

***“Each community needs to unify, we gotta start within our own neighborhoods...”***

Jorge Rogue:  
Little Village Community Member

*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**

Our *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. This work was funded through support from the Shure Charitable Trust, the Jewish Federation of Metropolitan Chicago, and United Way of Metropolitan Chicago.

**Biography:** This interview is with Jorge Rogue, a community member of Little Village. He has lived in the community for over 40 years and has worked with different community organizations. This interview was done as part of the Chicago Gun Violence Research Collaborative Graduate Student Fellowship series, *Perspectives on Chicago Gun Violence*. This interview has been edited for length and clarity.

**CGVRC Fellow:** Can you tell us a little about who you are, how long have you lived in Chicago and what connection you have to this community and this city?

**Jorge Rogue:** I lived in the city of Chicago, I'm going to say, I'm 43 now so minus ten. I grew up here in the community of Little Village I got here in '77 I was about one year old and moved out 10 years ago.

**CGVRC Fellow:** So now I'd like to ask a few questions about gun violence in your neighborhood being Little Village. Can you describe what your perception is of gun violence in the neighborhood – Little Village?

**Jorge Rogue:** Yeah, well there's many guns out on the streets, in this community that a lot of our young people carry and it's so easy for them to get the guns here in the community. They also think that the young people are not afraid to use them because of murders that we have in the neighborhood within the past 40, 50 plus years. There's been a lot, hundreds maybe thousands of murders right in this neighborhood due to gun violence. I've been shot at plenty of times, and I lost a brother to gun violence in November of 2018, so gun violence has affected me and the people I have mentored in this community or in the City of Chicago, but also it has hit hard, it has hit home, losing my brother in Little Village, due to gun violence.

**CGVRC Fellow:** What do you think generates the gun violence in this neighborhood?

**Jorge Rogue:** Oh man, what generates the violence? I'm going to say many things, a few things, right? Just the loss of respect for humanity. The soul has gone cold within young and old people, not just the young are using guns, you have adults using guns as well, on young people or young people on adults, so, it's a combination of many things. People don't like to talk about it. It's not just an addiction of many young people being under the influence when they use these guns, but it's also a spiritual side, a dark spiritual side as to why people have used guns and why people continue to take lives with guns. When I say there is a dark side it's because it's a spiritual battle that young people are within themselves fighting to either hurt someone by fighting with them or stabbing them or using a gun and not just anyone can take a gun, pull the trigger. It takes more than just the person. It's what the person is carrying, whether anger, hate, towards someone. You know, people say you got the angel on one side and you got the demon on the other side, and that's the reality. That's the truth. I've seen many guys in a killing zone and you can see it in their eyes. They say your eyes are the window to your soul and I've seen individuals in that zone of, "I'm going to take someone out." And so, if you've been part of that world, you can attest to it and if you've been part of the that violent lifestyle due to whether drug dealing or gangs or you've had to use a gun, you see that side, that dark side of a person. That's scary because something else takes control of that person's mind and so it becomes easier to shoot someone, to hurt, to kill, but and it can be a combination of drugs, it can be a combination of mental health issues, a combination of substance abuse issues it can be also the spiritual stuff I was talking about. You know, in the spiritual realm that people don't like talking about, but it's there.

**CGVRC Fellow:** So, what do you think is being done in the neighborhood to address gun violence – any specific programs or policies that are trying to address it? And two more parts to that question, what

suggestions do you have for how your neighborhood could support the youth and reduce gun violence and describe any frustrations that you found, that you have had with the current efforts to reduce gun violence. So, we will start with any specific programs or policies that are in your neighborhood to help reduce gun violence.

