

“Sometimes you just gotta listen. Sometimes you just have to be an open ear.”

Charles Montgomery, Donnell Robinson, & Demeatreas Whatley
Violence Interrupters
Cure Violence

Perspectives on Chicago Gun Violence
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Chicago Gun Violence Research Collaborative

The Chicago Gun Violence Research Collaborative (CGVRC) Graduate Student Fellowship brings together student fellows (graduate students from Chicago-based universities) and faculty fellows (professors and public health professionals) to address gun violence by conducting change-oriented research in partnership with Chicago communities.

To learn more about the CGVRC, please visit us at: <https://www.cgvrc.org>

Perspectives on Chicago Gun Violence

Perspectives on Chicago Gun Violence project allowed CGVRC Graduate Student Fellows to conduct stakeholder interviews, gaining a diverse perspective on local gun violence and organizational efforts to prevent it. The CGVRC was funded through support from Sinai Urban Health Institute, the Shure Charitable Trust, the Jewish Federation of Metropolitan Chicago, and United Way of Metropolitan Chicago.

Biography: This interview is with Charles Montgomery, Donnell Robinson, and Demeatreas Whatley. They are a part of the Cure Violence program. This interview was done as part of the Chicago Gun Violence Research Collaborative Graduate Student Fellowship. **This interview contains graphic language.** It has been edited for length and clarity

CGVRC Fellow: The first question is, could you tell me about who you are? Starting with you, Charles.

Charles: I'm a young African American man, I have a family of four, four kids, a fiancé, and I've been working with cure violence for about a year and a half.

CGVRC Fellow: Absolutely. How long have you lived in Chicago?

Charles: I've lived in Chicago all my life – since I was born and I have been directly at one point involved in street violence and now I'm directly involved in curving street violence.

CGVRC Fellow: Do you have any connection with a particular community here in Chicago?

Charles: Yeah, I connect real throughout the city, Grand Crossing, the Chattem and Auburn Gresham neighborhood. Pretty much throughout the whole city.

CGVRC Fellow: Okay. Donell how about yourself?

Donnell: I'm Donell, I'm a Cure Violence, violence interrupter. I've been doing the job for like 2 ½ years. I was a problem at first with the guns, the shooting, being in the streets, but I mean, everybody change they life and want something better for the next person, and for myself. So, I feel I can make a change to help the next person out from the things that already have been done or been doing through my life, so I came to cure violence to make a difference. My name and my word reach a lot of places throughout the city, you know what I'm saying? I work for Grand Crossing, we have certain beats and in our area that we work through 79th all the way down to 67th to reach out to the young black men, black women, to help them try to see something different in their life that they probably don't see. There ain't anybody giving it to them. So, I'm just here to help and hopefully change lives, and save lives.

CGVRC Fellow: How long have you lived in Chicago?

Donnell: I lived in Chicago all my life, 43 years.

CGVRC Fellow: Mr. Demeatreas...

Demeatreas: I'm Demeatreas. I'm 47 years old, been in Chicago all my life. I've been working with Cure Violence for 10 years. I started as a violence interrupter. Now I'm a supervisor in the Grand Crossing area. Basically, my former connection is in the Woodland community, Washington Park area, Jackson Park. I'm very familiar in the Grand Crossing area, a lot of areas that I can reach but those are my strongest areas, over there.

CGVRC Fellow: Talking about gun violence in your particular neighborhood, so put your mindset in your particular neighborhood, can you describe your personal perception of gun violence in that neighborhood? Just going back to you, growing up in the city or your involvement in Cure Violence, your perception of gun violence?

Demeatreas: Well, now it's a big change because everybody using guns now. Opposed to when we was coming up, we had to fight, we had to fight...you know what I'm saying? That was one of the good things about it, but these guys don't know anything about fighting. So, everything is gun violence. Everything around revolves around a gun, I mean whoever has the biggest gun he has the power in his clique, you know what I'm saying? So, everything revolves around guns, I mean, if you don't have a gun you not shit, really. That's how they look at each other. And a guy just put that on Facebook yesterday or something, he said "you was real cool when you didn't have your own gun, now you have your own gun you don't fuck with me." You see what I'm saying?

It's crazy because it's just that, I mean even from experience I know when I grabbed my first gun. You know that gave me a sense of power. So, I figured man I wish a nigga would. I was tipped off like I wish a nigga would say anything. So, you can imagine nowadays with all the different area codes, they clout chasing, they are doing stuff just you know, for likes on social media. Just to be recognized and things like that. That adds to the problem, I mean, and they guns is much bigger now. I mean, it's crazy. The bigger your gun, and the bigger the clip, the bigger nuts you got basically. And the crazy part about it, a lot of these young guys can't even control these weapons, they're so powerful. That's why you have a lot of innocent people getting shot because they can't control this big 'ol 40 caliber weapon.

