



## HOW PLACE-BASED APPROACHES TO YOUTH VIOLENCE PREVENTION CAN BUILD COMMUNITY TRUST

### **A Report on Get IN Chicago's Police-Youth Baseball Leagues, 2015-2017**

Crystal Jackson, PhD, Get IN Chicago

In 2015, with attention to the often contentious relationship between police and communities of color, Get IN Chicago partnered with the Chicago Police Department (CPD) to develop a place-based strategy to provide officers an opportunity to build positive relationships with youth and to help mitigate negative perceptions youth may have of local law enforcement.

This report outlines the program development and impact of the resulting police-youth baseball leagues.

Because the youth-police programming was meant to change perceptions and build relationships, it focused specifically on younger children between the ages of 9 and 12 years old whose experiences with and attitudes toward police might be more malleable than older youth. This age group was also important because data from CPD showed that negative contact between youth and police was occurring at earlier ages in some Chicago police districts.

## Findings & Implications

In communities of color where basketball and football were far more prevalent, the Police-Youth Baseball Leagues were noteworthy for their popularity and growth, their community-building and their impact on young people. What began with one league in Englewood in three summers evolved into two additional leagues in North Lawndale and Austin, culminating with an annual All-Star Game.

### Key Findings and implications from this report

#### **F1. All Youth Experienced Positive Changes in Self-Perception of Leadership, Conflict Resolution Skills, and Future Orientation.**

This is significant as youth violence frequently emanates from unresolved conflicts that escalate. Youth ages 9 to 11 experienced the most benefit to their leadership skills compared to all other youth. Youth ages 9 to 11 were also observed to have significant improvements in self-perceptions and about the future compared to other youth participants.

*Implication: Early exposure to youth development activities yield greater impact.*

#### **F2. Participating police officers believe league participation created opportunities to improve community relations.**

“The grandmother came up to me and said, ‘you know what – you’re the only one he listens to.’ When I showed [the young man] I cared, and I talked to him [then] anything I asked him to do he did with no problem. So that’s what his grandmother noticed and that’s why she asked me to be a mentor.” - *Officer focus group participant*

*Implication: Introducing year-round opportunities for police and youth to interact with each other positively may facilitate more communication and improvements in community trust.*

#### **F3. While Youth Perceptions of Police Didn’t Change, Their Willingness to Examine Perceptions Did**

Notably young girls showed the most progress in modifying their negative perceptions of police. Although overall boys and older youth did not report significantly modifying their negative perceptions of police over time, they did demonstrate more willingness to question their beliefs by the end of the league.

*Implication: When working to improve trust, recognize small gains.*

#### **F4. League Benefits Extended to Community Level Outcomes**

Beginning with refurbished parks, the involvement of parents, retired and off-duty police, neighbors, businesses, churches, and non-profits on game days helped to build leagues drew large additional social cohesion in neighborhoods. As a welcome but unexpected consequence, the leagues drew large audiences from the community to congregate, share information and community spirit.

*Implication: Reclaiming public space reduces violence and builds social cohesion.*

# HOW PLACE-BASED APPROACHES TO YOUTH VIOLENCE PREVENTION CAN BUILD COMMUNITY TRUST

*Background: Youths' negative contact with police occurs early and often*

## National Data

African Americans experience routine contact with police more frequently than any other group. African Americans are more likely to be pulled over by police, and they are more likely to be ticketed as a result of a routine traffic stop.<sup>1</sup> African Americans are also more likely to be searched even though they are no more likely to be carrying illegal substances. In poor neighborhoods where crime rates tend to be higher, the likelihood of police contact oftentimes increases, especially for African American youth.