**Jorge Rogue:** Yeah, I'm going to say that there are certain programs like, CPD is doing something about having a gun-turn in program and they're having one this weekend on the 18<sup>th</sup>, at the community church on Lawndale, so they do that. I'm not sure how often they do that, but they do that and they're doing that this weekend. But I also know we need to do more of that, maybe twice a year or once every six months or once a year. I think we need to do that much more often. I feel like not just the police department, but community organizations need to support the department when they're having those gun turn-in programs. I know churches support them, but I feel like even community organizations can get on that support to help them. Imagine if we had multiple locations that same day, we had all the churches opening their doors to have guns brought to the priest and to the police department and have the clergy people preaching to support these efforts and community executive directors or program directors that are working with young people or with children to support those efforts and to promote it through social media and through newspapers. So, I think that it is very important we do that more often, gun turn-ins. And, also policies. I know there are policies in our community, at least through the violence prevention collaborative, I know they're doing stuff to change policies.

I'm pretty sure there is also another collaborative not too far from us in the lower end of Little Village, Marshall Square. They also have a nice collaboration. They're doing some stuff to bring awareness and hopefully change our impact policy. I feel like we need to have more of those discussions, but also believe that we also need to hold corporations like the NRA and hold our politicians accountable because they can enforce much stronger policies and change what we already have in the state of Illinois. I mean, something's happening right? Some stuff works, some stuff ain't working and we seen that. So, it has to be taken on not just by community. Politicians need to get on board with the community and hold them accountable and put out some bills to stop guns from coming in from other states, from the Midwest. There are other states that aren't that hard on gun policies, so we have to hold those states accountable. Why they keep coming to our border, crossing to Illinois, we do have stronger and strict laws in Chicago. So, I feel like we need to hold our neighboring states accountable with changing their policies and how they are handing out guns to whoever is trying to buy them. So, there is a black market too, for guns.

**CGVRC Fellow:** And that's leading to a follow up question. Do you feel like the turn-ins work? Because I'm wondering how many people that have guns and are using them, are even willing to turn them in?

**Jorge Rogue:** Look, I feel like one gun, that's one gun off the street. You gotta think that one gun could hurt ten people if you take one gun that's an effort, it's an impact, that's a life. And, I also feel like families and parents, adults, should know what's in your home. So, I feel like it also comes back to the home of the young people. Moms should be in their children's business, moms and dads should be in their business of what my son or daughter are involved with, what are they bringing into my home, so it starts there as well. I feel like our moms and dads could turn those guns in, I feel like they can help be part of the solution to turn these rifles or handguns in. So, we need to hold ourselves accountable.

**CGVRC Fellow:** Yeah, so it's not just the people who are using the guns but their family members and other people in the house?

**Jorge Rogue:** Definitely. Because if your brother and your sibling or someone gets shot, it affects the whole entire family from the grandma to the uncles and aunts, brothers and sisters, so of course you take one gun its saving lives.

**CGVRC Fellow:** So, what suggestions – besides the gun turn-in – do you feel that the neighborhood could do to support youth?

**Jorge Rogue:** I feel like we need to start taxing the corporations that support the NRA, or if we don't tax them with a higher tax, give 50% of what they make on their taxes for youth programs. They are trying to legalize marijuana – do the same for that, you know, tax those companies those corporations that support the NRA. They need to pay their dues as well. And yeah, pay their dues by putting money into youth and children's programs. Big time. And the corporations that are building these guns and bullets, we need to tax them as well and put money [towards] everything for youth programs.

**CGVRC Fellow:** So, thinking about Chicago as a whole, how do we prevent gun violence in Chicago, not just Little Village?

**Jorge Rogue:** In the whole city? I feel like we gotta come to the table, all communities, community leaders, community advocates, and community clergymen. Each community needs to unify. We gotta start within our own neighborhoods, get that together, work on our neighborhoods, like us, here in Pilsen or little Village, Grant Park, we gotta work from within our own, and then be big brothers to our neighboring communities and work as a whole team. I feel that we can do it, we can't leave Lincoln Park out of it, we can't leave Michigan Avenue, the Magnificent Mile out of it as well, because they have to give, they have to put in, because they are affected.

