

# The Chicago Project for Violence Prevention

BY DIGBY DIEHL

THE  
ROBERT WOOD  
JOHNSON  
FOUNDATION®

Chapter Six,  
excerpted from The Robert  
Wood Johnson Foundation  
Anthology:

**To Improve Health  
and Health Care  
Volume VIII**



Edited by  
Stephen L. Isaacs and  
James R. Knickman

*Published 11/2005*

## *Editors' Introduction*

Every year, *The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation Anthology* contains a chapter that looks at one of the smaller investments made by the Foundation. This close look at a community project is meant to provide a balance to the attention generally given to the Foundation's large, multisite national initiatives, and to put a human face on its programs. Although 65 percent of the Foundation's approximately \$400 million annual payout goes to these national initiatives, the Foundation makes between 240 and 427 grants annually to projects outside of these large national initiatives. Many of the grants are based on unsolicited ideas developed and advanced by creative people interested in addressing a health-related problem. In addition, the Foundation supports the *Local Initiative Funding Partners Program*, which, in collaboration with other, primarily local, foundations, makes grants to support community-based organizations and community-generated ideas.

The Chicago Project for Violence Prevention is one of the projects funded by the Local Initiative Funding Partners Program—in this case, in partnership with the Chicago-based John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation and the Chicago Community Trust. The brainchild of the physician-epidemiologist Gary Slutkin, who dedicated himself to doing something about the striking number of homicides involving Chicago children, the project strives to reduce violence in high-crime, gang-ridden neighborhoods. The project is unusual in two respects. First, it evolved from Slutkin's experience in East Africa, and represents one of those occasions when the developed world learns from the developing world. Second, violence prevention is not one of The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation's priorities. However, the project turned out to be such an interesting one that it was awarded an almost unprecedented second grant from the Local Initiative Funding Partners Program.

Digby Diehl, the author of this chapter, is a frequent contributor to *The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation Anthology* series. Diehl did his research on the chapter by spending time with the principal actors in the project and witnessing their work on the streets of Chicago.

---

Many Americans were astonished to learn in the movie *Bowling for Columbine* that more than 11,000 people are killed by guns in the United States each year, and another 16,000 people use a gun to commit suicide.<sup>1</sup> Compared with thirty-six other industrialized nations, the United States is the world leader in gun death by a wide margin. In Japan, for example, a citizen is 208 times less likely to be killed by a gun than in the United States.<sup>2</sup> In its first ever *World Report on Violence and Health*, the World Health Organization reported in 2002 that more than 1.6 million people worldwide are killed by violence every year.<sup>3</sup> Violence is one of the leading causes of death among people ages fifteen to forty-four, and it accounts for 14 percent of deaths among males and 7 percent of deaths among females. Each day around the globe, more than 1,400 people are killed in acts of homicide—almost one person every minute.<sup>4</sup>

In Illinois, the number of people killed by guns jumped 14 percent, from 1,130 in 2000 to 1,289 in 2001.<sup>5</sup> According to the Chicago Police Department, the city had 598 homicides in 2003, down 8 percent from 2002.<sup>6</sup> Unfortunately, this still made Chicago's murder rate approximately four times the national rate. The city has both the highest murder rate of the nine largest cities in the United States and the highest number of homicides. Of the 598 homicides in Chicago in 2003, 484, or 81 percent, were committed with a gun.<sup>7</sup>

---

### “Children Shooting Other Children with Guns”

These grim statistics are the backdrop for the creation of the Chicago Project for Violence Prevention, which was founded by physician Gary Slutkin in 1995. A Chicago native, Slutkin returned to his hometown after two decades of moving around the world as an epidemiologist. As chief of interventions and prevention for the World Health Organization, he had battled tuberculosis in San Francisco and Somalia, AIDS in Uganda, and other infectious diseases internationally. By 1994, Slutkin was ready to come home. “I had been traveling from country to country for years, and I was in my forties,” Slutkin recalls. “But what was I going to do? There are plenty of AIDS doctors in the United States. In fact, it didn't seem as though the U.S. had any problems at all: everybody has clean water piped into their homes; there is a lot of food; the land is good; the GNP is enormous. Then, gradually, people began to tell me about the situation of children shooting other children with guns.”

On first returning to the United States in 1994, Slutkin spent six months in Washington, D.C., talking with government leaders about the growing problem of violence in our cities. After returning to Chicago, he questioned city officials, police administrators, university professors, priests and ministers, community leaders, gang members, and prisoners. He then repeated the process in several other cities. He was disturbed by how intractable the problem of violence in our inner cities seemed to be, and by how ineffective most of the efforts to cope with it had been. “I listened to hundreds of stories about ten-year-olds shooting twelve-year-olds, and about how incredibly unsafe American cities were becoming. I had heard nothing like that overseas—except for war zones,” Slutkin says. “There were all kinds of programs and projects, but I didn't see a city that really had a strategy for reducing violent behavior—certainly not one that made any sense. I was touched by the stories I heard and puzzled by the problem. It seemed to me that this was a terrible trend that had to be

reversed. Chicago, my hometown, was the national epicenter for violence, so I decided to begin here. I got support for my own salary and then an assistant and finally some staff. We just rolled up our sleeves and began.”

