

The 2021 Brave Behind the Bullet Initiative  
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The 2021 Brave Behind the Bullet peace and conflict resolution initiative seeks to help develop allocated psychological resources and advocacy support for Black mothers whose children were homicide victims of gun violence in Washington, DC and Baltimore City. This initiative ensured that these goals were achieved by providing Black mothers who lost a child to gun violence with complimentary advocacy support in preparation for public court hearings, free virtual therapy sessions offered by licensed clinicians, and privileged online access to community gun violence healing symposiums in the Baltimore-Washington metropolitan area. In the midst of sustaining this project other funding raising efforts did not contribute towards this initiative. However, I have received additional funding to continue this project through the Fall and Winter months from September through December. The additional funding organizations include Building Blocks DC & Washington Society for Psychological Study of Social Issues.

The idea of this project emerged from my own experience of being a native Washingtonian who witnessed a disproportionate amount of Black youth lose their lives to gun violence. While observing this reality, I also noticed that there was a gap in services as it pertains to particularly Black mothers who lost a child to gun violence not receiving therapeutic services. Also, the foundation of the *2021 Brave Behind the Bullet* initiative originated from my 2020 honors thesis titled *Understanding Black Mothers Who Lost A Child to Gun Violence*. As a lead principal research investigator of this honors thesis, I successfully formulated a descriptive research study empowering Black Mothers who lost a child to gun violence throughout Washington DC and Baltimore City. While formulating this research I received Georgetown University's Institutional Review Board documented approval and as a targeted intervention this project works to document the personal experiences of grief, resilience, and post-traumatic growth that Black Mothers in the Baltimore-Washington area who lost a child to gun violence endure. Therefore, the idea of this project emerged from being devoted towards amplifying the needs of a marginalized population that was underrepresented in services and the dialogue around gun violence.

Particularly, the issue of gun violence within Washington, DC is centered around masculinity and hyper aggression. Taking this phenomenon into consideration, Black women often become invisibilized and deemed unimportant within the conversation of gun violence in inner city communities across the nation. Therefore, the focus of the issue of gun violence ignores the lived experiences of Black women and mothers. This has resulted in a lack of tailored specific interventions and resources being established to directly address the pain and suffering that Black mothers experience due to institutional forms of racism, sexism, and patriarchy.

As a native Washingtonian I chose to select the District of Columbia as my host site given that in the late 1990s DC was the murder capital of the United States. In addition to this statistic, there are intergenerational effects that still exist that emerged from that period of time which has led to a continuation of gun violence recurring in specific communities. The opportunity to work in the host site of Washington, DC was consistently intriguing and thought provoking. The District of Columbia is a city with many resources, however the resources are not always applied in an efficient manner to meet the needs of marginalized populations in need. Furthermore, I also felt a sense of urgency and necessity with addressing the issue of gun violence considering that this issue has been an ever-present issue plaguing a multitude of Washington, DC's communities.

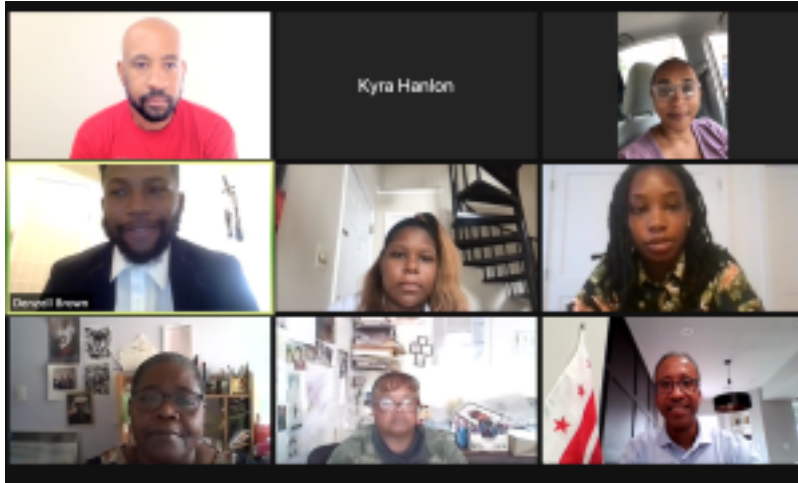
Initially at the beginning of this project I had major concerns about the possibility of engaging Black