The impact of disproportionate negative contact with the police can be severe. African Americans are almost three times more likely to die from routine police contact than are Whites, according to the *American Journal of Public Health*.<sup>2</sup> A 2015 special report in *The Washington Post* highlighted that unarmed African American men are seven times more likely to die by police gunfire than other demographic groups<sup>3</sup>. As a result of the level of negative contact Blacks experience with police, many have heightened fear of the consequences that routine police contact can bring. High arrest rates and increased risk of fatal encounters with police have led to African American parents heightened need to teach their children survival strategies when encountering law enforcement.<sup>4</sup>

## Age is one of the most reliable predictors of negative police perceptions.

Nationwide, one out of every three youth experiences arrest by the age of 23<sup>5</sup>. Not surprisingly, less than half of Black youth (44.2%) trust the police, compared with 59.6% of Latino youth, 71.5% of White youth, and 76.1% of Asian American youth.<sup>6</sup> Substantially fewer Black youth (66.1%) believe the police in their neighborhood are there to protect them compared to young people from other racial and ethnic groups.<sup>7</sup>



## Chicago Context

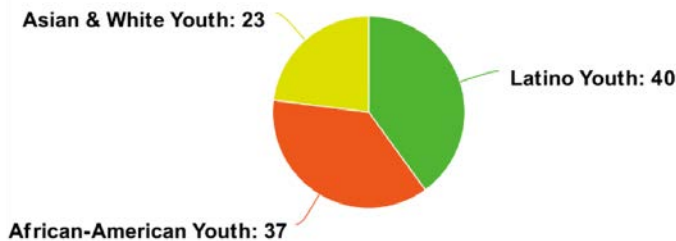
Although juvenile arrests have trended down in Chicago since 2009, African American and Latino youth continue to experience arrests at higher rates when compared to other youth.<sup>8</sup> **While African American and White youth in Chicago commit minor crimes (i.e., marijuana possession) at similar rates, African American youth are 12 times more likely to be arrested for them.**

When taking into account arrests for all crimes, African American youth are almost *twice* as likely to be arrested when compared to all other Chicago youth.<sup>9</sup>

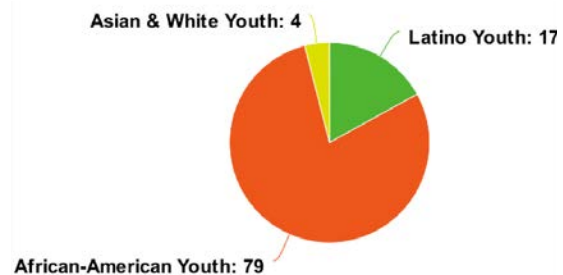
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### The breakdown for 2013 by general population and arrests<sup>10</sup>:

#### % of Juvenile Population



#### % of Juvenile Arrests



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Moreover, ten communities out of 77 accounted for 70% of all juvenile arrests in 2013. All of these communities are on the cities predominately African American and Latino south and west sides.<sup>11</sup> Arrest data indicates that not only do young people in a limited number of Chicago neighborhoods experience more negative contact with police, but contact occurs at earlier ages. Children as young as ten years old have experienced negative informal contact with police.<sup>12</sup>

Implicitly in the baseball program is an attempt to understand how policies, practices, and community based programs can decrease disproportionate negative contact. Furthermore, mediating the resulting negative attitudes toward police among young people is crucial to improving police/community trust. That trust, in turn, is the foundation necessary for residents and police to work together to improve safety and build social cohesion.

Positive police contact (e.g. community policing initiatives) has been shown to improve community trust, but youth experience this type of informal contact with police at lower rates when compared to older groups.<sup>13</sup> In Chicago, black youth have the lowest rates of participation in community policing efforts.<sup>14</sup> Poor relationships between police officers and youth lead to more unfounded arrests and less community cooperation with criminal investigations.

Creating an environment and structure for positive contact among police and black youth young enough to have their experiences and opinions influenced was the primary impetus for the leagues.

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## *Choosing a “Place” for a Place-Based Initiative*

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Neighborhoods that experience disproportionately high arrest rates, and other forms of negative contact with the police are often characterized by additional social ills including chronic unemployment, food deserts, a lack of green space and high crime rates. For instance, in Chicago’s Austin community—the third neighborhood to start a league—which ranks 4<sup>th</sup> among districts with the highest juvenile arrest rate and struggles with high rates of community violence, the unemployment rate is 15.4% compared to the city average of 9.9%<sup>15</sup>.

While negative contact with police is not restricted to poor communities with high crime, the odds of experiencing negative contact increases in these heavily policed areas, especially for youth.