Susan Scrimshaw, dean of the School of Public Health at the University of Illinois at Chicago, immediately saw the importance of Slutkin’s determined focus. His colleagues at the department of epidemiology at the university were equally willing to support his new project, even though no one—including Slutkin—really knew what it would be or how it would function. Installed in offices at the School of Public Health, Slutkin began drawing upon his experiences with epidemics in Somalia, Uganda, and sub-Saharan Africa. Others have used words such as “epidemic” and “disease” as metaphors to explain problems of violence. Slutkin sees violence as literally a public health issue, a social disease that may respond to the same preventive practices that he has applied to epidemics in many parts of the world.

“If you trace our whole global history as human beings, all you see is failure in the realm of violence prevention,” Slutkin observes. “Our whole history is one of wars. The last century was the most violent ever, and the last decade had the largest war since World War II, in which two and a half million people died in the Congo, as well as genocide in Bosnia, Kosovo, and Rwanda.”

Slutkin finds that the twenty-first century has not begun well either, with terrorist attacks and war becoming more and more common. “Thus far, our response to violence has been more violence,” he says. “That’s why the idea of approaching the problem of violence as a health problem seems so revolutionary. The general public believes: (1) there’s nothing you can do about it; (2) violent behavior is ‘natural’ to the perpetrators; and (3) the appropriate response is to put them in prison or some other form of retaliation. I believe that this public perception is wrong on all counts.”

“Kids who behave violently have learned this behavior,” Slutkin says.

They have learned it from their parents, from their peers, from the police, from their entertainment, from their communities. For them, violence is simply a cultural norm. We need to change that norm. Whatever you’re talking about—smoking behavior, drunk-driving behavior, seat belt behavior, immunizing behavior, breast-feeding behavior, condom-using behavior—these are areas where societies have successfully changed norms that affect public health. Not every culture agrees that you should not have unprotected sex, or should not have ten or twelve children in each family, or should not be free to smoke in public places. On the other hand, almost everyone agrees that we should not have violence. This is an easier behavior to change. If you provide some alternatives, some modeling, some handholding, some safe retreat and face-saving, you can change people. It’s only a behavioral norm.

---

### **A Place to Begin: Identifying Infrastructure**

In the early years of the Chicago Project for Violence Prevention, Slutkin worked with a small team to build alliances with organizations already working in the most violent neighborhoods. “Public health people talk about building on existing infrastructures, and I really believe it,” he says. “In African refugee camps, people would say, ‘Oh, there’s no infrastructure here.’ Well, there is. You just can’t see it until you start to ask questions. The mothers talk to one another, and the tribes talk to one another, and the ethnic groups talk with one another. In an inner city situation, you want to

discover the different community infrastructures. You want to learn who's working with whom and who doesn't want to work with whom. You need to develop relationships so that people are not automatically against you."

Slutkin and his small staff decided to focus initially on the Austin neighborhood, a predominately African American area that led all Chicago communities in the number of homicides in the mid-1990s, according to the Chicago Police Department. "What we looked for was a community group that had some relationship to the residents, had a recognized leadership, and had a desire to do something for the community in the area of violence prevention," Slutkin says.

In many other countries, you will find a government ministry. In U.S. cities, the infrastructure is primarily police, fire, and schools. Fire isn't really relevant here. Schools arguably could work, but primarily in the daytime. And police wasn't where we wanted it to begin. We were working on the streets, often in the evening and at night. What we began to look for was a community group to serve as a project partner. The Austin community actually had four community groups that worked together. As it turned out, we worked primarily with one group, and they worked well with the other three. The Austin community formed a violence-prevention coalition with youth groups and other social service agencies and police and probation; this became the model we followed in other communities. In each of the neighborhoods where we are involved, we work with one community group and try to form a coalition that is as all-inclusive as possible. From the community's point of view, the infrastructure is that already established community group.

Beginning in 1995 and working with the Austin Violence Prevention Consortium, the Chicago Project for Violence Prevention began to address the problem on a block-by-block basis, stabilizing one block as a peaceful area before adding another. It enhanced community policing with people who were given the task of identifying areas in the neighborhood where violence repeatedly erupted, and provided an aggressive program of public education with leaflets, posters, and classroom speakers. It also provided job opportunities and opened the Austin High School for after-school programs.

In 1997, the Chicago Project offered a summary of its activities in the first two years. First, the group had recruited a core of technical experts in violence prevention. Many of the people in the office had academic backgrounds; but the outreach workers were chosen for their abilities to relate to people in the community and to identify with problems on the streets—because they had lived with them personally. Second, they reviewed successful community programs that could serve as models and developed a strategy to adapt those models in the target communities. Slutkin believed wholeheartedly in the public health strategy: the idea that violence is a learned behavior and that epidemics of violence can be controlled by changing community behavioral norms.

