THE BROOKINGS INSTITUTION

SAUL/ZILKHA ROOM

DISRUPTING THE CYCLE OF GUN VIOLENCE: A CANDID DISCUSSION WITH YOUNG CHICAGO RESIDENTS

Washington, D.C.

Friday, March 9, 2018

ARNE DUNCAN, Moderator
Nonresident Senior Fellow, Governance Studies
The Brookings Institution

WENDY JONES
Executive Director, Youth Peace Center of Roseland
Partner, Chicago CRED

ROGERS JONES
Director of Operations, Youth Peace Center of Roseland
Partner, Chicago CRED

JERVON HICKS
Life Coach, Youth Peace Center of Roseland
Life Coach, Chicago CRED

DAMIEN FLUNDER
Participant
Chicago CRED

BRANDON WILLIS
Participant
Chicago CRED

MALIK TIGER
Participant
Chicago CRED

* * * * *

P R O C E E D I N G S

MR. DUNCAN: Good afternoon. We'll jump right in. And I'm Arne Duncan and I have an amazing brain trust here that you're going to hear a lot from and have a chance to ask them some questions. I'll give maybe three minutes of quick context for the work we're doing and why, and then we're just going to have a conversation. We're always very real. We're sometimes a little raw, and that's just -- I mean, it's so important that we be honest and authentic on what's working, what's not, and why.

So context for Chicago and why I do this work. When I lead the Chicago Public Schools for seven and a half years, by far the hardest part of my job was the number of our kids who were shot and killed. During those seven and a half years we averaged one child being killed every two weeks. And going to those funerals and going to those kids' homes and going to schools where there's an empty chair and trying to make sense of the senseless was by far the hardest of my job.

In hindsight very, very naively I thought we hit rock bottom. I thought it couldn't get worse. And in the seven years my family and I were here in D.C. things got a lot worse. And in fact, this past year, Chicago Public Schools, 40-week school year, September through June, they had 59 kids killed, so more than a child every 2 weeks killed. And these are kids in school.

Last year in Chicago, there were 660 homicides, almost 3,000 people shot. There's something I'm obsessed with called the "clear rate." The clear rate is percent of crimes that get solved. In Chicago, if you kill someone that has about a 26 percent clear rate, so there's a 74 percent chance that you'd literally get away with murder. If you just shoot someone and don't kill them, that has about a 3 to 4 percent clear rate, so it's 95, 96, 97 percent change that there are no consequences.

Chicago has very strict guns laws. But Chicago, unfortunately, is not an island and we live right next to Indiana and lots of guns pour into our community from many different places. So for me, going home, this was a crisis facing the city and the thing that's toughest for me is how I just think we've robbed our kids of their childhoods. And the level of fear that our kids live with every single day is extraordinary. They struggle to make it back and forth to school. All my life I've tried to preach think long term and think about college. And if you're just trying to survive every day that stuff is like a foreign language, it doesn't quite make sense.

I grew up playing basketball everywhere in the South and West Sides. You can't do that anymore. Most of our parks are pretty much empty. And for me it's just not fair.

In every crisis there's an opportunity. For me as I started to sort of think about what to do returning home there are two parts of the opportunity that really attracted me. One was that things are so violent, things are so bad that many of our guys are looking to change, looking to do something different, looking to get out of the street life. And two, there's a myth that folks selling drugs are making tons of money. Some are making some, but a lot of guys are risking their life, getting shot at, police are chasing them, and making next to nothing.

And so what we started 16 months ago with a cohort of guys on the far South Side, in the Roseland and Pullman community, and we found guys were most at risk of shooting or being shot, which in Chicago that's 75 to 80 percent of young black men, 17 to 24. And we hired them and we've worked in a cohort with them, building a brotherhood, building a camaraderie. Candidly, some of our guys were shooting at each other prior to that. We had to work that through early on. We do hard skills, we do soft skills, we do trauma care, we do substance abuse. A lot of our guys have gotten high

school diplomas; you'll hear about that. Two of our guys are in college now.

And our goal is to keep them with us for roughly a year and then spin them off into legal economies. We're trying to provide a pathway from the streets and violence, and that really starts there, into the legal economy.

We started in September. We started working with Mr. and Mrs. Jones in March of '17, so they've been working with a group of guys for almost a year. And so it's sort of a good time to sort of reflect.

And I'll just sort of stop there and just jump into the conversation. And start right down the line. And I don't say this lightly. I always say Mr. and Mrs. Jones are walking saints. We have six cohorts of guys now, three South Side, three West Side. The first one, we have a small team we did ourselves. Every other cohort has been led by community partners: churches, nonprofits, social service agencies. Our whole goal is to build capacity in communities to really take on and do this work.

So I'll start with Mrs. Jones; we're just going to line up.

MS. JONES: Sure. Good afternoon.

MR. DUNCAN: Real quick background and why you do this work.

MS. JONES: Good afternoon. My name is Wendy Jones and I am the founder and executive director of the Youth Peace Center of Roseland. It is a nonprofit organization on the far South Side of Chicago. I've actually owned that building, a former Chicago public school teacher who wanted to do something different in my community, but continue to help young people. And I've been there 22 years.

