



Communities Partnering for Peace (CP4P) Street Outreach: The Moments that Matter

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“Communities Partnering for Peace (CP4P) Street Outreach: The Moments that Matter”

by the **Northwestern Neighborhood & Network Initiative (N3)** at the Institute for Policy Research, Northwestern University

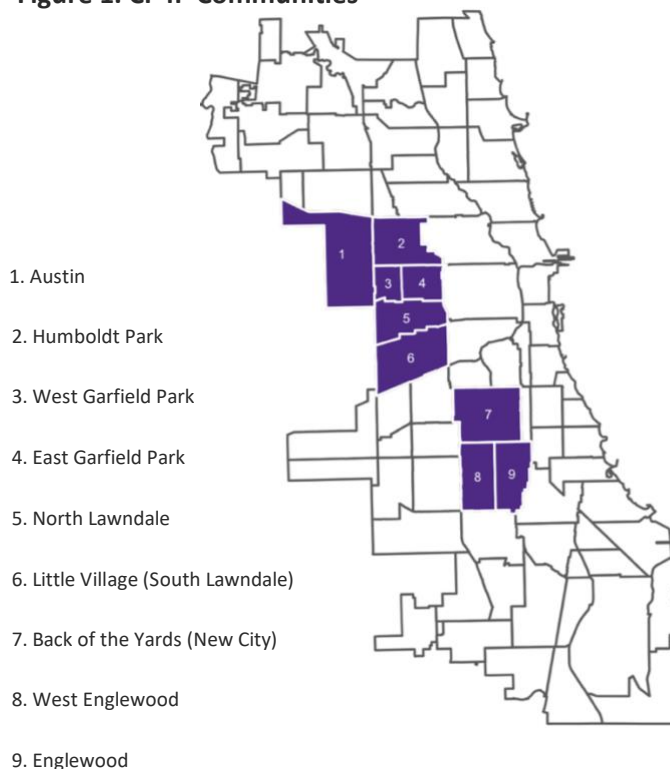
Background and Context

Communities Partnering 4 Peace (CP4P) is a collaboration of Chicago street outreach organizations working towards a common goal: reducing gun violence among individuals with high-risk and gang-involved individuals. CP4P uses a comprehensive, long-term approach that relies on street outreach workers to strengthen relationships throughout their respective communities. They serve as front-line mediators in on-going disputes as well as providing direct social services like legal and restorative justice, employment support, and trauma-informed behavioral health counseling towards individuals who have the highest likelihood of shooting or being shot.

Street outreach is a decades-old practice in Chicago and other cities around the country. It is a model of violence prevention that relies on “**credible messengers**” to form relationships with community members at the highest risk of being victims or perpetrators of violence.

The credible messengers are typically well-respected and well-connected community members and mentors who have lived experiences with gun violence. Street outreach workers leverage relationships within their networks to directly intervene in conflicts that could escalate into violence, and work with their participants to find opportunities outside the world of street crime and violence. The following research is focused on the

Figure 1. CP4P Communities



eight original CP4P organizations that cover communities depicted in Figure 1.¹

As the research partner for CP4P, the Northwestern Neighborhood & Network Initiative (N3) uses quantitative and qualitative methods to study its impact. A preliminary analysis of CP4P's neighborhood-level impact on shootings and homicides found that [shootings and homicides have decreased in CP4P communities since the launch of the programs in 2017](#). While analysis of administrative and survey data illuminates a wide range of behaviors and outcomes, they cannot fully describe the full spectrum of potential participant outcomes. Therefore, CP4P and N3 launched a qualitative study to provide a more holistic account of participant's lives and experiences with street outreach. This study enriches our understanding of how and why certain program elements work. Working together, CP4P and N3 developed a set of four questions to explore in a series of focus groups and interviews with outreach participants:

1. What influence, if any, does street outreach have on participant mindset, values, and perceptions?
2. What influence, if any, does street outreach have on participants' integration into their local communities?
3. How do participants measure progress and define success and failure?
4. What outreach interactions matter more or less to participants?