And they shooting 30 times, spinning out so fast, you know? So...I mean but yeah that's the difference between now and back then because everybody has a gun, everybody. Everybody has a gun, and it's just like wow and everybody got a chip on their shoulder.

CGVRC Fellow: Donnell, you got anything to add to that?

Donnell: I mean, he basically covered everything, but I mean it's just like he said, everybody just clout chasing, you know what I'm saying? They not even focused on money no more. Money ain't even an issue no more like, they don't even care if they got two dollars to get out of jail if they go to jail, you know what I'm saying? They not even thinking, they off so many drugs and all that stuff. They not even thinking of the consequences, behind it until they get in that situation. Now they are crying, now they want to tell on everybody. They can't take the heat; they can't take the way it ain't no loyalty out here in the streets. That's why it's so wild. It's just everybody's just running wild, like haywire until you can sit down and think then you realize what's going on in the world today but if you're not thinking, you just reacting. Once you become a reactor it's no turning back.

Charles: That's true.

Donnell: Because now you're just pushing forward, you're not slowing down you're just moving forward real fast and once you move forward real fast, you're not thinking of the consequences behind it. That's why so many little kids getting killed, so many women getting shot and it's crazy because they not thinking. They just come through shooting everybody, and then the person that they looking for isn't even shot, he's still running around. Now he back on social media, "y'all ain't did shit woo, woo," now he is chasing them now. It's just a big ol', like, it's just clutter, and it's crazy, it's like a circus.

So, it's like man you know, you try to teach your neighborhood to be better, or the guys, the younger guys that's coming up to be, better. But they don't want to listen they think smoking, and drinking is where it's at. Until the reality kick in, you know what I'm saying? Either you'll be in jail or you're gonna be dead and if you want to spend the rest of your life in jail, ay, can't nobody change your mind or

thought you gotta change with self, first. Self-preservation is the first law of motivation. So, if you don't have that. You don't have nothing.

CGVRC Fellow: They pretty much covered everything? Or you got anything to add?

Charles: They covered everything, man. I mean, I'm a lot younger than they are, but I'll say the time of me coming up, up until now, a lot done changed man. It's a whole lot of like real senseless killing man. I mean they, just they hit all of it, you know what I mean? Like, I mean shit just so different bro, you know like, I can remember like, I mean I'm only 30 but I can remember a time like when we get out school after you know we was fighting. You know what I'm saying? They just don't do that shit no more.

CGVRC Fellow: You went to Simeon?

Charles: No, I went to Hirsch.

CGVRC Fellow: So, moving on to the next question, what do you think generates gun violence in your particular neighborhood? Like what generates it? Y'all kinda covered it a little bit, you know, clout, social media, touch on a little bit more in detail because it's different you know, from even our era. I'm 35 myself. And I feel like J Cole, I'm like the middle child. Right there in the middle you know, but at the same time, in our era or in your era what do you feel generates that gun violence?

Donnell: The power, respect...

Demeatreas: It ain't got nothing to do with power or respect.

Charles: It ain't about that no more.

Demeatreas: Because most power came from the guys that's already locked up.

Charles: Right.

Demeatreas: And then it's not that because it's just they don't have no guidance, you know when you got, 10 running rebels over here with 2 guys that's probably calm, cool and collected you can't do nothing with the 10 running rebels because they feel like they own the streets now.

It ain't like they producing money to keep the neighborhood together. They just like man look, we can kill these niggas and we cool. You know what I'm saying? Like, I don't know what it is about killing the person you know what I'm saying? Because everybody is not doing what they're supposed to be doing, you know what I'm saying?

If I'm just shooting to be shooting, can't nobody get no money because the police everywhere, how is anyone supposed to get any money when the police is everywhere? So, I'm just shooting to be shooting, it ain't no unity, it ain't like when I came up they made you do this or made you do that. You can't really tell these guys nothing, they just they doing it on their own and it ain't no repercussions behind it, so when you ain't got repercussions behind situations that you do, you like, you like a running rebel.

So, it's different now like I can call him, he from 67th, I'm from way over here I can just say "Hey Whatley man, Joe, I need, we need to link up I got some niggas, I want to j down on." And it's cool. Nothing will

happen to him, nothing will happen to me. But back in the day I could have never called Whatley up and be like “hey we gonna jump-we gonna j down on some of these guys.” He would be like nah dog I ain’t on that. You know what I’m saying?

But now it’s like we clicked up, we don’t care where you’re from. You could be from 95th, I could be from 43rd. It’s just like that right now and then these guns they just lay them on the ground. They can just pick them up from anywhere. Ain’t no, guns just everywhere, I ain’t saw this many guns in my life.

So guns just everywhere, everybody got guns, you know what I’m saying? And you can’t even really approach a person because everybody strapped. And got a chip on their shoulder, like they the man. So, it’s just hard, it ain’t no leadership. And that’s where the problem come in at, once there’s leadership, I bet you the gun violence will go down but there ain’t no leadership and you can’t lead without soldiers cause everybody wanna be a head, you can’t have a head without a body so you need a body to run the head.