My husband and I have worked with a number of young people in that community from elementary school all the way up to about 26 years old. The last 12 years we've been working with older youth between the ages of 16 and 26. Then Chicago CRED came into the community and we were so excited about helping them

because usually the little funding that we get is like a drop-in: four months or a summer youth program, the funding is gone and kids are back on the street doing the same thing that they were before that dropped in. So with Chicago CRED it's been amazing because now we can offer young people more wraparound services, more support services of the type of services that we know that they need.

So it's been really amazing and I'm sure you'll get a chance to hear a little bit more from me, but we're going to just move it down.

MR. JONES: I'm Rogers Jones and I serve as the director of operations for the Youth Peace Center Roseland, but I'm also with these guys. I'm the dean. And so as with anything else when it's new, young men come into the program, they want to know who are you, what you're about. And so one of the things that we give them and question is, are you here to change the direction of your life? If they say they are or they act like they don't know if they want to change the direction of their life, then we say stick around with us and we'll see if we can help you.

We use a model, get inspired, make a change, change your attitude and your thinking, and then you'll change your life. This helps us quite a bit. We try not to take on the mother-father feel of them, but we are listeners. We have to listen to what they're talking. We don't want to preach to them. I want to hear your story, what got you into it, where do you want to go. This has helped us and we're continuing this work.

We're very grateful for Chicago CRED, but this is not new to us. We like all types of people. We don't discriminate against anyone. We want them to do better and we're going to work hard for them to reach that goal.

MR. DUNCAN: Extraordinarily hard.

MR. JONES: Yes.

MR. DUNCAN: Mr. Hicks, one thing that is -- like I say, we're trying to do

lots of different things and there's no one simple answer to what we're trying to do. I would argue one of the most important pieces is we have a life coach for every one of our young men. And Mr. Hicks is one of our life coaches.

And our life coaches have interesting backgrounds and I'll have him talk a little bit about his background. But these are the guys who all day, every day are thinking about how he helped guys move from point A to point B and take the next step. Transformation is not easy, it is not overnight, it is not linear.

But before we talk about the work, Mr. Hicks, maybe talk a little bit about your background and what you used to do and what you're doing now and why and what changed.

MR. HICKS: Good evening, everybody. I grew up in the Roseland area, same place I'm working right now. Went through the penal system, came up through the gang life, thought it was the best thing in the world at the time. Spent over 16 years on 4 different stints throughout the Department of Corrections. And I made a lot of mistakes and I just thought to myself when I came home this last time that before I went in the grave or let someone kill me I'll just change on my own.

Started doing the right thing, ran into Mr. and Mrs. Jones, worked with a program called CeaseFire that aims at stopping the violence, stopping the shooting. Was good at that and they gave me the opportunity to interview for this life coaching job, which is a whole different world. But all the same, its stop the violence. And I'm just here to give back so they don't go through the things I went through.

And a lot of times, you don't understand, just hearing Chicago this, Chicago that, it's bigger than the words you hear. It's actuality with us. With this gun violence it's almost like music to your ears every night.

So I'm just here to help these little guys and felt a little love for most of

them. And we're just striving and struggling with them till they get to the point where they can make things happen.

MR. DUNCAN: Take a minute. You grew up around guns, using guns, loving guns. Talk about that.

MR. HICKS: Yeah, I wanted to shoot everything up, man. I'm going to be honest with you. If you wasn't throwing up the pitchforks running from my hood, it was going to happen for you. Didn't care who you was with. Don't care who you can go get or what you can go get. There was a sense of invincibility.

I came around guns real early, like 12, 11 years old. I'm doing shootings, running in the house, my momma don't know what's going on, until eventually the police started running in behind me, so.

I think it's more like a -- it's an addiction. We look at a drug addiction, but guns is an actual addiction out there. Just by hearing the shots alone, some of these guys get enthused and it's hard once they get enthused by shooting. It's almost like New Year's, you hear it every day. Well, I wanted to be the shooter, I want to shoot. And once they become addicted, you've got to find the right drug and the right system to get them away from that addiction. And that's what we're doing through Chicago CRED program: job awareness, just teaching them competency, you know. And I'm happy to be a part of it.

MR. DUNCAN: You got locked up not a couple times, but four times.

MR. HICKS: Yeah.

MR. DUNCAN: And what was different the fourth time from the third time, from the second time, from the first time? What made you decide it was time to actually do something different?

MR. HICKS: I'm trying not to -- well, I was trying at this point not to

become (inaudible) habitual, so I got to Class X's in my background. Just to give you a little insight on that, I don't know how y'all law is here, but if I was to get into another problem, I have 25 years minimum to start with, and I don't want to go that route. The 60/30 was enough; the 85 was the sentence another thing.

And to break it down in a nutshell, I think that kind of like deterred me because your friends ain't your friends at the end of the day when you're in trouble. You're going to go calling for mommy and go calling for your relatives, so -- and it's rough. Cook County Jail is rough. It's real rough.

