

“Free and Alive Until Age 25”: Hope Dealing in West Palm Beach

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## Executive Summary

Community violence is a problem in many cities across the nation. Reports of increased gun violence during the pandemic are still being edited...One group is dedicated to keeping community member “free and alive until 25” Through their Hope dealing framework young people are paired with adults that support their development. Through providing "mentoring and programming dedicated to empower and inspire inner city youth to embody the change they want to see in their communities” Inner City Innovators (ICI) are doing the best they can to support their community to deal with underling issues of community gun violence.

The solution presented isn't a solution at all but rather a look at how one program in one Southern city interprets the different avenues to quell community violence. The ICI framework includes both preventative and interventive models that, if properly invested, will live up to their motto of "free and alive at 25.”

Two key themes emerged from the interviews:

1. Mentorship, building relationships, and using social capital to increase engagement are all used as measurements of success
2. Providing resources help to eliminate harm/harm reduction model is a best practice

One recommendation we offer is to provide resources to conduct participatory evaluation that is based on the desires of community members.



## Background

Neighborhood Scout reported WEST palm beach with a crime rate of 40 per one thousand residents has one of the highest crime rates in the country (Neighborhood Scout, 2021). Our problem specifically centers around gun violence reduction in West Palm Beach, FL by Inner City Innovators. Studying their tactics and approach offers another peek into what other cities are doing to combat violent crimes in their communities. This project also serves to collect and analyze best practices for reducing violent crimes.

We describe ICI as a successful community-driven model based on the number of community-based partnerships they have, the Hope Dealer model which includes a large volunteer base, and their commitment to giving resources to those young people most at risk to be perpetrator or victim of a crime. They also offer anti-violence workshops and community-driven models of addressing gun violence in the region.

## Problem Statement

There is no single “correct” approach to addressing community violence. Organizations take multiple approaches to combat the problem. We interviewed an organization local to West Palm Beach, Florida, and a national organization with a West Palm Beach chapter. The two organizations were the Inner-City Innovators (ICI) and the National Urban League (NUL) respectively. Each organization brings a different approach and objectives to ending community violence, both of which are pertinent to expanding our understanding of the need.

Our inquiry concerns how gun violence reduction is viewed and attended by these organizations. We wanted to gain a better understanding of what approaches work well to deter and decrease gun violence rates in Palm Beach. As a result, we used phenomenology as our methodology since we are researching the individualized experience of our participants with this phenomenon. We are seeking to understand what actions become measurable best practices.

## Proposed Solutions

Inner City Innovator (ICI) leadership uses social capital as a resource to develop its social network and affect change in the West Palm Beach community (N. Austin, personal communication, March 2, 2022). An overarching theme in the ICI framework is the concept of social capital. They build networks and relationships around their community. As word-of-mouth spreads, news travels that ICI is available to all who need their services. Youth who are familiar with ICI trust ICI. The element of trust is important, and ICI embeds its operations in areas the youth are familiar with. They hold events in local parks and community centers.

### Anti Violence Workshops

Because homicide disproportionately affects young black males residing in communities of concentrated disadvantage, we've created workshops geared towards giving these youth the skills they need to reduce their likelihood of perpetrating or being victimized by gun violence. Homicide is the leading cause of death for African American males between the ages of 15 and 24. We aim to end this trend through our Anti-Violence Workshops.

Through our workshops, we teach youth residing in communities of concentrated violence how to keep themselves SAFE while navigating life in their communities.

- BE (S)mart about who you associate yourself with.
- BE (A)lert to your surroundings at all times.
- BE (F)earless about getting yourself out of uncomfortable situations.
- BE (E)arnest about keeping yourself and others safe by any means.



[LET'S SETUP A WORKSHOP](#)

Success in ICI is evaluated by the number of successes they have. The primary measure is the number of youths they keep free and alive through the age of 25. ICI chose 25 as the age because they believe a person's brain is fully developed at that age. Free means free from being incarcerated or in a cemetery. Another measure of success is the number of mentors. ICI also measures success by the number of professional opportunities youths are presented with.

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## Community Engagement

To convey a credible, clear message about the consequences of gun violence our team hits the streets of our target neighborhoods on a weekly basis to engage the youth most likely to perpetrate or be victimized by gun violence in hopes of dealing them hope for their futures and connecting them to vital resources.

If you serve our target population and need help getting information about your services to the people who need it most feel free to contact us. It takes a village!

