

Where Peace Lives

Transcript

I'm running into every fire every day for 37 years.

It's the work we do. We ain't got no vests, no guns or nothing, but we got our heart. We got our love for our community. Any time these interrupters come out here and put their life on the line so everybody can go home with their life is a powerful, powerful thing.

Community violence intervention is really about communities transforming pain into purpose.

There is a new and innovative way for us to create and sustain safety, and that's CVI.

CVI works because gun violence is preventable, and we actually can also see that it works with data. 2023 was the single largest decrease in gun violence in history, 13%. And then in 2024, we beat that 16%. And we're continuing to see these numbers go down. And in some cities, they're seeing lower rates and amounts of gun violence than ever in recorded history.

All right, good seeing you, bro.

Community violence intervention is an absolutely essential part of preventing gun injuries and gun deaths in this country. Far few people actually know what CVI means.

There's a history to where violence exists in this country. I think people are surprised to learn that violence isn't like evenly distributed everywhere. It's highly concentrated in specific communities that have experienced systematic neglect over decades, decades, maybe even hundreds of years.

How people define community varies, but typically it's folks who know each other or grew up in the same area or went to school together. Community violence is typically connected to some interpersonal conflict between people who share a community. And so community violence intervention can be street outreach that works with folks in their neighborhood, hospital-based programs, therapy and lifestyle changes. So it shows up in different ways working to intervene acts of community violence by engaging those who are most at risk or most vulnerable to violence.

All of us deserve to have a supportive ecosystem. Ecosystem is about looking at violence like, okay, what do we need to support communities, to support individuals to be able to live safe, eat healthy, make smarter decisions. We have street outreach and interruption work. We have life coaching, hospital-based violence intervention, peace fellowships, cognitive behavioral therapies that are focused on violence. All of these are working in concert. Their strategies are different, but they are all aimed at disrupting

cycles of violence and saving lives, and in doing so, transforming whole communities. That's what the CVI ecosystem is.

LIFE Camp is an organization that I founded in 2002. The work is around focusing on those young people that the world doesn't care about and helping to reduce and change the system of violence that existed in our community.

We're working on peace. We're working on personal transformation, a lane within public safety that you can utilize non-punitive strategies to redirect the lives of individuals that have the likelihood of creating violence that focuses on giving people life, giving people hope. The best violence interruption or intervention is preventing something from ever happening.

At its core, CVI is an essential part of our public safety ecosystem.

We're looking at what people have been doing to protect each other, help each other, support each other, and we're giving it a term.

We need people to understand gun violence in this country. It really is people getting into arguments and those arguments turning deadly because a gun is at hand.

I was caught in the middle of a crossfire and a bullet that hit me, hit two arteries and nearly cost me my life. And when I emerged from my recovery, I committed to really the urgency to take action on this issue.

I got into violence intervention work because I was exposed to so much violence. I saw so much pain. I recognized that the key to my purpose in life is about helping people connect to each other.

Now I get emotional when I talk about the work. This is personal. This is my passion. I was born and raised in a single parent home. I was the oldest of four boys. I lost my brother to gang violence. My brother was murdered, right? Got caught in between crossfires of two rival gangs and was shot dead.

If you or your family member got shot, all of a sudden chaos happens. So when a trigger gets pulled, it sets off a cacophony of all sorts of different things happening at the same time. And so CVI recognizes that these effects of gun violence are massive and widespread, and we need a full team and whole of society approach to address it.

A violence interrupter is much like a firefighter. They run to instances of conflict to help mediate those conflicts.

We are the part of the team that gets the network in the community together. I'm the community liaison. I'm in charge of making sure that we have connections with the schools, the churches, police departments, stakeholders, businesses.

What's so special about it is that we actually from this community. We already have a connection with everybody already. People actually do respect us in the community and when they see us, they know we don't mean no harm, that we actually trying to help them, and we really want the best for them.

I think you start to see the love for the community that they have in a different way. The pride for the city that you come from instead of the destruction. It's more than just taking a gun out their hand. You change their mindset, then they going to view the world different.

One thing good about our violence interrupters that we try to get people from the community that is credible. They have relationships in all these zones and we travel in twos for safety and we use the briefing, take that information, and they shared connected with the data, and then we'll be able to go out and extract in the community and see where those areas we need to target the most.

Many of the folks that are in the CVI space and the folks who are doing the frontline work have maybe themselves been perpetrators of violence or they've been victims of violence, talking to the people that are the interrupters themselves. That's a story of new life. It's a story of redemption.

All of that revolves around a person's what we call LTO, license to operate, which is really one's credibility that is given to you by community in order to engage those that will have the highest chance of being shot or being a shooter. People that are at the center of that cycle of violence.

Lived experience and local experience is part of the power of CVI.

Particularly in LA, as we have a lot of Latinos, Chicano communities, the conversations are different, the interactions are different. It's culturally appropriate and responsive to where our communities are at.

Intervention is very connected to the culture that we come from, right? Those beliefs that we learned either in Mexico, or we learn in our household. The way that we operate, the way that we connect with our community members, looks different. Not a lot, but it looks different.

This is not a cookie cutter approach. This is something that really supports the needs in communities.

The innovation here was the specificity of addressing violence through an epidemiological lens. The same way that we can stop epidemics like AIDS or tuberculosis, we can utilize those same epidemic reversal strategies to stop this epidemic of violence.

Violence is like it's contagious. This, you know what I'm saying? It's a disease. You know what I'm saying?

The Jill Fox Center for Hope stands between that neighborhood, which has life expectancies of 20 years lower than that neighborhood north of Northern Parkway. We had a duty to help those kids there because if we didn't do something, they were going to end up in that hospital down there.