And we're dealing with the actual gang life that has no laws to it anymore. You know, when I came up, doing the GD through Larry, who I'm sure you've heard of this name before, we had laws and policies there was certain things I couldn't do. I couldn't be outside on Election Day selling drugs. I couldn't not be in school. I couldn't even sell drugs without somebody letting me know it was okay to sell them.

So right now there's no unity, no law, no structure. But these guys are still representing something that -- or going to war for something that was already going on before they was born. Most of these guys is 23, 24 years old. They're battling stuff that happened 30 years ago that they're carrying on through the legacy of their neighborhoods.

MR. DUNCAN: And go to Damien, maybe just talk a little, all three of you guys, just talk a little bit about what you were doing before, a year ago, and what you're doing now, and we'll start there. Just give us a little background of what you used to be doing.

MR. FLUNDER: Hello. How y'all doing? I'm Damien Flunder. About a year ago I was really doing a little bit of everything. Yeah, I was really doing a little bit of everything, like shooting, selling drugs. Police steadily kicking in my grandma's door. I'm

steady going back and forth to jail, just dumb stuff, really stuff over nothing. Like you said, Hicks, it's just stuff from a long time we're just still carrying it on through the legacy.

It's really at some point you've got realize that you're getting older and it's just time to grow up, especially when you got kids. I got two daughters, so. I've been shot up, stabbed, in jail. I just did a year and a half. But sometime you really got to grow up and mature yourself.

And I met Mr. Jones actually through Malik. He asked like, yeah, you in a gang? I wanted to lie to him and tell him no. He's like, yeah, you shot somebody? You've been shot before? Well, I've been shot before, but I don't know if I should tell you I shot somebody. (Laughter)

So he told me to come down the next day. I met him, I stuck with him. He was real cheerful. He was real cheerful, cracking jokes. He was just somebody who's real comfortable I could be around. I stayed with it. Every meeting we had, I just -- I stayed up with it.

Then I started getting my high school. They put me in school to get my high school diploma. Honestly, I didn't think I could get my high school diploma. I dropped out of school at like sophomore year. I was -- we was in war real bad. It was -- school, that was the last thing on my mind, I ain't going to lie.

But they helped me get my high school diploma and I'm really motivated and dedicated to it. And real reliable, like he can ask me to do anything, I'm going to do it, like I'm a real reliable guy, so. I say they helped me get my OSHA card, my food sanitation license, my driver's license. I didn't think I was going to ever get that either. (Laughter)

I'm doing -- actually I just had an interview yesterday and we got on the plane this morning, but I got the job, though, so. (Applause)

MR. DUNCAN: We did not plan that, but that worked out great. (Laughter) And our goal is, for their cohort, our goal is spin guys off when they're ready, so they actually have guys now already working full time in construction, they have a guy working in a law firm. And Cold Stone Creamery came in with an offer and he'll start there soon. Everyone's path is different. Some guys might be with us 8 or 9 months, some guys it might be 15, 16 months. Again, there's no straight path.

Malik, what were you doing before, what are you doing now? What's the program been like? What's worked, what hasn't? But talk about maybe before last year.

MR. TIGER: Pretty much what I was doing a year before the program was I basically was out of control, in and out of jail, selling drugs, catching cases. It was completely out of control. And once I got into the program and began to start making a change, things started to -- begin to come easier to me, you know what I'm saying.

Like before the program and before -- first off, Mr. and Mrs. Jones, that's my godfather and that's my godmomma. And I got shot in 2015 six times. I got shot in the back of my head, my hand, and three times in my back, you know what I'm saying. And then I was incarcerated right after that for a gun charge, so I really didn't have no direction and I really wasn't looking for no direction either.

Now since I've been in the program, they pretty done show me my self-worth and showed me there's an easier way than going out here picking up a gun, selling drugs. You ain't got to worry about it. It's real life, black, successful men out there that's not ducking from the police or ducking no enemies. So they just showed me a brighter way and a brighter future.

And like Damien said, I end up getting my food sanitation license, my unarmed security license, and a lot of other certificates and a lot of accomplishments that I -- then came to doing the program. So overall, I feel like I done did the whole 360.

MR. DUNCAN: Malik, most folks in here haven't been shot. What's it like to be shot? What's it like to lie in your own blood?

MR. TIGER: Completely unexplainable, you know what I'm saying. When you're questioning and asking yourself if you're going to live or, you know what I'm saying, am I going to see my momma tonight or am I going to make it? No mother wants to bury their child and I don't want my mother to bury me either, so it was just like -- it was completely life-changing sitting in your blood, you know what I'm saying, laying there, not knowing what's next, not knowing what's to come.

MR. DUNCAN: Malik, how many of your guys the past couple years have been shot and how many have been killed?

MR. TIGER: The past six months we just lost two friends back to back. And last week one of my other friends just got killed, so it's an ongoing cycle that it ain't going to stop unless we break it, you know what I'm saying, unless we change and we make a difference in our community.

MR. DUNCAN: And then what made you decide to change?

