

CRAIN'S CHICAGO BUSINESS

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What businesses must do to stop the cycle of violence

We asked leaders of several nonprofits that work with at-risk youth for a prescription.



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We asked leaders of several nonprofits that work with at-risk youth for a prescription.

A four-pronged approach



Ric Estrada

- Be specific, be a partner, be patient. Specify what re-entry workers can do to make business comfortable hiring them. That could include hires securing a certain number of hours in job skill training and counseling, and participating in restorative justice and healing programs. Businesses need to partner with nonprofit skilled in re-entry work to determine criteria, invest in programs and help build safety nets, because these neighbors will fail a few times before we see significant retention and growth.

- Be committed to building capacity and investing in minority-owned businesses. If you can't/won't hire re-entry workers, build capacity and partner with minority-owned vendors. Minority-owned businesses hire minorities at much higher rates than other businesses. As a large nonprofit, Metropolitan Family Services partners with smaller nonprofits to enhance collective strengths and abilities to serve. The same needs to happen in the private sector, targeting minority-owned companies. Minority- and women-owned business/enterprise requirements exist for most businesses that seek government contracts, and companies that value profits that minority consumers generate establish their own goals. Set the bar high. Blow by the required goals if you want healthier and safer communities.

- Be a voice and a funder. Solutions and services to reduce Chicago's violence require sustained public- and private-sector funding. Challenge public-sector leaders to put their money where their mouths are if they want lasting violence reduction, healing and peace. When they invest, match their investment. Chicago's future as a prosperous global city requires this dual commitment. Funding disruptions destabilize our most vulnerable communities and make street outreach much more difficult. Traumatized communities take time to recover because they do not trust that the public and private sectors are committed long term. Today we have promising resources, infrastructure and momentum, but all must be sustained! For example, Los Angeles is a success today, but it took 20 years to get there. They have less than a third of our gun violence and a much larger population.

- Support mental health services. It is in our collective best interest to act now.

Ric Estrada is CEO of Metropolitan Family Services, which runs Communities Partnering 4 Peace.



Dr. Gary Slutkin

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Arne Duncan's mission: Stopping gun violence

The former Chicago Public Schools CEO and U.S. secretary of education is director of Creating Real Economic Destiny, a nonprofit geared toward at-risk youth.

Do anti-violence programs work? Ask these at-risk young men.

In their own words: Antonio Alsup and James Collins participate in life- and job-coaching programs at Inner-City Muslim Action Network, a CRED partner in solving the city's violence issue. They talk about their lives and what the programs have done for them.

Treat violence like an epidemic disease

Over the past 20 years, dozens of studies have shown that violence behaves like and fulfills the criteria of an epidemic disease. A 2013 Institute of Medicine report confirms that violence is transmitted through exposure and trauma.

Acknowledging this allows us to see people and communities differently—including those who do violence. Therefore we are now responding differently, with much more powerful community-based prevention. These health approaches prevent violence through detection, interruption, preventing spread, treating trauma and changing behavior—using trained local community workers as we do with other epidemic diseases.

In response to the Chicago epidemic of 2015-16, many local philanthropies funded several health approaches through Communities Partnering for Peace, READI (Rapid Employment & Development Initiative), CRED (Creating Real Economic Destiny) and others. This is an incredibly positive development for the city, and violence in Chicago dropped in both 2017 and 2018. Cure Violence helped develop this approach with several community groups and now focuses on training, technical help, hospitals and demonstration sites.

Despite this progress, Chicago communities still do not have funds to cover all of the neighborhood needs. For example, current health approaches in Chicago cover approximately 20 percent of the areas with severe violence, compared with New York City's estimated 60 percent coverage.

Businesses can have a significant impact on violence by helping to expand the coverage of these health-based solutions and by advocating for a citywide approach with the next city administration.

The epidemic of violence is the greatest public health problem of our time. It is also the only epidemic in which the city of Chicago and the health sector have not been sufficiently engaged. Twenty-five other cities in the U.S. have funded this approach, and many studies have shown large reductions in violence as a result. It's well past time for Chicago to more fully invest in the health approach to preventing violence.

Dr. Gary Slutkin is CEO of Cure Violence and professor of epidemiology and global health at the University of Illinois at Chicago School of Public Health.