In 1997, as the program began to show promise in the Austin community, the Grand Boulevard and Logan Square neighborhoods were added, and funding was found for a full-time violence prevention program manager in each neighborhood. In the office, a rigorous set of evaluation tools—using Chicago Police Department records of shootings and survey data—was developed. At the same time, a steering committee was formed. Consisting of representatives from all levels of the city of Chicago, the steering committee served as a citywide mechanism to support the specific communities with assistance from many partners in the city government to stop violence. It also provided linkages with the police and probation services.

As the Chicago Project for Violence Prevention found greater financial and political support for its efforts, it worked on developing different plans tailored to each neighborhood. It also provided modest funding and fund-raising assistance to selected youth and domestic violence prevention programs.

---

### **The Local Initiative Funding Partners Grant Application**

By 1998, the Chicago Project had attracted the support of the Department of Justice, the Chicago Community Trust, and the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation. In December of that year, Slutkin applied to the Local Initiative Funding Partners Program of The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. The grant application proposed to expand the program over a four-year period, to eventually include a total of seven Chicago communities. These seven neighborhoods were at that time responsible for almost 40 percent of all homicides citywide.<sup>8</sup> The application predicted a dramatic reduction of forty to a hundred fewer killings per year at the end of the four-year period. Developed by the Chicago Project Steering Committee and consisting of twenty city, county, state, and federal agencies, the core of this violence prevention program is an eight-point plan:

1. Strong community-wide coalitions and community work on norms.
2. A unified message to those at the highest risk that shooting is out.
3. Rapid and coordinated response to any violence, including prevention of retaliating.
4. Identification of most at-risk persons and ensuring alternatives and linkages.
5. Additional supervision of those most at risk (including those on probation) for gun use and involvement in violence.
6. Increased availability, safety, use, and supervision of after-school programs, other safe havens.
7. Increasing pressure on guns and gun movement at all steps.
8. Prosecutions for violence and communication of prosecutions and sentences.

The application to the Local Initiative Funding Partners Program provided a detailed description of the plan and how it would be implemented, monitored, and evaluated. “When the grant proposal first came in, it was an unusual application for a Local Initiative project, because it positioned shooting and street violence as a public health issue,” recalls Pauline Seitz, the director of the program. “Our reviewers spent considerable time debating whether this really fit into the context of our Local Initiatives program. It came to us with strong local support. The MacArthur Foundation and the Chicago Community Trust offered persuasive arguments that the problems of community violence were a significant public health issue. The costs within the local medical systems to deal with treatment and follow-up were substantial, not to mention the mental health consequences. It moved forward with debate from concept paper to full proposal. Finally, we made the decision that we should visit Chicago to learn more about the program.”

“There was a remarkable level of cooperation from all parts of the communities brought together by the Chicago Project for Violence Prevention,” Seitz recalls.

The steering committee brought support from the top echelons of the city together with grassroots community groups. Often in collaborations of this size and scope, you have very strong ground support for it and very strong conceptual support at the policy level, but it is hard to pull the middle in. But they were doing it.

One of the most impressive points made to us during the site visit was that if you lived in a neighborhood where a street light had been shot out, you would know whom to call and would get almost immediate attention to the problem. To me, that was a realistic example of how well the project could work.

The most powerful aspect of the Local Initiative site visit was a trip into the devastated neighborhoods that Slutkin proposed to serve. “As we visited these communities, there was no question that they were infected with drug abuse and violence,” Seitz says.

These are unsafe, unhealthy communities where the norm is violence. These are places where no one feels safe. The framing of it as a public health issue—that the violence is contagious, that it has become an epidemic—was appropriate. When you put outreach workers into the situation, they can change community attitudes. The outreach model has been effective not only in American health situations but also in international health. It has ameliorated deep community health problems. Dr. Slutkin made a strong case that this could work and that Chicago was an environment where it needed to be tried. We decided to fund the project.

---

### **Lessons from the Boston CeaseFire Program**

In addition to the development of the overall Chicago Project for Violence Prevention, the project supported by the Local Initiative Funding Partners Program included an innovation called CeaseFire. Adapted from a successful Boston antiviolence program, it focused on an intensified multiagency outreach effort, which involved the city, the police, the clergy, and other social agencies working in cooperation with one another. The Chicago Project people learned from Boston’s experience that when agencies and individuals overcame their own turf warfare, they could accomplish more. As James T. Jordan, who was director of planning for the Boston Police Department, put it, “The key is collaboration.”

Boston’s program was impressive. A Harvard study identified about 1,300 young people in sixty-one gangs. Although they made up less than 1 percent of their age group citywide, they were responsible for at least 60 percent of all youth homicides in the city. Moreover, the violence was disproportionately clustered in gang turf.<sup>9</sup> Unlike Chicago, where violence often appears to be drug-related, Boston’s violence was more personal and retributive. The initial study, directed by the senior researcher David Kennedy at the John F. Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University, defined the problem and helped determine the course of its solution. “The main message, backed up with posters and handouts was...from now on, when you do violence we are going to crack down on you on every available legal front.”<sup>10</sup>

Coordinated by the Boston Police Department, this project, dubbed Operation CeaseFire, concentrated on identifying high-risk gang members and intervening among them to alter their behavior. Aided by a coalition of fifty-four churches called the Boston Ten-Point Coalition, the department deployed street workers, most of whom were ex-offenders themselves. One minister, the Reverend Eugene Rivers, is a former gang member who knows the territory. He has been effective in attracting troubled youths to the programs at his church’s recreation center.<sup>11</sup>