STAY UPDATED



The National Urban League’s primary focus is to “enable and empower African-Americans and others in underserved communities to achieve their highest human potential and secure economic self-reliance, parity, power and civil rights.” The National Urban League combines risk indicators, geo-political, and ethnic subdivisions of targeted communities to identify and provide diverse services with an array of goals for victims of gun violence.

### *Mentoring as Social Capital*

“We define success by first of all keeping the youth free and alive through the age of 25. That means free of incarceration, free from the cemeteries. So, we’ve already succeeded if we keep youth in our community alive and free from those institutions. That’s the number on success rate that we have. But we noticed that when we started recruiting, we started with 3 mentees and now we have a total of 64 (I think) that’s registered. We would consider that a success as well, because now we have a full program of mentees that we’re mentoring either in a registry in process, or they’re actually being required to. And now we matched about 30 mentees with about 5 mentors in our programs. That’s another way that we evaluate success.” - Norman

## Hope Dealer Mentoring

A hybrid mentoring program for inner-city males between the ages of 15 and 24 focused on leadership development, social/emotional learning, and community service.

Real change happens when those who need it lead so we aim to empower our mentees to embody the change so desperately needed in their communities.

BECOME A MENTOR

BECOME A MENTEE



## Lady Hope Dealer Mentoring

The sister program of our Hope Dealer Mentoring Program but for young ladies and with an added emphasis on reproductive education

BECOME A MENTOR

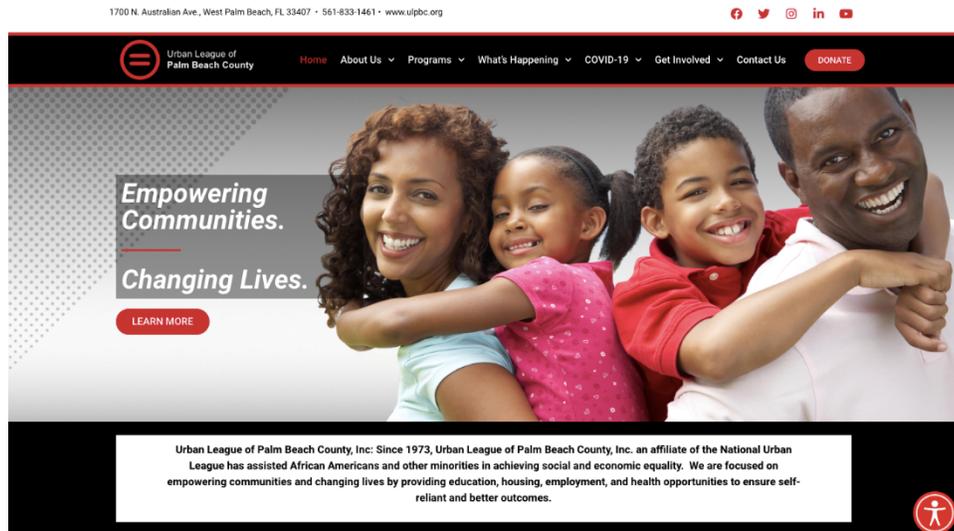
BECOME A MENTEE



“We’ve allowed – due to our ratio, we have 5 mentors, so with 30 mentees matched, that’s about 5 mentees per mentor, right? Well, all of our mentors that we currently have now, they were at once a mentee in our program. So, all of our mentees is paying it forward to the community. Because our whole goal is to have each one of our programs run by members of our community who’ve basically went through our program as a mentee – or from the community – because they better know and understand what these kids are going through and that social capital is already there.” - Norman

“But we want that mentorship, and that one-on-one small group mentoring, to be facilitated by mentors that 1) were once a mentee, and 2) they’ve gone through our leadership program, and now they are mentors. But the expectation of those mentors are basically facilitating and overseeing the mentees that they currently have. And making sure that they start from an ideal state and that they get through to their real state. And that’s by practice on a weekly basis, and then a group setting basis, and wherever they may fail, or they may stop at, we’ll revisit that on the wheel, and continue until they’re free and alive until the age of 25.” -Norman

“We also have a mentoring program that is funded by the Department of Juvenile Justice, and it's a federally funded program where we do group mentoring. We take individuals, I believe we're up to 120 mentees students. here we do group mentoring it's not we are not allowed to do One-on-one mentoring where they meet with a mentor, and we focus on college work and life. So we have multiple buckets that can catch catch many many students from many different areas, depending on what buckets. you think you will fit well in better in that's where we place you and all of them focus on college work.” - Tomas Evangelista (T. Evangelista, personal communication, April 7, 2022).