mothers who lost a child to gun violence to participate in a virtually executed project in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic. Secondly, I also faced challenges with coordinating and arranging scheduled times for the mothers to meet with social workers and therapists considering that professionals in this field were overloaded with clients and tasks to complete given that the global pandemic heightens mental health issues among a large population of individuals. Facing this challenge encouraged me to define peace as a tailored and specific intervention devoted towards creating justice, access, and restoration to people or populations in need. Using this working definition The 2021 Brave Behind the Bullet Initiative has contributed to peace short term using multiple sectors that included individual healing outcomes and interpersonal community building. This project allowed Black mothers who lost a child to gun violence to establish a community network of mothers that are invested in healing and lifting up their voices to council members and mental health providers. Secondly, this project also challenged institutions of power to look more critically at resource distribution, laws, and community interventions geared towards serving marginalized populations. Additionally, the long term effect of this project will be continued with funding that will sustain this project through December while also building a petitioned portfolio of political members' signatures that will be used to change community restorations laws in Washington, DC. Additionally, this project has created changes through being one of the first community interventions that has connected Black mothers in the Washington, DC and Baltimore area who lost a child to gun violence to free therapy, opportunities to speak to council members, and free trauma-informed yoga. The cohort members of this project were able to meet with the District of Columbia's Ward 5 Councilmember Kenyan McDuffie, also attend a yoga session with Washington's Victory Wellness collective, and receive weekly virtual therapy sessions for up to 2 months. The anticipated changes that will result from this project in the future is currently focused on the Brave Behind the Bullet Initiative transitioning into a 501(c)3 non-profit organization that is devoted to providing Black mothers with free virtual therapy, opportunities to speak to councilmembers, and trauma informed yoga sessions for years to come. This project changed the way I think by encouraging me to examine my own privilege considering that as a Black male I do not have the same lived experiences as a Black woman, particularly a Black mother who has lost a child to gun violence. Therefore, I made it my mission and direct task to use the privilege I have in an informative way to contribute to peace and populations in need.

Lastly, although the 2021 Brave Behind the Bullet initiative was impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic this project was successfully conducted remotely allowing Black mothers who lost a child to gun violence to access resources by using emails, web-based platforms, and phone calls. Secondly, therapy sessions also had to be performed virtually and certain participants did not always have access to capable devices to compete with online psychotherapy sessions. Despite these challenges, the 2021 Brave Behind the Bullet Initiative advanced by creating an online community where Black mothers who lost their children to gun violence supportive needs were prioritized in a safe space.

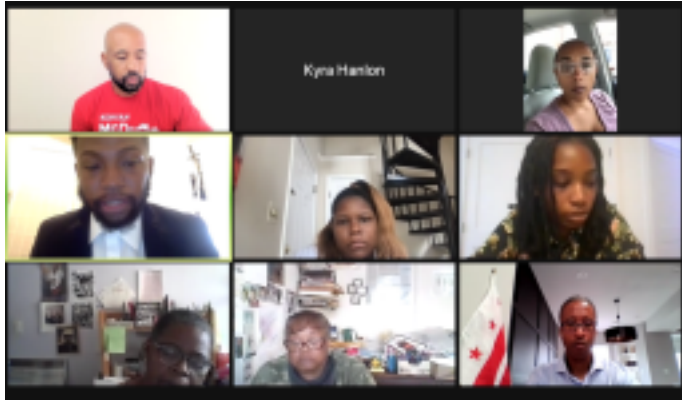
The advice I would give to future PfP grantees is to be patient, exhaust every possible resource, create alternative solutions, and remember to forgive yourself when you make mistakes.

**Personal Statement**



- My name is Denzell Brown, I am a Washington DC native and undergraduate student at Georgetown University majoring in Psychology who is devoted to the lived experiences and psychological healing of Black Women in the DC-metropolitan area. The 2021 Brave Behind the Bullet initiative was valuable given that it effectively illustrated Black mothers who lost a child to gun violence post-traumatic growth coping

qualities and also portrayed this population as sources of knowledge, hope and change.



**LINK TO VIDEO MEETING WITH COUNCIL MEMBER WITH Kenyan McDuffie below**

**Meeting Recording:**

[https://dccouncil-us.zoom.us/rec/share/Z5MIh7oVyw9QsTSBzprNHC1g5YGGzbwccWHx5Ek9mgX6h90hmu4Vb\\_-Mb5A5PbsI.YCHYNzqtD0UsOwx5](https://dccouncil-us.zoom.us/rec/share/Z5MIh7oVyw9QsTSBzprNHC1g5YGGzbwccWHx5Ek9mgX6h90hmu4Vb_-Mb5A5PbsI.YCHYNzqtD0UsOwx5)  
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