The city’s Englewood community was chosen as a pilot site for the police-youth league because it is one of the neighborhoods where youth have experienced disproportionate negative contact with police and Leo Schmitz, the Englewood Police District Commander at the time was committed to the overall goal of improving community trust between youth and officers. Similar to most violence-stricken neighborhoods, poverty, unemployment rates, and Individual Education Plans in Englewood are higher than the city’s average and dedicated resources in neighborhood schools are often limited. The league created a new opportunity for police to connect with youth through an organized pro-social activity.

Starting a league required access to a public park where baseball games could be played, and the identification of an implementation partner who had the interest and capacity to work with Get IN Chicago and the Police Department. To accomplish these goals, additional partnerships were established with the Chicago Park District and Teamwork Englewood, a local non-profit in Englewood provided a grant by Get IN Chicago to run the league.

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## *The Chicago Park District*

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A partnership with the Chicago Park District began early in the planning process. As the leading provider of recreation opportunities in the city of Chicago, the Park District was instrumental in selecting the league’s location. Taking into consideration several factors, including proximity and availability of the required amenities (i.e., fieldhouse, baseball diamonds) The Park District identified Englewood’s Hamilton Park as the best option. Although Hamilton Park’s location was initially perceived as less proximal for some residents, as it was less centrally located and had fewer existing programs than Ogden Park, Hamilton Park was home to a large fieldhouse, four largely underutilized baseball diamond and baseball fields that required maintenance before youth could begin practicing.

Less frequent use of Hamilton Park also made it vulnerable to crime. The development of the league created a unique opportunity for the Chicago Police Department and the Chicago Park District to work collaboratively with the community to improve perceptions of safety around the immediate vicinity of the park and to increase residents’ use of public recreation space. Hamilton Park was selected as the league’s site in April. The Park District restored the baseball fields to optimal usage, and a plan to maintain them throughout baseball season was put into place. The Chicago Police Department increased its presence in and around the park throughout the season. Not only did some off duty officers offer their assistance to youth during practices but on-duty officers provided a significant presence on practice and game days.

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## *Teamwork Englewood*

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To select the league's implementation partner, Get IN Chicago released a Request for Proposals to 'anchor' organizations located in Englewood that had previous experience offering sports programs to youth, including recruitment, enrollment and program retention. Teamwork Englewood, a long-standing non-profit in the community, was ultimately selected to run the league. With a \$100,000 grant from Get IN Chicago, Teamwork Englewood managed all personnel and programming costs including nutritious snacks and meals for the players. Additional support for uniforms and equipment was provided by Mesirow Financial and CVS Health, two of Get IN Chicago's corporate partners.

The league, formally named the Englewood Police Youth Baseball League (EPYBL), served Englewood boys and girls ages 9 to 12 years of age.

Participants were divided into six teams named after community leaders. Practices and schedules were ironed out for each week from May to August. In addition to practices and games, enrolled youth also participated in structured mentoring sessions focused on improving social and emotional learning skills, teamwork and health. The full model included 50 hours of programming.

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## *Community Buy-In*

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To recruit for the league, Teamwork Englewood conducted presentations at neighborhood schools, churches, and community events from March 2015 to May 2015. Announcements about the league were also posted on Englewood's community portal, an online platform accessed by hundreds of neighborhood residents each week. The 7th District police department in Englewood supported the recruitment process by setting up an enrollment center for parents at the station. Participation in the league was free, and consent for participation was obtained at the time of enrollment.

Youth recruitment was initially slow. Outreach efforts were challenged by some parents who questioned whether their child would enjoy playing baseball instead of another sport such as football or basketball. Others questioned the safety of the location where practices and games would occur. Still, others voiced skepticism over the involvement of the police in the league. When formal recruitment ended in late April, the league was at less than 80% capacity.

Despite under-enrollment, the league proceeded with planning its opening day ceremony for the end of June. Teamwork Englewood passed out dozens of flyers to local businesses, schools, churches and neighborhood residents. Announcements about opening day were also featured prominently on the Englewood community's online portal. Additionally, Teamwork Englewood worked with the Park District and Police Department to plan a parade through the neighborhood that featured players wearing their league uniforms.

