Evaluating Illinois' Peacekeepers Program

Peacekeepers Program Data and Violence Trends Analysis for July 1, 2023 - December 31, 2024

Corners | CENTER FOR NEIGHBORHOOD ENGAGED RESEARCH & SCIENCE

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*Le Penseur and Seeds of Roseland were de-contracted at the end of 2024; Acclivus is now implementing partner in Riverdale/Altgeld Gardens and G.O.D. is also taking on South Deering

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Executive Summary

The Peacekeepers Program originally launched in Chicago in the summer of 2018 as the Flatlining Violence Inspires Peace (FLIP) Strategy. FLIP began as a summer-based community violence intervention program and grew to provide services in 16 Chicago community areas (CCAs) that held the lion's share of violence in the city of Chicago.

FLIP combined group violence intervention, violence prevention, and workforce development strategies designed as a street outreach apprenticeship program. Its immediate goal was to reduce gun violence in hotspots—areas with disproportionately high levels of shootings and victimizations. FLIP theorized that if gun violence could be reduced in these spatial pockets within a program community, it would create extended periods of peace across the broader community, ultimately contributing to a citywide decline in gun violence victimizations over time.

In January 2023, the Illinois Office of Firearm Violence Prevention (OFVP), housed within the Illinois Department of Human Services (IDHS), supported the program's transition into a year-round initiative, piloting their involvement and investment in the re-branded Peacekeepers Program (the Program). At the conclusion of the pilot period, two critical milestones occurred: the program was integrated into the Reimagine Public Safety Act (RPSA) portfolio and, for the first time, received public funding to operate year-round. Moreover, with this funding, the program was required to expand into RPSA priority communities, allowing the intervention to extend beyond Chicago and into surrounding Suburban Cook County.

Beginning in July 2023, the start of the state's Fiscal Year 2024 (FY'24),[1] the Program began expansion, significantly increasing its reach with OFVP support. The program was implemented in phases, with new sites launching between October 2023 and April 2024. This phased rollout brought the program to 35 areas, including 13 additional CCAs and 8 Cook County suburbs.

While none of the expansion communities have yet to complete a full 24-months of implementation, the original 14 pilot communities that began year-round implementation in January 2023 have now reached this milestone, allowing for a more comprehensive analysis of how gun violence patterns have changed over time. These communities—Austin, West Garfield Park, East Garfield Park, Brighton Park, North Lawndale, South Lawndale (Little Village), New City (Back of the Yards), Roseland, West Pullman, Greater Englewood (Englewood and West Englewood), Humboldt Park, Woodlawn, South Shore, and Greater Grand Crossing—represent the program's longest-running sites.

As the Peacekeepers Program's research and evaluation partner, the Center for Neighborhood Engaged Research & Science (CORNERS) at Northwestern University is conducting an independent evaluation of this work, tracking both the implementation and impact of the Program. While CORNERS provides regular internal-facing reports to program stakeholders, this report marks an important program milestone and includes mixed methods, multi-year analyses.

The report begins by providing an analysis of the 14 communities that implemented the Program for two consecutive calendar years. This exploration seeks to understand violence trends during the 2023-2024 year-round implementation of the Program compared to 2021-2022 calendar years, when the program was only implemented during the summer months. Additional analyses will examine violence trends at both the community area and city-wide levels to assess the program model's claim that a reduction in hotspots might contribute to broader reductions across Program communities and the City of Chicago. The report also provides a brief overview of the year-over-year violence trends in the 13 Chicago-based Program expansion communities and their respective hotspots, during their launch year, to better understand violence trends following their start dates. This focus on both established and expansion communities highlights the progress made across all program community areas and offers insights into how implementation over consecutive 24-month periods aligns with observed violence trends. This report does not seek to establish causation or correlation between violence trends in program community areas and the implementation of the Program. Instead, it provides an exploratory analysis of gun violence trends in these areas, with a particular focus on program hotspots. Finally, the report concludes with early findings and recommendations on the implementation of the program.

Peacekeepers Program Key Findings

24-Month Violence Trends in Established Peacekeepers Community Areas

- Hotspots experienced a <u>41% overall reduction in victimizations</u> in 2023-2024 compared to the previous two-year period. Humboldt Park had the sharpest decline in hotspot shooting victimizations at 84%.

- Peacekeeper community areas saw a <u>31% decrease in shooting victimizations</u> in 2023-2024 compared to the previous two-year period. Humboldt Park had the sharpest decline in community area victimizations at 48%.

- Citywide, Chicago experienced a 28% overall reduction in shooting victimizations in 2023-2024 compared to the previous two-year period. <u>Both Peacekeeper community areas and hotspots saw sharper declines</u> in shootings than the citywide trend.

- Hotspot violence trends show seasonal patterns with consecutive reductions in shooting victimizations every year between 2021-2024.

- <u>13 out of 14 Peacekeeper community areas saw an increase in their hotspots' average peace intervals</u>—the time between violent incidents. This trend indicates potential progress in disrupting cycles of violence, reinforcing the need for continued monitoring to determine whether these intervals extend further over time.

- Collectively, hotspots experienced a net increase of 136 days without shooting incidents, indicating longer periods of stability in intervention areas.

- Violence trends within established Peacekeeper community areas and the City of Chicago closely mirror trends within program hotspots with both community areas and Chicago experiencing their <u>lowest shooting victimization level in 5 years</u>.

13 Expansion Community Area Violence Trends

- <u>8 out of 13 expansion communities saw a year-over-year decrease in hotspot shooting victimizations</u>. Two community areas saw increases in shooting victimizations in their hotspots and three experienced no change.

- Despite increases in violence in some hotspots, these communities still experienced promising positive outcomes. For example, in South Deering, <u>Peacekeepers brokered a Peace Agreement that withstood several external challenges</u>.

- Findings provide preliminary insights about initial implementation, emphasizing the need for continued hotspot monitoring to track long-term changes in violence.

### Early Findings of Peacekeepers Program Implementation

- <u>Formalized and transparent communication processes</u>—including increased oversight and a robust feedback mechanism – are essential to successful program expansion and implementation.

- <u>Linking Peacekeepers to income-generating opportunities beyond CVI is critical</u> to ensure that all Peacekeepers have access to employment opportunities and to secure the long-term sustainability of the Program.

- <u>Sustained and meaningful engagement with Peacekeepers is critical</u> to successful program implementation and long-term program success.

- Strengthening trust between Peacekeepers and community stakeholders—as well as <u>building respectful working relationships with law enforcement</u>—is key to stakeholder buy-in and effective implementation.

Program Implementation Highlights (July 2023 through Dec. 2024)

- By the end of FY'24, the Peacekeepers Program was operational in <u>27 Chicago Community Areas (CCAs) and eight Cook County suburbs, more than doubling the number of implementing communities</u>. Of the 25 RPSA communities identified for implementation, the program was launched in 21.

- <u>201 hotspots</u> had Peacekeeper coverage throughout Chicago and Suburban Cook County.

- Street outreach workers recruited <u>1,213 Peacekeepers</u> in FY'24, who received training in conflict mediation and other violence prevention activities. The program experienced low attrition, with approximately 10% of Peacekeepers (n=119) leaving.[2] <u>Six Peacekeepers died</u> while engaged in programming: two from natural causes and four from fatal gun violence.

- 75 Peacekeepers transitioned into full-time CVI careers between January 2023 and December 2024. This brings <u>the total number of Peacekeeper transitions to full-time positions to 171</u> since the program's launch in 2018.

- Peacekeepers conducted <u>2,172 conflict mediations, of which 68%</u> (n=1480) <u>were successfully resolved</u>. These mediations represent conflicts that, absent intervention, may have resulted in violence.

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2 These attrition numbers include self-reporting by state providers. The 10% attrition rate may be an undercount due to data limitations.