In Boston, Operation CeaseFire is the end result of a planned intervention that has a number of organizations at its center. As Blaine Harden of the *Washington Post* reported, “When, for example, Boston’s Youth Violence Strike Force decides to smash a boomlet of juvenile violence, they order an ‘Operation CeaseFire,’ which begins with a neighborhood meeting.”<sup>12</sup> The Strike Force informs parents of the impending crackdown, and follows up with weekly police check-ins with the street workers, teachers, and other neighborhood leaders. These proactive measures are simultaneously accompanied by other initiatives—including heavy sentences for gun possession, intensive “no-violence” messages, and plenty of counseling coming from the clergy.

Slutkin saw how the Boston group drew together organizations to form a “community octopus” that embraced troubled and violent teenagers who, perhaps for the first time, heard the message that someone cares. “We added two components to the Boston plan,” Slutkin says. “First, we designed a massive public education effort, a way of messaging to the community. It mobilizes people and gives them information for action, instead of feeling trapped. Second, the most important component of our project that is different from Boston’s program is the strong emphasis on community involvement and community awareness. We work hard to make sure that people in the neighborhoods talk to one another. We added that to the efforts of police, clergy, and outreach workers.”

The Chicago Project for Violence Prevention has also created a communications network, whereby the highest ranks of city government hear about street-level problems through regular project steering committee meetings. Chicago Mayor Richard Daley and Francis Cardinal George, the Archbishop of Chicago, are cochairs of the Chicago Project, and Slutkin notes that their involvement is not simply ceremonial: “We have regular contact with the mayor’s office, and Cardinal George has taken the leadership of the Covenant for Peace in Action. Cardinal George personally mediated a solution to a gang warfare situation that undoubtedly saved lives.” The Covenant for Peace in Action, signed by 122 Chicago clergy, commits its signatories to active participation in violence prevention measures, including urging congregations to respond to shootings, leading night marches, offering safe havens to victims, and mediating between violent groups.<sup>13</sup>

---

### Inside the Chicago Project for Violence Prevention Offices

At the nerve center of the Chicago Project for Violence Prevention, in offices on the tenth floor of the University of Illinois School of Public Health, a violence management team under the direction of Slutkin monitors shootings throughout Chicago on a twenty-four-hour basis. It alerts community action groups, coordinates crisis intervention, and supports seventy outreach workers in the field. The team shares the latest data in regular meetings, where so-called Rapid Response strategies are put into action. When a shooting is reported in one of the Chicago Project neighborhoods, churches, schools, and community organizations are asked to gather at the scene to express their disapproval publicly. The shooter receives the message from the community that his violent behavior is unacceptable. Perhaps equally important, large crowds of people, often staying around until late at night, are bad for drug sales. “Between twenty-four and seventy-two hours after a shooting,” says Frank Perez, the project’s outreach coordinator, “we inundate that spot with our “no shooting” materials, with our outreach workers, with church members, with clergy, and we walk.” The ceremonies may involve prayer, setting up urban monuments, or holding rallies to drum up support for no violence.

Sending messages to the community is just as important as receiving messages from the community. “I have to tell people in a hundred different ways, over and over, to stop killing each other,” says Stephanie Shapiro, public education coordinator for the project. The messages on her posters are strong and to the point:

- Stop. Killing. People.
- Don’t Let 6 x 9 [the size of a prison cell] or 6 Feet Under Be Your Only Choices.
- What if you could take back the split second you pulled the trigger?
- Four to fifteen years for just shooting a gun. Is it really worth it?

“We have disseminated more than a million pieces of violence prevention public education in flyers and posters,” Shapiro notes. “Approximately 80 percent have gone into the specific neighborhoods we have targeted and 20 percent have gone elsewhere in Chicago. Not only does this support our fundamental message, but just about every piece of material from us has our toll-free 800 number, where people can call us.

“That 800 number can put young people in touch with an outreach worker in their community, which is one of the most important things we deliver,” Shapiro says. “There is a very high turnover rate of grassroots organizations in our neighborhoods, but CeaseFire is there every day. We provide contacts for job training, drug rehab, and other public resources. When we did focus groups with gang members and students from an alternative high school, the concept of an outreach worker who would really help you and understand some of the problems you faced in your life was one of the biggest things we could deliver.”

Outreach coordinator Frank Perez explains that, unlike many programs, the people in his group will “bring the mountain to Mohammed”—bringing help to individuals who need it. They may offer their clients help in returning to school, finding a job, or simply earning a few dollars to buy a decent pair of shoes. Even before they gain their clients’ trust, however, CeaseFire workers are on the scene to defuse disputes before they escalate, to hide people who are targeted for one reason or another, or to talk down a would-be killer. “We’re talking to them from the public health perspective regarding the nonsense of the violence in their community,” Perez says. “Ours is a carrot-or-stick approach. If you become involved in violence, then it is law enforcement’s job to come in and physically remove you to make sure that you don’t do this again. Our job is to prevent you from shooting that gun in the first place.”