**On opening day approximately 200 community members came to Hamilton Park to see the league in action. A local DJ played music while complimentary ballpark concessions were given to everyone in attendance. Recently manicured fields were outfitted with signage from league sponsors and partners, while local elected and police officials gave speeches offering their support for the league and the community.**

Word of mouth and opportunities to see the league in action seemed to have a positive effect on program enrollment. In the days following opening, additional youth joined so that more than 100 youth were registered for the program by the first week of July.

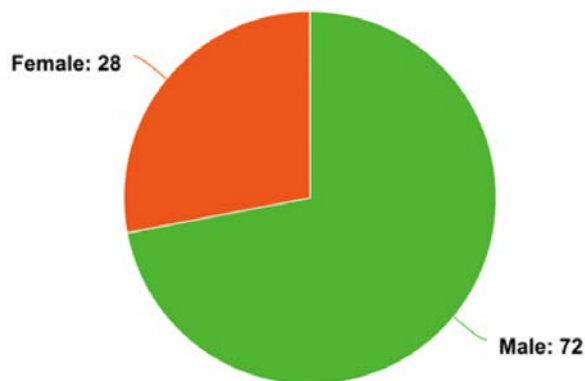
The support the community demonstrated for the league on opening day continued throughout the season. Game days were well attended by parents, on-duty and off-duty police officers, community members, business owners and other neighborhood residents who would bring lawn chairs and coolers to the park and spend the afternoon watching and encouraging the youth. Businesses, churches, and other non-profits also took the opportunity the league presented to set up information kiosks, and concession stands offering everything from connections to services to homemade food and drinks. The league was highlighted by local and national media coverage which generated excitement and put a positive spotlight on a community that was often in the news because of violence.

The success of the Englewood league motivated other Chicago police districts to access the opportunity. In 2016 the league was expanded to include Chicago's North Lawndale community, and in 2017 the city's Austin neighborhood was added, tripling league enrollment capacity to 300. As the league grew, members of the Illinois State Police, now lead by Leo Schmitz, also volunteered as officer-coaches. To support the expansion of the league, Get IN Chicago funded two additional non-profit organizations to operate as implementation partners.

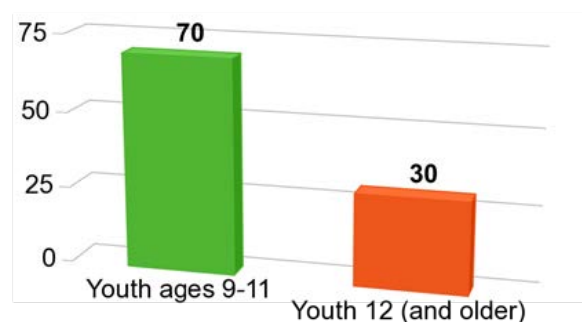
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## Youth Survey Results: Police-Youth Baseball Leagues

% by Gender



% by Age



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### Highlights

- All youth experienced improved self-perceptions of leadership, conflict resolution, and future orientation.
- Compared to older participants, youth ages 9-11 experienced the larger gains in leadership /conflict resolution skills –they also more significantly participated in the survey.
- Compared to older participants, youth 9-11 had the largest gains in future orientation.
- Although negative perceptions about police persisted for boys and older youth, both groups showed more willingness to question their beliefs by the end of the league.

## Methodology

A pre and post survey was administered to learn how youths' participation in the league impacted their perception of police. The survey also included items measuring youths' self-perceptions of leadership/conflict resolutions, community involvement, and police trust. In addition, the survey included items to measure youth future orientation. Future orientation refers to a child's ability to set future goals or plans. It reflects hope. Types of questions used to assess future orientation for youth were: I will go to college. I will get a job when I am older, and I will graduate from high school.

