

PROPOSAL TO EVALUATE PNLV's ZERO YOUTH VIOLENCE PROGRAM

Submitted by:

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BACKGROUND

Cure Violence (CV) is an approach to eliminating gun violence developed at the University of Illinois Chicago. It is rooted in the understanding that violence is a public health epidemic perpetuated through social norms, spreads from person to person, and can be interrupted using disease control and behavior change methodologies that center both structural and contextual causes of violence. The CV model detects and interrupts potentially violent situations; identifies and changes the behaviors of the highest risk transmitters, and changes group norms that perpetuate violence. Credible messengers and violence interrupters are central to CV programs. They are viewed as trustworthy and credible by the population served because they are carefully selected from the community, have similar background and experiences as individuals most prone to violence, and undergo training on how to deescalate and interrupt violence.

Promise Neighborhoods of the Lehigh Valley and Cure Violence

In 2019, Promise Neighborhoods of the Lehigh Valley (PNLV) received a grant from the Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency (PCCD) to pilot CV in designated neighborhoods within the city of Allentown. PNLV then requested Cure Violence experts to conduct an assessment and feasibility study in Allentown. The CV expert visited in April 2019 and sought to answer the following questions: (1) Is there a governmental or non-governmental agency with the capacity and the will to implement the CV model with fidelity? (2) Does official and unofficial data exist about violent incidents to focus and monitor the implementation of the model? (3) Does official and unofficial data exist about the nature of violent incidents to determine if the CV model is appropriate? (4) Does official and unofficial data exist to create criteria to identify a high-risk target population for focusing implementation of the model? (5) Do community organizations exist who fit the CV criteria to serve as partners to implement the model? (6) Do individuals exist who could fulfill the role of Violence Interrupters and/or Outreach Workers?

The CV team reviewed data provided by the Allentown Police Department, conducted interviews with community-based organizations and community members, and met with representatives

from PNLV, Allentown Police Department, Mayor Ray O'Connell, City Council members, representatives from Lehigh Valley Health Network, St. Luke's Hospital, Allentown School District, Lehigh Valley Community Foundation, Neighborhood Health Centers, and with the Office of Congresswoman Susan Wild. Ultimately, this feasibility study concluded that the CV model can work in Allentown because of PNLV's strengths in effectively developing partnerships with agencies and organizations across Allentown, the practice of working with individuals with a history of incarceration or who have had associations with groups involved in high-risk street activity, and because of Dr. Batts' experience, relationships and skills to lead the development and implementation of Cure Violence.

Zero Youth Violence: PNLV has been implementing *Zero Youth Violence (ZyV)* in Allentown using the CV model. While violent crime rate in Allentown reduced by more than 50% between 2017 to 2020, people under the age of 25 are involved in about 50% of the incidents of violence. PNLV's ZyV program approaches the problem of youth violence as multi-faceted. Specifically, the program's violence prevention efforts include developing a sense of belonging among youth, providing opportunities training programs and capacity building, and responding to acts of violence by caring for survivors as a community. Training violence interrupters and credible messengers to interrupt violence, prevent retaliatory shootings, and to help foster new social norms is at the center of all these efforts. Zero Youth Violence is led by the people who are most impacted by gun violence but whose voices are often ignored in the search for solutions.

OBJECTIVES AND METHODS

PNLV's Zero Youth Violence integrates community-based upstream level interventions to prevent violence and more downstream level actions to interrupt violence, to stop retaliation and to care for victims. We seek to conduct a multi-level qualitative and contextual evaluation of ZyV. This evaluation is necessary for five reasons. First, it will provide the data needed to establish the merits of the program for community well-being, Second, it will formally acknowledge the work of PNLV and contributions of those who now serve as credible messengers and violence interrupters. Third, it will establish Allentown as a city with a model for CV implementation, regardless of its successes or challenges. Fourth, it will identify any gaps and needs that can be addressed moving forward. Fifth, it will identify specific successful strategies and mechanisms that can be used to address other structural problems that promote community thriving.

In two phases, the evaluation will answer three main questions and address three specific objectives.

PHASE 1

Question 1: What are community and stakeholder perspectives of Allentown's Zero Youth Violence Initiative?

- i. Explore perceptions of the impact of ZYV from the perspectives of organizational stakeholders and PNLV staff

Method: Unstructured interviews with PNLV staff and volunteers, representatives from the Allentown Police Department, Allentown City Council, Office of the Mayor, Lehigh Valley Health Network, St. Luke's Hospital, Allentown School District, Lehigh Valley Community Foundation, Office of Congresswoman Susan Wild, and Neighborhood Health Centers

Question 2: Does Zero Youth Violence community-based programs reduce violence?

- ii. Describe trends in sense of belonging and sense of community among young adults before and after implementation of ZYV.

Method: Document review of ZYV programs, narrative interviews of a representative sample of young adults and their families in Allentown. Unstructured interviews of ZYV program staff and volunteers.

- iii. Describe the relationship between participation in PNLV's ZYV programs and sense of belonging.

Method: Unstructured interviews of ZYZ program staff and narrative interviews of a representative sample of young adults and their families.

- iv. Identify whether ZYV program is associated with trends in gun violence in Allentown.

Method: Review official Allentown Police Department reports of shooting incidents. Review news articles and unofficial sources. Unstructured interviews with ZYV staff and narrative interviews with young adults and their families.

PHASE TWO

Question 3: How does ZYV influence social norms around violence and community responses to violence?

- v. Identify and describe successful mechanisms through which ZYV interrupts violence.

Method: 4-month team-focused ethnographic study of day-to-day duties of ZYV program staff (especially credible messengers and violence interrupters), and observations of two young adults who are at high risk for violence.

- vi. Describe how ZYV programs help families navigate violence and cope with loss.

Method: Life history interviews with three families who have directly experienced violence.

TIMELINE

Monthly work plan							
PHASE ONE	April & May 2023	June 2023	July & August 2023	Sept. & Oct. 2023			
Obtain and review APD data on gun violence/ shootings in Allentown. Review contextual data from other sources. Obtain and review ZYV programmatic materials. Development of interview materials.							
Development of recruitment strategies and obtaining IRB approval							
Interviews with ZYV staff and volunteers, interviews with organizational stakeholders and narrative interviews with young adults and their families.							
Data analysis and report writing for Phase 1							
PHASE TWO					April 2024	May 2023 to August 2023	Sept. 2023 & Oct. 2023
Recruitment and training of two young adults who participated in Phase 1 to be part of ethnographic team							
Ethnographic assessment and life history interviews with young adults and families							
Data analysis and report writing for Phase 2							

BUDGET

PHASE 1	Cost
Expert time including direct research costs and travel (Dr. Alang & one Research Assistant)	\$14,000
Incentive for young adults and families participating in narrative interviews (60-90 minute interviews)	\$1,000 (\$50 X20)
Total	\$15,000
PHASE 2	Cost
Expert time for Dr. Alang & one Research Assistant	\$12,000
Expert time for two Allentown-resident community ethnographers	\$10,000 (\$5,000 X2)
Incentive for life two young adults at risk of violence who volunteer to be observed by community ethnographers for four months	\$2,000 (\$1,000X2)
Incentive for three families participating in life history interviews (90–120-minute interviews). At least two family members to participate in life history interviews	\$300 (\$100 X3)
Total	\$24,300