**Chicago Project for Violence Prevention / Ceasefire**

The mission of CeaseFire Illinois, a unit at the University of Illinois at Chicago School of Public Health, is to: a) work with community and government partners to reduce violence in all forms; and b) help design interventions required to better define what should be included in a community or city anti-violence plan.

It is widely understood that violence has a significant financial and emotional impact on individuals, families, and neighborhoods. In addition to limiting investments in neighborhoods and creating an overflowing prison population, the costs to individuals and families in terms of lost lives, broken families, stress, and anxiety are unquantifiable. Growing up in communities where violence is an everyday occurrence, youth learn that violence is normal and are thus more likely to use violence or become victims of violence. In Chicago, like many other cities in the US, violence is one of the leading causes of death for people between 15 and 34 years old. More than eighty-five percent of the 513 homicides in Chicago were the result of gun violence. The majority of victims are young men of color from low economic backgrounds. For these young victims, violence has reached epidemic levels.

CeaseFire recognizes that gun violence is concentrated in communities with high unemployment rates, few business opportunities and limited social service resources. In fact, 79.7 percent of homicides in 2012 took place in only 11 of Chicago’s 23 police districts. In most of these 11 districts, killings were concentrated in two to six police beats. The homicide rates in some of these beats were as high as 144 per 100,000 people—astronomically higher than the national average of 4.7 homicides per 100,000 people.

Many CeaseFire program participants are beyond the reach of traditional social support systems. They have dropped out of school, exhausted social services, and may never have been employed. As a result of violence, they are often arrested or taken to the emergency room. As credible messengers, CeaseFire staff members are successful at engaging this population. Staff members will help change their behavior and connect them to resources that would otherwise be out of reach.