Let me tell you something, young people are getting shot in those areas as well, it's not publicized in the newspaper, but people are getting shot in Lincoln Park. Robberies are happening. Young people don't stop gang banging because they're going to cross into a nice community. If they see a rival they are going to respond whatever neighborhood you're in. You could be in the nicest, safest neighborhood or block, but guess what? You could get shot. You could be an innocent bystander and get shot because of a stray bullet. Or you're affected if you end up getting robbed at gun point. So, it affects every community in our city. I feel like we need to come together and unite as one and with politicians. I keep mentioning them because they have the power to change community and policies. They are part of the solution to what's going on in our city and we can't leave police out of this. Police need to be with the city with the community. They gotta be looked at as we are partners. Collaboration has to happen, they can't be looked at as "that's them." We're partners, we're collaborators, yeah it takes everyone. It takes everybody not just one community because that community is being picked because they have the highest violence. We gotta think about those that have no violence but are part of this city, to get behind us and everyone else.

**CGVRC Fellow:** What do you think we need to know to better understand gun violence, the researchers, so as the Chicago Gun Violence Research Collaborative – what suggestions do you have for research questions, what should we be asking?

**Jorge Rogue:** Who are you interviewing? Not just interviewing us, but community members?

**CGVRC Fellow:** Who should we be interviewing?

**Jorge Rogue:** I feel that you should get everyone's perspective. When you just focus on one generation or one culture, youth and adults and elders, and young adults, young men and women, we isolate them. We have picked who we want to interview, doing research on and it's a form of us targeting them. As they are the ones committing the crime and so you have to speak to everyone because some of the elders or parents at one time were shooters, used guns before, so you have got to get everyone's perspectives – grandparents, they've been affected by violence, you gotta get the parents, the teenagers, even the little guys, the kids that have an understanding of what guns do and get their perspective as well. You gotta start from the elders and work your way down and hit everyone, get everyone's perspective not just our target, we label them our at-risk young people. We gotta get rid of those labels and start seeing them as partners, as resources, as they can be solutions to the issues and the problems that are going on in the city with gun violence.

**CGVRC Fellow:** And what questions should we be asking?

**Jorge Rogue:** Simple things like - see that's the tricky part though...

**CGVRC Fellow:** Is it even about asking specific questions or is it more about building relationships?

**Jorge Rogue:** Thank you, it's that. You cannot come and ask the young people questions that they aren't going to trust you with. Because you might record or have us on waivers, that type of turnoff, that's like a red flag for them. How do I know? I know my mentor who brought me to this panel thing, or this interview, but I don't know what you're going to do with this information afterwards and even signing it says that, this waiver you may lose it, may lose documents, so you gotta be mindful of that and it is about building trust and building and relationships and having this discussion, dialogue, tell me a story that you experienced that your mom or your relative experienced due to gang violence. Maybe tell them to tell you a story. Instead of you interviewing them. I feel like everyone has a story to talk about to say, this is my life, this is what I experienced. So, you gotta hear from also every person who has been shot, or been a victim of a shooting, or family members who has lost loved ones to gun violence. It's very important to get every perspective and ask simple questions: "Tell me what you experienced," "Talk about trauma, how did it effect you mentally, emotionally, spiritually," "Did you faith increase, did you lose your faith – while you went through that or saw your friend, peer, loved one go through that?" I feel like those are kind of like things we should be asking instead of coming with our answers and our questions. Let them give them to you by getting to know them by communicating with them and being able to articulate not just coming with your well versed self, but being down-to-earth, speaking their language, speaking and articulating what they are articulating as we say, "slang words," being able to dialogue.

**CGVRC Fellow:** So, get rid of this? And just have honest real conversation?

**Jorge Rogue:** Yes, get rid of this, because even me, I feel a certain way about it. I'm trying to put myself not just in my shoes but in all those categories. If I was a grandfather, what would I be telling you, as a parent, like I am right now. I'm telling you, but as a young person that we represent, that we advocate for.

**CGVRC Fellow:** And I think even like having the recorder, this paper, the waiver, even like you and I are friends we've known each other for a few years and I feel like it's weird, right? It just like changes everything, it changes the way we are talking and communicating, so I can imagine what it does to a youth I had no relationship with – you and I see each other every week and it still makes it super weird.

