



—Chicago—
CRED
CREATE REAL ECONOMIC DESTINY

VIOLENCE PREVENTION
THE CHICAGO CRED APPROACH



ENGAGING DIRECTLY WITH THOSE MOST AT RISK

Chicago CRED (Create Real Economic Destiny) believes that the way to stop gun violence is by engaging directly with those most at risk of shooting or being shot and giving them an alternative to the street life. Many of those at highest risk have been in and out of the criminal justice system; many have been shot; most have lost loved ones; and all have witnessed levels of violence that would traumatize the most seasoned soldiers. Yet, their courage and willingness to change their lives and help others change, gives us hope.

YOUNG PEOPLE ARE THE SOLUTION, NOT THE PROBLEM

The individuals we work with are often seen as the problem, but in our world, they are the only ones who can solve it. They have the experience, relationships, and the incentive to do the difficult, dangerous work of reaching out to family members, friends and neighbors and getting them to stop shooting. They have the respect and trust of the people most at risk, who are often beyond the reach of police, schools and social services agencies. In a phrase, they have what we refer to as "LTO," or "License to Operate."



THE FIVE PILLARS OF ACTIVITY

Outreach Workers Bring Participants into CRED

Outreach workers are the tip of the spear for violence prevention organizations. They canvass neighborhoods, monitor social media, track shootings, and map conflicts in order to bring individuals at highest risk into CRED. They serve as our HR department, recruiting participants into our program. They work mostly nights and weekends when gun violence surges and intervene when possible before disputes escalate. They negotiate non-aggression agreements among opposing street factions. They also support victims and their families after shootings occur.



“Experience is the best teacher. It just doesn’t have to be your own experience.”

—Richard Blackmon, Life Coach

Life Coaches Build Relationships to Guide Participants Through the Program

Life coaches wear a lot of hats: teacher, advisor, advocate, and friend. With caseloads of up to 15 at any one time, they guide participants through CRED’s 18-24 month program, are available around the clock and provide support in moments of crisis. They facilitate group discussions aimed at self-regulation and reflection, and create safe spaces for participants to be vulnerable and share their stories. Many CRED life coaches have had similar life experiences as participants. While most are considerably older than the participants, CRED has also begun developing “peer” coaches who are closer in age to the people they serve.



“People who are healed can help heal their family and community.”

—Dr. Donald Tyler

Clinicians Help Address Trauma, Self-Regulation

Many CRED participants have experienced massive trauma in their lives, from gun violence, physical and sexual abuse to hunger and homelessness. CRED’s licensed therapists work directly with young men and women individually and in groups to help them process trauma. They teach cognitive behavioral intervention (CBI) to help them understand the relationship between thoughts, feelings and actions and build self-regulation habits that enable them to live safely and work.



Education Tutors Guide Participants Back to School

With support from education tutors, hundreds of CRED participants have returned to school and earned high school degrees on-line. Some have gone on to higher education. Education tutors help participants plan their education and stay on track to completion.

“For our participants, a high school diploma is much more than a piece of paper. It’s a source of pride and proof that they can accomplish something they never thought possible.”

—Elaine Henton,



Employment and Training Coaches Teach Job Skills

The final stage for our participants is to join the legal economy. Before entering the job market, participants acquire basic job skills, including soft skills like showing up on time and learning to take feedback, and technical skills like carpentry and computer-assisted design. They enroll in certification programs that train them for fields like commercial truck driving and security. Employment coaches also help participants get jobs in a range of fields and continue to support them on the job. So far, at least 40 employers in 17 different job sectors have hired our participants.

STRATEGIC INITIATIVES AND PARTNERSHIPS

The everyday work of supporting participants consumes most of CRED's time and budget, but we also have several targeted strategies to reduce gun violence and make communities safer.

FLIP (Flatlining Violence Inspires Peace)

The FLIP Program recruits men and a few women who are very close to the streets to put down their guns, put on a CRED jacket or tee-shirt and occupy 80-90 of the most violent locations in the city during summer evenings and weekends. Their presence alone has helped dramatically reduce shootings at these "hot spots." The program began in 2018 with private funding and is now publicly funded and operating year-round in 14 Chicago communities.

North Lawndale Collaborative

Most violence prevention programs show significant impacts with individuals but less so with whole communities. Several organizations and community groups in Chicago are collaborating in one neighborhood, North Lawndale, to take the work to scale. By serving at least half of the approximately 1250 individuals at high risk, "The Collaborative" hopes to reach a tipping point that dramatically reduces gun violence communitywide. Initial results are promising.

