Get IN Chicago Key Learnings to Reduce Violence

In five years of funding and studying youth violence prevention programs, Get IN Chicago has learned a great deal about how we as a city can take incremental progress to larger-scale individual and community change.

Increase Focus is Needed On Acutely-High-Risk Youth
- Acutely-At-Risk youth are highly likely to be victims or perpetrators of violence and are already involved with or on the cusp of becoming part of the justice system.
- They are typically young minority men who have been victims of violence, are not engaged in school, had IEPs for cognitive or social-emotional issues when they were in school, have a parent who is or has been in prison and had several interactions with the juvenile justice system.
- Importantly, a distinction needs to be made between these acutely high-risk youth and the many youth in Chicago who are not achieving their full potential and would and do benefit from youth development and extra-curricular programs.

These Acutely-High-Risk Youth Need Highly Coordinated and Comprehensive Services
- Youth most likely to be involved in violence need a highly integrated set of services overseen by a professional case manager.
- Acutely high-risk youth struggle with a broad set of issues such as homelessness, substance dependence, education challenges, unemployment, trauma and bad role models.
- Get IN Chicago created its SYNC network (Strengthening Youth through a Network of Care) to provide integration among the programs addressing each of these issues.
- SYNC case managers work to engage target youth in a comprehensive set of services and advocate for them to get the right “dosage” for their specific needs.

Human and Community Service Organizations Need More Support & Capacity Building
- The capabilities and capacity of social services providers in Chicago are not currently sufficient to reduce youth violence.
- Underinvestment in the most violent neighborhoods has also led to insufficient investment in social service providers in those same communities.
- Community-based programs are critical to building trust, leveraging community assets and making it easy for youth to access services.
Many non-profits are small with limited funding and don’t have the capacity to invest in continuous improvement.

Investment in identifying and disseminating best practices and expanding capacity is necessary.

We Need to Measure Outcomes in Addition to Services

- Assessing outcomes for social services is difficult but is necessary and needs to be expanded.
- Program delivery can be improved by instituting new measurement and accountability with the ultimate beneficiaries being youth participants.
- We need to move past the culture of measuring activity (30 young people in a mentoring program) to establish new metrics based on life progress (re-engagement in school, securing employment, getting counseling) and integrating them into performance management systems.