We see health care as a critical component. Hospital-based violence intervention recognizes that at a point when a victim of violence enters the hospital, there's a critical window of time to meet them where they are, help them process the trauma of that experience. Those community members with lived experience come to the hospital. Be there at bedside.

Our job as interventionists is to not only prevent that person from either coming back to the hospital for a violent injury, but from also from them being discharged from the hospital and then retaliating and engaging in future violence in their communities.

I oversee two hospital responder programs where there's a bedside intervention, where if someone comes in who's shot, they're met by someone who might have been shot themselves, and they say to them, "Look, how can I help you first? Keep you safe? And what do you need to help you get on the right path?"

I have lived experience. I'm 46 years old. The first time I've been shot, I was 14. The last time I was shot, I was shot in my head. That led to a hospital responder coming to my bedside. Asked me to go into a program that actually got me this job to be the first hospital responder for Grace Medical Center.

Community violence intervention is something indigenous to our community since we've been a community. And so seeing this approach expanded across the country has really created opportunities for those with lived experience, and many of which have been system impacted where their past may have been a liability, where in this work, their past is actually an asset.

Me being a hospital setting is that's even more important because when somebody come to the hospital and they be like, "Oh damn, yo. We was in Hagerstown together." It's inspiration to them. "Oh, you. Oh, you did that? Oh, I know I can do it." That's the credible messenger.

Mediating conflicts, encouraging behavior change, alternate paths to dispute resolution, work. Behavioral interventions provide individuals at higher risk of gun violence involvement with tools to navigate conflict and diffuse them without using a firearm.

It's really about helping people understand that the connection between your thoughts, your feelings and behaviors. Understand that you can control any one of those at any time, but you have to be intentional about recognizing what you're thinking, how it's affecting what you're feeling, and then what the results are, what the behavior connected to that is.

Youth guidance creates and implements program that enable young people to overcome obstacles, succeed in school and life. We have two evidence-based programs. BAM, Becoming a Man, and WOW, Working on Womanhood program. We do it through a school-based counseling program, focuses on cognitive behavioral therapy and then also through workforce development and post-secondary pathways.

Each part has a part to play in combating violence.

Taking a public health approach is doing everything possible to prevent someone from ending up in a coffin, a cage, or a trauma bay. And being smart on public safety really requires investing upstream and doing everything possible for preventing harm from happening, and breaking the cycle of gun violence.

We had a 12 year-old girl about two years ago that was shot and killed. Um, shot in the chest. We could not save her life in the trauma bay, but we became close with her 14 year-old brother. He said he lived a life of hopelessness. Through the help of community violence intervention organizations, credible messengers, folks with lived experience, he started to get mentorship. He started to see some hope. And now, fast forward 2 years, he's going to nursing school and he brought four friends with him. That's what community violence intervention is about.

Cities across the country are seeing historic drops in homicides. And many are pointing to a common factor, community violence intervention programs.

When you see the numbers, and I can tell you right now that gun violence is down 40% in Chicago this year, and that's at coming after 3 years of declining numbers.

Numbers don't lie. Go on Google and look it up.

It is a crisis, but the best thing I can tell you is that we have the solutions that work.

We've seen a 52% reduction in gunshot wound admissions at Sinai Hospital.

In our community, we went 865 days without no one being shot. We went 4 years without no one being killed.

Y'all are the key. Y'all are the oxygen mask to pump new love and new life and new hope into their souls, into their hearts.

As someone who does it and who lives it, I can boil it down to a very simple point, and that is just love. We're just trying to get back to a point where love is the focal point.

Being able to work with men and women who have been there, done that, and build a platform to stand on to say, this is the type of safety we need is critical to reshaping how this country not only sees our communities, but also how they see safety.

We've evaluated a number of CVI programs at the University of Chicago Crime Lab and found that they can change behavior, reduce the likelihood that someone is arrested, is a victim of a violent incident, can even increase other aspects of success in economic mobilities.

Until we truly address the real root cause drivers of violence, it is a very fragile thing that we have done that easily can be reversed.

I'll say what I can say without like tears because it's unfortunate to have way too many examples, um of this being crystallized for why I do the work that I do. Knowing too many people who have been harmed in this way. But because of that, right, there is an inability to quit.

The lack of understanding decisions that continually take away from this work that we know is important, and me recognizing the ramifications of what that means for our communities. Those moments can be the moments that really make you want to just say, I give up, cuz I don't know how many different ways I can shout this, right? I can put it to you on paper, I can research it, I can, right, show you the evidence, and then you still don't support? What is your real motive here?

That's when it's good to like be in community and know that there's a community of us out here who know and understand the work. And then you remember all of the instances, and all of the people that you are doing this work for. So, you continue to do the work.

This is our everyday life. We're not separated from these people that we're talking about. These are our families.

This work gives to you like I mean it was handed off and cultivated by elders that have been doing this work for a long time, and it's something that I honor. There's a spirit to it.

I would like to see CVI being every city's priority. If everybody watches this, then I think that it will be more broadly understood.

It's very important. It's making change. It's changing my city.

It's for me to show that I'm on the right path and to get other people also on the right path. I deal with giving them job opportunities. If they don't have certain identifications while they walking around here, I make sure they get that. It make me feel good that I'm doing my job out here in these streets and changing lives. I interrupt violence.

I want to feel safe everywhere. I'm a new mom. I want my child to feel safe going to their friends' homes. That shared safety is critical for community. We see violent trends shift and communities thrive. There's more room for economic prosperity, relational prosperity. There's a sense of connection. Every community wants that.

The first step is believing in people. Because when we actually care and invest and pour into those communities, we see lives change.

If you care about being safe, you should care. Everybody understands that they feel like they deserve safety. They feel like they deserve peace. They feel like they deserve communities that they can exist in without fear of loss.

Appreciate you. Love you. They trying to get a tear on camera.