According to Perez, the most compelling outreach weapon is information, and not just the news that the violent life does not pay. CeaseFire workers paper a target neighborhood with “Stop. Killing. People.” posters, which are, according to Slutkin, “like a slap in the face.” CeaseFire posters make a statement, according to Perez. The posters show up in residential windows or on the lawn. Displaying the posters seems to imply inclusiveness—concern for the neighborhood—that belies the common urban practice of turning a blind eye. “People become—I don’t know if it’s cold, callous and insensitive, or just fearful—to the point that they act as if the violence doesn’t exist,” Perez notes. “We urge them to take a proactive approach and say, ‘No, I’m not going to have people getting killed in front of my home.’”

---

**CeaseFire on the Streets**

Following Rapid Response procedures, the presence of CeaseFire workers in the neighborhoods makes it possible to avert escalations of warfare. Police statistics reveal that violence most commonly occurs from Thursday evening to early Sunday morning.<sup>14</sup> This pattern determines when CeaseFire's seventy outreach workers are on the job. Frank Perez comments, "It's not a traditional nine-to-five. It's not even a traditional work shift or workday, and it's not even a traditional kind of job, where you're expecting clients to come to you." In fact, the outreach workers want to help people out of the life that they themselves escaped, even if they have to work from sundown until sunup—which they often do.

A popular CeaseFire tactic for building community ties is a barbecue. Usually held on Friday or Saturday nights, the barbecues get started about 9 p.m. and can last until 2 in the morning. "At first, the drug dealers started moaning and groaning about us ruining their business," Perez says. "But after we started cooking and after we started delivering, they were the first ones in line." One outreach worker, Rick Jackson, usually serves as the cook. He notes, "Our idea is not just to go out and feed the neighborhood. We have a purpose: the barbecues give us a chance to pass out business cards and to talk to people in the neighborhood—to tell people what we're about—and for us to offer alternatives and resources to those who need help."

CeaseFire also makes it known through flyers that the retribution for killing someone far outweighs the temporary satisfaction of settling a score, proving one's superiority, or regaining a corner on which to sell drugs. "In the state of Illinois, when you kill someone with a gun, you're going to get at least twenty to forty years," Perez says. "If it's a gang-related homicide, you will probably see that doubled. If you get out of prison, you will be a very, very old person when you get out. So you basically sacrifice your life as well as your victim's when you pull that trigger."

Such harsh terms, plus the fact that in Illinois prisons today inmates are sometimes confined to their six-by-nine cells for twenty-three out of twenty-four hours a day, makes fiction out of the romantic stories of prison life that circulate through young gangs. Perez notes, "We say, 'Hey, you want to do that, that's fine, but check this out. Do you want to keep dealing drugs? Do you want to keep being involved in gangs? Or would you rather get your stuff together and make more money?'"

---

**Outreach Workers Come Back to Their Communities**

Perez and the outreach workers know whereof they speak, because most of them have been on the streets, and their credibility in the communities they serve stems from actual experience. Still, they battle such high levels of distrust that some who come from different neighborhoods must take time to gain trust in a new locale before they can be effective. "Our outreach workers come from the same lifestyle as our clients," Perez says. "We specifically hire that population to work with the gangs and the troubled individuals. There's an old Indian saying: 'You cannot judge where I've tread unless you've walked in my moccasins.'"

Outreach workers earn a modest living, but they receive health coverage, vacation, and sick time. Because they are employed through the University of Illinois system, they also are eligible to receive free tuition to any state school in Illinois. Many have taken advantage of this perk to earn bachelor's

or even master's degrees. Aside from these tangible benefits, however, there is a moral and spiritual imperative. Rick Jackson, the outreach worker and cook, says, "This is my chance to give something back to the same community that I once ran through and stole from. I just wreaked havoc all through the neighborhood. Now it's my chance to strengthen it."

Jackson works with a diverse group of at-risk youngsters. Even before he joined CeaseFire, he started coaching neighborhood basketball teams when he saw that a lot of the youngsters came from single-parent homes. "They just needed a male role model, a father figure in their lives," he says. "I saw an opportunity for me to try to fill that void for a lot of them." Since he has been an outreach worker with CeaseFire, his visibility in the neighborhood has grown. Now he deals with brothers and sisters of his former clients, and the relationship contributes to his success. Even some of the young people in the neighborhood who are still dealing drugs respect him. "They have to respect me," he says. "I tell them, 'I've helped your little brother get off the corner and get into school, and I've helped your little nephew and your little cousin, and I let your other cousins play on my basketball team.'"

Recently, one of Jackson's young men garnered media attention when he entered Southern Illinois University. Shane McCoy, who once lived in a neighborhood on the other side of Chicago, was hanging out on the streets after his father and mother both turned to drugs and the family lost everything. He had dropped out of school because he was ashamed of his clothes, and when Jackson discovered the reason, he went into high gear. "I got him a job at the community center, got him back in school," he says proudly. "CeaseFire raised some money so he could go to the prom. We got a few dollars for his pocket, too. He couldn't believe it."<sup>15</sup>

Antonio Pickett, another outreach worker, maintains a similar passion for the program. Having spent two terms in the state penitentiary, when he first came out he began talking with eighth-graders about the hazards of street life. He often found himself arguing with kids about the new realities of what prison life was like today. "They'd say, 'What? Man, my uncle told me I get to go out to the yard and play ball and lift weights!' I said, 'No, not no more. That's over with. You are stuck in your cell.'"