You ain’t got none of that, you can’t control it. It’s uncontrollable, and that’s just the disease of it, that’s just the disease of what we going through now, it’s a disease. So now it’s taken some of the guys that have been through it or already changed they life to try to find a cure for it and that’s what we out here doing.

CGVRC Fellow: Anything to add to that before I move on to the next?

Charles: No, I think, he hit it real good.

CGVRC Fellow: Okay, so the next question is – what is being done in your neighborhood to address gun violence, do you know of any specific programs or policies that are trying to address gun violence in your neighborhood? What suggestions do you have for how your neighborhood could support the youth? And then, how to reduce gun violence. And then, can you describe anything that you have found frustrating about the current efforts to reduce gun violence? So again, we are talking about policies and programs, any suggestions and then things that are frustrating you right now things that are currently being done but not really working?

Demeatreas: I wouldn’t say frustrating I mean we, we as Grand crossing do a lot for the community. We feed the community, we go out and try to play basketball with the kids, whatever we can do to try to adverse them from the streets. So, we do a lot and then there’s some there’s a lot of things in the community that the community would help us with, to try to you know, reduce the gun violence in the neighborhoods. So, we go to schools, we go talk to the schools, wherever the kids at that need our attention in our area that we work in, and we go, and we go outside the neighborhoods sometimes, you know what I’m saying, if we have to go way out, we go as a team. To try to show them a different way it’s not frustrating. Everything in the world takes time.

So, if you ain’t got the patience and you ain’t got the time then this ain’t the right job for you. Because you have to have patience and time because you was one of those kids that jumped off the porch just like these kids did ain’t nobody tell you nothing. It takes time and patience for you to grow and learn just as well but you have to have patience with it.

Charles: For real. Just to piggy back off of what he said, as far as another route, we can go as far as helping them is resources. You know what I'm saying? I think I would have got, my life together a lot faster if I had something to deter me from the streets. You know what I'm saying?

CGVRC Fellow: Can you elaborate on resources?

Demeatreas: Well, we have resource fathers.

Charles: Yeah.

Demeatreas: We connect with different companies for jobs. Try to get them back in school. We have a big community event with different schools, teachers, principals, security guards, whatever. Jobs, you know? We have resources for jobs. It's just they have to have the initiative to want to do it.

You can't make a grown person do something they don't want to do. I mean you can present it to them, and if it's available and they want it, then we help them. So, we have different resources, to help them to get back in school or to help them with jobs, and we got a lot of kid's jobs. We got a lot of kids back in school. So, I mean for every kid we can say it's a plus in our community, where we working in. So, every day we out here fighting to get them kids either a job or back in school. Because education you gonna need no matter what's going on in life, if it's a small education or it's a big one. You're gonna need education period.

Because this just how life revolves right now. But I mean, we pushing, everything we do is for the community, for the kids, to try to help them do better. Either if its school, finding them a job or we ask them what they want. Or, ask them how can we help them. Sometimes you just gotta listen. Sometimes you just have to be an open ear. You know what I'm saying? We doing different things every day. To make sure the kids have something better to do in life. And I mean we go to schools, like I said we find jobs so we do basically, it's not frustrating though.

Donnell: I think with the frustration part to a policy. I think our main thing with Cure Violence is we try to stop the spread of the disease by changing the mindset of individuals because everybody don't want to go to school, everybody don't want to go to work. But if we can change your mind about conflict resolution, every time you have an argument with a person that don't mean you have to go fight. Every time you fight that don't mean you have to go shoot.

That's our main thing, trying to get they whole thought process about violence and confrontation. Once we can get them to thinking differently about violence, we may have a chance and opportunity to kinda like shake them to get them out of that sickness that they are in. Then they become the cure and they bring it back to they homies. Like man, joe, let that ride.

They don't even know but they just saved somebody's life but that's the cure. Spread that, you not spreading that disease like "fuck that nigga, let's blow, blow, blow, blow." "Let it ride, let it ride, joe." That's the mindset that we are trying to get in their head, and once they get it, it'll spread. It's like the disease spread, now the cure spread to their homes. Now they got someone from the other side. That cure is going to spread through this whole 79th street because we changing their minds and the frustrating part is about policy making. Now the University of Chicago have done quantitative and qualitative studies on cure violence.

I mean we make instant results saying that whatever community cure violence is in they immediately see a drop-in shootings and homicide, immediately. You know, when you think about the University of Chicago doing a study everybody listens because that's supposed to be the mecca of this research program. I mean they say immediately drop in shootings and killings in whatever community they go in but what the government doing? Snatch the funding. What the mayor do with the 2 year contract? Snatch the funding within a year.