MR. TIGER: I just felt like if I keep doing and keep going the direction that I was going in, I knew that I was insane, you know what I'm saying. Like the definition of insanity is doing the same thing, expecting for a different outcome, you know what I'm saying. I know if I'm steady going to jail, I'm steady -- incidents steady happening, it's not the law. It's not the police no more. It's me now, you know what I'm saying. If I'm steady bumping my head, steady falling, it's not nobody else. It's me.

MR. DUNCAN: Brandon, talk a little bit about what you were doing before, how things are going now. What's your sense?

MR. WILLIS: Okay. A year ago, I'd say I was like kind of struggling to survive in the streets, like I didn't have no income, nobody to help me out. So it was

really leading towards selling drugs and robbing to get my money and to get the things that I wanted.

And a year ago, I'd honestly say my momma thought she was going to have to bury me or I was going to be in a cell somewhere because of the route I was taking. I got kicked out -- expelled from all CPS schools, had to go to an alternative school; ended up getting kicked out of an alternative school for gang fighting. It was just rough.

But since then and since the program, Chicago CRED, I've been like on the righteous path, trying to do the right thing and make the right moves and right choices. Mr. and Mrs. Jones have been a big help. My life coach, Mr. Hicks, has been a big help keeping me motivated, not going to retaliate when things happen to people that's close to me and my family. And that was like the hardest thing to do.

A few months ago, my little brother was shot and like that's my little brother, we grew up together. So it was hard to, like, not retaliate and not go back in the streets and jeopardize myself. So Mr. Jones, Mrs. Jones, Mr. Hicks, everybody was just in my head, like stay focused and stay on the right path. Everything's going to be okay, it'll work out for itself.

MR. DUNCAN: So take a minute and just walk people through because a huge percent of the violence in Chicago is retaliation. And these are battles that go back 15, 20 years. And the thing that's craziest to me or most heartbreaking is that the kids fighting the battles now and dying often don't even know why those battles started and it's just what they're doing.

But walk through how hard it is not to retaliate when that's how you've been trained and raised all your life and how you struggle with that and why did you decide ultimately not to.

MR. WILLIS: I think the hardest part of not retaliating was actually when you sit down and just think about everything that's going on, like your thoughts be racing fast in your head to see your -- somebody you love in that much pain and that close to dying. Like it's hard to stay focused and it's hard to not to go and make somebody feel the same way they made your love feel.

But the thing that kept me calm the most was my daughter. Like she was just born, so me not wanting to lose her or miss out on her life was the main thing that kept me focused.

MR. DUNCAN: For three guys, tell the audience the hardest thing about this year. What's been the toughest thing working on this year?

MR. WILLIS: This year, the toughest thing to work on this year was, like I said, staying focused and keeping up the good work that we've been keeping up. Like my fellow co-workers right here, Mr. and Mrs. Jones helped us get -- handed us our certificates to build our resume and our background, food sanitation, unarmed. My two most recent certificates is what I'm most proud of, my -- I just got a certificate for asbestos removal in deconstruction and lead abatement. So them two certificates, like, boosted my ego a little bit. (Laughter)

MR. DUNCAN: Malik, hardest thing this year? Hardest part of transformation?

MR. TIGER: Like he said, the hardest thing is just staying focused. You know, when you're trying to change you've got a million and one things and a million and one people trying to stray you from the direction that you want to go. So the biggest thing is mind over matter, you know what I'm saying. What's a priority to you, you know what I'm saying? What's your dreams, what's your goals? You've got put yourself first, you know what I'm saying. That's pretty much the hardest thing, just staying on track and just

staying focused and keeping my head right and not letting nobody else distract from the direction that I want to go.

MR. DUNCAN: Damien, I'll just twist it a little bit that what we're really trying to do is create a safe environment within the group and there hasn't been one fight all year. We had one crazy girlfriend a couple weeks ago, but that wasn't one of our guys. But the guys were all going home to their same homes in the same neighborhood every single day, and we are not yet to the point of really reducing neighborhood violence and that's what we're trying to do starting now.

So this year, amidst all this good work, Damien, you get stabbed. And what's that like when you're trying to turn, when you're trying to change, and still that's the reality of where you live, that's the reality of your community?

MR. FLUNDER: I would say the hardest thing for me this year about that was retaliation. When I got stabbed, I was in a store, I didn't even know it was going to happen. I turned around and it was just -- started a fight, it just started. Right. The man, we just go to fighting.

I felt I was numb. My whole side was numb, I didn't know what was going on. But I came out, I had a gray hoodie on, there was -- when I came out, my gray hoodie, I had a gray Nike. It was new, too, so. (Laughter) It was full of blood, though. So I'm trying to see. I'm trying to get to my grandmother's. My grandma's an R.N., so I'm thinking, like, okay, she's going to patch me up and I'm just going to go kill him. So that was the only thing that was going through my head.

But when I got her, she was like, no, you need to go to the hospital like right now. I'll call the ambulance. I didn't even all the ambulance. I drove myself, as a matter of fact. I drove myself to Roseland Hospital. Then they transferred me to Christ because my lung was punctured.