Billy Moore

Help youth feel differently about themselves

In November 1984, the world witnessed my greatest mistake when I killed high school basketball superstar Benji Wilson. I served 20 years in prison for my crime. Since then, I've been committed to reconciling my past by working to reach young men before they end up on a path to destruction, with a life sentence or early death.

For young African-American men in Chicago, the margins of error are small. Many of our young men feel imprisoned in their communities. With high poverty, no jobs, run-down neighborhoods, irrelevant schooling and drug trafficking, they feel trapped. Survival means embracing the lifestyle around them and accepting low expectations. That's why many of them have guns: to protect themselves, to carry out "justice" the way it's been carried out for decades—without the police. The stress of living under these circumstances is beyond imagination. So far this year, almost 400 people have died from gun violence, but more than 2,000 have been shot, according to city data. And that doesn't count the family members who are directly affected. This is what young African-American men in Chicago are forced to live in.

These young men have been told they are irredeemable for so long that many have begun to believe it.

There aren't enough programs like IMAN (Inner-City Muslim Action Network) or our collaborative partners Chicago CRED and Chicago Beyond that help young men feel differently about themselves and their communities. Programs like these build positive networks among the same young men who sometimes see each other as enemies. We help develop social emotional skills and attainable goals. IMAN has been doing this work for over two decades. However, in order to reach more individuals who are at risk, we need more engagement from community members, leaders and businesses to get involved. This means coming together to scale out the efforts and resources to expand our capacity.

This epidemic of gun violence has a residual effect over the entire community. In order to thrive, everyone must get involved. I'm calling on the business community to get involved not just from an economic development standpoint, but a moral one. Creating viable solutions is a heavy lift that requires everyone to come to the table, especially businesses, as we collectively seek to eradicate the cultural norm and cycle of violence in communities. While lives are being lost, revenue is still being generated, but how much of it is going toward ensuring the preservation of life and keeping communities safe? Businesses need to be a part of the larger solution by investing more resources toward prevention, like the work happening here at IMAN. We can't do it alone.

And we need more men like me engaged in doing this work—men who have lived these experiences, felt the way these young men do and come home to reconcile our pasts and improve our communities.

Billy Moore is a case manager at the Green ReEntry program of the Inner-City Muslim Action Network.



Adam Alonso and Andy Wade

Hire. Invest. Get to work.

Since 1969, BUILD (Broader Urban Involvement & Leadership Development) has mentored thousands of young people who know the pain of violence intimately. Our youth have been incarcerated, arrested, hurt and traumatized in ways no human being should experience.

Yet every day, we see our most hardened youth succeed. With help from caring adults, hard work and hope, yesterday's gangbanger can be tomorrow's branch manager. Or chef. Or coder. Or attorney. The paths to success are as diverse as a great city's talents.

But it takes more than goodwill. Opportunities to earn, learn and grow are essential. It's no coincidence that our most violent neighborhoods are also our poorest. If a teenager is struggling to make rent and gangs are the only way to earn, violence is the ugly cost of doing business.

We can do better. That's where business comes in. Big or small, Chicago businesses can make a dent in violence simply by doing the things they do best: Hire. Invest. Shop for vendors. Get to work.

We don't pretend it is easy. Eighty percent of our 63 staff members come from the same background as our young people. Getting a prison record expunged, introducing work habits, healing past trauma and finding entry-level jobs with growth potential is hard work. The rewards are immeasurable. You may find the finest teammates you've ever had in Austin, Englewood or Humboldt Park. Look beyond the past, and you'll see a brighter future.

You don't have to go it alone. Support programs, tax incentives, investment vehicles, volunteer experiences and workforce partnerships are already in place. If your business model doesn't fit, you can invest in ours, or any of the dozens of other nonprofits that do this work every day.

The time to act is now. Put Chicagoans to work, and great things are possible.

Adam Alonso is CEO and Andy Wade is chief strategy and development officer at BUILD.



The Rev. Dr. Marshall Hatch Sr. and Marshall Hatch Jr.

A vision of One Chicago

Business leaders in Chicago have a long history of civic engagement and community leadership. Our city's current violence epidemic has stained our international reputation. Our inequalities are graphic and our poverty is race-based. This is a dangerous mix. One part of Chicago is thriving, with dynamic economies attracting skilled workforces in vibrant neighborhoods, while other parts of the city are ZIP codes of desperation segregated from opportunity. We are discovering daily that violence is not contained. A city so divided by class and race cannot stand. We need a vision of One Chicago.