So that's what frustrating for those who like are the administrative level because we like, we just showed y'all black and white data. That this is effective, this is impactful any community we go in. We don't go into the places where it's not going, you know what I'm saying? Data says, it's a lot of shootings on 71st and King drive, this the most affected area, that's where we go. That's where we go to have meeting with these guys that are a part of this disease. Who was once part of the disease like all of us, we go right in there in the middle. Then it spreads out, we go right in the middle of it, look shawty what's going on? First you find out what's going on because you have to listen to her and most of the time they beefing over some garbage. Sometimes it be generational, sometimes they don't even know. That's us letting them know "come on now you don't have to do this here." We get in their mind, you know what I'm saying? When you doing this good work, you see the shawty's navigating towards you, drawing towards you but then you have to worry about damn I'm going to be working come June 31st that's like what?

Y'all seeing what we doing to these kids, y'all seeing what we doing for these kids? And then y'all turn around and snatch the funding. I mean the government just really, remember 2015? When he cut off all the social service programs and the shootings in Chicago sky rocketed. Sky rocketed, you know what I'm saying? So, now we must question the policy makers. Do y'all really want this to stop? Because I don't see benefits from it, from all the over-time you get. They benefit from the shootings and the gun violence.

I mean that's what the question should be. I mean, y'all benefit what's the problem? Because y'all can find money for everything else. Becoming A Man, good program-they don't worry about funding. Ain't none of those kids in the street, don't none of those kids come from the street. We deal with those guys you can't get into the Becoming A Man program because they're hot headed.

Donnell: These guys can't get into those boys clubs and stuff like that. We get to them, we work with these guys constantly. And we get them to start changing their mindset. We say we can put them in jobs. We have a job agency, we go out of our way to help them, you know what I'm saying? But then you get policy makers to-so that's the frustrating part with me.

CGVRC Fellow: Yeah, yeah. Y'all got me thinking, now I'm going off script. Y'all remember that prodigy album the red, the red city HNIT. Remember that one skit and he was like y'all keep telling me to be cool, be cool, be cool, be too cool you gone lose. Remember that skit? How do y'all feel about that when he, when like the shawtys they telling they guys be cool, be cool and then he, the one that want to go, shoot, comes back saying no you telling me to be cool, we gonna lose. You know, how do you combat that? Like man, okay, you're telling me to be cool once, twice, now you're telling me to be cool again, now they just about to come over here, treat us like some bitches or something like that. Like, how do you combat that?

Demeatreas: We got people working with both sides.

Charles: Exactly.

Demeatreas: We not dealing with just one particular group. So, group A, group B get into it, they gone work with group B, we gone work with group A. Now if group A don't want to hear it now we gotta be honest with group B. We can't be like "Stand down joe, we got them, Joe." We still working on them guys, they, they trying not to listen, man.

Donnell: We just buying time.

Demeatreas: Y'all trying to be cool but guard your grill, guard your grill bro. I'm not telling you it's a peace treaty, we're not at that right now. We still gotta work on that other side. You gotta be honest with them, because we tell them yeah it's cool you don't have to worry about that side and they wanna knock their heads off, they looking at us like we're crazy. Right, right. Like y'all told us, now we done lost creditability with this group. So now we can't tell them nothing, now the other guys we told to stand down, who got killed?

Charles: Who got killed?

Demeatreas: So, that's why we have these guys, they working both sides. To communicate, and it gotta be real. Man, joe, they're trying to hit that, and we gotta get back to them. We can't save every battle. Can't win every battle, you know what I'm saying? I mean we, with that-we deal with that all summer. Going back into detail, you know what I'm saying? Um, but if you got any more questions for me let me just give you my number or we can email and we can just um, we could sit back and talk.

(Demeatreas leaves the interview)

CGVRC Fellow: So, moving onto the next question, anything else you all want to address as far as policies? Suggestions?

Donnell: That's basically it for policy. We just try to, we just buy time, if we can. If two groups get into it, like he said we don't tell nobody there's peace if it ain't peace.

Because we want them to make sure they secure and they life is not in danger. We don't want nobody to get killed from our work and now we go back on the block now they. Hey, hey, we don't want y'all over here. You know what I'm saying? We want to be as honest as possible, you know what I'm saying? If it's cool, then we'll let them know it's cool. If it's not cool then we'll let them know, hey y'all just have to play some defense.

Just don't go over there sliding, they ain't gonna come over here sliding. We're not telling yall just be out here free balling, just be secure with yourself, you know what I'm saying? That's all it is. That's basically it.

CGVRC Fellow: Yeah. That's what's up. So, moving on to the next question, thinking of the city of Chicago as a whole, how do you; prevent gun violence? In Chicago as a whole?

Donnell: I mean, it's gonna be hard to prevent gun violence period but we can reduce the homicides. You know what I'm saying? But it's gonna take a group effort, it's gonna take everybody. It ain't just gonna take certain individuals they think, I mean yeah we have the best influences out here with the

kids, because we from the streets but it's gonna take everybody. All the people that are up over us, you know what I'm saying? To help, to push it where it needs to be, we had a good meeting what was that Saturday?