The baseline measure (Time 1) was offered 1 to 2 weeks before each league's start date, and the follow-up measure (Time 2) was administered the last week of each league. Surveys were completed in small groups of fewer than 10 youth. The survey was read aloud for younger children (under the age of 10) and children with apparent reading comprehension challenges. Older youth (10 years old and older) completed the survey independently. T-tests were conducted to determine if statistical differences in means were observed for Time 1 and Time 2 responses. Mean comparisons of each survey domain were conducted by gender group (boys, girls, all youth), age group (under the age of 12, 12 year-olds and youth older than 12), and community group (Austin, Englewood, and North Lawndale). Parental consent for participation was collected at the time of enrollment by the implementing organizations in each community. Participation in the surveys was not incentivized. There were a total of 598 youth participants (Time 1 N= 280 Time 2 N= 318). A total of 167 surveys were completed (Time 1 N= 98 Time 2 N= 69). The completed surveys account for 27.9% of all the participants, which is above the national average. The national average for external surveys is typically 10-15%.<sup>16</sup>

**No statistically significant findings were observed from Time 1 to Time 2. However, trends in the data suggest that participation in the league positively impacts leadership and conflict resolution skills and future orientation. For all youth, the largest improvement (13 percentage points) was observed for survey items measuring leadership/conflict resolution. Boys and youth ages 9 to 11 experienced the most benefit to their leadership skills compared to all other youth. Youth ages 9 to 11 were also observed to have significant improvements in self-perceptions about the future compared to other youth participants. While no statistically significant findings were observed for survey items measuring community involvement, youth from the Austin community experienced more improvement in leadership and conflict resolution and future orientation than youth from Englewood and North Lawndale.**

This study also includes qualitative findings from a series of police focus groups conducted at the end of the pilot season of the Englewood league. Overall, police gave positive feedback about the youth baseball league during the focus groups. They found it to be beneficial to youth.



# IMPLICATIONS FOR NEIGHBORHOOD-LEVEL PRACTICE AIMED AT IMPROVING COMMUNITY TRUST

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## *How did the league benefit youth and police officers?*

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To understand the impact of the league for youth and police, Get IN Chicago collected survey data from youth and completed focus groups with officer-coaches. In the following section, we describe these findings.

Pre-survey findings suggest that all youth entered the league with negative perceptions of police. Younger youth (ages 9-11) and girls held fewer negative beliefs than boys and older youth (12 years old and older). Although boys and older youth did not significantly modify their negative perceptions over time, they demonstrated more willingness to question their beliefs by the end of the league.

Post-survey findings suggest youth experienced positive changes in their self-perceptions of leadership conflict resolution skills and future orientation.

- For all youth surveyed, the largest improvement (13 percentage points) was observed for survey items measuring leadership/conflict resolution.
- Boys and youth ages 9 to 11 experienced the most benefit to their leadership skills compared to all other youth.
- Youth ages 9 to 11 were also observed to have significant improvements in self-perceptions about the future compared to other youth participants.
- Youth from the Austin community experienced more improvement in leadership and conflict resolution and future orientation than youth from Englewood and North Lawndale.

Separate from survey responses, one community organization reported significant progress in youth being able to develop relationships with other youth beyond neighborhood divides, including gang boundaries.

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**“To ask kids to cross the streets and neighborhoods is terrifying and then to develop friendships in addition to that is hard. Our kids, with the help of the coach mentors, were able to do that.”**

– A league organizer in Englewood.

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Thus a program intended to build trusting relationships between police and youth had the unexpected benefit of enhancing trust *among* youth in the community and significantly increasing self-efficacy.

Analysis of focus group data gathered from police officers who participated in the league indicates that league participation created opportunities to improve community relations in the following three ways:

**1. Ease of access lowered barriers to community engagement:**

“There were parents there every day – at every practice and every game. You’ve got an untapped [resource] right there. You don’t have to go knock on the door. You have them here already.”

- *Officer focus group participant*

**2. Sports Proves a Basis for Building positive relationships:**

“The grandmother came up to me and said, ‘You know what, you’re the only one he listens to.’ So I gave him my number. Whenever I tell him to do something he’s right there. But for a relative or family member coming up and saying they couldn’t get him to respect them enough... but I guess he saw me in a different light ... When I showed him, I cared, and I talked to him. After that talk, anything I asked him to do – he did with no problem. So that’s what his grandmother noticed and that’s why she asked me to be a mentor.”

