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The CGRVC fellowship program provided me with an opportunity to explore neighborhoods, collaborate with a multidisciplinary team about structural causes of gun violence, and collect data on neighborhoods' preventative practices. We investigated interventions and initiatives advancing equity and social justice leading to sustainable positive change in Chicago neighborhoods including Austin, North Lawndale, Garfield Park, and Englewood. By viewing local, neighborhood-based practices and initiatives from a resident-oriented lens, it further illustrated the importance of understanding the lived experience of others within their communities. This program has helped me break down my own assumptions about gun violence, specifically within Chicago neighborhoods, shifting my focus from solely victimization to social determinants and resiliency in the communities.

Due to COVID-19, the fellowship program shifted to a virtual environment, and we were challenged to adapt a research activism framework to collaboratively elevate, evaluate, and expand upon initiatives already working in communities. This meant revising our ideas and narrowing our focus to researching neighborhood-based practices and their efforts to curb gun violence. We began discussing how this virus could impact gun violence within neighborhoods due to social distancing and limitations to accessible programs. It is monumental to see organizations such as READI shifting their preventative efforts from in-person to more current accessible formats. For example, they are offering virtual behavioral therapy services through Zoom, text, email, telephone, and other creative services. They are also providing virtual career counseling, educational programs, and wellness checks while still having volunteers on the ground to help the neighborhood get their needs met. The investment in their communities and creativity of the services help foster a sense of belonging and increase social interest through this cooperation, compassion, and contribution to human welfare.