It was a 399 meeting. The homicides was under 399 but it took, it take the funding to have us out here. Don't take the funding from us, and then the shootings go sky high and then they be like oh well we should have kept this and kept that, while they down, let's keep them down

Let's keep them down. Let's keep the neighborhood safe, where the kids can go out and play this summer. It's hard for you to even have your kids outside because you don't know who's gonna come through, shooting. But if they know certain people outside, they not gonna do it from the respect a person have for that area. They ain't gonna do it they're gonna be like "oh no, dude out there man, we gonna have to do that another day." You know what I'm saying you got to, have it where the kids can come outside and play in the neighborhoods, play at the parks, and it's safe. If you can't have safety for the kids then there's no reason to be out here. You have to be able to have the community safe, you know what I'm saying? Because it's a lot of people that do stuff in their homes. In their houses, in their backyards, people just coming through shooting and all that. It doesn't help the neighborhood.

And so, now long as you keep funding going everybody still playing they part, everybody still out here talking to who they need to talk to, getting people in the right places, you know- moving how it's supposed to go. But I mean, it's all on, it ain't us because we willing to do the job. Period. We willing to go out here stick our necks out and you know, good results behind it. So, if you got great results behind the work you doing and you're supposed to keep it going, period, and that's where he elaborated on about the funding. You know what I'm saying? With no funding you can't expect a person to have the same intensity they had without money. You know what I'm saying? People still have to live, people still gotta eat.

CGVRC Fellow: Charles, do you have anything to add to that?

Charles: No, I was just going to basically say a perfect example you know, senseless violence and you know how it just moves throughout the city man. Just a few weeks ago, I think it was about a week ago, a lady she was up at Metro PCS you know what I mean? Just to go off of what he was saying, there's a lot it's just a lot of senseless killing. She was just at Metro PCS I forgot what neighborhood it was, but she was with her kids and somebody just came past shooting and killed her.

It's just unfortunate that stuff like that happen, but I think you know with a program like this, you know what I mean? I want to say it was Englewood we don't have a site at Englewood anymore.

Donnell: Yeah, it happened in Englewood but like I said, you have to want to do the job too. You can't have the job and then don't want to do the job.

Charles: Exactly.

Donnell: But when you got the people that really want to do the job, to make a change. To help the community out then that's them the communities you fund.

CGVRC Fellow: And I like programs like this cause it's similar to like people who are trying to make a difference because you know, programs like this create a pathway, a work force. You know you get all of

the returning citizens that's coming back from being down for a minute, boom now they got something to do. You know what I'm saying, now they got a little bread, feed the family.

Donnell: And it's positive.

CGVRC Fellow: And it's positive.

Charles: It's positive.

CGVRC Fellow: So, now they getting that-they're already getting retrained in a different area you know if they wanted to jump off in a different area that's positive they can-at least they got something to come back to, and it's reducing gun violence. So, um that's just my personal input towards like programs like this. Um, so moving on to the next question: what do you need to know to better understand gun violence? Do you have any suggestions for research questions that would, that you would like the Chicago Gun Violence Research Collaborative to work on? What do you want us to work on?

Donnell: I mean the best way to know is talk to the kids.

They the best people to know what they wanna do, how they doing it? See a lot of people don't listen to the people, you know what I'm saying? Because they say like, kids of the neighborhood of the community, they can't come down here, and just wander in here and feel like they can talk to the top person of UIC. You see what I'm saying?

So they don't, if they don't feel comfortable talking to you, then you will never know what they're thinking because a lot of these guys don't even want to be out here. They're just out here because they influenced by some other guys. A lot of these guys don't even want to pick up a gun. They just picking up a gun because they homies got the gun. So, if you could reach them, and sometimes they just want somebody to talk to, they want somebody to hear them out, and it's a lot of times they don't get that at home. So, when you don't get it at home you figure you can't get it from nowhere.

But there's people out here like me, and it's a lot of other people out here like me that are willing to listen. That's the main category is to hear them out because a lot of these guys don't want to be in the streets.

But they feel they don't have any other choice and when you have persons that think like they have no other choice, then they wild, they like wolves and they don't want to be because then they get jammed up and there's nobody there for them. Now they crying every day, they wanna go home they want their momma, they want their sister, they want somebody but it has to come from them. You have to take them, put them in an environment where they're comfortable and, and, and let them talk and see what is the issue. Why they want to be in the streets, or why you want to play with guns or why you wanna take somebody's life or is you fine with somebody taking your life? And once you come up with those questions and answers you basically know what's going on but you have to be able to listen to them. Cause they got a lot to say it's just a lot of people don't listen to them.

Charles: Exactly. So, to put what, what Donnell said in a nutshell, I guess would be to-don't treat them like statistics, you know what I'm saying? Don't just look at, them as you know, oh well, you know, here today, statistic tomorrow types, you know what I mean?