Both programs provide services and opportunities that target individuals, like 1) assisting with establishing participant's social currency, 2) aiding with recognizing, acknowledging, and expressing the effects of gun violence, and 3) promoting a pay-it-forward leadership style. ICI goes door-to-door in communities where one or more members has connections to establish new networks and strengthen existing relationships. ICI helps participants with attaining an education and a driver's license to encourage participant acknowledgement of individual self-worth to their friends and family. Additionally, group emotional and mental healing occurs using the COMPASS methodology in separate male and female small group sessions. Leadership is incentivized and encouraged through hands-on community projects, meetings with the press, and S.M.A.R.T. goal setting. Conversely, the National Urban League segments its programs and rewards while providing community offices and meeting spaces which may be separate from the participant's neighborhood. Individuals may or may not receive children and family nutrition assistance, education assistance, and driver's license assistance. Participants living in two West Palm Beach zip codes are eligible for a program that excludes the rest of the city. Notably, the National Urban League provides judicial services assistance to qualified participants.

Analyzing local and national non-governmental organizations focused on reducing gun violence in West Palm Beach, Florida highlights the need for a comprehensive approach to stemming the rise of gun violence in Urbana, IL.

The National Urban League of West Palm Beach generates ideas to help the community through community advisory boards. These boards partner with other agencies to provide community-based help to recently released offenders so they have a chance to become productive members of their communities. The interpersonal and intrapersonal networks these committees form with the citizens are also important to establishing the foundation to improve people's quality of life. When people's quality of life is improved, it is hoped that the violence rate decreases. By giving the communities control over these boards, the communities are involved in their own successes.

The National Urban League has no single definition for success of the communities. However, the ultimate success they want to see is someone taking advantage of community programs to

move “up and out” of their current life conditions. Success can be earning their high school diploma or getting vocational training, for example. When the community succeeds (in having self-autonomy), the National Urban League succeeds.

## Solutions/Conclusion

Success is not only measured in meeting contractual obligations but also when the individual participating in one of their programs achieves their personal goal(s). Inner City Innovators takes a more community-based, grassroots approach. The organization was started by a community member who sought to help improve the conditions where he lived. His reach is more local, as compared to the Urban League, with a broader reach. While the Urban League operates with a broader approach, Inner City Innovator’s approach should not be discounted. There is no right or wrong approach to either working locally (in the neighborhood) or county-wide to address gun violence issues. Inner City Innovators and the National Urban League work to provide people with the opportunities to better themselves AND the communities around them. By participating in each respective organization’s programs, youth learn life-skills that set them up for success. Participatory Evaluation Methods In an effort to improve the efficiency and accuracy of support we offer a collaborative evaluation method.

During the interviews, the research team witnessed from both interviews a true desire to transform the conditions that their stakeholders are navigating. One way to get on a pathway of accountability is participatory program evaluation. These approaches help facilitate those most affected by gun violence in developing the standard by which success is measured and sharing the context of the evaluation analysis with their peers also engaged in similar work. This perspective of evaluation makes room for nuance and supports the reflexivity necessary for success. The result of the transformative collaborative evaluation can be put into a database that is accessible to people within the network of gun violence reduction coalition. You then have a database of evaluation research led by those impacted by the engagement and we won't fall into the trap of saviorism because the best practices come directly from those who are in the engagements.

**Collaboration**



**Competition**

Because communities around the nation have seen an uptick in community violence (Schleimer et al., 2022) there is an appeal to deepen our understanding of the problem in order to properly attend to it. What better way to connect with others than by a community-based resource hub that

offers communities and researchers to come together and work toward a solution to the issues they face. Communities and researchers can develop empirical evidence and simultaneously create an empowered community who isn't reliant on council or those interested in making money from surveillance technology for data on their community. This is real community data. This model merges and muddles the identities of stakeholders and evaluators in that one is both simultaneously.

## References

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## **Author Biographies**

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Brad King (He/Him) is a MSLIS graduate candidate with the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign. He earned a B.A. in Library Science from the University of Arizona Global Campus with a focus on globalization and information systems. His research focuses on DEIA in libraries, archives, and cultural heritage institutions, application of machine learning in historically static environments, and proprietary information systems.

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Posey (She/Her) is a youth worker and organizer in the central Illinois area. Currently, her work looks at the \ the Radical Imagination in grassroots information ecologies. She's interested in curating spaces for the imagination to ignite, influence and liberate! She is excited to think critically about the role of activists and organizers in sharing alternative media and expanding access to social justice culture.

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Ivan Kong is a second-year PhD student studying cybersecurity at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.