So, how do you interview somebody that you don't know? Because I had people interview Marcus and Sylvia and it's like, I think it's just weird. How do you get real honest dialogue when there is a recorder, a waiver, I have to ask all these questions, you know?

**Jorge Rogue:** You bring someone that can navigate, that they know, that they know they aren't going to be put in danger, pimped, that you are going to protect them as much as you can. But because this is a conversation that needs to happen, an important conversation that they need to be part of. They are being brought up to the table and this is an opportunity for you to bring ideas, your vision for your neighborhood or how you can impact gun violence and I feel like making them feel comfortable by who you bring with them. And I feel like advocates are very important whether it be a pastor they trust or a mentor they trust or a father they trust, but you have to have key players in the community because I trust you but I've seen institutions come in and out of Little Village and not just Little Village, they grab and collect their data and they forget that we stay here, the residents, that we stay here, we live here, we raise our children here, we go to church here, we shop here, we work here – and so our life is around this neighborhood, so we have to be careful who we allow in.

**CGVRC Fellow:** And pastor Vick used to say it all the time, people come in stay 2-3 years do research and then they go there the experts writing books about it.

**Jorge Rogue:** We are the experts, we need to tell the story, we need to share this information we have here in our brain and bring it out and say this is what needs to happen – this is what we can bring to the table to make our neighborhood better and safer. But those real conversations and dialogue is not happening because it's hard work. But, I feel like this is a good start. Having this type of interview, this type of conversation and dialogue. I feel like you are a person they should have on that research team. You are someone we know, who they have to have, people that look like you and I - that trust and know, "hey this is my neighborhood I'm staying here." I feel like we gotta bring our own researchers we have to raise them and I'm talking to the youth now and I'm telling them, look we lack researchers that are black and brown and we need you to come out and go and get ready and come back and do our own research and research that's not just done in group settings and stuff like that, research that you're walking with people and following them and getting to know them and its hard work but it has more impact. When you are in the peoples shoes when you walk in peoples shoes and sleep in a community and go to school and worship in a community that you go to work in you know – that's important who we have coming in to do research.

**CGVRC Fellow:** Are you optimistic or pessimistic that things will get better, and that Chicago is on the right track?

**Jorge Rogue:** You know what, I am very hopeful. Ten years ago, I've seen this neighborhood improve, twenty years ago and I've been doing the work for this August will be 26 years, community work in my neighborhood and other neighborhoods. I've had the opportunity to not just work here but in others. And I've seen that every neighborhood has improved, its taking time and I feel like it's going to take time but we've gotta be patient and we've gotta get our hands dirty and get in the mud with people. I feel like our neighborhood has improved within the last 26 years when it comes to violence. I believe so. I'm very hopeful. I don't even want to think that it won't because then I wouldn't be doing what I do. I've been a spectator of miracles; I see [this] in my own life and the families of the young people that allow me to be part of their lives in the neighborhood. I've seen them change. I've seen them go from being locked up to getting out, getting married, having kids, getting a house, having a better job than I have, a better car than we have, having a home in a wealthier community or suburb which I am so happy about

that. They are living their American dream – they are doing well – I am very hopeful I have seen more young people do well for themselves than those who have not done anything. That’s why I know that there is hope. I know that I gotta continue to say yeah we will improve. We will be better, we will change, like Dr. King did or like Moses. He didn’t get to see the people right or he didn’t get to take the people to the promised land, but he planted some seeds to take the people to the promised land. So did Dr. King, and I feel like if we are part of those seeds that had been planted and 10, 20, 40 years from now, 50, 60 years from now we will have instead of 7 to 10 murders or 20 murders in the community, we will have between one and five murders. I hope all that. And, our city – we used to have in the 90’s – a thousand-something murders, 900 murders and we are at 3-something, I think we are doing better than last year, so I am very hopeful that our city will get better.