Today Pickett tries to reach ex-offenders who may be in danger of returning to their previous lifestyles. "A lot of guys, they don't want to be out there selling drugs, and if somebody would give them a chance, give them a job, they wouldn't be out there sticking up stores or selling drugs. I believe this with all my heart."

Gangs have a reputation for committing violence for its own sake, but Pickett thinks that many shootings are the result of turf disputes. "If I'm selling drugs on this corner and another guy sells this end of the block, he's getting all my customers," he says. "Then there's going to be a conflict." Tio Hardiman, a community coordinator, adds that gang culture has changed in the last twenty-five years. Following the law enforcement crackdown in the 1990s after the abundance of drugs in the 1980s, large gangs began to disband, breaking up into factions and renegades. "Some were making money and some weren't, and that's what led to a lot of killings," he explains. "If you look at the statistics on homicides that were gang-related, a lot of the killings were based on old-timers trying to get their positions back." Perez believes that differences among ethnic groups are part of the

problem. “Latinos are more with the machismo, more gang revenge. I don’t believe that the Latinos are shooting each other that much over the drug trade. A lot of it is personal. A lot of it is easy access to a gun.”

---

### Meeting the Drug Dealers

After hearing all of the troubling descriptions of drug dealing and violence in impoverished Chicago neighborhoods, I wanted to see the streets and the drug dealers myself. Frank Perez, outreach coordinator, agreed to take me out to visit some of the neighborhoods on a Tuesday night before Thanksgiving. We were accompanied by Outreach Worker Rick Jackson.

At approximately midnight, we set out in an unmarked white Chevrolet. First, we drove down Chicago Avenue, then Augusta Avenue, through North Avenue, among many other streets. Along Chicago Avenue, which previously had been a major drug sales venue, the street was lit up as brightly as if it were daylight. High-pressure sodium lights provided illumination for the multiple video cameras with telescopic lenses that were recently installed by the city on behalf of the police department at a cost of \$22,000 each. These cameras were capturing every movement along the avenue. There was not much to capture. The temperature was below freezing and few stores were open, with the exception of liquor package shops, fast-food venues, and bars. Few people were on the streets, and those who were out appeared to be rushing to get inside someplace warm.

Frank and Rick joked about how the expensive lights and cameras had displaced the drug business into the shadows off Chicago Avenue. As we worked our way further north of the city onto Fullerton Avenue, we passed a saloon, prophetically named “The Last Chance Bar.” Frank and Rick pointed out that just two nights earlier, a double homicide had occurred on the sidewalk in front of the bar where we were stopped. Two local gangs, with the colorful names of the Spanish Cobras and the Imperial Gangsters, were warring. There had been five deaths by firearms in this area during the past month. A seventeen-year-old boy had been arrested for the “Last Chance” shootings. “His life is over,” said Frank, shaking his head in disbelief. “In the state of Illinois, if you are over the age of 18 and kill more than one person you are eligible for the death penalty. If you don’t get the death penalty, it’s automatically prison for your entire natural life. He’s not even wet behind the ears yet and he’s never going to see daylight again.”

The mood in the car was somber as we turned off the overlit avenue onto the residential side streets. The contrast in lighting was shocking—and worrisome. Other than the path of the headlights there was no illumination on these dark streets, with the exception of an occasional dim streetlight. As my eyes adjusted to the lack of light, I could see in the periphery of the headlights small groups of people, two to four, standing on roughly every third or fourth street corner. They appeared to be young men, black or Latino, and they were clearly not out to enjoy the freezing night air. I asked Frank why they didn’t seem concerned about a car with a Caucasian man in the front passenger seat who was looking at them. “There are only two reasons a white guy would be in this neighborhood at this hour: either he’s buying drugs or he’s a cop. And you don’t look like a cop. I’ll show you what they think you’re doing.”

With that comment, Frank slowed down at the next street corner and pulled over to the curb. I rolled down the window and immediately a group of three kids, between the ages of thirteen and eighteen, hurried over to the car saying, “Wha cha want? Wha cha want? Rocks? Grass?” One flashed a Ziplock bag of white powder. I said something inane: “What are you guys doing out here?” As quickly as they had rushed over to the car, they receded to the shadows. If I was not a customer, I was not of interest. A similar scene was repeated twice more on other corners.

Strangely, I did not feel much sense of danger. It was late and dark in an unknown neighborhood, and uncomfortably cold, but I did not feel threatened by violence. “Well, I would not suggest that you come here by yourself,” Frank said tactfully, “but you are probably not in any danger just driving around with us. Most of the shooting happens between gang members. They have much more to fear from each other than you do from them.”