The hardest thing I'd say was retaliation. Like for something to happen to me, like I felt that was kind of crazy. It was retaliation. It was staying focused, right.

My grandma, she called Mr. Jones to try to make sure, like keep him on the track and keep him -- you're the only person that's in his head right now. You're who he's close to, so.

I thank Mr. Jones really for like everything.

MR. DUNCAN: Hicks, two questions, you can take them in either order. One, what's the best thing about being a life coach? What's the hardest thing about being a life coach?

And then I got back to Cook County Jail every month and we recruit guys who are coming out of Cook County Jail to come into our program to sort of try to stop the cycle. And two times ago, Hicks came back with me. I want you to talk about the life coaching part first, and then maybe what it was like to go back to a place where you spent too much time.

MR. HICKS: Life coaching? Life coaching it's not the easiest job in the world, far from it. (Laughter) Hands down, it's almost unexplanatory, but just to jump in real quick, you heard these little guy talking about retaliation. So I talk to them about everything. I'm a Facebook detective. I'm all that. I need to know what's going on. I need to make sure you're cool.

But when they speak of retaliation, here's what you don't understand. When they don't retaliate, they become even more of a coward than they was before whatever happened to them. So now it makes our fight even more to keep them off the streets.

He gets stabbed, he don't do nothing back to these individuals, it makes them want to do something else to him. That's a fight in itself, even with being shot.

So life coaching is fun. I have my fun moments, successful moments. But then it's a struggle. And I'm going to strive with them through it because I didn't have it easy. One of my worst fears is not seeing them one day, waking up, not getting a phone call. So actually we've been blessed, like Arne said, no fights. A few incidents here and there, but, for the most part, it's a brotherhood.

To jump to the county jail thing, it was one of the oddest experiences that I'm actually in the county jail with my street clothes on. I'm actually on the deck. I'm on a live deck with individuals that are housed there. It's something else. It's almost like being a basketball player. You never, ever practice and you're finally on the court and you've got to figure like, well, why am I here? And I figured out that I had to deliver.

Come to find out, three of the guys that was in the group we was talking to was from the neighborhood that I was born and raised in. And a lot of times you just got to look at these guys and you see them sometimes their pants sagging. It doesn't mean they're a thug. It doesn't mean they're going to shoot you. Some of these guys are more educated than you can ever imagine. The problem is in order for you to over a perception of a person you got to take away what you think about them because as you look at them, they're looking at you a certain way, too. So that's it. And they already know they'll never get a second chance to make a first impression. And I'm proud of my guys.

And speaking of life coach, these two are life coaches. We've got other people that life coach. You guys are life coaches and probably just don't know it. It's a gift. You just got to figure out what yours is.

MR. DUNCAN: So our three guys, I always ask the question and people think it's funny, but I'm dead serious, coming into our program, pay cut or pay increase?

MR. WILLIS: It was a pay cut, to be honest.

MR. DUNCAN: Pay cut, yeah. Why did you decide to take a pay cut? That's hard to do.

MR. WILLIS: Because it was the smartest thing to do, to be honest. Like I ain't got no more risk, I ain't go to look over my shoulder. I was worried about going to jail, getting robbed, nothing like that, working no corner or something like that. I got a legal income that could be explained for if I get pulled over with some money in my pocket. I could show check stubs now. Couldn't do that when you was selling drugs.

MR. DUNCAN: Malik?

MR. TIGER: For me, I feel like it was a pay cut, but, also, I feel like it was worth it, too, at the same time because the stuff that I had to do before, the risks and the other things I had to look out, I don't got to look out for now. I don't got to worry about no police. I don't got to worry about nobody robbing me. And I don't got to worry about nobody raiding my momma's crib, you know what I'm saying. So I just feel like, like you said, it was the smartest I could have did was take the pay cut.

MR. DUNCAN: Damien?

MR. FLUNDER: I say it was a pay increase for me, I ain't going to lie. I'd say it was a pay increase because all the money, like, I had fun. I stayed fun and, you know, I got to give my grandma's doors fixed. I got kids. I don't know, I didn't know where the money -- how I was going to get the money. It was a pay cut -- I mean, it was a pay increase. I know the money's coming now. I know every two weeks there's a check. I know my car is going to be loaded, like this morning I woke up, my car was loaded, so. (Laughter)

MR. DUNCAN: Just so the audience knows, it's usually about 50-50 with our guys, about half it's a pay cut, sometimes dramatic; about half it's a pay increase. It's just interesting, so it's different motivations.

I'll go down the line. So, Mrs. Jones, we'll go right down the line, just sort of step back and sort of bigger picture. So in a perfect world I'd love to see Chicago have no homicides. That's probably a little bit unrealistic. So what I keep saying is I just want Chicago to be more normal, not such an anomaly.

And just to give you a sense of what an outlier, how insane it is right now, Chicago, as you guys know, is the third largest city in the country. We have way more homicides and way more shootings than New York and L.A. combined. So think about that, number 3 way more than 1 and 2 added together.