This rapid research report is based on findings from this fourth research question. We examined participants' descriptions of street outreach in the context of the life experiences and changes they reported before, during, and after working with a CP4P organization. Findings are based on 16 interviews with CP4P participants and 16 focus groups, each one with between five and ten CP4P participants. The interviews were conducted with participants from the eight originally funded CP4P organizations. The research and interview questions were designed jointly, though an engaged research process between N3 and CP4P organizations. An N3 researcher and outreach worker co-facilitated each interview and focus group, asking participants about their life experiences, interactions with outreach, challenges, and successes. To further identify impactful interactions with outreach workers, we also constructed a journey map for each interview based on participants' narratives of their experiences. Six types of key interactions with outreach emerged from our analysis of the interview and focus group data and journey mapping; the mapping depicts a chronology of significant life events and how they align with outreach interactions.²

1. The original eight CP4P organizations are the Institute for Nonviolence Chicago (INVC), Alliance of Local Service Organizations (ALSO), Breakthrough, UCAN, New Life Centers, Precious Blood Ministry of Reconciliation, Inner-City Muslim Action Network (IMAN), and Target Area Development Corp.

2. Two N3 research analysts created "journey maps" for each interview participant. These maps involve coding interview transcripts for the discrete events, emotional experiences, mindsets, behaviors, and interactions with outreach as reported by participants. The maps established a chronology to examine how significant life events and changes lined up with outreach interactions.

Participants Share Why Outreach Matters

During interviews, CP4P participants described their outreach workers as heroes, mentors, and surrogate family.

There are six types of interactions that outreach participants said mattered to them the most. The six interactions fall into two general areas of assistance for participants:

1. Emotional coping and support, and
2. Resources and opportunities.³

Emotional Coping and Support

Chicago outreach workers offer emotional support and coaching to their mentees as they go through crises and the trials of everyday life.

Offering Help During Dark Times



- Participants described in detail how their outreach workers offered support during life's greatest challenges—"my lowest point." Rather than waiting to hear from participants in crisis, outreach workers proactively reached out when informed of violence or other challenging incidents.
- Other particularly impactful outreach actions during participant crises were: outreach workers' modeling of spiritual wellness, conflict mediation, and consistent follow-up.

Responding with Consistent Intervention



- While outreach workers often respond to crises, their more mundane engagements don't go unnoticed by community members. Participants perceive their outreach workers as "always there"; this commitment at times extends, willingly, into outreach workers' off hours, which serves as powerful evidence of sincerity to participants.
- Participants cited outreach workers' persistence as a key reason why they embraced violence-prevention and other related programming. Shifts in mindset were also reported, particularly related to motivation, stress tolerance and reducing impulsivity.

3. All icons are from [The Noun Project](https://thenounproject.com/). Credits: "Handshake" by Misha Petrishchev; "Phone" by Markus, NO; "Friendship" by Symbolon; "Briefcase" by Template; "Courthouse" by Corpus Delicti; "Help" by Adrien Coquet, FR.

Serving as Positive Mentors



- Outreach workers serve as many participants' entry into and foundation of new, healthier relationships. Participants appreciated these new social networks characterized by perceived safety and "positive energy."
- By connecting participants to a like-minded peer group, outreach workers help participants to increase their goal-setting and improve their self-images.

Resources and Opportunities

Chicago outreach workers also open doors for their mentees, connecting them to resources and new experiences related to employment, education, arts, and civic engagement.

Providing Social Services and Recreation



- Leveraging their own personal and professional networks, outreach workers are able to connect residents to previously untapped resources in their communities.
- Offerings range from a longer-term scope (employment, education, housing) to a situational one (food assistance, transportation, etc.). Several participants mentioned that they had "never dreamed" of certain accomplishments they would come to achieve through the outreach programming.

Offering Legal Support



- Outreach workers' roles often include advocating for participants navigating the criminal legal system. This includes attending participant court hearings, sharing participant progress with parole/probation officers, and visiting incarcerated program participants.
- Legal support is at times the context through which participants first meet their outreach workers. During interviews, some of them reflected on how outreach worker encouragement at this stage contributed to their success later on.

Promoting Community Service



- Typically, outreach workers are influential and embedded community members whose personal stories model transformative change for others.
- Several participants discussed how their admiration for outreach workers motivated them to "give back." Participants described contributions to local anti-violence efforts, like Flatlining Violence Inspires Peace (FLIP) in vivid detail.

Below, we highlight the story of one participant from Chicago's West Side, drawn from his own words and his journey map. It illustrates how outreach workers form relationships, work with participants, and describe the program's impact on participants' lives.

Maurice's Story

Most days Maurice⁴ wakes up with his heart racing. He takes the bad memories that revisit him at night, notes his thoughts in his phone, and gets along with his day.