As Frank and Rick observed to me, the young drug dealers I was seeing probably did not carry guns themselves. “If gangs are fighting over drug territories, they might give the dealers some protection,” explained Frank. “In that case, you would never see the shooter. He would be back behind a building or some bushes.” Rick, who had been quiet for most of the drive, said:

“You know it is sad. They are standing out there in that cold ass weather for hours, risking arrest or worse. Most of them are minors, school dropouts. Many of them can’t even read or write. The majority are from broken homes. They’ll be lucky to make fifty bucks on a night like this. What else are they going to do? They can’t get jobs. I want to help them just because their lives are so hopeless.”

Frank responded, “Yeah, Rick, it is sad, and there are so many issues of poverty, family, education, health, employment, and so forth that need to be addressed. But I can’t help a kid if he’s dead. We’re working on the most fundamental problem: to keep them from killing each other.”

The many causes of homicide—street gang turf wars, personal disputes, drugs, domestic issues, burglary, or child abuse—make the problem more difficult to control. However, despite the varied causes of murder, CeaseFire is making a difference in some of the worst areas in Chicago: West Garfield Park experienced a 56 percent reduction in shootings after four years of CeaseFire interventions and the West Humboldt Park community had a 30 percent reduction in shootings after two years of CeaseFire activities.<sup>16</sup> After the first year of implementation, one of the CeaseFire beats in that district went from forty-three to fourteen shootings a year, an unprecedented reduction.<sup>17</sup> Overall, the CeaseFire zones of the four districts with full CeaseFire implementation have averaged a 44 percent decrease in shootings.<sup>18</sup> Community Coordinator Tio Hardiman notes, “We’re definitely headed in the right direction. It’s just a matter of the city and state opening all the way up, saying, ‘OK, we’ve got what we need with CeaseFire. We can control violence in our communities with a unified effort that brings all the resources together.’”

Each June in Chicago, there are organized celebrations of CeaseFire Week, a time of nonstop activities in every target neighborhood, and even some neighborhoods that have yet to be added to CeaseFire’s caseload. All of CeaseFire’s participating partners—the churches and other social organizations—hold fairs, seminars, and fiestas to generate visibility. Hardiman observes, “It started out as

CeaseFire Day. Then it became CeaseFire Weekend, and then it grew to CeaseFire Week. We don't have CeaseFire Month yet, but it's growing."

---

### **The Chicago Project for Violence Prevention in the Context of Gun Violence Nationally**

Some observers have noted that the results of the Chicago Project for Violence Prevention should be viewed in the context of a remarkable reduction in American homicide rates in the 1990s. That statistical phenomenon was examined in a *Scientific American* article by Richard Rosenfeld, chairman of the department of criminology and criminal justice at the University of Missouri–St. Louis.<sup>19</sup> Rosenfeld points out that “the national homicide rate peaked at a high of 9.8 per 100,000 in 1991, and then fell to 5.5 by 2000—a 44 percent decline.” The trend lines for all crimes “began to level off by the end of the 1990s and then rose slightly from 2000 to 2001.” Data for 2003 and 2004 is inconclusive.<sup>20</sup> His article examines various possibilities that may have affected the drop in murders, including economic trends, police crackdowns, higher incarceration rates, an apparent national decline in cocaine use, more vigorous domestic violence intervention, and more permissive “concealed carry” laws.<sup>21</sup> Rosenfeld concludes that no analysis of the decline provides a comprehensive explanation for the statistics.

“I would be the first person to question how much of the decline in violence can be attributed to our intervention,” Slutkin notes. “There are many factors at work, but the declines in shootings directly followed our interventions, and are larger than in all comparison sites. The Chicago Project for Violence Prevention does not claim to be the only way to stop the killing. What we have demonstrated, however, is that we have a method that uses public health strategies to change community standards about violence. That does stop killings.”

In his understated, nonconfrontational manner, Slutkin does not mention that the Chicago Project operated in an environment that was—and is—far more violent than the nation as a whole. In 2002, the homicide rate for Chicago was 22.3 killings per 100,000 people in the entire city—four times the national rate.<sup>22</sup> In the specific neighborhoods targeted by the Chicago Project, the murder rates are even higher. Moreover, the years when violence declined most markedly in Chicago Project neighborhoods occurred after the nationwide gains had already been realized. The number of shootings dropped 25 to 72 percent in the Chicago Project for Violence Prevention neighborhoods between 1999 and 2003—a time period after the national statistics had leveled out.

---

### **CeaseFire: Sharing the Lessons Learned**

From the inception of his focus on the Chicago epidemic of violence, Slutkin envisioned that the “vaccine” would be applicable in other cities, perhaps in other countries. As he outlined the success of his CeaseFire approach in speeches to professional groups around the country, numerous representatives from city commissions, police departments, and various community groups asked him for information about how to apply the same techniques in their cities. In discussions with Pauline Seitz, director of the Local Initiative Funding Partners Program, he was encouraged to write another grant application for this purpose.

“As a general policy, we do not renew Local Initiative grants,” Seitz points out. “However, the Chicago Project had very well-organized findings that would be useful to other communities who are interested in replicating this model. We gave a second grant to support the Chicago Project’s ability to share the lessons learned from their experiences. It is certainly not a full-scale replication. It makes sure that the Chicago Project is documented and is consolidated in a form that other communities can use to take advantage of their successes. There was definite interest on the parts of other communities in adapting this model. This second investment was made in order to capture those lessons learned and to see how they might be applied elsewhere.”