Introduction
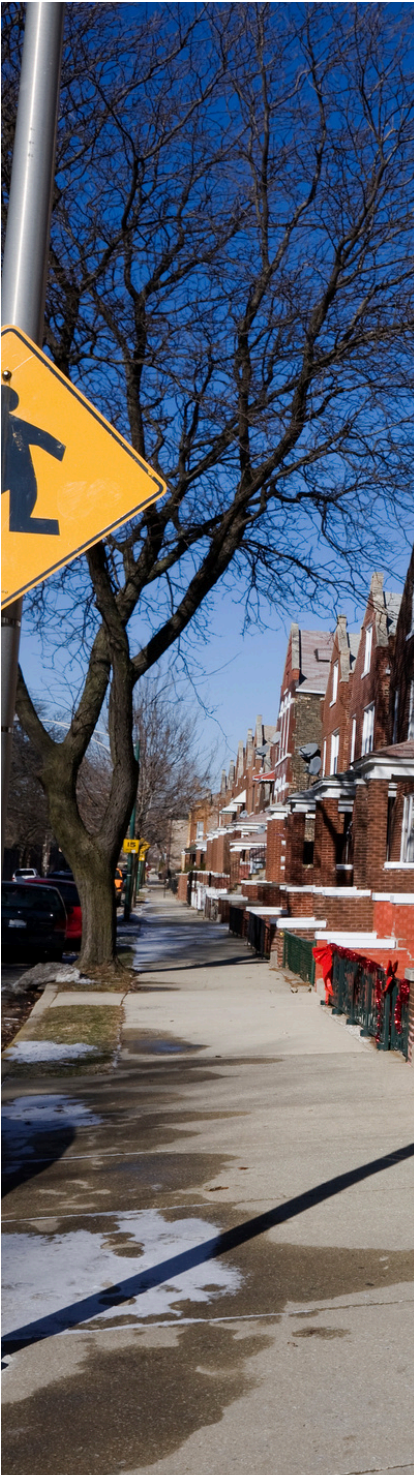
The Peacekeepers Program (the Program) is a community violence intervention (CVI) initiative designed to address gun violence in community "hotspots"—specific areas with disproportionately high rates of shootings and gun-related victimizations. Violence in these hotspots is often driven by complex and interrelated factors, including illicit substance use, domestic violence, robberies, and group-related conflicts. These issues are further compounded by systemic disruptions to community health stemming from public policy that socially, politically, and economically disenfranchise these areas.

With the support of street outreach workers, the Peacekeepers Program recruits community members with unique insights into their neighborhoods and connections to those close to community violence. Peacekeepers are trained as street outreach apprentices, leveraging their lived experiences to identify key drivers of violence and mediate conflicts. This recruitment strategy recognizes that those who are deeply embedded in the community are often the best positioned to engage individuals driving violence and build trust within the community.

Beyond violence intervention, the program also serves as a workforce development initiative, particularly for individuals who face systemic barriers to employment, such as re-entering citizens or those without prior work history. Peacekeepers are trained to become street outreach professionals, creating pathways to employment opportunities. The Peacekeepers Program theorizes the following: as violence within hotspots declines, particularly gun violence stemming from group-related conflicts, overall community violence will also decrease. Simultaneously, the Program seeks to support Peacekeepers who face workforce barriers due to their re-entering status or group affiliations to transition into stable careers within the CVI field and other industries. This dual-purpose strategy seeks to address both the immediate drivers of gun violence and the structural inequities that contribute to its persistence.

Program Expansion

During FY'24, the Peacekeepers Program expanded significantly, increasing its reach from 14 Chicago community areas (CCAs) to 35 communities across Chicago and Suburban Cook County. This marked a pivotal phase of growth for the program with support from the Illinois Office of Firearm and Violence Prevention (OFVP) and the Re-Imagining Public Safety Act (RPSA). Alongside this geographic expansion, financial support through the RPSA allowed the program to transition from a summer-only model to a year-round initiative starting in January 2023, effectively providing both workforce development and gun violence prevention support in communities that are responsible for the lion's share of shootings and shooting victimizations in Chicagoland.

The Peacekeepers Program relies on two state providers, Metropolitan Peace Initiatives (MPI) and Acclivus. Chicago CRED serves the dual role of implementing partner to two CCAs and pro-bono consultant to OFVP. In this latter role, CRED serves as a thought-partner, provides general implementation oversight and technical assistance, conducts site visits to assess model fidelity, and makes program recommendations. These organizations manage and support 19 subcontracting CVI organizations, and their street outreach teams, ensuring that Peacekeepers are resourced and deployed across 201 hotspots in Chicago and Suburban Cook County. Acclivus played a particularly prominent role in the program's expansion to ten CCAs and eight Cook County suburbs in FY'24.[3] Meanwhile, MPI continued its long-standing commitment to the Peacekeepers Program in Chicago, operationalizing the program's expansion in three CCAs.

Table 1: Implementing Communities by State Partner and Launch Period (Suburban Communities are underlined)

Provider	Pre-RPSA Expansion Communities	Post-RPSA Expansion Communities
MPI	Austin, Brighton Park, East Garfield Park, Humboldt Park, New City (Back of the Yards), North Lawndale, Roseland, South Lawndale (Little Village), South Shore, Greater Englewood, West Garfield Park, Woodlawn, West Pullman[4]	Albany Park, Belmont Cragin, Hermosa
Acclivus	Greater Grand Crossing	Ashburn, Auburn-Gresham, Burnside, Chatham, Chicago Lawn, Washington Park, South Chicago, South Deering, Riverdale, Fuller Park, <u>Bellwood, Calumet City, Dolton, Chicago Heights, Markham, Maywood, Park Forest, Sauk Village</u>

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3   As of FY'25, Acclivus also provides support to the Berwyn, Cicero, and Harvey suburbs who all experienced delays in implementation during the FY'24 reporting period.

4   Due to their proximity to the Roseland community area and group related dynamics, CRED manages two hotspots in the Pullman community; however, this community is not included within the RPSA coverage area. The Pullman based hotspots are included in the analyses provided in this report.

As part of an effort to better understand the implementation and impact of this expansion, the Center for Neighborhood Engaged Research & Science (CORNERS) at Northwestern University is conducting an independent evaluation of this work. CORNERS' evaluation includes two interrelated research efforts:

1. A Process Evaluation, which aims to assess the strengths and opportunities for improvement in the implementation of this type of multi-site, multi-pronged intervention.

2. An Impact Evaluation, which aims to determine the effect of the Program's approach on Peacekeepers as participants of the Program, and on reducing violence in implementation communities.

This report presents an overview of the Peacekeepers Program's trends and achievements across all program hotspots in the 27 Chicago community areas based on key implementation milestones and time periods, as well as early findings and recommendations from the initial expansion of the Program. The findings in this report lay the foundation for ongoing and future impact evaluation. Due to the expansion communities' more recent launch dates, this report includes a snapshot of violence trends in Chicago expansion communities. Future reporting will include more comprehensive analyses of all expansion communities, including those in Suburban Cook County.

Photo: Government Alliance for Safe Communities

Understanding Violence Trends in Peacekeeper Communities

As the Peacekeepers Program has both expanded and transitioned to a year-round implementation model, it is important to examine how violence trends have shifted in program community areas. This report explores the violence trends across different implementation timelines to provide insight into what these patterns look like in newly established and long-term program areas.

Specifically, this report explores three key questions:

1. Have violence trends changed in the hotspots of the 14 Peacekeepers community areas that previously operated only in the summer but have now transitioned to year-round implementation?
2. Have violence trends changed at the broader community area level of the 14 Peacekeepers community areas that previously operated only in the summer but have now transitioned to year-round implementation?
3. What do year-over-year changes in violence reveal about newly expanded Peacekeepers Program hotspots?

To answer these questions, this report first examines violence trends in Peacekeeper communities that have had continuous programming for a full 24 months, analyzing year-over-year (YoY) changes in hotspot activity in the calendar years of 2023-2024 relative to 2021-2022 (when the Program only operated in the summer months). By examining the frequency and distribution of shootings at both the hotspot and community levels, we aim to determine whether observational data aligns with the program's expectations of reducing violence over time. Next, the report gives an overview of violence trends in expansion community areas from their Program implementation start date through December 31, 2024. This helps establish what violence patterns look like at the onset of implementation in expansion areas and provides a foundational understanding for future analysis. This report provides a descriptive analysis of these trends, offering insights into patterns of violence across different implementation phases. The primary figures presented focus on hotspot activity rather than broader community-wide changes, as the Peacekeepers Program is grounded in the premise that hotspots serve as the center of gravity for gun violence within a community—meaning that sustained reductions in these high-risk locations should eventually lead to broader declines in shootings at the community level and, ultimately, citywide. While they do not establish correlative or causal relationships, the findings aim to inform ongoing program assessments and future strategic planning for the Peacekeepers Program.