2020 Vision Campaign

Key influencers, especially in the music community, are helping reduce violence by creating anti-violence videos for CRED's 2020 Vision campaign and posting them on Instagram.

Out of Town Trips

To help participants stay safe during big holiday weekends when gun violence often surges, CRED organizes out of town trips to places like Memphis, New Orleans, Atlanta and Washington D.C., exposing participants to historical sites, museums and cultural attractions.

Court Referral

With the support of judges and prosecutors, CRED has begun partnering with the judicial system to provide alternatives to incarceration.

Citywide Coordination

To maintain trust with individuals at risk, violence prevention groups do not collaborate directly with police, however, CRED leaders meet regularly with police and other public agencies to share information on violence trends.

CREDMade

CREDMade is a for-profit food packaging business started to give participants real-life work experiences in a thriving industry. Employees earn a living wage, get health and retirement benefits and skills that can prepare them for jobs in the food-packing industry. Clients include a variety of food manufacturers in Chicago as well as a non-profit organization fighting hunger.

Research Partner

CRED partners with Northwestern University to evaluate our programs, tell us what is working, and help us improve. Northwestern's research shows that participants in our program are about 50% less likely to be shot or rearrested than they would be if not in CRED. Northwestern also helps CRED's outreach workers understand how community networks can both drive violence and foster peace.

Public Policy and Advocacy

Although CRED does not take any public funding, we partner with a variety of community stakeholders to advocate for public investment in violence prevention. Due to our collective advocacy, the total amount of public dollars supporting violence prevention in Chicago has risen from nearly nothing to more than \$100 million annually.

CRED participants have visited historical and cultural sites all across America.



FAMILIES, WOMEN AND YOUTH SERVICES

Family Case Management

CRED recognizes that, in some cases, the best way to support participants is by working with their families. Family case managers develop individualized family service plans for hundreds of families to link them to health care, housing, employment, and legal services. In emergency situations, case managers help with temporary housing and food.

Women's Program

While gun violence victims and offenders are overwhelmingly male, there has been an uptick in violence involving women. In 2019, CRED started a program for women, many of whom have children and some of whom have suffered sexual abuse as well as gun violence-related trauma. Nearly 100 women have now gone through the program and are on a new path to safer lives for themselves and their families.

Youth Program

At any one time in Chicago, there are an estimated 5000 young people under the age of 18 in the pipeline to the street life. They need help to avoid trouble and stay in school. Some also need the same trauma-related services as older participants. In 2021, CRED started a youth program on the South Side with just seven participants. Today it has grown to more than 40 and plans are underway to open a West Side youth program.






LESSONS LEARNED TO CONTINUALLY IMPROVE

Violence prevention work is incredibly uplifting, but it can also be humbling. We learn as we go along and we are deeply committed to listening, constantly evaluating ourselves and getting better. A few important lessons:

- **LTO Matters:** The best people to do this work are the ones with the trust and respect of the people involved. If they're not on your team, it is much more difficult to succeed.
- **Stipends matter:** Our participants need to eat, pay rent and take care of their families. CRED provides modest stipends, so they don't have to stay in the illegal economy just to eat and keep a roof overhead.
- **Social media drives much gun violence.** Young people at risk often threaten and taunt others on social media. Because it is "public," it triggers often violent responses.
- **Police ineffectiveness also drives guns violence.** Arrest rates for shootings are so low in neighborhoods we serve that the vast majority of shooters are walking around free and people don't feel there is any justice. Many shootings are retaliation for other shootings.
- **Violence is highly concentrated.** About 6% of the blocks in Chicago account for about 60% of the gun violence.
- **Hurt people hurt people.** It is vitally important to address trauma, or the violence won't stop. That includes gunshot victims, witnesses, and survivors of people killed.
- **Jobs are the final stage, not the first:** We believe a job can stop a bullet, but many participants are not ready to work. Getting them a job isn't enough. They need support to keep the job.

