



FULL CASE STUDY: COMMUNITY SAFETY COORDINATION CENTER

"We want to get closer to the root of the problem, not just address the symptom."
- The Culture Committee of the CSCC

TITLE: Community Safety Coordination Center and the Culture Committee

POLICY AREA: Community Safety, Communications, Public Health

TEAM MEMBERS: Office of Equity and Racial Justice (OERJ), Community Safety Coordination Center (CSCC), Chicago Department of Public Health (CDPH), Garfield Rite to Wellness Collaborative, Enlace, The Firehouse Community Arts Center.

Problem Statement

Dominant culture attacks communities of color, fails to support their needs, and fails to provide meaningful opportunities to thrive. This causes people to feel unsafe, switch to a "survival" mindset, and manifest behaviors that are detrimental to their overall wellness and the wellness of their community. Gun violence is a symptom of this larger problem. Is it possible to drive a narrative change effort that embraces the cultural assets of a community and leads to behavioral change aligned with building community wellness?

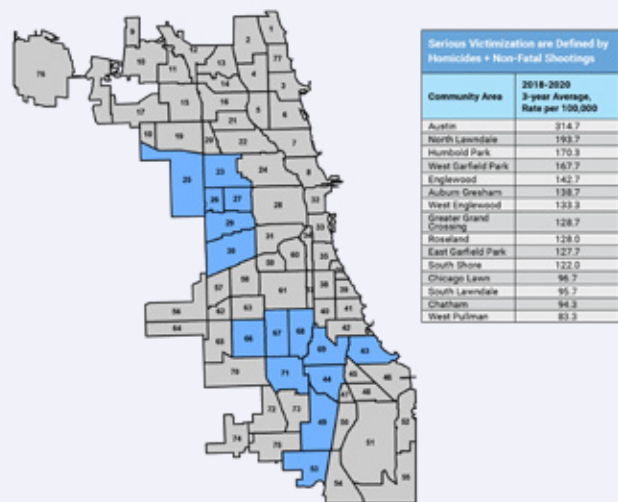
Reflection Questions

- What values and principles matter most to people in certain communities?
- How are these values and principles expressed through individual and collective actions/ behaviors? Which actions/behaviors currently drive toward harm/lack of safety of individuals and the community?
- How can we empower people to change actions/ behaviors to align with individual and collective health and wellness?
- What is the environment we are responsible for creating/maintaining to ensure communities have fair and just access to opportunity and resources that provide everyone the ability to thrive?

REFLECT ON OUR PAST

The context and history of violence in Chicago is complex and when government leaders and community members came together to grapple with that history, the group found inspiration for a new way of working together from the City of Chicago's response to Covid-19.

"We know a great deal about the nature of violence in Chicago. An overwhelming number of homicides in the city are gun-related and victims are disproportionately African American and Latinx males. Most shootings and homicides happen outdoors in public spaces. In 2019, the median age of homicide victims was 271, and 50 percent of the city's shooting victimizations occurred within 10 community areas that comprise 15 percent of the city's population.



Source: [OCOS One-Year Assessment](#)

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REFLECT ON OUR PAST

These neighborhoods are located on the South and West sides of Chicago where poverty, low educational attainment, and poor health outcomes including shorter life expectancy are concentrated.” – Our City Our Safety

Although Chicago is not the most violent city in the country, there is a strong narrative that violence is out of control and intractable. Understanding the scale of the problem is important, however, it is not enough when working to address it. The causes of violence are complex, the problem is long-standing, and the interventions to violence take significant time to see a meaningful impact.

Community violence is a public health problem. COVID-19 demonstrated that we have the power to tackle public health problems. In 2020, as Chicago contended with the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, officials followed the data to find that the racial disparities in infection and death rates were disproportionately manifesting in Black and Brown communities. To help save the lives, the City mounted the Racial Equity Rapid Response Team (RERRT) in 2020 and tapped Chief Equity Officer, Candace Moore (CEqO Moore) to help lead the effort which would focus on those most vulnerable and most impacted by racial disparities.

The RERRT proved to be a powerful strategy of bringing government leaders into partnership with leaders from the communities most impacted by the problem. The RERRT was a place to share knowledge, address conflict, build trust, and ultimately develop promising strategies. However, one of the most powerful outcomes was the transformed relationship with community partners and government leaders. Both sides were treated as valued partners, shared decision-making power, trusted one another’s judgment, and worked together to meet needs. This resulted in better and more effective strategies than any side could do in isolation.

The success of the RERRT in addressing the COVID-19 public health problem prompted the question: “Could the strategy behind RERRT be effective for another one of Chicago’s biggest public health crises, violence?”

