



Stop the Violence

Two promising programs to reduce youth violence were unveiled in Chicago this fall

A TEEN CAN'T BE TRAUMATIZED by seeing an act of violence if the act never occurs in the first place. As the costs of community violence, especially among adolescents, become more and more clear, policymakers are intensifying their search for ways to stop what has become an epidemic.

One of the biggest new programs in Chicago is an initiative at the Chicago Public Schools launched by CEO Ron Huberman shortly after the school year began. With an analysis of the hundreds of students who have been shot over the last few years, a team at CPS has built a \$30 million program that will provide an array of supports for 1,200 students who are most likely to be killed, including a paid job and an adult advocate on call 24 hours a day, all in the cause of keeping them away from trouble. Another 10,000 students will be targeted for intervention, and CPS is providing resources such as extra social workers and security guards to the 38 schools where 80 percent of the students who have been shot attended.

The program is costly and as of yet untested—although its design

was deeply informed with data about best-practices of violence prevention around the country. Supporters say that, considering the depth of the problem in Chicago and a relatively poor track record for approaches to date, the plan is a good one. "I think it's one of the most remarkable public policy decisions I've seen. It's a prototypical SSA response to an issue, using data and analytics to arrive at a solution, and an ability to see where theory and good practice happen," says SSA's Hermon Dunlap Smith. Professor Melissa Roderick (Huberman is an alumni of the School).

This fall, the University of Chicago Crime Lab and community partners also announced a new program designed to help CPS students between the ages of 12 to 16 avoid conflict. "Becoming A Man—Sports Edition" is a youth intervention that uses cognitive behavior therapy (CBT) to teach at-risk young men, many of whom lack positive male role models, emotional self-regulation and social skill development, building on student strengths.

The BAM program has been successfully implemented at Clemente

High School since 2001 by Youth Guidance, one of Chicago's oldest and most established social service agencies. Groups of 15 to 20 boys meet once a week for a period throughout the school year, with one-on-one counseling and mentoring as well. "It's a place for them to come in and check in; most youth at these schools don't have that opportunity. And once they break through their defenses, they can talk about what they're thinking, what it takes to be a man," says Anthony Di Vittorio, the BAM program manager for Youth Guidance.

In the expanded version at 15 schools, participants will also be involved after school with a package of Olympic

sports—including archery, boxing, judo, team handball, wrestling, rugby and weightlifting—developed by the nonprofit World Sport Chicago. Providing a safe environment during a potentially risk-filled time of the day, the programs will be directed by coaches trained in the basics of the BAM program, reinforcing its messages and values.

As with all Crime Lab programs, "Becoming A Man—Sports Edition" will be evaluated with rigorous standards and scientific protocols akin to a clinical trial in medicine. The outcomes for its 550 participants will be compared to a similar group of students who are not enrolled in the program, and researchers will look at the program's cost-effectiveness, as well.

"Violence prevention and the criminal justice response have cost billions over the years, but we really don't know what is most effective," says Harold Pollack, who, along with fellow SSA professor Jens Ludwig, co-directs the Crime Lab. "We'd never tolerate that level of a lack of evidence in clinical health care. This program is an attempt to change that."

Roseanna Ander, the Crime Lab's executive director, points out that, although CBT has been widely studied, this program will be the first large-scale, clinical trial of the therapy in a school-based setting. "This particular intervention—the BAM Sports model—is immensely scalable, and that's one reason we chose it to study. If this is shown to make a difference, it is something that can be replicated not just at CPS, but at schools and other youth serving organizations across the country."

Above: Students in an earlier BAM program warm up with sit-ups. Below: Anthony Di Vittorio (left) teaches boxing techniques.

