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As an aspiring clinical-community psychologist, I am interested in systems-level factors that influence communities and well-being. I decided to apply for the Chicago Gun Violence Research Collaborative fellowship because the program seemed to target those systems-level factors that contribute to gun violence and which negatively impact our communities. My interest was piqued when I read the abstract for the “Defund the Police” project, which sought to better understand what calls to “defund the police” actually mean. I have been involved in activist work for years, but I was very intrigued by the movement to defund the police, particularly as it boomed after the murder of George Floyd. I was excited for the opportunity to systematically research this topic, as I knew it had far-reaching implications.

Throughout the fellowship, I had the opportunity to hear from many different folks, some who conducted research on gun violence, some intervened in communities affected by gun violence, and some used their art to bring awareness to the issue. I was particularly struck by Dr. Carolyn Vessel and I AM ABLE. I hope to one day start a similar program, and her commitment to community, listening, and understanding the effects between trauma and future violent behaviors was really inspiring to me.

Further, the fellowship has influenced by own research interests. I am primarily interested in homelessness and trauma. However, this fellowship has broadened my interests to also include systemic factors of violence. One of my current projects is a systematic review examining the literature concerning interactions between police officers and people experiencing homelessness, as well as the perceptions that people experiencing homelessness have of police officers. I likely never would have considered this had I not been involved in the fellowship and learned more about calls to defund the police.

