Once a month, our journalist Richard Hétu immerses us in the news of New York, where he has lived for nearly 30 years.

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"I thought he had to watch for the young people standing in the entrance hall," says the one who inherited the nickname "Tree" because of his high stature. On his return, the guy had disappeared. But the young people were still in the entrance hall.

"I told them what I had seen outside, then I went back to my apartment by taking the stairs rather than the elevator," continues Tree.

As he started the second flight of steps, he saw, on the upper landing, the guy with the hood, who was to enter the building through a back door. Pointing a handgun at him, the individual fired a shot. The bullet penetrated Tree's chest and came out from his lower back.

The violence interrupter had just been in turn the target of the scourge he is trying to contain within the BIVO organization (Brownsville In, Violence Out). Thank God, as he says, none of his vital organs had been reached.

"I am grateful, because it could have been worse," he says during an exchange along a commercial street in Brownsville, not far from BIVO HQ. "Four teenagers could have died in the entrance hall. The shooter was patient. He waited. He was determined to do what he had to do."

But Tree took a bullet for the young people.

**Defuse conflicts**

The story goes back to February. Since then, the shooter has been arrested - at the age of 22, he wanted to settle a "beef", a dispute - and Tree has been honored by the mayor of New York for his "relentless efforts" against gun violence.

Now considered a hero on the streets of Brownsville, Taronn Sloan says he never thought of changing jobs after being shot.

"I won't lie, it's one of the best jobs I've had," says this former security guard in a SoHo store.

BIVO, his employer for a year, is one of the twenty organizations funded by New York City to combat gun violence in hot districts. Inspired by the Chicago Cure Violence program, the NGO recruits community members, especially people with a history of gangs, to act as mediators capable of defusing interpersonal conflicts before they become violent.

The clientele targeted by BIVO: 15-24 year olds.

"We don't have weapons, we don't have bulletproof vests," says Darien "Mello" Scriven, deputy director of BIVO and former detainee.
But changing minds remains a constant challenge.

"It's very difficult lately because of social media, rap, and videos that show drugs, murders and all the other things that young people watch," says "Mello".

**Easy targets**

It is 1 p.m. Tree and three other BIVO violence interrupters begin the first of their two daily rounds. Until 3 p.m., they will walk to the four areas of the neighborhood where their organization operates. Each of the areas has a low-rent housing complex where thousands of people live.

At 4 p.m., they will return to BIVO HQ to write a first report. At 5 p.m., they will leave for their second round, which will end at 7 p.m. During the rest of the evening, they will have to be available on call.
<<A young person from zone A cannot go to zone B without risking his skin.>>

- Nyron Campbell, head of the violence interrupter foursome, crossing the avenue that separates the two zones
The four men exchange complicated handshakes with the young people they meet and hear from them. They do not interact with the police officers on the street corner.

"If we want to maintain our credibility, sometimes we cannot interact with them," explains Nyron. The violence interrupter presents a 22-year-old nicknamed "City".

"All I want is to leave Brownsville. I do everything to avoid problems, but we are all easy targets."

"City", 22 years old

However, gun violence has fallen in New York over the past year. In the Brooklyn area including Brownsville and part of Bedford-Stuyvesant, the number of homicides decreased by 40% from May 21, 2022 to May 21, 2023, and the number of shooting events by 26.3%.

**High-risk guys**

"We have to do something good," says Dushoun Almond, director of BIVO, alluding to data from the New York Police (NYPD).
"I can't speak for other organizations, but we have a good mastery of our guys. They are not going to shoot people. I don't mean that we have perfect guys who don't carry weapons. I'm not going to say that because we have high-risk guys carrying weapons. " Dushoun Almond has already been one of them, as recalled by the smoking gun he had tattooed in his neck at another time. Today, he boasts of having helped 18 boys and girls pursue college studies.

Such an assessment tends to confirm the rather positive conclusions of a report published in 2017 by researchers from the John Jay College of Criminal Justice, who studied two NGOs similar to BIVO in New York.

"Just theoretically, it is logical for people to adopt violent behavior when they have no natural reluctance to hurt others," says Jeffrey Butts, director of this research. "A police officer would say that it is because they are not afraid of being punished. But a social science specialist would say that people behave well when they care about other people around them, when they feel connected to the community and when they feel respected. This is the theory behind these programs. ”

The reality is sometimes harsh. One evening in May, the BIVO team joined other organizations to denounce gun violence. A few days earlier, a member of the community had been shot because of a simple "beef".

Megaphone in hand, a violence interrupter nicknamed "C-Bo" lectured the crowd gathered in front of a housing project where the shooter and his target grew up.

"Come on, bro," launched C-Bo. Every quarrel does not have to be turned into a funeral, every quarrel does not have to be Afghanistan. ”

That evening, Tree was not working. He was celebrating his 36th birthday. Thank God.
Number of homicides in 2022

- Chicago: 697
- Philadelphia: 516
- New York: 438

Homicide rate per 100,000 inhabitants

- New Orleans: 74.3
- Chicago: 25.3
- New York: 5.2

Brooklyn in 2002

- 138 homicides
- 448 events involving gunshots

Sources: Viewpoints and the Brooklyn Attorney’s Office

Source: