the city continues to evolve around this critical issue.

How would you address the need to raise more funds and sustain gun violence intervention efforts?

We can control our impact by raising more funds to support organizations doing the work on the ground. By helping them build their infrastructure, we enable them to reach more people and achieve better results. It's essential to keep these efforts going, because when we stop, the deaths from gun violence go right back up.

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What does long-term success look like?

Long-term success is not just about the numbers, though fewer fatalities and injuries are critical metrics. It's also about people feeling safer in their communities. This is a more complex, harder-to-measure goal. Although it's promising to see the numbers decline, one gun death is one death too many. The ripple effect of losing just one person in a community is tremendous. Families fall apart. It's not just a statistic—it's someone's son, someone's parent. I think when we humanize this issue, it becomes much harder to dismiss it. This isn't just about improving Philadelphia's image; it's about valuing every single life.

Read more about David's background in his announcement [press release](#).