As enumerated in the proposal, this new grant has five specific goals:

1. The development of CeaseFire (or CeaseFire-like) violence prevention plans with two cities.
2. The development of materials for distribution to cities and states describing the CeaseFire approach, costs, benefits, and possible cost savings.
3. Strengthening of data and evaluation capacity to better document project results.
4. Presentations at national and other meetings of the CeaseFire approach.
5. Distribution and dissemination of information on the CeaseFire approach.

“As I see it, this new grant will enable us to reach three relevant outcomes,” Slutkin says.

First, more U.S. cities will be able to work together to prevent violence in a civilized way. To begin, they have asked us to work with two additional cities. We will probably work first with Baltimore and one other city that has not yet been selected. Baltimore will do its own program with its own name, but it is using many of the same ideas and same strategies that have been successful in Chicago. Second, the Local Initiative program wants us to produce some kind of operational manual for use in other communities, a sort of CeaseFire Start-up Kit. Third, we are going to look at the feasibility of creating some kind of national network, a new set of connections among cities, to prevent violence.

Sitting back in his office chair with shirtsleeves rolled up, as usual, and tie loosened, Slutkin relaxed his often serious philosophical stance and smiled broadly.

I was just thinking that next to all of the positive strides we have made in these neighborhoods, all of the killings we have been able to prevent, and all of the remarkable statistics we’ve chalked up, one particular CeaseFire story has touched me personally. One of our outreach workers came in last week and told me that he had been out at a late-night club in the neighborhood. It was two or three in the morning, and people had been drinking. An argument turned into an exchange of insults, and one young man pulled out a gun. Now, usually, what happens in these situations is that someone else pulls out a gun and people are killed in the resulting gunfire.

Instead, our outreach worker told me, everyone in the room just looked at the gunman as if to say: “What’s wrong with you?” He looked around, embarrassed, and put the gun back in his pocket. I love that story! It shows a tangible change in community standards. It was just as if someone had lit up a cigarette in the middle of a Robert Wood Johnson Foundation Board meeting. Social disapproval at its best! When I heard that story, I knew we were really making a difference, and that this could stick.

---

Notes

1. Bowling for Columbine, a documentary film written, produced, and directed by Michael Moore (a Dog Eat Dog Films Production) and released by Alliance Atlantis and United Artists, Inc.
2. Ibid.
3. WHO. *World Report on Violence and Health*. Geneva: World Health Organization, 2002.
4. Ibid.
5. Data from CDC cited by Join Together Online. (<http://www.join-together.org/sa/news/features/print/0,1856,567733,00.html>).
6. Chicago Police Department, Research and Development Division.  
"Crime Summary—Chicago, 2003." ([http://egov.cityofchicago.org/webportal/COCWebPortal/COC\\_EDITORIAL/03YEHomicide.pdf](http://egov.cityofchicago.org/webportal/COCWebPortal/COC_EDITORIAL/03YEHomicide.pdf)).
7. Ibid.
8. Chicago Police Department. "Chicago Homicides—1997." Cited in the Chicago Project for Violence Prevention grant application materials, December 3, 1998.
9. Braga, A. A., and Kennedy, D. M. "Reducing Gang Violence in Boston." In W. L. Reed and S. H. Decker (eds.), *Responding to Gangs: Evaluation and Research*. Washington, D.C.: National Institute of Justice, July 2002, p. 272.
10. Sweet, L. "Boston's Assault on Violence." *Chicago Sun Times*, March 10, 1997.
11. Leland, J. "Savior of the Streets." *Newsweek*, June 1, 1998, pp. 20–25.
12. Harden, B. "Boston's Approach to Juvenile Crime Encircles Youth, Reduces Slayings." *Washington Post*, October 23, 1997, page A3.
13. CeaseFire Web site. ([http://www.ceasefirechicago.org/main\\_pages/clergy.html](http://www.ceasefirechicago.org/main_pages/clergy.html)).
14. "Homicide in Chicago—December 2002." Chicago Police Department Research & Development Division, January 2003. (<http://www.cityofchicago.org/CAPS>).
15. Leroux, C. "Reclaiming a Neighborhood: A Life and Death Struggle for West Garfield Park." Part One of two parts. *Chicago Tribune*, November 14, 2003.
16. The Chicago Project for Violence Prevention. "Updated Results in First CeaseFire Zones." Data source: Chicago Police Department, Research and Development Division, updated by CPVP, September 22, 2003.
17. Ibid.
18. Ibid.
19. Rosenfeld, R. "The Case of the Unsolved Crime Decline." *Scientific American*, February 2004, 82–89.
20. Ibid., pp. 84, 85.
21. Rosenfeld considers the possibility that laws permitting the carrying of concealed weapons may have reduced violent crime "by making would-be offenders aware that potential victims could be armed." But he fails to note the possible deterrent effects of the Brady Bill in 1994.
22. Heinzmann, D. "Chicago Homicide Rate Still #1." *Chicago Tribune*, January 1, 2003, page 1.