- *Officer focus group participant*

**3. Social Engagement can lead to addressing deeper social issues:**

“If you show more compassion or show more of the good things [police officers] do collectively maybe the community would embrace us more. ...We go from baseball, to football, to basketball. Great! Then we [have the opportunity to go] to some social issues.”

- *Officer focus group participant*

Data from this study suggests that the league provided police officers with one way to improve relationships among officers, youth and other community members, while also building broader social cohesion in neighborhoods that experience high crime.



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## *Implications for Youth Policy and Place-Making Policy*

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Get IN Chicago's Police Youth Baseball Leagues were implemented as a place-based approach to improving community trust between youth and Chicago Police officers in the Englewood, North Lawndale and Austin communities. The following section outlines initial policy recommendations to guide other place-based approaches focused on building community trust.

- **Recommendation 1: When working to improve trust, start younger than 12**

**Findings from the current study suggest that boys and older youth have greater difficulty trusting police officers than girls and younger children.**

In high crime neighborhoods, negative contact with police can occur as early as 10-11. The data from our survey indicates that youth under the age of 12 are still forming their impressions of police – compared to older youth. Our data suggests that older youth hold more firmly ingrained beliefs that may prove more difficult to change. However, the negative perceptions of police held by boys or older youth may not be enduring. The data showed that by the end of the league, the youth observed to hold negative attitudes about police were more willing to weigh their perceptions and question existing beliefs.

Providing opportunities for positive informal contact with police officers may be vital to changing youths' perceptions of unfairness. Public forums that the leagues create are natural opportunities for youth voices to be raised on issues impacting their daily lives, including dialogues on fairness in policing. Additionally, the league may provide youth the opportunity to view police officers as multidimensional actors that contribute to the community in various ways aside from enforcing the law.

Moreover, in Chicago, youth between the ages of 15 and 17 experience the greatest involvement in the justice system. They account for 80% of juvenile arrests while constituting only 16.6% of the city's population. Providing boys and youth with early opportunities for positive engagement in the community and with police officers may play a vital role in stemming the tide of justice involvement at vulnerable development periods.

- **Recommendation 2: Prioritize extended positive informal contact between police & youth/communities**

Findings from this study suggest that community trust comes from prolonged positive informal contact. While the police-youth leagues supported by Get IN Chicago included intentional partnerships with the Chicago Police Department, it was challenging to maintain high levels of officer participation. Officer participation in the leagues had to be balanced by police districts' need to patrol communities. To the extent that officers could maintain consistent participation, their contact with the youth was limited to a 12-week program. Introducing year-round opportunities for police and youth to interact with each other positively may facilitate improvements in community trust.

**Introducing more opportunities to bridge the gap between officers and residents may help both groups identify common goals and encourage greater social connectedness between police officers, youth, and other community members.**

- **Recommendation 3: Reclaiming public space can create more social cohesion**

The leagues created opportunities to see police interacting with youth and other residents in a positive way. Police could build positive relationships with youth by acting as officer-coaches. But positive engagement was also apparent in other ways. On-duty and off-duty officers across all three leagues routinely stopped by the parks to watch games and practices, or to lend a hand with coaching. In Austin, officers developed a walking group that included parents and other residents who walked the park for exercise during practice. These observations suggest that the leagues gave officers a means to demonstrate a shared interest in the youth of the community and to build relationships with residents that extended beyond their role as law enforcement officers. The police-youth leagues focused on increasing the number of positive interactions between youth and police officers. Unexpected were the opportunities the leagues brought for other area residents, who came to support the youth, to engage with each other. ‘

Over the course of the season, diverse community members across all three neighborhoods attended games and practices such as faith-based leaders, local politicians, community activists and local residents who simply enjoyed watching youth baseball. Some community members pitched in as coaches and informal mentors. As the leagues gained traction, the parks also became sites where community assets could be highlighted. For example, in Englewood, in-kind support was received from churches, local businesses and even area residents whose children were not participating in the league. These included homemade food and drinks and connections to companies and non-profits that work with residents on issues such as homeownership and financial literacy.

