

READI Chicago Evaluation Finds Reductions in Shootings and Homicides



Participating in READI Chicago (defined as attending job orientation) may reduce shootings and homicides—the costliest forms of violence—by 32%, according to early analysis of program outcomes at 20 months. This finding seems primarily driven by a large, consistent and statistically significant reduction of 80% in shooting and homicide arrests for participants. The reductions are also strongest and most consistent for community referrals, who constitute one of three referral pathways into the program. The study is not yet complete; however, if these results persist, READI Chicago has the potential to contribute to the safety and economic opportunity among residents who have been disconnected, underserved, and at grave risk of violence involvement.

“READI Chicago reminded me that I’m intelligent and a leader. When someone believes in you, you want to step up.” —Jawanza, READI Chicago Englewood participant

ABOUT READI CHICAGO

READI Chicago connects individuals who are at highest risk of gun violence involvement with up to 18 months of paid transitional jobs and cognitive behavioral therapy, plus six months of supportive services. This innovative program leverages a strong evidence base and a new application of predictive analytics to test whether a highly-targeted, intensive program can produce a measurable decline in violence and criminal justice involvement. The program is being implemented in Austin, West Garfield Park, Englewood, West Englewood and North Lawndale in collaboration with six local partner organizations. READI identifies eligible participants through three referral sources: community partners, reentry from the criminal justice system, and a data-based risk assessment. The University of Chicago’s Crime Lab and Inclusive Economy Lab are conducting a randomized control trial evaluation, which is yielding powerful data and insights about the men who are most at risk of gun violence involvement and the effectiveness of the READI Chicago model.

“You can feel the tide changing around here. People have seen that other places offer support, but we offer a future.” —Michael, READI Chicago INVC Outreach Worker

EARLY ANALYSIS¹-KEY LEARNINGS:

READI Chicago is finding the right participants. Referrals to READI Chicago are at extremely high risk of involvement in gun violence. We know that men referred to READI Chicago previously experienced high rates of gun violence and justice system contact. For example, of the 2,014 men in this early analysis (82% of the eventual total sample), 35% had been shot at least once; on average they have been arrested at least 17 times. READI Chicago distinguishes these men from others living in the same community areas who are already disproportionately at high risk for gun violence involvement. READI Chicago serves men who are 1,030%—over 10 times—more likely to be shot and killed than their neighbors, even when eligible for all existing and/or new services available to them except READI.

READI Chicago participants are staying engaged in programming over time. Fifty-five percent of all individuals eligible to start work do so within 20 months. Prior to COVID, over 50% of those who start the initiative were still engaged after a year and continued to work during at least 79% of the weeks available to them. These rates of engagement are comparable to those of in-school programming for young people who are much more attached to services. Interviews with participants indicate that they are initially attracted to the paycheck, but stay engaged because of the strong “family-like” relationships in READI Chicago and access to CBT. Both participants and staff confirm participants are learning new skills and concepts in CBT that they are using in their everyday lives to change their thinking or navigate stressful situations. Staff report seeing evidence of behavior change in participants as a result through extensive qualitative data collection including observations, interviews, surveys, and focus groups.

READI Chicago may help keep participants safer. At this early stage, we see that men who participated in READI—defined for the study as at least one day of job orientation—may see reductions in shootings and homicide involvement of up to 32%.² This finding seems primarily driven by a large, consistent and statistically significant reduction of 80% in shooting and homicide arrests for participants. The reductions are also strongest and most consistent for community referrals, who constitute one of three referral pathways into the program. If these results persist, given that gun violence accounts for almost 90% of the cost of crime in urban environments, preliminary calculations suggest that READI Chicago may already be close to paying for itself.

Heartland Alliance partners with five community-based organizations to implement READI Chicago:

- Centers for New Horizons
- Heartland Human Care Services
- Institute for Nonviolence Chicago
- North Lawndale Employment Network
- UCAN

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¹ The early analysis sample includes 2,014 men enrolled in the study (or 82% of the total planned study sample) who have had the opportunity to complete 20 months of the program after randomization.

²This result is not statistically significant ($p > 0.1$). In the coming months, the analysis will include outcomes for additional study participants who progress through the program which will change these estimates and the confidence levels.