But we gotta do community by community, block by block, but we do gotta invest in the top 15-20 communities that are hurting from violence. Our money needs to be invested in youth programs and children. If we get them [when they are] younger, the better. If we can develop the children from the womb and do prevention from there I feel like we won’t have that many youth programs – at least for mentoring – because we are preparing, we are empowering our families – mothers, dads – to be mentors. Our uncles and aunts to step in – because it does take a village to raise our children – it does. And just because a program has impacted our community, has seen decrease that’s even more why we should be investing, because we have kids doing positive things and different youth organizations doing positive things. Graduating from college, high schools, GEDS, trade school, university, community college – we are seeing that more than ever. Twenty years from now, 10 years from now, I feel like there’s been a lot of hard work invested in this city and I still feel like we are in one of the greatest cities in the country – top 3.

One of the young people that we know, George, we were at a conference and he said, we need to stop beautifying downtown Chicago. He said it to a room of many community advocates. And politicians were in the room and community executive directors from organizations [were in the room]. He said we need to stop beautifying downtown and making it look so good and start investing in the neighborhoods and in the youth. And I feel like he was on point. We need to beautify our young people and our communities, our broken down communities, and so let’s do this. And, I hope that this research does bring that, that this research does bring those opportunities for wealth to go into the right organizations that are fighting to make their neighborhoods much better. We call it, so they could know quality of life in the neighborhoods. I have hope and faith that it will. We are going to face some trouble and hard times but we are also going to see progress and change.

**CGVRC Fellow:** I know you do a lot, with a lot of different organizations, but can you [identify] the organization that you work with and your role – anyone that you want to talk about.

**Jorge Rogue:** I’m going to shout out my church, and my organization as well. I feel like my church is like godfather or like a grandpa to programs like the youth boxing programs like the women’s domestic violence groups, they have adopted the basketball through the little village basketball league and I have seen our church support, open support groups to support different youth advocates or community organizations, staff, to be part of support groups, and teachers as well. Its open to anyone, but I have seen how our church has opened the doors to employment programs, educational programs, job-fair programs – like we had one today – and also health fairs.

Then, the New Life Community Centers of Chicagoland where I am a program director in our focus is mentoring and it’s through sports-based mentoring we have GEMS that you were part of – a program



that works with young women. That to me is a program that's really working with our young people one-on-one, and to me that's very important that our young people have at least one hour with their mentors a week, which is 4 hours a month. I know that our mentors do more than that, but I think we are one of the organizations that see many youth during the year. Through youth mentoring and sports-based [mentoring]. We can't leave "Running Forward" out, a program that trains young men for marathons. Who would have thought young people want to run marathons – they run away from the cops, but running marathons?

And then you have La Semilla, who is trying to reach our kids at a very early age by tutoring, literacy programs, where they are mentoring and educating as well. I feel like we are trying to do a wrap-around service and there is also good programs like Central State Senate that are doing great work with young people. And also, employment, and that is a big need that they help us out with a lot, even education. So, you gotta send a shout out to them, to Enlace for the work that they do and prevention collaborations. I feel like when I was part of the team in the beginning of it, a couple years ago (15-20), they have been trying to be the lead for violence prevention work. That takes a lot of resources and man power to organize 25+ organizations to come to the table on a monthly basis and have discussions on what we are affected by, here in the community. So, we gotta give them a shout out as well. Gotta give a shout out to our universities that come in here and do mentoring, there's too many so I'm not going to mention all of them. Mt. Sinai hospital is one of our biggest supporters that we don't give enough credit to and St. Anthony's hospital those two that are serving our youth by saving their lives, they've save lives, many parents by the counseling that St. Anthony provides the mentorship that provides the family, and Mt. Sinai too, and our first responders, they don't get a lot of credit but those are the people we call when we are in trouble. You've got firemen, paramedics and the Chicago police department, you can't exclude them. To me, those are the people that deserve the shout outs, the people that man they're going to come they may take ten minutes, but you know someone is going to come to your aid – when you break your leg riding your bike or your children swallows something and its stuck in their throat.

**CGVRC Fellow:** But it's really about getting everybody together, right?

**Jorge Rogue:** Yes, who works with kids? Children too were getting prevention from an early age, early head start. The churches in our neighborhood, the Catholics and churches.