**In these ways, the leagues served as a forum for community engagement around neighborhood issues and shared interests.** Social cohesion is increased when more community members become involved in their neighborhoods. The participation of these local residents created an atmosphere where community belonging could be affirmed. Similarly, the leagues also became a place where those who were motivated towards civic engagement could interact with like-minded people.

Additionally, the leagues created opportunities for the Chicago Police Department and the Chicago Park District to work collaboratively to rehabilitate existing resources and to improve safety around the immediate vicinity of each of the parks.

**In Englewood, for example, more programs for residents were operating out of Hamilton Park by the time the league ended. The transformation of a previously underutilized park and increased use through baseball, changed perceptions of safety which lead to more community use and less crime. The leagues helped reclaim valuable public space as sites where youth and families can safely convene.**

Prior research shows crime decreases in areas with open space and opportunities for recreational engagement. The impact of the league beyond the youth and the police to include a broader collective of community members warrants additional research to track sustainability. Formal league partnerships, along with the informal partnerships that emerged in each community, can help transform sometimes underused public green space to valued neighborhood assets.

- **Recommendation 4: Increasing exposure to youth development opportunities is necessary to support youth social and emotional growth**

The findings from this study suggest that exposure makes a difference in mediating disempowering beliefs. Youth participants made the greatest gains from the police-youth baseball leagues in leadership capacity and conflict resolution skills. Younger youth (9-11 years old) and boys experienced the largest benefits. Participating in neighborhood programs like the police-youth leagues may provide youth with early opportunities to meet critical developmental milestones. However, underserved communities often have fewer programs that allow youth to demonstrate these competencies.

Englewood, North Lawndale, and Austin not only experience disproportionately high rates of violence, but they also experience disproportionately high rates of poverty. For example, the median household income in Englewood is approximately \$19,795, more than \$30,000 less than the median income for the city of Chicago, and the neighborhood's unemployment rate (34%) is 24% higher than the city's overall rate.<sup>17</sup> These factors can limit the kinds of extracurricular opportunities parents can offer their children. The police leagues were offered to youth at no cost and therefore eliminated financial barriers to participation.

**Neighborhood-based pro-social programs such as the police-youth leagues may serve as critical safeguards for youth by providing the necessary scaffolding to support social and emotional growth.**

The league also provides a safe space for youth to engage. It provides youth with the opportunity to participate in constructive activities when they could otherwise be involved in harmful and dangerous activities. Developing, maintaining, and sustaining partnerships focused on place-making can be vital to a neighborhood's investment in its youth.

- **Recommendation 5: Increase opportunities for natural mentors to build relationships with youth**

Get IN Chicago developed a universal program model that all three leagues implemented. The model includes skills-based learning to advance youths' understanding of baseball. This component of the program is supported by weekly practice sessions, and sports clinics focused on specific skills such as batting or fielding. In addition, each league carries out a formal mentoring component. Formal mentoring sessions facilitated by staff were informed by research findings which suggest that building a relationship with a caring adult can have positive social and emotional impacts for youth.

Additionally, a trove of research confirms that participation in sports improves social and emotional skill development in youth.<sup>18</sup> Characteristics such as leadership, positive peer relationships, and conflict resolution can develop organically alongside the physical skills needed to play sports. Recent findings also suggest that sports participation among youth reduces incidents of serious crime, while also reducing school suspensions and improving grade performance.

Each league intentionally incorporates officer-coaches who serve as "natural" mentors to youth participants. A natural mentor is a term used to describe a person that is not assigned as a mentor "per se." They can be people like barbers, coaches, etc. They become a mentor to youth due to their natural and prolonged interactions with youth. The youth begin to see the individual as a

mentor because they spend time with them. The relationship develops organically over time, which then allows the youth to grow to trust the natural mentor.<sup>19</sup>

GIC Survey findings suggest that increasing the availability of natural mentors can have added social and emotional benefits for youth.