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- **Safety Matters:** Participants will not stay in the program if they don't feel safe. Find neutral and easily accessible locations and make sure that opponents ("ops") are kept apart from each other. Fear of being spotted and shot is real. It's happened to us.
 - **Community Matters:** One intangible benefit of CRED is that it creates a community for young people. Many come to us lonely, fearful and emotionally isolated. Over time, we become their family, they open up, and they see possibilities.
 - **Family Matters:** Over and over, our participants with children talk about wanting something different for their own kids. Helping them be good parents keeps them grounded, hopeful and committed.
 - **Housing and Transportation Matter:** For many participants, public transportation is not safe and housing options in communities where they are known can put them at risk. Our life coaches routinely pick up and drop off participants and we now have a unit devoted solely to finding safe homes for participants including in new neighborhoods.
 - **Data Counts:** Identify key metrics to hold yourself accountable and determine what is and isn't working. For example, some key metrics could include monthly and yearly levels of of gun violence in communities you serve and whether your program participants and alumni are harmed, arrested or employed. Share the data publicly and with your partners. Do not fall into the trap of only sharing good news.
 - **Listening:** We have built CRED into what it is today by listening carefully to our participants and co-creating as we went along. We constantly seek feedback and learn from our mistakes.
 - **Partnerships.** None of us can do this alone. You need the community, the government, and the business sector engaged and committed.
 - **Relentless engagement.** You have to be present in the lives of participants and the communities where they live. With this work, you see the best and the worst of humanity; to earn the privilege of seeing the best, you must pay the price and see the worst.
 - **Take care of your people:** Burnout is really common in this field. Staff often feel like they can never take time off. They are deeply affected when we lose someone we know – like a participant or a staff member – to violence. Make sure staff feel supported, heard, empowered and respected. When they need a break, insist on it.



GETTING STARTED IN YOUR COMMUNITY

There is no one-size-fits-all approach for creating an effective violence prevention organization. Bearing that in mind, here's a few steps we recommend:

- **Analyze the violence problem:** In some places, it might be drug-related--or not. It might be highly concentrated, like in Chicago, or more random. Study characteristics of victims and shooters. Look for trends—age, background, life experiences. The more you know about the problem you are trying to solve, the more likely your solutions will work.
- **Build capacity slowly and steadily:** Creating a violence prevention organization is like building a house. Start with the foundation--trusted and respected leaders in the community who can engage with the individuals most at risk. Add professional staff over time to help with grants, budgets, etc., but start with those closest to the problem.
- **Think about whether to keep your operation mostly in-house or whether you should partner with existing groups who already have relationships, credibility, and trust.** At CRED, we do both. In-house offers more control but partnerships are vital.



- **Communicate relentlessly:** Community residents are naturally curious, if not suspicious, of organizations doing this kind of work. They need to hear from you, over and over again, about what you are doing, who you are serving, and whether or not it is working. Spend much more time listening than talking. Traumatized people need to be heard and the path to trust is transparency and honesty.
- **Plan for the long term:** Results won't happen overnight. Like policing, violence prevention needs to be a permanent part of the public safety infrastructure. Don't expect quick fixes. It could take years to build the team, establish partnerships and hone your strategy. We've been at it since 2016 and we're really just getting started.
- **Study other places:** Chicago is way behind New York and Los Angeles with violence prevention. Some cities, like Denver and Eugene Oregon, have pioneered new ways to respond to mental health calls. Study the field. Learn from others.



COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

With support from philanthropist Laurene Powell and Emerson Collective, Chicago CRED was founded in 2016 by Arne Duncan, the former U.S. Secretary of Education (2009-2015) and CEO of the Chicago Public Schools (2001-2008). CRED has served more than 1000 participants working directly in five Chicago communities, Roseland, Pullman, West Pullman, North Lawndale and West Garfield Park and indirectly in dozens of others.



Wendy and Rogers Jones run the Youth Peace Center in Roseland.



Rami Nashashibi runs the Inner-City Muslim Action Network in Englewood.



Marshall Hatch Jr. runs the Maafa Redemption Project in West Garfield Park.

CRED SITES

CRED Women's Program
(Roseland)
212 E 95th St
Chicago, IL 60619

NORTH LAWDALE
5000 W Roosevelt Rd, Suite 201
Chicago, IL 60644

NORTH LAWDALE SATELLITE
2501 W Washington Blvd, Suite 101
Chicago, IL 60612

CRED WORKS
(Employment & Training)
1415 W 37th St, Suite 101
Chicago, IL 60609

CREDMADE
(Social Enterprise)
2420 S Wood St, Suite 6
Chicago, IL 60608

DOWNTOWN
c/o The Vistria Group
300 East Randolph St, Suite 3850
Chicago, IL 60601

ROSELAND
1050 E. 95th St
Chicago, IL 60619

ROSELAND SITE #2
1111 E 87th St, Suite 800
Chicago, IL 60619

ROSELAND OUTREACH HUB
519 E 103rd St
Chicago IL 60628



PARTNER SITES

Youth Peace Center
420 W 111th St,
Chicago, IL 60628

MAAFA Redemption Project
22 N Kildare Ave Ste 101
Chicago, IL 60624

IMAN
(Illinois Muslim Action Network)
2744 W 63rd St
Chicago, IL 60629

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