Established Community Violence Trends

Year over Year % Change of Victimizations in PKP Hotspots
Between 2021-07-01 to 2022-06-30 and 2023-07-01 to 2024-06-30
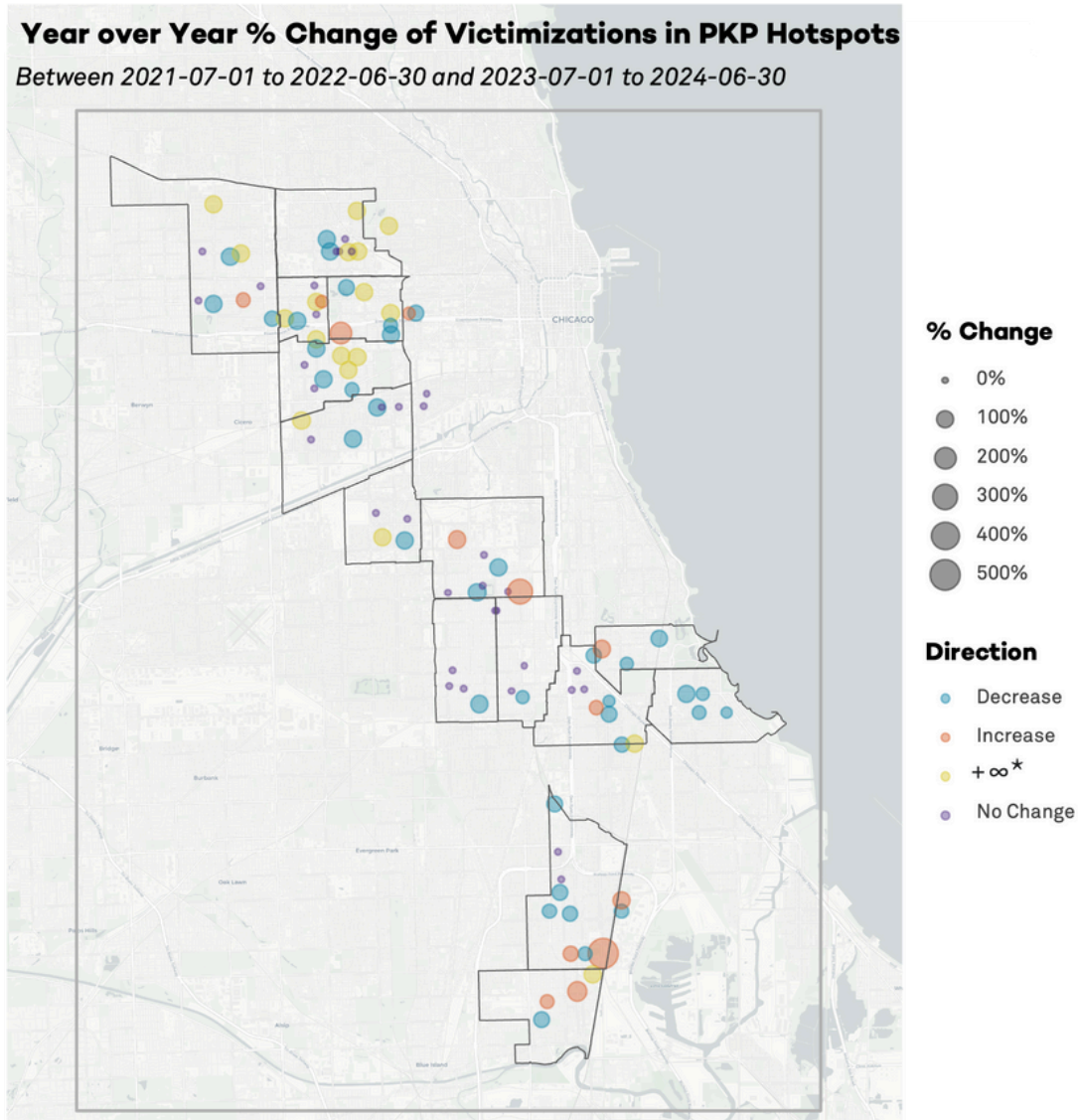
Figure 1

This section focuses on hotspots, the starting point of the program's theorized pathway to reducing gun violence in Chicago. All hotspot locations and their changes in victimizations are visualized in Figure 1 and displayed in Table 2 and Figure 2. Hotspots within the 14 established Program communities saw a 41% decrease in shooting victimizations over the 2023-2024 period compared to the previous two years, during which the program only operated in the summer.[5] On average, each hotspot experienced two fewer victimizations during the 24-month window between January 1, 2023, and December 31, 2024, than the prior two-year period of 2021-2022.

5 This equates to a change of 488 to 290, representing a 41% reduction. This decrease translates to a net reduction of 195 victimizations across all hotspots.

Established Community Violence Trends

Table 2: Aggregate YOY Shooting Victimizations Changes in Established Community Area Hotspots

Community Area	2021-2022 Victimizations	2023-2024 Victimizations	YoY % Change
Austin	35	18	**-48.57%**
Brighton Park	2	1	**-50%**
East Garfield Park	37	10	**-72.97%**
Englewood	12	12	**0%**
Greater Grand Crossing	69	36	**-47.83%**
Humboldt Park	25	4	**-84%**
New City	16	13	**-18.75%**
North Lawndale	16	12	**-25%**
Roseland & West Pullman	98	69	**-29.59%**
South Lawndale	12	4	**-66.67%**
South Shore	40	44	**10%**
West Englewood	10	2	**-80%**
West Garfield Park	44	25	**-43.18%**
Woodlawn	44	19	**-56.82%**
All Program Hotspots	488	290	**-40.57%**

Hotspot Violence Patterns and Average Shooting Levels Over Time

While the year-over-year analysis provides a snapshot of how victimizations have changed in intervention hotspots, it does not account for seasonal shifts in gun violence patterns. To better understand violence trends in hotspots since 2021, the rolling averages of shooting victimizations between January 2021 and December 2024 were calculated. This approach helps reveal overall shooting trends by reducing short-term spikes and dips in the data, offering a clearer picture of long-term gun violence patterns within hotspots.
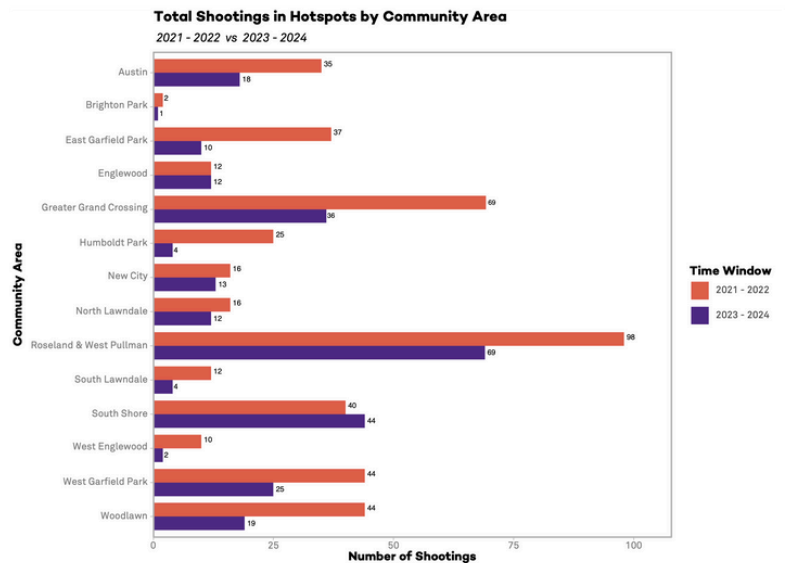

Figure 2

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This analysis also frames the conditions Peacekeepers face in hotspots, providing insights into the intensity of violence that they navigate while canvassing.
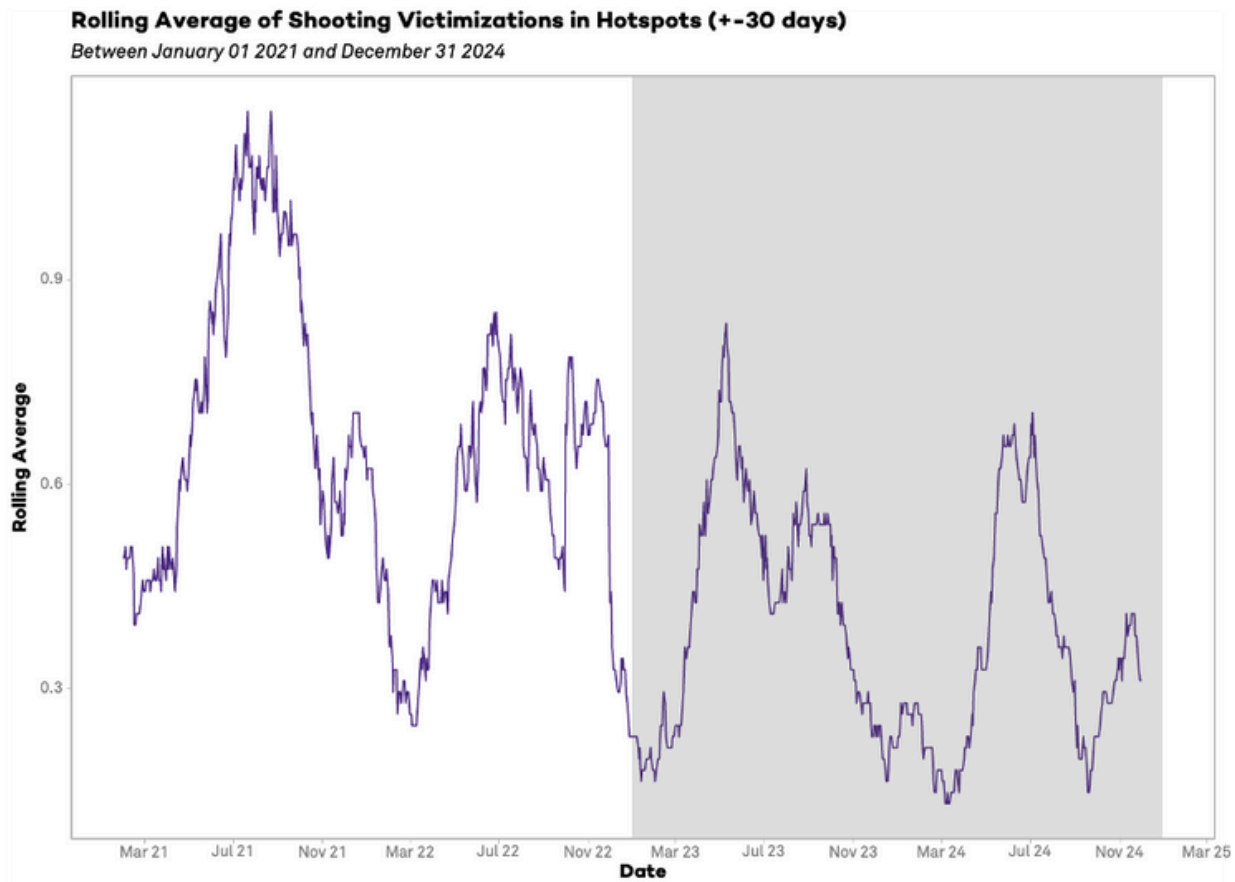

