



Reaching and Connecting: Preliminary Results from Chicago CRED's Impact on Gun Violence Involvement

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Reaching and Connecting: Preliminary Results from Chicago CRED's Impact on Gun Violence Involvement

by the **Northwestern Neighborhood & Network Initiative (N3)**
at the Institute for Policy Research, Northwestern University

Introduction

Chicago CRED is a multifaceted approach to reducing gun violence that strives to create lasting change by working directly with individuals who are most likely to be involved in serious gun violence. Beginning with direct street outreach efforts, CRED invites its participants to engage in a comprehensive intervention that connects this hard-to-reach population to services, including dedicated life coaching, trauma counseling, education, and, ultimately, reliable jobs. CRED launched its efforts in 2016 and operates in communities on Chicago's South and West Sides.

The current study examines the 234 men who entered the CRED program in 2019 from Roseland and West Pullman. All of these participants are Black, the average participant age at intake is roughly 24 years old, and the average level of completed education was 11 years of school. Some 85% of participants reported a personal or familial history of gang/group involvement, 75% reported a criminal record, and 9% reported being a gunshot victim prior to intake.

CRED Participants

CRED participants are among the individuals at the highest risk of being a gunshot victim in their communities. On average, the rates of gunshot victimization among CRED participants *before* participation was **25 times higher** than the city average and **nearly 15 times higher** than other Roseland and West Pullman residents. CRED locates their participants by reviewing and combining outreach staff's knowledge of the local area with up-to-date data on shootings and disputes to identify those most actively engaging in violence. Outreach staff attempt to connect with these groups, mediate conflicts, and monitor ongoing peacemaking efforts.

Figure 1. Change in Fatal and Non-Fatal Victimization Rates 18 months Before and After CRED Participation as Compared to City and CRED Community Annual Rates (2016 to present)

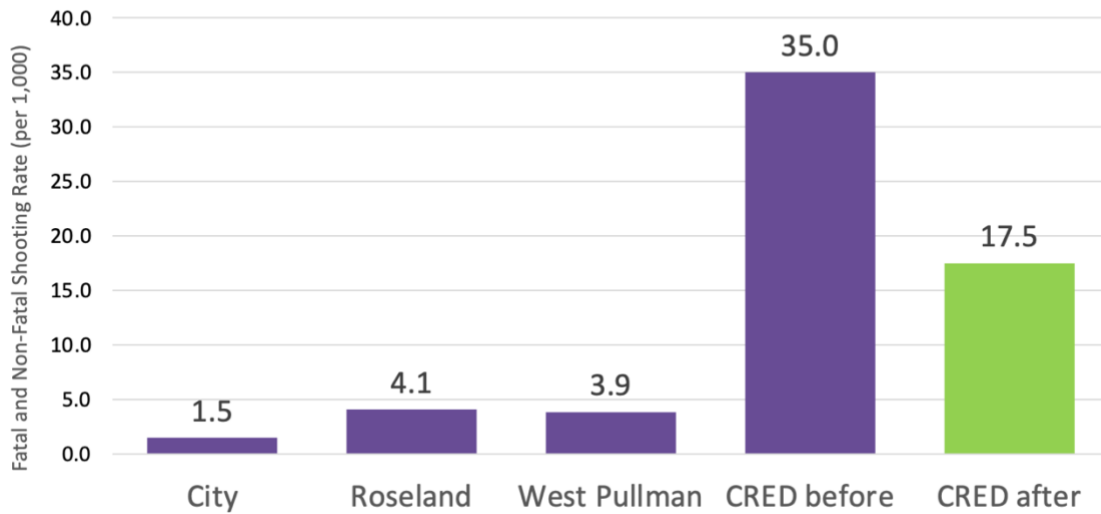


Figure 1 shows the change in victimization rates of CRED Participants in the 18 months after program participation compared to the 18 months prior to participation. Rates of victimization (per 1,000) for the city and the two CRED community areas are also shown as a point of comparison. While there are large decreases in victimization after 18 months, CRED participants continue to experience levels of risk far higher than the city and even others in their own communities.

Encouraging Early Results

Although it is too early to say anything conclusive—especially since 50% of CRED participants are still currently enrolled in programing—early program results appear encouraging.

Program uptake

Earlier research demonstrates that participants chose CRED and remained enrolled in CRED to avoid pervasive community violence and attempt to improve their own situations. Participants were receptive to CRED recruitment efforts, citing the program’s immediate, tangible benefits and fulfilling relationships with staff as key reasons for remaining engaged. To date, 27 men have completed the CRED program, reaching alumni status, where they receive continued support around employment and interpersonal needs. Sixty-three percent of the CRED participants without high school diplomas earned them through the program.