For us to be normal based upon population, relative to New York, right now we had 660 homicides last year, we'd have to go to 92. So we need a body count reduction of close to 500. So that's the kind of change that we need just to be normal. I wouldn't even say great, but just not such an outlier.

So let me just go sort of right down the line. I'll start with you, Mrs. Jones. So big picture, stepping back, for Chicago to get to a place that is not so crazy, what's it going to take the city to do? What do we need to do?

MS. JONES: Well, first, as the gentlemen are talking here, I'm thinking about my own sons. We're the parents of four sons. The two youngest ones have never walked to a corner store, didn't really know friends on their blocks because it was just dangerous. And this community that we're talking about, Roseland, is a predominantly African-American community that I moved into years ago. And my family was like the first black family on the block, so I've watched it change.

Went to high school, went off to college, came back, put my business there. I'm committed to the community. I think it's really important. It's so easy to just move away, but I've just committed, just wanted to stay there and see this thing turn around.

And when I think about what's hard, it's more than just reaching the young men. It's like we have to do like a holistic approach almost because what makes young men do this? They're not just waking up in the morning saying you know what, I think I'm going to shoot somebody today or I want to sell drugs today. There's a lot of dysfunction.

And at the end of the day, I think that these young men and the other young men that live in the community want the same thing you sons and daughters want. They want a healthy life, they want to feel safe, and they want to be successful. And I think these guys are showing that. You know, if given an opportunity, they can turn their lives around.

I think a lot of African-American communities across Chicago, there's a huge deficit. And we're trying to fill some of that with great programming, people that care, and opportunity. So I think it's going to take a lot more opportunity from organizations like Chicago CRED, and Chicago CRED having the resources to change more lives, to be able to touch more young men. And I think that that's a way that we could have more success.

MR. DUNCAN: Mr. Jones, how do we take this down at scale across the city?

MR. JONES: Well, I think one of the things that I try to do and encourage other young -- not only young people, but people who are older, like myself, you know, young people you have to really take a look at them and start listening to them. You know, I used to preach all the time don't do this, don't do that. You have to listen to their stories.

You know, I'm listening to these young men right here, I know who they were when they first came into the program. I knew some of the things they did. That did

not scare me. I'm not scared of that. I thought they came in the program because they wanted some help.

It's a great honor for them to come into the program and get a high school diploma, something they wanted. They accomplished something. A lot of young people in our community, they don't finish, but it's not because they lack the intelligence. They lack someone pushing them. And I think that when we look at ourselves and we think if we come from nice homes and we didn't haven't our children and not go to jail, it's up to us to step back and say let's help somebody else like somebody helped us. Somebody helped me to go to school. Somebody helped me with a job. I can't look at these young men that come into our program and turn my back on them. That's not fair.

Some of their circumstances were not the same and it's important. When I see them sitting here on this panel at the Brookings Institution talking to you, expressing themselves, they're not scared. They're telling real-life stories. These things really happened in their life.

But what makes me feel proud is that they have accomplished things. They've got certificates. They feel good about themselves. They got a haircut. (Laughter) They're smart. They have some money in their pocket. They're hungry. All of these things they do, and I'm very proud.

And I think that we have to look at ourselves once more and say, you know what, let's help organizations like CRED. What can I do to help other young people? And I hope that you will take this and help us help others.

MR. DUNCAN: Hicks, how do we take it down?

MR. HICKS: I'm going to jump out. I think we need to start focusing on some of these at-risk young women. Everywhere you go, every city, every state, at-risk young men, at-risk young men. But you don't realize that these men are at risk because

they're feuding over the same woman. I'm just being honest with you. You've got rival gangs having a baby by the same woman, unplanned parenting.

You know, I just think we focus a lot on the young men. The system already got a chokehold on them, and I mean a noose. A chokehold on them. So they're already walking in fear, scared of the police, whether you got a check stub or not. He's still wondering is he still going to bother me from a year ago when I was out there bad.

So even with the ops, what they call the rival gangs, them guys don't care that they got a job now in the program. They don't care about none of that. They don't care about none of that. We flew all the way here to Washington. We could be anywhere in the world, but we're here with y'all. Anywhere. We came here to see y'all, to deliver. Start focusing on some of these young women.

MR. DUNCAN: Damien, answer either question. One, how do we take it down in scale? Or two, what do you want this audience -- and we're going to open it up after these three, for your questions. What do you want this audience to know or think about walking out of here?

MR. FLUNDER: I would say I'm going to answer the first question. I'd say more programs like Chicago CRED because the generation now they're only joining gangs for protection, a sense of belonging, and a lack of role models. Like Chicago CRED, when I came in, I kind of got like a role model from my life coach and Mr. and Mrs. Jones, even though she a woman, but she's still like a role model.

MS. JONES: Thank you.

MR. FLUNDER: So I would say just more programs like Chicago CRED.

MR. DUNCAN: Malik?