RECLAIM OUR PRESENT

Building on the lessons learned, the Community Safety Coordination Center (CSCC) launched in 2021 to take a public health approach to violence prevention and build better collaboration across all the stakeholders. Similar to RERRT, the CSCC established a “Community Safety Leadership Collective” (The Collective). The Collective aimed to shift power by creating a shared table of government and community leaders who would guide the work of the CSCC and ensure that community voice was centered. The Collective identified three focus areas:

- **PEOPLE:** Focused on providing comprehensive support services to those at risk of or involved in violence;
- **PLACES:** Focused on improving City infrastructure and supporting community needs for safe, clean, and usable physical spaces; and
- **CULTURE:** Focused on expanding practices that build stronger relationships, counter narratives that promote unhealthy behaviors, and empower communities to make change that results in individual and community wellness.

CEqO Moore has been co-leading the Culture Committee as it has grappled with what community members felt was a dominant culture attack on communities of color and a failure to empower communities to meaningfully thrive. To combat this the Culture Committee chose to work toward developing strategies that would empower communities to build “culture wellness”, the unique, authentic expression of the values and principles that lead to the long-term health and well-being of the community.

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RECLAIM OUR PRESENT

Shared Culture Building Framework:

CULTURE: Unique, authentic expression of the values and principles of a particular group of people

CULTURE WELLNESS: Unique, authentic expression of the values and principles that lead to the long-term health and well-being of a particular group of people

BLACK-CULTURE WELLNESS*: Unique, authentic expression of values and principles that are self-determined by the Black community that leads to long-term health and wellness of the Black community

- Developed by the Garfield Rite to Wellness Collaborative

*can be adapted to other groups/communities (e.g. Latinx-culture wellness, etc.)

REIMAGINE OUR FUTURE

As the Culture Committee began to vision a better future that fosters a culture that supports communities of color, they chose to focus on launching a behavior change marketing campaign. The Culture Committee believed that a focus on strengthening culture was an important missing element to our current ecosystem of anti-violence strategies.

Initially, this presented some challenges for city officials who carried some fear about the perception of government connecting concepts of violence to culture, given the ways this kind of connection has been weaponized against communities of color in the past (e.g. “a culture of poverty,” super-predator, etc.). However, the committee worked through this fear by listening to each other, naming fears and constraints, and ultimately trusting one another to try something bold and promising.

As the Culture Committee moves forward with the development of the campaign, the objectives are two-fold: 1. Equip young people 10–14 years old in navigating conflict resolution by instilling positive values of cultural wellness and modeling healthy behaviors; 2. Encourage adults to take accountability for creating safe spaces, providing opportunities, and actively supporting the needs of youth.

The Culture Committee chose to center young people not because they are the biggest perpetrators of violent crime, but because they are making important decisions that impact the trajectory of their lives. The Culture Committee’s decision to focus on young people was a product of deep deliberation weighing our opportunities and constraints. We all agreed to move forward in this direction, but we named that it would be important to revisit future opportunities to more directly target the population most contributing to gun violence.

The work of the campaign is ongoing and the Culture Committee looks forward to launching the first phase of the campaign in the summer of 2023. Until then, **the group is proud that the campaign is rooted in these values:**

FOR YOUTH, BY YOUTH: Deeply engages youth from the 15 priority communities to ensure their voices are heard and their values and principles properly captured and expressed in the campaign.

COMMUNITY-DRIVEN: Coordinates closely with members of The Collective and other key partners in the 15 priority communities to ensure the campaign is solution-oriented, reflects the needs of the communities, and establishes credibility with the communities that need to be engaged around the violence prevention campaign.

EVIDENCE-BASED: Conducts research and utilizes learnings from other behavior change campaigns to understand the values, mindsets, and behaviors, as well as cultural and environmental factors that perpetuate violence and its effect on youth.

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OERJ HEALING INSIGHTS

Community is the expert in their own experience. Community members are living the experience that the problem is creating. The insight they bring to building solutions is invaluable. Working together allows you to access your shared expertise to address the challenge of creating a meaningful solution.

Progress moves at the speed of trust. Building trust must be an intentional focus, no matter how urgent the issue is. When conflict arises it is often a test to see how the values of your partnership will hold up.

Violence prevention is not only about stopping acts of violence, it's about building the wellness of communities. Every step of the way our community partners have reminded us that stopping violence requires us to build safety. Safe communities are healthy communities that have the assets and resources they need so the people can thrive.



CSCC work was guided in part by the Community Safety Leadership Collective, a committee of community partners advising the City on its approach to violence reduction