They people, you know what I mean? They got a voice, you know what I mean? Opinions, they got feelings, you know things going on in they mind, man. So, I think you know with the collaborative I think, that'll be the best way to tap into you know what I mean, to hear them out man.

CGVRC Fellow: So, if yall had a crystal ball what would you think the researcher should kind of align themselves with, if you can like predict the future or can get that insight...?

Donnell: You have to go to the hardest areas of Chicago. You see what I'm saying? You have to reach those guys.

CGVRC Fellow: What would you expect?

Donnell: You can't reach, you can't reach, you can't try to reach the guys that's not really into it. You have to reach the middle of the sources.

You have to reach out to them, you have to try to talk to them. You have to take somebody with you that might know them to introduce you to them. Hey this is such and such. He just want to ask y'all a few questions, matter of fact he want to listen to y'all.

But you take a reliable source with you and that can get you where you need to be at and once you find out exactly what's going on, the situation might be so easy to clear up, it don't even make no sense because it could be the littlest thing a person want to make them be a better person. A person just don't know because you never ask, you can't like if your kid crying but that kid never said nothing-what's wrong, what's wrong, what's wrong? But they kid just keeps crying you don't know what's wrong until you keep asking and then they tell you, and now you can figure the problem out. Same way with these guys, they just need somebody to talk to and they need a person to step up and ask them the questions of what I could do to make your situation better.

CGVRC Fellow: What would you think they would say?

Donnell: It depends. It can can come from home, it can from lack of attention, it can come from being around the regular guys that they wanna get away from, but they just scared to get away from. But giving somebody something else to do. Helps them out every day.

Charles: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

Donnell: Like if I don't have to be around the guys everyday...Like you (CGVRC Fellow) grew up in Englewood. But you turned out to be great. You see what I'm saying? Most guys that turned up in Englewood still out there gang banging, went to jail, went to the feds or dead. You turned out to be great, you had a way out. A lot of these guys don't have a way out.

And it took sometimes it take two parents- some people might just got a daddy, some people just might got a mother. So, they mixed up in those worlds. I grew up just with a mother. So, I was bad I did a lot of bad shit when I was younger. But as I was getting older, I realized, like hey, this shit ain't nothing. This shit don't even make no sense. I'm going to jail.

Now I gotta call out here for people to help me because I can't help myself in there. It didn't make sense but it ain't like I was neglected at home, it was just I had- I hung out with the outsider guys and didn't

nobody teach me how to pull myself away from that, I had to teach myself. Like hey, this shit ain't working out, I'm steady going to fucking jail, these niggas ain't going nowhere. I'm being a fucking guinea pig, like I'm the guinea pig, cause I'm doing everything. So I'm like hey, wake your dumb ass up.

Bag your fucking self up, think about what you're doing because you're having kids of your own. Now do you want your kids to grow up just like you grew up? Fuck no. So now I change my ways. So I want my kids to have something different, I'm being a father, that my father probably wasn't to me, but I'm making sure I am to them because sometimes it takes two parents to make sure they kids alright and people have problems with that, some kids got problems with that. Some kids miss they momma, they momma left them out there, they live with a auntie, or cousin or grandma a friend and now they just bitter but all it takes is somebody to talk to them but people don't take time for that.

People are like oh he bad as shit, I ain't dealing with that shit, and you know they wave kids off and they be like okay well fuck you, I'm doing this anyway. So, you get, the mindset has to be different for everybody, not just for them but for us too. That's why I take so much time, like if I meet a kid and I know, I'm like man what you need, what you need me to do, I might, can't do everything you need me to do but I can do some of the things.

And I give a person inspiration. Like man, dude trying, dude trying "could you help me find a job?" sure. I never thought I was going to have a job. I work for seven-up too, so I work two jobs, I never had a job when I was younger, all I did was run the streets, but I know if I can, I've been to the states, the feds, the juvenile, if I can come home and change everything that I did and work two jobs it's easy, for them. People always say oh man when you go to jail you can't get no job, that's a lie. That's a lie. Its people hiring felons everyday so that's a lie, it's just how you want to present yourself. How you want, how much do you want it for yourself? It gotta be first with you, but if you have someone helping you a little bit. It makes it even better. And that's what it gotta be, it gotta be helpful for both ends. It just can't benefit the top end and the lower end ain't benefiting from it. It ain't gonna work because they gone think they're being used, don't nobody want to feel like they being used. No man, no woman. So, if you, if a mother fucker can help them then that's what they looking for, and listen because it's something they be wanting to tell you.

They don't wanna be doing that shit, they'll call a mother fucker late at night, man I almost did some dumb ass shit, I was gonna go shoot, dude. Man, I needed to just holla at you. You know, I pick my phone up at any time of night, I'll be dead asleep that mother fucker ring, I'll pick it up, cause ain't no telling who it might be.