Rolling Average of Shooting Victimizations in Hotspots (+-30 days)
Between January 01 2021 and December 31 2024

Figure 3

The rolling averages presented in Figure 3 confirm that while seasonal patterns remain consistent, with victimizations rising in spring, peaking in summer, and declining in winter, the overall level of violence has steadily decreased over time. The magnitude of shooting victimizations has declined year-over-year, with 2024 showing the lowest total victimization count in the past five years. When comparing rolling averages from 2021-2022 to 2023-2024, violence not only occurs at lower rates but also exhibits longer intervals between incidents. This trend aligns with the observed 39% reduction in shooting victimizations across all hotspots over the same period. A possible factor in this shift may be the Program's transition from summer-only operations to year-round intervention. Expanding implementation across all seasons allows Peacekeepers to address underlying conditions that contribute to violence beyond peak summer months, potentially stabilizing high-risk areas more effectively over time.

Violence Trends

Hotspot Peace Intervals

While the rolling average provides insight into the seasonal violence trends within the Program hotspots over time, understanding the length of time between shooting events is critical to understanding if a reduction in shootings is translating into sustained periods of safety for the community. The Program builds on the FLIP theory that "flatlining" violence within hotspots will inspire broader peace. As periods of non-shooting are prolonged in hotspots, the expectation is that these stretches of calm will have a ripple effect—reducing the frequency of shooting incidents at the community level over time. The Program contends that the implementation of mediations and management of non-aggression agreements (NAAs) extends the duration between shooting events in hotspots, resulting in improvements in perceived safety and, in turn, a betterment of community wellbeing. Such improvements are meant to encourage community members, including potential shooters, to embrace these extensions of peace. Moreover, these violence free periods are meant to provide residents with intervals of respite from ongoing community violence, enabling those at highest risk to more freely engage in CVI services, creating space for recovery from the trauma of violence, and allowing community members to safely enjoy public spaces. To measure this, the proceeding analysis captures and quantifies such periods of calm within established Program hotspots, referred to henceforth as "peace intervals." A peace interval is defined as a period of one or more days where no shooting incidents occur within a given area.
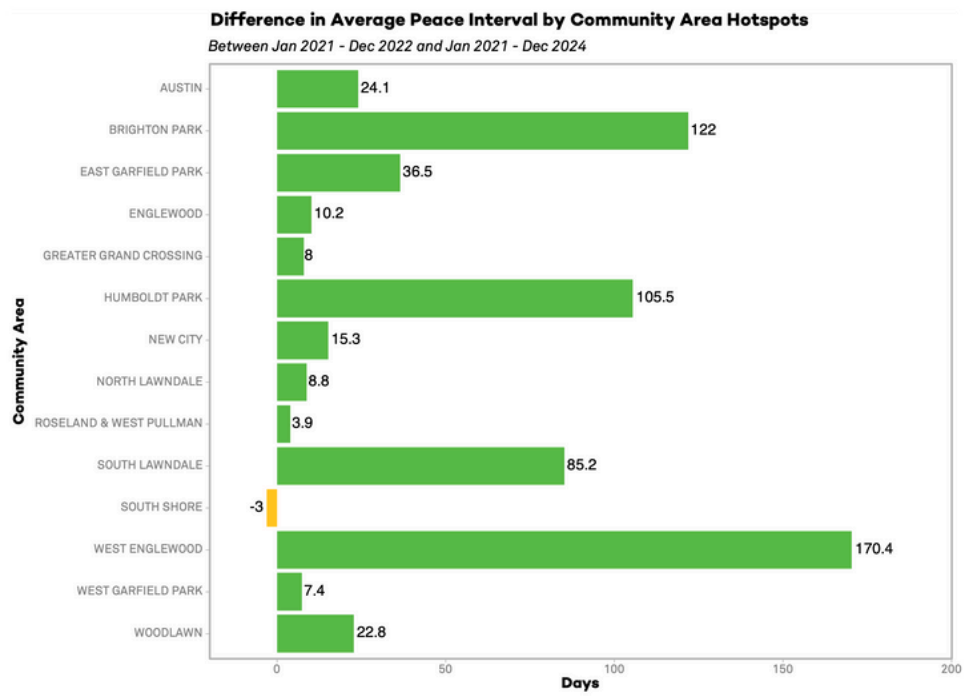

Figure 4

At the hotspot level, the change in peace intervals ranged from minor decreases to substantial increases (Figure 4). Given the vast differences between these communities and their hotspots in terms of intensity and nature of the conflicts, geographic size, and demographic makeup, we do not recommend comparing the hotspot peace interval gains or losses to one another. There were 136 more days without any shootings in hotspots in 2023-2024 relative to 2021-2022. Overall, the average window of peaceful days in hotspots is widening, allowing additional time for community members who inhabit these areas to experience respite from gun violence.

While rolling averages confirm that hotspots are seeing long-term reductions in violence, peace intervals also demonstrate that periods of calm are extending year-over-year. It is critical to assess whether these shifts extend beyond individual hotspots and influence broader community-wide and city-level trends. Since the program theorizes that reducing shootings in hotspots will drive down overall community gun violence, the next section examines how these reductions compare to overall trends in established the Program community areas and Chicago as a whole.