Early reductions of involvement in violence among participants

Early results find suggestive evidence of a reduction in gunshot victimization among CRED participants as well as a reduction in arrests for violent crimes.¹ Overall, the number of fatal and non-fatal gunshot injuries across all CRED participants decreased by nearly 50%, and the number of arrests for violent crimes fell 48% in the 18 months following the start of participation in the program.² It is important to note that, given the small number of participants and that most participants are still currently in programming, these changes are sensitive to even the smallest fluctuations in victimization or arrest. Quasi-experimental analyses comparing the CRED participants to more than 5,000 similar young men in Chicago who were not part of CRED or any known outreach effort do not consistently find statistically significant program effects.³

There are several important caveats around these preliminary results. **First, the scale of success must be put into the context of gun violence and risk in Chicago.** The noted 50% reduction in victimization seems impressive—and, indeed, this change is real and not some statistical artifact. But the levels of risk of CRED participants—even *after* participation—remain far above the city and CRED neighborhoods’ average rates. The rates of success, while an improvement, are unacceptably high by any moral, public health, or scientific definition.

Second, these preliminary results underscore the extreme levels of need among CRED participants, not to mention that, tragically, there is a much greater demand for services than there are available programs or interventions. For example, our quasi-experimental methods had no problem locating thousands of individuals in the city with comparable risk levels: For every one CRED participant, we found more than 20 other individuals with similar risk profiles who were not receiving similar services.

Third, given the dynamic nature of group conflicts and neighborhood disputes that drive much of the violence in Chicago, CRED participants, as well as those in the comparison groups, are influenced by the same larger factors that drive violence. These factors include persistent structural issues (such as poverty, racism, lack of access to education, healthcare, and justice) as well as external factors, including COVID-19 and the nationwide increase in gun violence in 2020.

¹ “Violent crime” in this study is defined as: homicide, manslaughter, criminal sexual assault, robbery, aggravated assault, aggravated battery, simple assault, and simple battery.

² These pre/post figures are derived by comparing the total changes in shooting victimizations and violent crime arrests in the 18-month window before and after each participant’s start date.

³ Quasi-experimental analyses followed nonparametric survival analysis using Bayesian Additive Regression Trees (BART) and included a range of balancing co-variates at the individual and neighborhood level. For a description of this modeling approach, see Sparapani, R., B. Logan, R. McCulloch, and P. Laud. 2016. [Nonparametric survival analysis using Bayesian additive regression trees \(BART\)](#). *Statistics in Medicine* 35(16): 2741–53.

Implications and Recommendations

These early results suggest that CRED (a) successfully **locates** high-risk populations, (b) successfully **connects** participants to intensive programming, and (c) potentially **reduces** the risk of involvement of gun violence of its participants in the short term. Importantly, this emerging evidence on CRED demonstrates that outreach can be an effective tool at reaching individuals who are at high levels of risk for involvement in gun violence and are, for a variety of reasons, “hard to reach.” Other outreach-focused programs such as [Communities Partnering 4 Peace \(CP4P\)](#) and [READI Chicago](#) find similar results. Initial results across these efforts show that program involvement can extend participants’ lives and provide access and connection to educational, employment, and health services.

These are life-saving efforts that are essential for neighborhood safety. Additionally, participants in programs like CRED have the benefit of receiving intensive and directed programming and support. Yet, such efforts must extend beyond participants to include neighborhood- and city-level efforts to improve the neighborhoods, schools, and employment conditions in which CRED participants and other young people like them live. Outreach can locate and connect these individuals with services, but outreach is not enough. Programs like CRED—that strive to extend the lives and opportunities of those most impacted by gun violence—must be further developed and more fully integrated into neighborhood, city, and state level efforts to improve neighborhood safety and community thriving.

The **Northwestern Neighborhood & Network Initiative (N3)** promotes new ways for faculty, experts, and students at Northwestern University’s Institute for Policy Research to engage communities, civic partners, and policymakers to address core problems facing the residents of Chicago and surrounding communities. Specific projects and types of engagement are linked by a focus on how the social relationships among networks, geographic communities, and the constellation of groups, organizations, and civic partners affect what we feel, think, and do—and how understanding, building, and leveraging this sort of network-thinking can improve neighborhoods, the city, and our region.

The findings in this report are preliminary. Data are still being collected and analyzed and these results have not yet been [peer reviewed](#). Initial findings, as such, could be revised as more evidence is gathered and analyzed.

For more information about this report, please contact Andrew Papachristos at avp@northwestern.edu. Follow N3 on Twitter [@N3Initiative](#).