After dropping out of high school at 18, Maurice spent most of his time either on the streets trying to make money or hanging out with his friends trying to stay safe. Maurice took risks, but he also worried about his safety. At 20, he had already lost too many friends. At that time in his life, Maurice always tried to find the fun, but gave little thought to where he was going. He said, "I'm the type that I really don't care about much. I really wouldn't even care sometimes if my mom wouldn't like it. I'm like, 'I'm grown. I do me. She's just going to have to get used to the stuff I do.' "

So far, Maurice has avoided jail, but he did not see his life going anywhere. He did not believe he could accomplish much of anything.

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"The jump" happened while Maurice was hanging out someone he thought was a close friend. He doesn't remember being attacked, only waking up in the hospital, his head swollen. A doctor told him the attack had shifted his brain to the left. Maurice had to relearn all the basics of life, from understanding his name to walking. As he recovered physically, Maurice learned that the group of men that assaulted him were childhood friends. Distrust, anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) set in.

A month or two later, Maurice remembers meeting Trey, an outreach worker from one of the CP4P organizations. It was actually the second time they had met: Trey had visited Maurice while he was in the hospital, but this was the first time Maurice remembers the two meeting. Trey offered to connect Maurice with services to help him move his life forward.



Help during dark times

4. All names in this story have been changed to protect participants' privacy.

Maurice was ready to accept the offer, but he was skeptical that anything could make a difference in his life. “When I first came in [to the CP4P organization], I’ll tell them straight up I didn’t think it was going to help,” he said. “I still came in with an attitude like, ‘I don’t give a f*** about this.’ ”

Maurice’s skepticism did not dissuade Trey, and it did not stop Maurice from trying out one of the organization’s programs that involved his passion, music.

A couple of years before, Maurice, as he recalls, “did a quick verse” [rapped a few verses] while smoking and joking with friends—rapping seemed to come naturally to him. After testing the waters and encouraged by his friends, Maurice stopped smoking and drinking to up his musical game. Using an old laptop, he started laying down beats, verses, and tracks. Since then Maurice has stayed sober to keep his mind clear to make music.



Social services and recreation

The first formal program Trey got Maurice into built on his passion for music, focusing on art and music, setting up equipment, and learning about music production.

Maurice, however, will be the first to admit that it wasn’t the music that brought him in the door, but the stipend. When the program and the stipend ended, Maurice got a different job. But he kept coming back to the program. The music and the camaraderie with other participants had won him over. In addition to the music, Maurice talked about the program’s discussion circles, where participants could talk about their days and their lives. He described people as quiet in these circles at first. Then, outreach participants cautiously started to share “like a turtle coming out with the little neck.” They opened up about their pasts and their experiences in their neighborhoods. Maurice never expected to have that type of emotional experience or leave the program with friends who felt like family.

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Maurice had learned to expect people to let him down, but outreach showed up for him on and off the clock. In Trey and the other outreach workers, Maurice found people who would lift him up in saying, “I’m not going to give up on you,” and “I know you have this potential.”

Maurice says having someone to push him made the difference between a positive and negative mindset. He is trying to get his GED, but he failed math on his first try and quit. Trey didn't let him off the hook. According to Maurice, "He was just like 'Why? What happened, little brother? ... Go back in and you could be ready for it. Don't just give up like that. You can do it. I know you can do it.' " That's not always what Maurice wants to hear, but he doesn't want to let Trey down. So he's giving the GED program another try.



Consistent intervention



Positive mentorship

Maurice still wakes up with panic attacks, his heart racing as he jumps out of bed, but Trey connected him with a counselor for that. Maurice still doesn't know exactly what his future will look like or if he can make money off of music, but he's hopeful and is at peace with his direction. "Music is my passion, yes, I love music, but I got to make sure my family is straight," he said. "If I can do it with the music, I'll do it, but if I can't, but there's another way. Let's get it."

Maurice has plans A, B, and C for what that job could be and how to keep pushing himself further and further: Back to school. To college. To possibilities he never saw for himself before.

"When I was really down, they came through. They showed as much love as they could. I appreciated that because it could be rough times. It could be good days, bad days, lost friends. Other times, you think nobody is on the side of you.

While you [are] sitting there shedding tears, they would always call."

—Maurice, CP4P Participant

The **Northwestern Neighborhood & Network Initiative (N3)** promotes new ways for faculty, experts, and students at Northwestern University's Institute for Policy Research to engage communities, civic partners, and policymakers to address core problems facing the residents of Chicago and surrounding communities. Specific projects and types of engagement will be linked by a focus on how the social relationships among networks, geographic communities, and the constellation of groups, organizations, and civic partners affect what we feel, think, and do—and how understanding, building, and leveraging this sort of network-thinking can improve neighborhoods, the city, and our region.

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