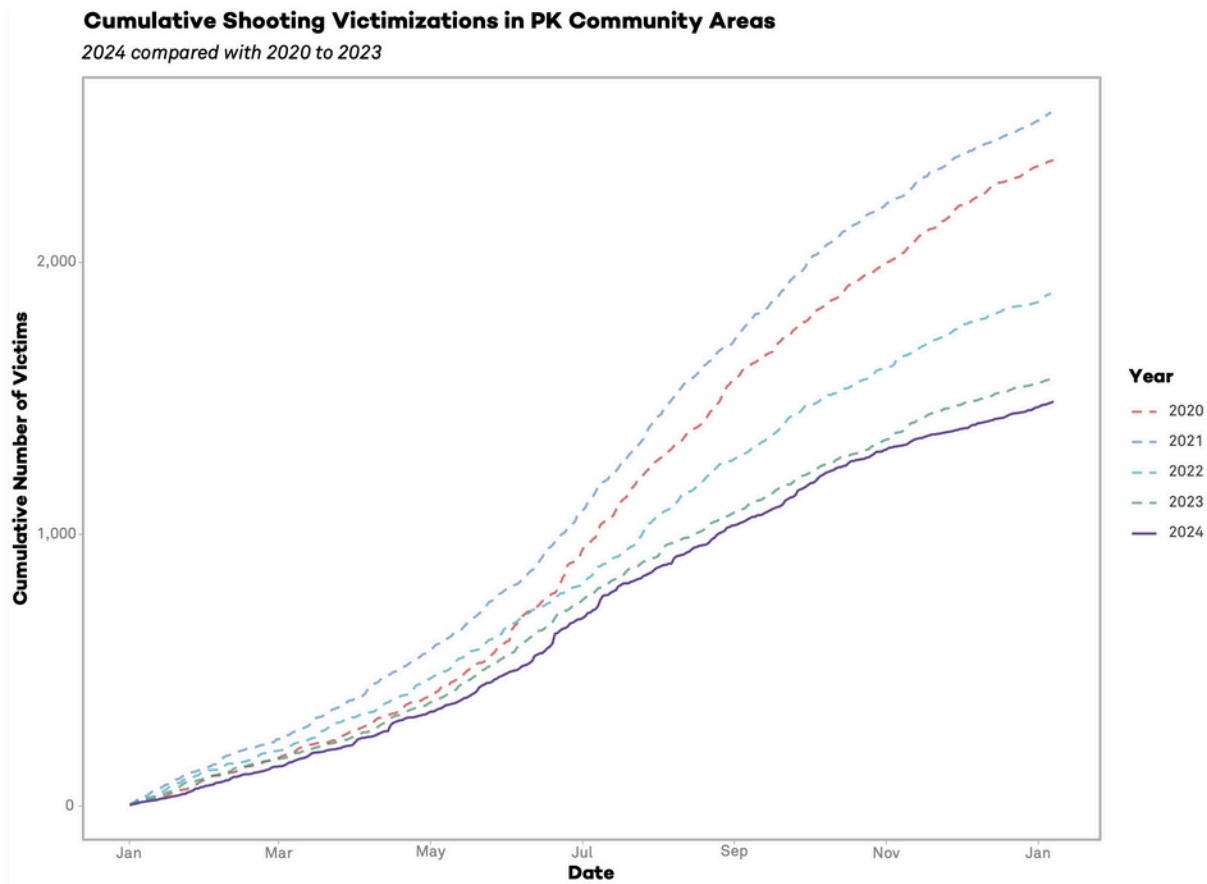**Established Peacekeeper Community and Chicago-wide Violence Trend Observations**

Cumulative Shooting Victimizations in PK Community Areas
2024 compared with 2020 to 2023

Figure 5

Chicago's established 14 Program community areas experienced a downward trend in victimizations, with 2024 emerging as the most peaceful year for these neighborhoods in the past five years (Figure 5). These community areas, which historically accounted for a disproportionate share of gun violence (55% of citywide victimizations), witnessed a steady decline in shootings between 2021-2024. Overall, Program community areas experienced a 31% decrease in shooting victimizations in 2023-2024 compared to the prior summer-only intervention years of 2021-2022 (Table 3).

Violence Trends

Table 3: Aggregate YOY Shooting Victimizations Changes in Established Community Areas

Community Area	2021-2022 Victimizations	2023-2024 Victimizations	YoY % Change
Austin	514	407	**-20.82%**
Brighton Park	87	53	**-39.08%**
East Garfield Park	297	186	**-37.37%**
Englewood	309	206	**-33.33%**
Greater Grand Crossing	366	209	**-42.9%**
Humboldt Park	339	177	**-47.79%**
New City	237	209	**-11.81%**
North Lawndale	392	302	**-22.96%**
Roseland & West Pullman	487	327	**-32.85%**
South Lawndale	223	187	**-16.14%**
South Shore	329	273	**-17.02%**
West Englewood	323	213	**-34.06%**
West Garfield Park	380	201	**-47.11%**
Woodlawn	157	117	**-25.48%**
All Program Areas	4440	3067	**-30.92%**
Chicago Citywide	7699	5534	**-28.12%**

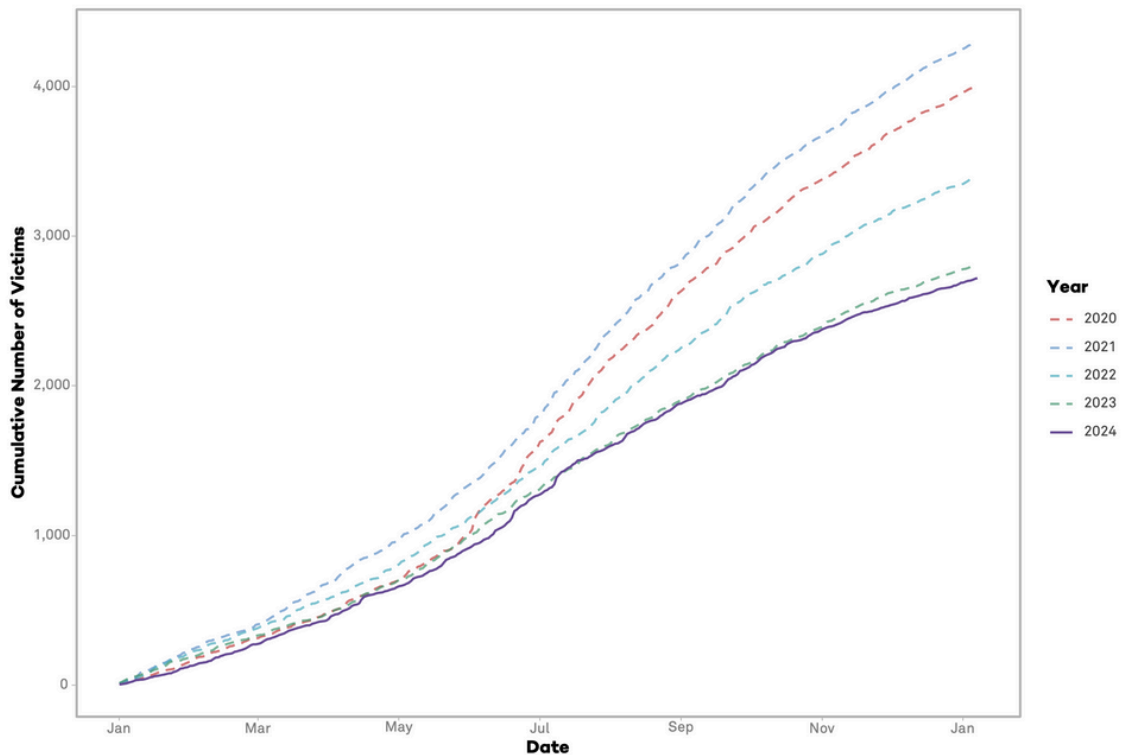**Figure 6**

Similarly, as demonstrated in Figure 6, the City of Chicago has experienced a steady decline in cumulative shooting victimizations since 2021, marking 2024 as the least violent year in the last five years. Additionally, the daily rate of victimizations has gone down consistently year over year. This progress follows a nationwide trend with a significant spike in gun violence during the COVID-19 pandemic followed by years of cooling.

While the city experienced a comparable number of shooting victimizations in 2023 and 2024, the Program community areas sustained notably fewer cumulative victimizations in the same period. This suggests that violence reduction in these historically high-risk areas may be influencing broader citywide trends, rather than simply mirroring them. These reductions align with a broader pattern of violence-related trends observed in cities that received expanded public investment into CVI strategies. For example, an analysis of the Cure Violence model in New York City found an 18% average homicide reduction in community areas where the program was implemented. Similarly, the impact of CVI programming extends beyond victimization reductions to justice system involvement, as demonstrated by an evaluation of the Chicago CRED program, which found that program participants who completed the program were 73% less likely to be arrested for a violent crime. As state and municipal backing of CVI expands, the promising Program hotspot, community, and broader citywide trends indicate that there is a demonstrated need for continued public investment in frontline violence prevention efforts, particularly as federal support for these initiatives remains uncertain.

Photo: Chicago CRED

Expansion Area Violence Trends

Table 4: Aggregate YOY Shooting Victimizations Changes in Expansion Community Area Hotspots

Peacekeepers Launch Month	Community Area	Pre-Launch Victimizations	Post-Launch Victimizations	YoY % Change
October 2023	Albany Park	4	3	**-25%**
	Belmont Cragin	2	2	**0%**
	Fuller Park	16	11	**-31%**
	Hermosa	2	1	**-50%**
	Washington Park	22	43	**95%**
November 2023	Riverdale/Altgeld Gardens	18	13	**-28%**
December 2023	Burnside	1	1	**0%**
	Chatham	29	26	**-10%**
	Chicago Lawn	50	46	**-8%**
January 2024	Auburn Gresham	78	69	**-12%**
	South Chicago	18	12	**-33%**
	South Deering	5	7	**40%**
April 2024	Ashburn	6	6	**0%**

Table 4 presents a year-over-year (YoY) comparison of victimization trends in hotspots across new program communities. Since each community area had a different implementation start date, this analysis is specific to the pre- and early-implementation periods of Peacekeeper interventions in each location. The research team conducted a YoY analysis beginning at each site's start date through December 31st, 2024, compared to the same period in the previous year for each cohort. However, at this stage, these data should be understood as an initial snapshot of violence trends at the point of intervention, not an indicator of program impact.

