

Promising Practices

Targeted Interventions to Combat Gun Violence: Chicago's READI Program

Background & Program Inception

Gun violence has a disproportionate impact on people of color, specifically young Black men, who are over [20 times more likely](#) to be a victim of firearm homicide than young white men. Chicago's Rapid Employment and Development Initiative ([READI](#)) program was developed as a response to an extremely high level of gun violence in the city in 2016. As is the case in many cities, Chicago's shootings are concentrated in particular neighborhoods and among small groups of people within those neighborhoods. For example, [in 2016](#), five neighborhoods in Chicago contained 9 percent of the city's population but 32 percent of its homicides. Because of this concentration of violence, targeted interventions are key. The READI program targets its services to individuals most at risk for gun violence and aims to build upon existing research showing promise that transitional jobs and cognitive behavioral therapeutic interventions can be effective in terms of reducing involvement in violence.

How the Program Works

The main premise of READI is to connect individuals most highly impacted by gun violence to cognitive behavioral interventions, paid transitional jobs and wraparound support to include referrals for housing, legal services and substance abuse services, if needed. The program launched in 2017 in five communities with the highest rates of gun violence: North Lawndale, Austin, West Garfield Park, Englewood and West Englewood. Participants engage in the program for 12-18 months. [The average age of men in the program is 25 and 97 percent of program participants are Black.](#)

Individuals are referred to the program in the following ways: 1) through a machine learning algorithm based on administrative arrest and victimization records, 2) through a referral from an outreach worker, or 3) through a screening process before leaving prison or jail. READI participants each receive up to 200 hours of cognitive behavioral therapy and spend 12 hours a week in professional development in addition to skills-based workshops. Each person receives a \$25 gift card for each cognitive behavioral therapy session and personal development session attended. So far, at least \$9 million has been paid in wages and stipends to participants of the READI program.



READI Job Opportunities

In the beginning stages of the program, participants work as members of a crew, usually doing outdoor work, whereas in later stages participants have a greater variety of job opportunities, including working with locally based employers. For example, one job opportunity for participants is with the [beelove café](#), where individuals learn customer service skills, package and label products and do quality assurance.

Partners & Funding

The READI program is run by Heartland Alliance, which provides logistical support and coordinates all activities including jobs, worksites and training. Additionally, Heartland Alliance manages a network of community-based organizations and transitional job providers in the area including the Institute for Nonviolence Chicago, UCAN, Heartland Human Care Services, North Lawndale Employment Network and Centers for New Horizons.

During the first three to four years of the READI program, 95 percent of the program's funding derived from the city's philanthropic community. Currently, the program is mostly funded by private grants, with some money from federal, state and city sources.

Evaluation & Effectiveness



This program is intent on providing solid evaluations to inform this work and ascertain its effectiveness. A program evaluation was conducted by the [University of Chicago Urban Labs](#) to assess the program after 20 months. A total of 2,456 people were included in the evaluation; these individuals were randomly assigned to either the READI program or the control group, who did not have access to READI services but could access any other services available. Some highlights of the evaluation are as follows:

- » READI drastically decreased serious violence involvement among men referred by community outreach organizations. This group of men saw a 79 percent reduction in arrests and a 45 percent reduction in victimization for shootings and homicide.
- » READI saves between \$174,000 and \$858,000 per participant.
- » Using human and algorithmic referral methods in conjunction with each other worked more effectively than either method used alone.
- » The program successfully identified and engaged those most at risk for gun violence.
- » READI participants stayed engaged in treatment, programming and work opportunities.
- » In terms of the program significantly reducing serious violence involvement, the results were mixed. Further evaluations and replications need to be conducted to fully ascertain the effectiveness of the program.

If interested, additional information can be found by reviewing the [full evaluation](#) or this [short research brief](#). The University of Chicago Urban Labs plans to perform an additional study of the program's impact after 40 months. Examining performance to date, Chicago's READI program presents promising preliminary results in terms of effectiveness and represents an alternative way of combatting gun violence beyond law enforcement tactics.



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