Somebody might just wanna hear my voice so they don't do no dumb shit, oh man he picked up, man thanks man, I was just thinking about doing some dumb shit. No man, what you need? You need me to come out, you want to go get some breakfast or something? No, I just wanted to hear your voice big bro, thanks man. You help a mother fucker out just like that. You never know when you can help a mother fucker but you got to be willing to have the door open though, your doors is limited you can't reach out to the younger people.

But if your doors is open, they willing to help you out. They willing to tell you what they need, how could they better themselves, and if you can help them then that's a plus.

CGVRC Fellow: Moving on to the next question, are you optimistic or pessimistic you know hopeful or doubtful that things will get better, that Chicago is on the right track?

Donnell: I'm, I'm optimistic. Everyday. And why I say I'm optimistic everyday I'm hoping to get better every day because my kids live in the city. I live in the suburbs but my kids live in the city and they walk to school, they catch the L to school. So, things can happen. I'm on edge every day because I don't know if somebody gonna come through shooting and they accidentally get shot. So, I'm optimistic every day and hopefully everyday this world gets better. But I know it don't get better without people pushing or helping. So, that's why I do the job I'm doing now because I want to make sure the neighborhoods can be safer for the kids to grow up in. So, if the kids can be happy, and go to school you have better turnouts in schools, you have better grade point averages, you have more kids going to college, everybody won't be worried about just going to prom, or some goofy ass shit like that because everybody, the world, is gonna be built on technology. Period. So, these kids are going to have to have way more than they think they need to have in the years and years to come. This shit is going to get much harder. I mean it's easier, period, now with the computers, when we came up it was all just books. Everything was books, books, books. Now it's much easier, they got laptops, they can research shit way better.

Instead of going to the library, sit for hours. Trying to find different books to try to find shit out. Now the technology is much better, but they got to have the mindset that they want to go further with their life. They just can't say well getting out of high school is good with me. Because you can't get shit, you know what I'm saying? You can't make it in life, everything is getting higher and higher every day. You know what I'm saying? It ain't like shit cheap like back in the day. Everything is getting higher and higher. Now your education has to be better, every year your shit has to be better, and better, and better, and better. So, now you can get them good top jobs and be executives and whatever you want to be but you have to have the mindset to push it, and the neighborhoods got to be way more safer.

CGVRC Fellow: Yeah so scaling back to Chicago, how do you think we can create a sense of optimism within the communities?

Donnell: Well, first of all, you have to get the kids together. We have to get them together like immediately.

CGVRC Fellow: Before you go there, I wanted to get Charles...What do you think?

Charles: He on a roll man but, but you know, I feel the same way. What you mean to get Chicago back optimistic in what sense?

CGVRC Fellow: A sense of hope within the city, within, amongst the youth. Y'all talk a lot about the youth. You know, just in general in our communities.

Charles: Yeah, I think when you have a program like that, keep Cure Violence.

Donnell: You need programs but you also need leadership.

Donnell: And even though the leadership that it might have had, it was bad but it was controlling. I bet you all this shooting wouldn't have been going on, now it ain't no consequences.

You know what I'm saying? They need leadership, and once they see what real leadership is as a role, all the shootings will go down, and they, like on Sunday's. Niggas couldn't be out on Sunday's doing no bull

shit because your church people went out, your grandma went to church. The whole damn family went to church. Everybody went to church- so if you out doing bullshit on a Sunday, you getting fucked up, you know what I'm saying?

It's bad when your grandma and them can't go to church. You, mother fuckers out here on the block shooting, and all this other goofy ass shit. It's no leadership so only way, there has to be leadership and they have to get some control over the right people, that's in all these different neighborhoods.

CGVRC Fellow: Would you agree Charles?

Charles: Yeah, I agree with that you know what I mean? And to even take it a step further I guess getting store owners in the community more involved with the guys on the street. You know what I mean? It shouldn't be so stand offish when they see each other.

Donnell: You know why it's stand offish? You have to realize something, it's not a lot of black community, black owners in these communities.

Charles: Exactly.

Donnell: But you know why? Because the young niggas don't respect that shit. They come in there, they steal from them, the store goes down, then now it's another abandoned building in the neighborhood. With the Arabs and all that, they don't care.

Charles: Right.

Donnell: You see what I'm saying? They gone come like I can have a black owned store in my neighborhood, y'all will skip over my shit and go to the Arab store. Only reason why is because that's what y'all used to. That's what the mindset for. It's for y'all to do that, instead of "hey it's a black owned store, I'm going to this black owned store to make sure he alright." They don't, they don't think like that, that's why it's so many communities, that are down and everybody else is taking over, and every other race is taking over. Because we don't want to buy shit in our own neighborhood. Most mother fuckers go outside the neighborhood, Beverly, Evergreen Park. They want to go where the white folks at. Because they know they shit safe, you know what I'm saying? Ain't no mother fuckers running in and out, niggas won't be hanging out in front of the store and all that other shit. But they don't think like that you have to give back to the community whatever you took out of it. Some kind of way, whatever you got out of the community you have to put back in, some kind of way, and that's how you help the community and that's how you help Chicago. You have to be able to put back what you took out of it.