The YoY data show that there is variability in victimization trends across hotspots. Some hotspot locations experienced notable declines (e.g. Fuller Park, Hermosa, South Chicago), while others saw no change or increases. This variance may not reflect the program's effects but rather, the pre-existing structure of violence in these high-risk areas. For example, South Deering saw a 40% increase in YoY victimization during early implementation.[6] However, a major peace agreement between groups in the area, established with Peacekeeper support, has remained intact, even during a temporary program pause in late fall 2024 due to transitions between subcontracting organizations.

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6 This increase represents an additional two shooting victimizations compared to the same time period of the previous year.

Violence Trends

In contrast, Washington Park's increase in victimization[7] may be influenced by its unique geographic and social dynamics. During site visits, the Washington Park Peacekeepers team noted that the neighborhood's position between two major highways—the Dan Ryan Expressway (I-290) and DuSable Lakeshore Drive—combined with its role as a major community gathering space, makes it a nexus of movement on the South Side. This high level of mobility creates opportunities for violence through increased social friction and the ability for individuals from neighboring communities to quickly enter and exit the area. Other CCAs in Chicago have experienced similar challenges arising from the built environment, including South Shore, East Garfield Park, and Humboldt Park. As one South Side outreach worker shared, "Some of the violence is because of people hanging out in one place and people from out of the neighborhood...popping shots at them."

This context of violence spillovers from other neighborhoods may help explain why Washington Park saw elevated YoY changes in victimization compared to other intervention areas, where trends are stabilizing or declining. The influx of external conflicts into high-mobility neighborhoods like Washington Park suggests that violence is not always concentrated where conflict originates but can be displaced into intervention zones. Without a broader community-wide analysis, these figures cannot be assumed to reflect overall neighborhood trends. Future analyses will assess whether hotspot stabilization in intervention areas leads to broader reductions over time.

To fully evaluate the Peacekeepers Program's effectiveness, ongoing tracking of hotspot activity is essential. Longitudinal analyses will help determine whether violence in intervention hotspots is declining. Additionally, comparing Peacekeeper-covered hotspots to similar high-risk areas without intervention will provide important context for understanding program effects. Given that these findings provide preliminary insights for the initial launch in expansion communities, continuous monitoring will be critical for assessing long-term strategic implementation and the program's impact on violence reduction.

> **"Some of the violence is because of people hanging out in one place and people from out of the neighborhood…
> popping shots at them."**

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7   This increase represents an additional 21 shooting victimizations compared to the same time period of the previous year.

Summary

Overall, the 14 established the Program community area analyses reveal a promising trend at both the hotspot and community levels. Over time, hotspot victimizations have become less frequent with longer periods of time without shootings. This pattern is mirrored in the community area observations as well, where the Program community areas have also experienced fewer cumulative victimizations. This observed "cooling" effect within hotspots may be related to the substantial increase in days of peace between shootings, or peace interval; however additional statistical analysis is required to better support the team's observation that beyond reducing immediate violence, the program may be contributing to longer-lasting periods of peace within intervention zones. Additionally, since this trend coincides with a broader decline in citywide victimizations, further research is also needed to assess the Program relationship to reductions at the hotspot, community, and citywide levels.

While these violence trends suggest progress in long-standing Program hotspots and their community areas, it is imperative to assess whether similar trends will emerge in the program's expansion areas.

Photo: Institute for Nonviolence Chicago

The 13 Chicago-based expansion communities, which are still in the early stages of implementation, provide a valuable foundation for understanding the program's long-term impact. Understanding how violence trends will change in these areas over time can provide important insights into the scaling and adaptability of the Program model, especially as variation in early trends across expansion areas highlight the strategy's agility in adapting to local contexts of gun violence. These differences reinforce the need for sustained public investment, tailored intervention strategies, and long-term tracking to assess how Peacekeeper efforts evolve over time in these new sites.
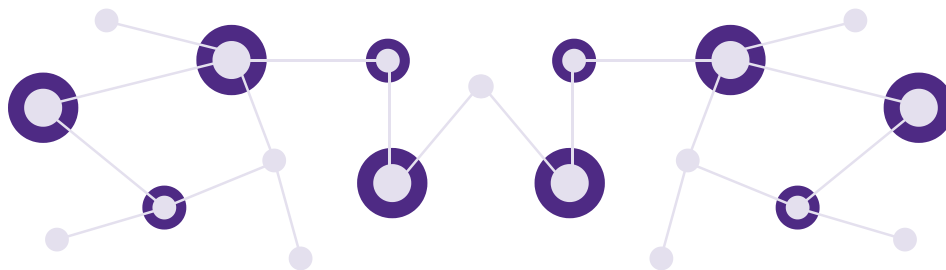
Process Evaluation Implementation Findings

Understanding the implementation of the Peacekeeper Program strategy and applying insights developed from data and analysis is vital both to ensure program effectiveness and to connect differences in implementation to individual and neighborhood outcomes. The following research questions guided the research team's evaluation of the implementation of the Program in FY'24:

1. What were the successes and challenges of implementing the Program during the expansion?
2. How did Peacekeepers engage in Program training and services during the expansion?
3. What were the key drivers of program buy-in during expansion?

To answer these questions, CORNERS collected a wide range of data, including qualitative data derived from ethnographic observations of program activities such as community events and meetings related to program implementation (e.g., data management meetings and street outreach manager meetings), informal conversations with a cross-section of key program stakeholders, and focus group discussions with Peacekeepers and street outreach staff.

Researchers subsequently prepared analytical memos for analysis. Through an iterative and inductive coding process, the research team identified three crosscutting themes that represent important factors shaping implementation of the Peacekeepers Program, including: (1) strategic communication; (2) Peacekeeper engagement; and (3) trust, relationships, and buy-in. The following findings and recommendations build upon the recommendations highlighted in the Spring 2024 report and are organized around these broad themes, with the goal of strengthening program implementation.

Finding 1: Formalized and transparent communication processes are essential to successful program expansion and implementation.

The expansion of the Peacekeepers Program in FY'24 reflects a shared belief in the value of the program and a commitment to its success among key stakeholders. Indeed, the coordination among key program stakeholders – including the Office of Firearm and Violence Prevention (OFVP), state providers (Acclivus and Metropolitan Peace Initiatives), subcontracted organizations, and local government – was described by one stakeholder as a "success story" in coordinated efforts to reach and support those at the highest risk. Despite this collective commitment to program success, communication challenges at times hindered effective program implementation. Improved communication – including a transparent, robust feedback mechanism – could help bolster successful program implementation.

Desire for Support, Oversight, and Consistent Standards for RPSA Communities

Successful program implementation during the expansion required effective coordination between state providers, subcontracted organizations, law enforcement, and local government, among other stakeholders. The significant effort required to expand the Program revealed varying levels of organizational capacity to coordinate in the manner required, highlighting the inherent difficulties of scaling a multi-stakeholder initiative while meeting the unique needs of each community.

Throughout programmatic observations and conversations with Peacekeepers and key stakeholders, there was a desire for more structured support – including additional oversight and consistent standards – between OFVP, state providers, and subcontracted organizations. In communities with fewer CVI resources, increased coordination before launching the program would have benefitted implementation. Establishing straightforward processes, systems, and expectations before implementation could enhance local resource coordination and support the successful onboarding of new communities.

The Importance of Streamlined Two-Way Communication

Focus groups and interviews with stakeholders suggest that the Peacekeepers Program lacks a clear feedback mechanism for subcontractor organizations—including frontline implementers—to share knowledge with OFVP and other critical decision-makers.

Increasing strategic communication mechanisms between stakeholders is important for successful program implementation and offers an opportunity to effectively manage limited resources and help OFVP better understand and address on-the-ground implementation challenges. For example, OFVP provided funding to neighboring RPSA communities based on their geographic proximity and shared challenges with gun violence, grouping them into clusters. In the Northwest cluster,[8] where neighboring communities were contributing to violence, one stakeholder expressed that more Peacekeepers were needed to cover the expanse of Northwest communities and their borders with other communities that contributed to group-related violence. Both state providers and subcontracting organizations shared frustrations with the practice of clustering as a mechanism for managing resources. Peacekeeper team leads and supervisors often used personal resources, such as their own vehicles, to facilitate Peacekeeper movement and ensure that these critical border hotspots received some level of coverage. A strategic communication process and robust feedback mechanism for sharing practical insights and experiences could help increase OFVP and state implementers' awareness of these challenges as they arise.

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8 The Northwest cluster includes Hermosa, Albany Park, and Belmont Cragin; ALSO is the implementing partner.

Finding 2: Sustained and meaningful engagement with Peacekeepers is essential for program implementation and long-term program success.

