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Finding solutions for gun violence includes redirecting our focus to address it through a public health lens, including a specific emphasis on collaborative interdisciplinary programs. While no single strategy, organization or discipline holds the solution for gun violence, comprehensive prevention programs should include voices from multiple stakeholders including community members, leaders, organizations, police departments, as well as academic institutions. The Chicago Gun Violence Research Collaborative understands this important concept and aims to train interdisciplinary graduate student cohorts to engage in opportunities for in-depth investigation and discussion of violence prevention strategies.

As a born and raised Chicagoan, it was important for me to be a part of this program to gain practical skills, interprofessional experience and build upon research concepts to change the narrative that Chicago is a city of violence. On the contrary, Chicago is a city of rich culture and it is imperative that we preserve our diverse communities through continued investment and opportunity for residents.

My experience with the CGVRC allowed me to delve deeper into existing community-based strategies meeting the intricate needs of their participants. Three important strategies which resonated with me include the implementation of wrap-around services to address the complex needs of participants, the use of cognitive-behavior therapy to target behavior change, and peace-circles as a restorative justice approach. Each approach focuses on preventing at-risk men, women and youth from repeated violence.

Several Chicago-area programs utilize a holistic, wrap-around approach to address violence and target participant-specific needs, increasing their potential for success during the program and beyond. This wrap-around approach links participants to services including legal aid, education, and job-training programs. Outreach workers, men and women from the community, offer kinship and accompaniment and extend opportunities to enroll in these programs. Participants are also provided with access to cognitive-behavior therapy, or CBT, a skill-building counseling approach that addresses behavior change, conflict resolution and the development of problem-solving skills.

Modern criminal justice reform includes a focus on restorative justice, instead of the nation's historical punitive approach that has contributed to mass incarceration. Several Chicago community programs have implemented Peace Circles as a restorative justice practice that emphasizes healing and learning through a collective group process. Participants focus on repairing harm done, assigning responsibility, and improving interpersonal communication by talking through conflict in a group setting.

Wrap-around services, cognitive-behavior therapy and peace circles have been effective approaches to reduce gun violence and prevent recidivism in communities, but it is imperative to also include policy change in the discussion of solution-based approaches to gun violence. Chicago neighborhoods have been plagued by the effects of systemic racism, historic community disinvestment, and lack of employment opportunity. While there is no one solution for gun violence, a public health lens may help reframe our conversation through prevention and investment in the men, women, and children in our communities that make this city a vibrant and diverse home.