MR. TIGER: Yeah. Basically what Damien said, more programs like Chicago CRED. Because I feel like Chicago CRED is the only program that offered us

what we done got so far. The only program that's guaranteeing that they're going to hold on to us, make sure we get jobs, make sure we get our high school diploma. The only program that gave us life coaches, gave us a therapist, you know what I'm saying. The only program. So I just feel like we need this program. We need this program to stay around to keep our youth, to keep us alive. You feel me?

I feel like if we give -- if you ain't busy, that's an idle mind. And once you got an idle mind, you got a million and one things to think about. How often to eat, how often to do this, or thinking about doing detrimental things to people. You got a million and one things to think about. So I just feel like Chicago CRED offered us so much to the point that we need to keep these programs, like to keep funding these programs, keep pushing, you know what I'm saying.

We got Mr. Hicks right here that's an amazing life coach. I can call this man at 1:00 in the morning, 4:00 in the morning, 3:00. (Laughter) He's up. I can call him at any time, he's picking up for me. He's there for me. I tell him I'm in a predicament, I can't get myself out. He's coming for me.

So I just feel like it's all we got right here. Y'all take -- they take this from us, it's probably going to be more youth dead, more youth in the county, more youth in the penitentiary. This is our hope.

MR. DUNCAN: Brandon?

MR. WILLIS: I think, like they said, we should have -- we definitely should have more programs, but I think it should start younger, like we should reach out to the youth before they get at-risk, you know what I mean? Like start in elementary schools. The things that some people teach the young'uns these days, nowadays, that what leads to the chaos and leads to the out of control. So I feel like if we reach our youth and raise our kids the right way, the next generation will be better than our

generation.

MR. DUNCAN: Let's open it up to the audience.

SPEAKER: First of all, I want to thank you for sharing your stories. It's been very informative and we really appreciate your joining us. So my question is for Hicks.

So you mentioned that you have been in prison several times. So I'm just wondering what is like when you come out of prison? How do people treat you? Is there any support that is provided to you? Is it basically impossible to get a job when you have a prison record? How can we do a better job helping people coming out of prison?

MR. HICKS: Nothing is impossible. Otherwise, we wouldn't be here. So, you know, you got to have confidence in yourself. You know, coming home from the penitentiary or the county jail, you already done missed out on something. Most guys come home, low self-esteem, no money, pretty much no family to go to. You're bitter. The blame game is there. You always blame it on everybody else but yourself is why you did four or five years.

You just got to come home focused. You got to be ready to let go of the streets. The street's got the strongest handgrip I ever seen in life. You can go from walking out of the church on a Sunday to going in a store and come out a gang member. And it's just that quick because the lifestyle is so enticing.

And then you've got think when you come home from prison, what is offered to someone with a parole officer tagging around everywhere you go or a probation officer? What's offered to them? What's offered to them? Here, what's offered in Washington? You got programs. Now these guys come gravitate to these programs because that's all they got. It's either this or it's that. And for the most part, these guys have been loyal. At 35, they still struggle. You got to offer them something that you

never had.

Like me, I never had a job. I never cared to have one. I had guns. So I needed some money, I'm going to go get it. But the law started changing, your mindset changed, you got to start looking. Okay.

And again, society looks at criminals like they're the worst in the world. There's people in here that got away with stuff. Let's be honest, you just ain't been caught. There's some guys doing time that didn't do the crime. Thirty years they come home, the state don't want to give them nothing, compensation.

So you pick your poison. But you got to understand it's something in the individual. Regardless of what that piece of paper say about them, there's something deep down in side that could be brought out. You might just have to help them.

MS. ELLIS: Wendy Ellis, George Washington University. Hi. I have a question. You made a very poignant statement and you're talking about the streets not wanting to let go, but the experiences that all of you have get under the skin. And so my question to you, all of you who are running the program, what are we doing to not only just provide the help from education and economic mobility, but also the healing that has to come with the traumas that have been experienced from the violence that all of them have experienced or been a part of?

MS. JONES: So we're very fortunate to have an amazing psychologist on our team. Our guys also have CBT, which is cognitive-behavioral therapy. We do a lot of circles. And so we do have a team of very qualified people that are addressing the trauma with all of our young men and it's just a part of the program and a very important piece.

MR. DUNCAN: I would say quickly, we're doing a ton and I promise you we're not doing enough. And people talk about post-traumatic stress disorder, this is

current. This is present. This is every single day and for some of our guys it's been since birth. So this stuff is deep. We do that.

We have our guys write autobiographies to tell their stories, which is very tough and extraordinarily powerful and healing. But we're doing as much as we can in many areas and know we're not doing as much as we should.

MS. JONES: If I can just say, I just want to touch on what Arne said. We had a wonderful program where the guys actually wrote memoirs, and it was truly an amazing way for them to unload their trauma. And then we had a reading, they were able to read their stories and they were so powerful. And it was healing, as well. I wish we had brought a sample to read, but definitely a great part of our program.

SPEAKER: If one of you wouldn't mind just telling us about your trauma during -- I mean, I would really like to hear about that and your healing process.

MR. DUNCAN: Malik, I'll put you on the spot.