A key goal of The Peacekeepers Program is to create pathways for personal growth and leadership development for individuals at high risk for gun violence involvement or with influence among gun violence networks. As Peacekeepers gain experience in their roles as Peacekeepers, there are opportunities for advancement, including additional training and promotions to supervisory roles. Further, Peacekeepers can receive services as needed, including educational programming for those without a high school diploma or GED, behavioral health services, and workforce development programming. While some Peacekeepers have benefited from these opportunities, capacity limitations among some subcontractor organizations may have hindered their ability to provide meaningful services and ongoing engagement to Peacekeepers. The research team identified three principal challenges to engaging Peacekeepers: 1) variations in training and timeline among Peacekeepers, 2) heterogeneity in service availability and accessibility, and 3) disparities between the number of available professional roles in CVI and the growing number of Peacekeepers.

Variations in Program Training and Timeline

Peacekeepers rely on the experiential knowledge and connections they developed before becoming a Peacekeeper to mediate conflicts. However, before leading violence interruption activities as a Peacekeeper, individuals must complete the Core Training at subcontractor sites, equipping them with essential conflict mediation and community engagement strategies and skills. While all subcontractor organizations must provide this basic training to Peacekeepers, some sites also require a more in-depth, intensive training that can take up to several weeks to complete before Peacekeepers can begin violence intervention activities. Beyond the training mandated by the program model, state providers require additional training for Peacekeepers. The variation in training type and length between subcontractor sites highlights an opportunity for the Peacekeepers Program to explore strategies for building the capacity of organizations to develop specialized on-site training for Peacekeepers.

There is also variation across subcontracting organizations regarding the length of Peacekeepers Program participation. For example, some Peacekeepers remain in the Program indefinitely, while others have a more limited tenure. Street outreach workers voiced reservations over the concept of placing time limits on Peacekeeper participation, speculating that early removal from the Program might lead to participant re-engagement with groups, potentially eroding trust in the peace-making process. At the same time, indefinite time periods may present challenges for organizations who must manage wait lists for coveted Peacekeeper spots while providing the requisite support for existing Peacekeepers.

Heterogeneity in Availability and Accessibility of Services for Peacekeepers

In alignment with the Program model, Peacekeepers receive services such as workforce development, resource linkages, and personal development. In FY'24, all subcontractor organizations reported connecting program participants to supplementary activities that enhance skills and support personal development and well-being, as the program model dictates.[9] For some locations, additional trainings included public speaking, professional understanding with law enforcement, anger management, overdose support, American Standard sign language, and first-aid training.[10] Subcontracting organizations also reported that case management teams and street outreach workers linked participants to services such as Medicaid, Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) programs, and Housing Choice Vouchers.

Subcontracting organizations also reported that case management teams and street outreach workers linked Peacekeepers to services such as Medicaid, Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) programs, and Housing Choice Vouchers.

However, access to these services varies due to differences in financial resources and implementation approaches at the subcontractor level. While most of the state's funding finances stipends for Peacekeepers, both Acclivus and MPI stepped in to bridge financial gaps for subcontractors that had limited case management, skill development, and mental health resources. This support helped ensure that subcontracting partners met program standards despite varying levels of resources.

Significantly, although state providers helped bridge resource gaps by providing additional support to subcontractors who lack the means to offer comprehensive wraparound services, street outreach workers report that group affiliations in some communities prevented Peacekeepers from traveling to access these services. Indeed, Peacekeepers shared that NAAs can also restrict their movement, impinging on their ability to access wraparound services. This reality underscores the complex needs of this population and clear opportunities to strengthen access to services.

Workforce Development Capacity as a Barrier to Program Success

The Peacekeepers Program emphasizes the importance of providing participants with access to dignified and consistent income as a requirement for sustainable violence reduction. A robust program structure with built-in leadership and career advancement opportunities is essential to supporting Peacekeepers' ongoing development and ensuring Peacekeeper continuity in the CVI field. However, street outreach workers have identified a bottleneck in the Peacekeeper-to-CVI workforce pipeline, which oftentimes limits career progression for skilled Peacekeepers.

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9   Subcontractors were unable to provide the exact number of Peacekeepers who participated in each training at the time of data collection. Case management and service linkage conversion data were also unavailable. The evaluation team anticipates having these data for any subsequent implementation update reports.

10 American standard sign language (ASL) is provided at G.O.D only.

Since the program's initial launch in 2018, 171 Peacekeepers have transitioned into CVI-focused careers. This bottleneck has resulted in three distinct Peacekeeper cohorts: (1) those ready for full-time CVI roles but awaiting openings, (2) those prepared to advance within the program to take on additional responsibilities as the Program team lead or supervisor but awaiting vacancies, and (3) those who require continued support to disengage from group involvement fully. Focus group discussions revealed that resource constraints are the primary limitation to Peacekeepers transitioning into the CVI workforce pipeline. For example, as one Peacekeeper Supervisor described, "Everyone here wants to become outreach… If we had the funding, everyone would be outreach."

While the program aims to transition Peacekeepers into full-time roles within the CVI field, Peacekeepers also acquire transferable skills applicable across various industries, such as data management, public speaking, conflict resolution, and relationship-building. During group conversations, some Peacekeepers and street outreach workers shared that diverse income opportunities – such as launching catering, real estate, and personal care businesses – have been critical to their financial stability. Expanding job placement assistance and access to diverse employment opportunities empowers Peacekeepers with transferable skills and promotes long-term economic stability. With 1,213 Peacekeepers and limited positions available in the CVI field, linking Peacekeepers to income-generating opportunities beyond CVI is critical to ensuring that all Peacekeepers have access to employment opportunities.[11]

Finding 3: Strengthening trust between Peacekeepers and community stakeholders is key to stakeholder buy-in and effective implementation.

As with Community Violence Intervention in general, relationships are key to success. Trust between Peacekeepers and the community - and building respectful working relationships with law enforcement - is essential for gaining program buy-in and facilitating effective implementation. While Peacekeepers' trusted relationships with street outreach workers and communities are more readily established due to their shared goals and proximity to the issues at hand, the relationship with law enforcement is more complex due to the historical context of police interactions with many communities served by CVI. Respectful relationships create a foundation for addressing challenges, coordinating efforts, and sustaining the program over time.

Building Trust between Peacekeepers and Community Stakeholders

Trust between street outreach workers and Peacekeepers is foundational to the success of CVI strategies. Similarly, in the context of the Peacekeepers Program, trust between the participant (the Peacekeeper) and the outreach worker is key to successful program implementation and impact. This trust begins with street outreach workers engaging with Peacekeepers as participants, offering them potential linkage to resources, attending court dates, and providing guidance. This initial outreach builds a foundation of trust and a path toward positive change for Peacekeepers through their participation in the Program.

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11 This is the total number of Peacekeepers that participated in FY'24 and does not account for participant turnover.

Trust in the Peacekeepers Program was evident among street outreach workers whose buy-in was critical to fostering trust and establishing the program's credibility within communities. Street outreach workers carry significant responsibility for the program's implementation – including participant recruitment, providing training support, and offering mentorship—all while fulfilling their broader street outreach duties. During focus group discussions, street outreach workers described the Peacekeepers Program as a natural extension of their outreach efforts. They noted that the program amplifies their ability to be present across multiple areas simultaneously, ultimately enhancing the efficacy and reach of their violence prevention work.

Peacekeepers also build trust with communities in a variety of ways. Subcontracting organizations host a wide range of events and activities during which Peacekeepers actively engage in relationship building with residents, such as community barbecues, "Light in the Night" events, walking families to and from school, and community cleanups. Peacekeepers also link their neighbors to critical resources and supplies for daily necessities like groceries, toiletries to youth in need, and school supply giveaways. For example, Peacekeepers and street outreach workers described their shared celebration when a young person living on the street received resources through their subcontracting organization to secure an apartment.

By maintaining a consistent presence in the community, Peacekeepers strengthen their relationships with residents. As one Peacekeeper reflected,

> **"When I first started, it wasn't like this. It was only a handful of people. People were curious about the job, but now all people know who we are. We put in work to be known. We are doing a service. When we expanded, they could see the big picture. It makes a big difference. We are a household name now and are being proactive and not reactive. We're not just here [only] when someone is shot."**

Indeed, Peacekeepers approach their work with the community with a holistic understanding of the interconnected nature of community members. As one Peacekeeper described, "In our community the kids don't leave. Our kids are cousins. I know a lot of people. We have to intervene because they're brothers. People are people. We are all connected. I can't turn a cheek if someone's brother is outside. I would be less of a mother if I don't help the kids out there."