CGVRC Fellow: So, once we start getting that sense of optimism you know how would you be able to tell that things are getting better?

Donnell: Well, you basically, first of all you'll see people out. You don't even see people hanging on their porch anymore. People used to just hang on their porch enjoy the weather, you know what I'm saying? Sit out there, they might just be playing cards, they might just be, whole bunch of old ladies on the porch talking, gossiping. You don't even see that, they're scared to sit on their own porch. Once you can see, the communities of Chicago I'm going to say the bad areas, you see people can just hang out again, relax, don't worry about no shootings. None of that, then you will see Chicago get better because now the community going to up-rise. They will build more places, like I come from 52nd and Princeton. I can

ride down from 55th to 43rd it's so many fucking abandoned houses over there it don't make any sense. Empty vacant lots, niggas that don't want to put money back into the neighborhood. They grew up in the neighborhood their whole life, they just rather move out, move somewhere different and then they mad when the Mexicans come over there and buy everything or somebody else. How could you be mad? Because you had time to do it yourself or put everybody together, that you needed to. Hey, let's buy up these lots, let's put some houses over here let's keep the area how it's supposed to be. Once people start thinking like that, then you'll see Chicago up-rise.

CGVRC Fellow: Would you agree with that?

Charles: I agree man. I agree with that. You know what I mean...I just think yeah once everybody at least get on one accord again then you know as far as like what he was saying earlier how it used to be. You have to understand with the street guys and the people in the community, once everybody get back on that one accord, that these are civilians-the ops or whoever it is you know what I mean, whoever once we get back to that line of thinking you know what I mean we'll be on our way. Everybody is not an enemy, everybody isn't involved in the street shit, you know what I mean? It ain't just you know fuck everybody, we see someone we gonna shot fuck your momma, fuck your daughter. When people start you know, you know being cognizant of that, man like how Whatley was saying earlier, how oh let me sit back you know what I mean? Maybe I don't have to do that today, maybe I'll wait until he by himself, not when he is with his daughter, not when he is with his family. You know what I mean?

I think when people start getting back into that frame of mind, I think we'll see it go back up. Strive for each other, for the civilians for the street guys, for everybody. You know what I mean?

Donnell: Man, the next door neighborhood can come to you and say hey, such and such broke into my house. Man, we going down there we beating you're ass. What you doing? And bring all that shit back.

Charles: For real.

Donnell: You know what I'm saying?

Charles: Yeah.

Donnell: Now mother fuckers they so scared, to even say something. But that's how you know when the community, is going to up-rise. Because it's respect, once you got respect you got everything, without respect you got nothing. If I can't respect the man then I don't have shit, I don't give a fuck what color you wear, the way you wear your hat, you a man before you anything. And once you can respect man, then your life gets better.

CGVRC Fellow: Does your organization help the neighborhood in general? Not just with respect to gun violence but with anything else?

Donnell: Of course. We feed the community, we coach basketball games, referee basketball or just go out there and watch them play. Just to support, they looking for the support. Let me show out a little bit, they just looking for that.

Charles: Pass out food to the homeless.

Donnell: Feed the homeless, give them clothes, I mean we don't just do gun violence we do everything. You know what I'm saying? Whatever is going on in our community, we attend to it. Whatever we gotta do, we ain't getting no extra money from the UIC. We coming from our own pocket. We come out of our own pocket and do it. Just to give back, like I said sometimes you gotta give back what you took out of it.

CGVRC Fellow: Anything else that y'all want to add before I end this recording towards the other interrupters or other researchers need to know as we move forward through this process?

Donnell: I mean, no. I mean, every, every community is doing what they supposed to be doing and like I said we used to all be here, for community meetings from each area, west side, south side, east side, north side. And they doing they job, they doing a great job. They get out to a lot of kids. I mean, it's a whole bunch of different communities Little Village, Pilsen, all that. Everybody got they own interrupters in those areas. north, west, south, east and they doing they job and I can just give them a hand and tell them to keep up the good work and like I said the only way to make it better is you bring everybody together.

CGVRC Fellow: That was from Donnell. Charles?

Charles: I just wanted to say to the other interrupters I guess, that um keep up the good work. I know y'all job hard, you know what I mean? I know we work hard, we do everything that we can do. Day in and day out man just keep, stay positive out here, you know what I mean? That's pretty much it, that's pretty much it man. Keep up the good work. For real.

CGVRC Fellow: Okay, that's I'm going to end this recording right now, that concludes our interview for the record. I really appreciate you fellas for the record. I just want to say this on the record y'all doing some phenomenal work.