What can we do? First, we must recognize the great talent being stifled in impoverished black and brown communities. Through our Maafa Redemption Project ("maafa" is a Kiswahili word meaning "the great disaster," commonly used to refer to the tragic history of the trans-Atlantic African slave trade and its enduring effects), we have found amazing human potential on the street corners of West Garfield Park. Young men ages 18 to 26 who had been written off as "documented

gang members" are finding purpose, voice and vocations through investment in character development, cultural enrichment, life coaching, and employment and career training. Business leaders can lend their voices to help us change the narrative about inner-city youth and see in them our future leaders and workforce.

Second, business leaders should partner with social service agencies in distressed communities to offer entry-level employment opportunities for our young people. Chicago CRED has been a forceful advocate for employing at-risk young men, even as they have invested in job-readiness programs. Leaders in the Illinois Medical District, such as Rush University Medical Center, are now looking to the greater West Side as an extension of their neighborhood and as a place to recruit talent and make investments and forge partnerships. The Chicago Bulls organization has been intentional about offering opportunities to inner-city job seekers.

Lastly, our major corporate leaders can embed themselves in local chambers of commerce in communities like ours. We have recently moved to reconstitute our local chamber and look forward to organizing small businesses on the far west Madison Street corridor. Imagine major corporate executives sitting with our small-business owners as members of our chambers in West Garfield Park and Austin, envisioning and resourcing a rebirth of neighborhood commercial strips together.

Working together, there is much that we can do to help create One Chicago with a dynamic city center and safe, flourishing neighborhoods for all.

The Rev. Dr. Marshall Hatch Sr. is pastor of New Mount Pilgrim Church and president of Pilgrim Development Corp. Marshall Hatch Jr. is executive director of the Maafa Redemption Project of West Garfield Park.



Eddie Bocanegra

We don't stand a chance if we don't get a chance

While a small number of Chicago's highly disadvantaged neighborhoods account for a disproportionate amount of the city's violence, every one of us is affected. The good news is, we all can be part of the solution—especially the business community.

Decreasing violence in Chicago requires the courage to act boldly to holistically address root causes like poverty, trauma and a lack of access to jobs.

Those of us who have made mistakes, and paid for them in jail, don't stand a chance if we don't get a chance. Many leave prison with high hopes for a better future. Without viable alternatives, though, many people with criminal records go back to what they know and lose hope, and the cycle of poverty, desperation and violence continues in neighborhoods that are already disadvantaged.

Focusing on jobs works. We launched READI Chicago last fall, engaging those most likely to be involved in gun violence and connecting them with 18-month paid jobs,

cognitive behavioral therapy and support services. A year into the program, we are making strong progress. But this kind of program only works if we have commitments from the business community to give our program graduates a leg up, a critical second chance in life. This is where the business community can make a vital impact on violence and community revitalization.

We've seen across this city what happens when the business community gets involved—things happen and lives change. To create a safer future, we must do two things: Treat the trauma and provide a way out. Opening doors and reducing barriers to employment is the key. And Chicago's business community holds that key.

Eddie Bocanegra is senior director at [Heartland Alliance's READI Chicago](#).



Autry Phillips

Change the mentality

The cycle of violence won't be stopped by one person or one entity; it has to be a joint venture. Chicago businesses are in the best position to contribute to the reduction and eradication of the senseless violence plaguing the city streets. It makes good business sense to invest in the communities that are experiencing violence.

What must business do to stop the violence? Stop acting like it is not their problem. We have heard numerous times that one thing that would stop a bullet is a job. That's true, but employment is only one solution. We need business to invest in changing the mindset of individuals experiencing a lack of hope.

Giving someone a job is good temporarily, but teaching someone to change his mentality, that a gun will not solve his problem, will yield a much bigger dividend and help create a community environment that is poised for self-sustainability.

Businesses could agree to work together with community outreach workers as a means of building relationships with the community. When a young man is caught stealing or engaging in other adverse behavior, someone from the outreach team can be called to provide guidance and mentoring. Having this type of paradigm within the community would shift the way the community operates and would aid in

ensuring that those prone to bad behaviors can be in a much better position to become productive members of society.

Atry Phillips is executive director at [Target Area DevCorp](#), a regional grassroots social justice organization.

Inline Play

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