Peacekeepers' lived expertise and rootedness in their community helps them effectively mediate conflicts. Conflict mediations are tracked by community sites through a survey form that asks Peacekeeper team leads to describe individual conflict and mediation processes. A review of Peacekeeper Program conflict mediation data reveals that Peacekeepers use their skills to navigate a wide range of conflicts.

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12 Light in the Night are events hosted by MPI subcontracting partners with the goal of establish a safe space for community residents to gather and fellowship [XI]. These events are held monthly across MPIs partner communities throughout the year. For subcontractors who implement the Peacekeepers Program, Peacekeepers also attend the events to readily dispel any conflicts that may arise during the event. To learn more about Light in the Night events, please visit the MPI Light in the Night events calendar https://metropolitanpeaceinitiatives.org/events/

Around 60% of reported mediations involve verbal and/or physical conflicts, while the remaining 40% consist of non-conflict incidents encountered by Peacekeepers in their work.[13] Conflict mediation data also demonstrates that Peacekeepers often resolve conflicts through the facilitation of mutual agreements or apologies between the parties involved to prevent future escalation. License to Operate (LTO) is often leveraged to gain rapport with individuals who are in conflict. As one Peacekeeper described, "Well, seeing I know both parties, it was easy to talk to everyone together and we all came up with an agreement."

Peacekeepers play a key role in healing fractured relationships caused by group-related conflicts, including between opposing group members who also participate in the Program. As one program leader shared, "You're looking at three major opposition groups in this room today. Major deaths have happened on all sides between these groups. For them to be sitting in this room, playing tag, talking about their experience, I have to interrupt so I don't have to go outside to wipe my eyes from getting emotional."

Building Respectful Working Relationships with Law Enforcement

While progress has been made in recent years between CVI and law enforcement (for example, through efforts such as the Chicago Police Department and CVI Professional Understanding initiative in Chicago), historical tensions remain. These tensions are felt by the Peacekeepers in their dual roles as both frontline workers and Peacekeeper Program participants. For example, focus group discussions revealed that many Peacekeepers were initially hesitant to join the program due to concerns that street outreach workers were affiliated with law enforcement. Law enforcement was also initially wary of the Peacekeepers Program. For example, Cicero and Berwyn – both slated to begin program implementation in FY'24 – faced resistance from local law enforcement who expressed early skepticism about the Program's approach and effectiveness. This resistance – coupled with limited CVI subcontractors in each community – prevented the program from initially launching in these areas. Ultimately, Cicero and Berwyn obtained buy-in from law enforcement, identified a subcontractor to support implementation, and launched during the first quarter of FY'25. Nonetheless, Cicero and Berwyn highlight the Peacekeeper Program's ongoing challenge of balancing community support with institutional buy-in.

Expansion communities in Chicago also encountered challenges from district beat officers who occasionally confronted Peacekeepers during canvassing. For example, according to the Peacekeeper hotspot team in one community, a Peacekeeper was detained and arrested without cause while canvassing. The arrest impacted the morale of the team, which had just witnessed a youth shooting the day before. Such incidents highlight the importance of continuing to invest in efforts aimed at fostering collaboration and mutual respect between law enforcement and Peacekeepers. Indeed, Peacekeepers across community areas voiced the desire for additional training on managing police interactions. Through informal conversations, Peacekeepers shared their perspective and experiences with some officers, which they described as occasionally disrupting program activities. According to one Peacekeeper Team Lead, "Some of them are good cops, some of them are idiots. They'll say, get off the block, you're going to go to jail, ask them why they're there. [We] have to explain to them that this is their job."

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13 This analysis currently includes conflict mediations reported by MPI subcontractor partners only. Future reports will aim to expand this analysis to incorporate data from Acclivus subcontractor partners.

Process Evaluation

According to some key stakeholders, law enforcement's support of the Peacekeeper's Program has evolved over time. While the program requires that police departments contribute to hotspot identification, in some communities law enforcement collaborates more closely with street outreach teams to foster mutual respect between beat officers and Peacekeepers. One program leader noted this transformation, describing that "Some police wouldn't even talk to us...but when we say their top cop supports us, municipal officers start to listen."

To promote transparency, Peacekeepers wear uniforms identifying them with the program. While designed to be helpful, some Peacekeepers report that the uniforms contribute to heightened scrutiny of Peacekeepers by law enforcement. For example, as one Peacekeeper described, "Police harass [us]. [They] say they're gonna take our vests."

Summary & Recommendations

Despite challenges in implementing the expansion of a highly complex strategy, there are early signs of promise in this community-driven program. The partnership between state providers and local subcontractors, which provides the infrastructure for effective training, stipends, and resource linkage - while simultaneously allowing the program to remain nimble and responsive to each community's needs - is key to the Peacekeepers Program's success. The following recommendations seek to strengthen the program's ongoing implementation.

- **Expand opportunities for employment beyond the field of CVI.** Through the Peacekeepers Program, participants are gaining important skills that are applicable to other fields and industries. While the Program provides an important workforce pipeline into the CVI field, the limited number of readily available CVI positions presents a barrier to Peacekeepers' career advancement. The creation of additional pathways to a diverse range of workforce development opportunities beyond the field of CVI can help enhance the long-term success and viability of the Program.

- **Ensure all subcontracted organizations can provide standardized training to Peacekeepers, including personal safety, conflict de-escalation, and mental health support.** Standardized Peacekeeper training is key to improving implementation outcomes. Both state providers have intensive street outreach training that has been adapted to support Peacekeepers' instruction, yet disparities remain across subcontracting organizations. Leveraging the combined expertise of both institutions is key in reassessing the program's core training model and ensuring it addresses the skills that Peacekeepers have identified as particularly valuable in the field. These include navigating intimate partner violence that escalates into the community, anger management, managing conflicts involving substance use or Narcan distribution, and addressing disputes involving individuals of genders different than the Peacekeeper. While some subcontracting organizations provide specialized trainings, they are not consistently implemented across all partners, leading to uneven skill development among Peacekeepers. Ultimately, this inconsistency may impact the program's overall effectiveness across implementing communities.

- **Continue building respectful working relationships with law enforcement.** Leadership at state providers and subcontracted organizations should maintain regular communication with district commanders to quickly address any issues that arise between officers and Peacekeepers to ensure uninterrupted program operations. Law enforcement leaders who support the Peacekeeper Program model should address misconceptions about the program among their officers-such as dispelling rumors that the program will encourage police de-funding-to build trust and foster buy-in among their officers.

Building Toward Long-Term Violence Reduction

The findings presented in this report suggest a promising trajectory for violence reduction in both established and expansion Peacekeeper communities. In long-standing intervention areas, shooting victimizations have become less frequent, and peace intervals have grown, pointing to a shift toward sustained periods of calm. Expansion communities, while still in the early phases of implementation, provide a critical foundation for assessing the program's long-term impact.

While violence trends in established Peacekeeper areas align with broader citywide reductions in gun violence, further research is needed to examine the relationship between the Program and these shifts. A correlation-based evaluation will be essential for assessing how changes in victimization patterns coincide with program activities at the hotspot, community, and citywide levels. Ongoing and future analyses will focus on identifying associations between Peacekeeper interventions and observed violence reductions to ensure that resources remain data-driven, responsive, and effective in supporting frontline violence prevention efforts. Finally, the research team will continue to follow implementation of the Program as it continues to evolve.

Appendix

List of MPI PKP Subcontractors

Community Area	Implementing Partner
Austin	INVC
Little Village & Brighton Park	New Life
East Garfield Park	Breakthrough
Englewood & W. Englewood	Target Area
Humboldt Park	ALSO
New City	INVC & PBMR
North Lawndale	UCAN
Roseland & West Pullman	CRED
South Shore	Claretian
West Garfield Park	INVC
Woodlawn	Project H.O.O.D.
Albany Park	ALSO
Hermosa	ALSO
Belmont-Cragin	ALSO
MPI Total	**10 Total Implementors**

List of Acclivus PKP Subcontractors

Community Area	Implementing Partner
Ashburn	Restorative Project
Auburn Gresham	Target Area
Bellwood	BMU
Burnside	Unstacked
Calumet City	House of James
Chatham	Second Chance
Chicago Heights	I & F
Chicago Lawn	Restorative Project
Dolton	House of James
Fuller Park	Acclivus
Greater Grand Crossing	Acclivus
Markham	House of James
Maywood	BMU
Park Forest	I & F
Riverdale (Altgeld Gardens)	Seeds of Roseland
Sauk Village	I & F
South Chicago	G.O.D.
South Deering	Le Penseur
Washington Park	Acclivus
Acclivus Total	**11 Total Implementors**

The Center for Neighborhood Engaged Research & Science (CORNERS), housed at Northwestern University's Institute for Policy Research, leverages the transformative power of networks to help community and civic partners build safer, healthier, more equitable neighborhoods.

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