**Neighborhood-level analysis of survey data from this study finds that only youth from the Austin community, as a distinct group, experienced substantive changes in leadership and conflict resolution skills. Austin had the highest officer participation rate, including CPD officers and officers from the Illinois State Police.**

Being more deliberate in offering programs that encourage civic engagement may increase other positive outcomes for youth. Substantive contact with natural mentors could provide youth with extra support in meeting critical developmental milestones. More generally, expanding opportunities to participate in sports for youth in high crime areas could demonstrate positive impacts for community safety, education outcomes, and juvenile justice involvement.

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### *The Future of Police-Youth Baseball Leagues*

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As of July, 2019, all three of the police-baseball leagues are continuing.



#### **The Englewood Police Youth Baseball League**

The Englewood Police Youth Baseball League (EPBYL) will continue in its fifth year with the sponsorship of the Bessie Feinberg Foundation, Cubs Charities, and Get IN Chicago. The league has received community support from six partner organizations. The EPYBL will continue with its six teams. Each team is named after an old Negro league team and African-American leaders. It will serve boys and girls from the community. The league

will serve 120 youth ages 8-12. The youth are able to join the league with no cost and therefore eliminating financial barriers to participate in the league.

The league's Director of Operations is Marco Johnson, a retired police officer, Mr. Johnson states that "Our league helps neighborhood youth stay out of trouble and safe during the summer months. We want the youth to get to know the police as human beings and to learn how to interact with the police and community adults".

Officers will continue to stay involved with EYPBL further strengthening the relationships they have established with the community. The league thus far has had a tremendous impact on youth. The youth in the EPYBL have been able to use the skills gained from the baseball league to get better grades and develop critical developmental skills.



### **The Westside Police Youth Baseball Leagues**

The Westside police-baseball leagues Austin and North Lawndale are continuing with support from Get IN Chicago and the Westside Police District. The two baseball teams will be collaborating with newly created police-sponsored youth baseball teams. There are a total of nineteen teams to date. All of the teams will join under a single umbrella- the Chicago Westside Police and Youth Sports Conference.

Each team will be sponsored by a police district, a local church, and community non-profit organizations. The teams will consist of youth in third through eighth grade. Youth can join at no charge. The youth will receive the benefits of learning team building skills through baseball. Outside of baseball, they will gain the advantage of being educated about violence reduction, restorative justice practices, nutritional counseling, tutoring, mentoring, and leadership.

The main driving force behind the Chicago Westside Police and Youth Sports Conference is Sgt. Jerome Harris.<sup>20</sup> Sgt. Harris lives in the North Lawndale community and serves in the 15th District. Sgt. Harris became a part of a Little League baseball team as a means to combat stress from his job as an officer. Sgt. Harris thinks that the baseball league offers positive benefits for the officers as well as youth. He firmly believes teams are a way to help officers deal with trauma, provide a positive outlet, and inspire officers by reminding them what they are fighting for.

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“If we are not part of the solution,  
we are part of the problem.”

– Sgt. Jerome Harris,  
Chicago Westside Police and Youth Sports Conference

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Sgt. Harris believes "Churches, faith organizations, have an opportunity to be part of this process, so in partnerships with our police departments and our community organizations, it gives up an opportunity to be part of a greater thing," he said. "If we are not part of the solution, we are part of the problem."

With the contributions of its corporate partners, Get IN Chicago will continue to support the Englewood, North Lawndale, and Austin team for this year. Get IN Chicago is pleased to support solutions that improve the lives and secure the futures of at-risk youth.



## Citations:

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## Background:

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*UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO CRIME LAB STUDY AND THE UNIVERISTY OF MICHIGAN STUDY*

<http://www.businessinsider.com/a-new-youth-violence-prevention-program-that-emphasizes-sports-and-counseling-is-reducing-states-costs-2012-7>

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*SPORTS PARTICIPATION AND JUVENILE DELINQUENCY: A META-ANALYTIC REVIEW*

<https://news.umich.edu/high-school-sports-participation-lowers-major-crime-and-suspensions/>

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*SPECIAL REPORT | Healing America's Cities: Why We Must Invest in Urban Parks*

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.socscimed.2008.10.028>

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*JUSTICE DIVIDED | Teamwork Englewood News Release. Englewood Police Youth Baseball League Launches a New Season Promoting Peace and Safety in Englewood.*

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