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University of Chicago and non-profit organizations team up to reduce youth gun violence, improve school outcomes in Chicago

School-based program will build scientific evidence about violence prevention efforts

The University of Chicago Crime Lab and its community partners are launching a new program designed to help society learn more about how to help adolescent boys avoid conflict and succeed in school and life.

The University of Chicago Crime Lab was established to find ways to reduce crime and violence by helping government agencies and non-profit organizations rigorously evaluate pilot programs designed to curb violence and related social problems such as truancy and school failure.

Beginning this month in 15 schools, the initiative, Becoming A Man (BAM)—Sports Edition, will provide hundreds of adolescent boys around Chicago with a combination of cognitive behavior therapy (CBT) and access to non-traditional sports, with the hope of identifying an effective strategy for addressing the unique challenges facing many of the city's male youth. It is

the first effort designed to help scholars scientifically measure the effectiveness of these two interventions. The MacArthur Foundation, Joyce Foundation, Chicago Community Trust, McCormick Foundation, National Institute of Health, Spencer Foundation, and ComEd are among the organizations that provided funding for the \$1 million program.

The first component is a group-based youth intervention designed by Youth Guidance, one of Chicago's most experienced social service agencies. It offers counseling, systemic-change and life-preparedness programs to Chicago public school students who come from some of the city's most challenged neighborhoods. Becoming A Man uses cognitive behavior therapy to improve students' emotional self-regulation and social skill development to help them avoid potential conflicts. Youth Guidance has successfully implemented BAM in one Chicago high school and several elementary schools and is expanding the program to 14 other Chicago schools, where it will be available for seventh-, eighth-, ninth- and 10th-grade students.

"Sports Edition," the second intervention component, is a package of Olympic sports that includes archery, boxing, judo, team handball, wrestling and weightlifting. It was developed by World Sport Chicago, a non-profit organization that serves as the legacy of Chicago 2016 — the organization responsible for the city's bid for the 2016 Olympic and Paralympic Games.

World Sport Chicago aims to increase the awareness of and involvement in Olympic and Paralympic sport among the city's youth. World Sport Chicago will provide after-school sport programs that offer safe and supervised recreational opportunities directed by coaches trained in the basics of the BAM program model. This training will help support students' social and emotional development. The sport component seeks to reinforce the principles and values that students learn through BAM. It also provides a safe and structured environment for students to engage in positive activities during after-school hours, a time when youth are particularly at risk.

First such program to be evaluated akin to clinical trial in medicine

The University of Chicago Crime Lab will evaluate the program using the most rigorous standards and scientific protocols, akin to a clinical trial in medicine — another area where lives are at stake. If effective, and financially efficient, it could become a model for anti-violence interventions that could be implemented across the country, according to Crime Lab co-directors Jens Ludwig and Harold Pollack, both professors at the University of Chicago.

The University of Chicago Crime Lab was launched in April 2008 in partnership with the City of Chicago, with the goal of developing a portfolio of rigorous experimental evaluations and benefit-cost analyses to identify the most cost-effective ways of addressing the major social problems facing the nation's cities. Among the most important of these problems in Chicago is gun violence, which disproportionately harms low-income, minority youth living in the city's most disadvantaged neighborhoods. About 500 Chicago Public School students have been shot in since September 2007.

"Gun violence remains the leading cause of death for young people in Chicago and other cities across the United States. The ripple effect of youth gun violence is enormous," said Ludwig, the McCormick Foundation Professor in the School of Social Service Administration. Gun violence negatively impacts the mental health, schooling, social and emotional development and even the physical activity level of young people who live in neighborhoods with frequent shootings. A study by the Crime Lab earlier this year found that the social costs that gun violence imposes on Chicago may be as much as \$2.5 billion per year, or about \$2,500 per year for each Chicago household.

"We are honored to be able to partner with two community-based non-profits, Youth Guidance and World Sport Chicago, that are aggressively working to improve the life chances and quality of life of young people in Chicago," said Pollack, Professor at the University's School of Social Service Administration.

Vivian Loseth, chief executive officer of Youth Guidance, noted, "We must be willing to hold ourselves accountable when it comes to offering programs and services to our city's young people. We need to know if our intentions and our actions are achieving results. This is also an opportunity to learn and share best practices with the broader community. That is why Youth Guidance is grateful to be partnering with a world-class research team to evaluate one of our most promising programs."

"This study recognizes the potential for sport to be a powerful tool in the positive development of our youth," said Patrick G. Ryan, Chairman of the Board for World Sport Chicago. "We are proud to be a part of this pioneering program and commend all involved for collaborating in such a positive way for the benefit of our youth."

Crime Lab selects program from among 30 applicants

In March 2009, The University of Chicago Crime Lab released a report entitled, "Gun Violence Among School Age Youth in Chicago," and launched a design competition to find the most promising intervention ideas from community based organizations, as well as city, state and federal agencies. An advisory committee made up of youth and community representatives selected from among more than 30 applications the program developed by Youth Guidance and World Sport Chicago.

For more information, visit <http://crimelab.uchicago.edu>.