MR. TIGER: It's like I can't even really explain it to you all. Being shot six times and I got shot in the back of my head, my hand, my back, my arm. And to top it all off, it took me a whole year to get back completely to what I was. So it was like the trauma and the waking up in the middle of the night. I still don't sleep good all the time, you know what I'm saying.

So it's like I can't really tell you how it feels, you know what I'm saying. Like you would just have to be in my shoes to experience it. And I wouldn't want nobody to experience it, if you experienced the pain that I felt, wondering was I going to come home to my momma, you know what I'm saying.

And what made it so bad, my son was four months and I had another girl that was six months pregnant with my daughter. So my kids wouldn't even would have knew me, you know what I'm saying. I would have been nothing but a figure of my kids'

imagination. They wouldn't have had nothing but a picture to show this is how my daddy look or they would have had nothing but stories.

So the trauma, you can't sleep, not eating, wondering who -- if this person is that person. I can't really explain it to you, you know what I'm saying. But one thing I can say they gave me an outlet as far as like they said we have a therapist, we got life coaches, we got people that's here that's trying to help us heal, you know what I'm saying. But I basically have to heal at my own pace.

MS. THOMPSON: Good afternoon. My name is Eboni-Rose Thompson. I'm here with America's Promise Alliance. So I'm sure that you all have seen all the coverage in the news around Parkland and the mass shootings and kind of the conversation around gun violence, centering on that specific type of school violence. How do we open up the conversation?

So we talk about violence for all kids and for all communities because D.C. is home for me and there are a lot of kids who look like me and look like you all in places here who face a lot of trauma and violence daily, but they're not part of that conversation. What will help open people's eyes to see that certain things just all kids should have?

MR. DUNCAN: I'll take this one very quickly. We sent down six of our high school teams to spend this past Saturday with the Parkland kids, and there was transformation on both sides. And they're going to come visit us in May. The march on the 24th, bring my family back, one of our high school kids is going to speak.

And so we're building those bridges, and I think the diversity of that movement -- race, class, socioeconomic status -- I'm more hopeful on this issue than I've ever been. And I would just say the Parkland kids totally got the need not just to invite our kids, but have our kids help lead the movement.

All the way in the back.

SPEAKER: Hi, thank you. First and foremost, gentlemen, like you said earlier, it does take a lot of courage to, A, not retaliate and then also be able to walk in your neighborhood where your peers and your neighbors know that you have not retaliated. So first and foremost, I salute you for being able to have the courage to be able to just walk down the street every day with your heads up.

My question pertains to are you all aware at Chicago CRED of any sort of analysis between how much a murder costs? So here in the District, we look at before the investigation of a murder it's a little under half a million dollars the cost to the city overall per murder.

So have you seen any programs that have been able to measure the cost of someone being murdered? To then say, listen, well, in the District if it cost $500,000 for the city before they even start the investigation, the prosecution, and the jailing of someone, maybe just saving one person's life, that $500,000 could be put into a program like Chicago CRED. Are you aware of programs that have made any sort of analysis in that direction? Thank you.

MR. DUNCAN: Yeah, we did all that analysis before we started. But every homicide in Chicago costs the city between 1.3- and $1.4 million. A bed in Cook County Jail is 55-, $60,000 a year, and our cost per head is lower than that. So I think I could make a pretty good ROI case.

And to be clear, our time with the men is basically for around a year. And the goal was, you know, the rest of their lives they're in mainstream society. So this is not an ongoing investment from the public sector. We're doing this all from the private side, and that's a separate conversation why Chicago isn't doing more publicly. We won't have that one today. But the ROI case, forget the heart piece of this, the emotional piece

of this, the financial savings to society is staggering.

SPEAKER: My colleague over here (inaudible) two things. Thank you. I am on the Listserv for a lot of the meetings that take place here in at Brookings, and this is the first one I made sure I came to, so I can greet you all and let you all know that people are thinking about you here in D.C. D.C. used to be that city with that high number. Like we know -- I don't know how many Washingtonians are in this place, but I'm a Washingtonian, so I know about the numbers. I know about the crack numbers. I know about all of that.

But my question to you all, anyone can answer it, how do you feel when you see the outpouring of support when 50 people are killed and 600 are just not spoken about in Chicago? Like everyone changes their Facebook profile when there's a mass shooting. And I just keep thinking Chicago, what about 500? What about the 550? What about the 600?

Okay, it was a mass shooting, 40 white people were killed at a concert. God bless all of them. But what about the 600 poor black people that are killed in Chicago year after year after year? Like how do you feel about that?

MR. HICKS: I think being from Chicago, it's kind of like the norm to us. Out of states it's the norm of y'all, too. Oh, Chicago, turn the TV, it's another shooting, you know. And at the end of the day, I just believe in a nutshell that we need to pay more attention to social media. Because if you do look at these mass shootings, there was a possibility it could have been stopped had you have looked into the social media or looked into this text or looked into that. We overlook the smallest thing and then it becomes huge.

So as far as Chicago, of course we're sick of it. I'm sick of hearing (inaudible). We got a funeral home that literally got a drive-through. You do not have to

get out your car. You can drive, like a Burger King. You want to see your partner? Pull up, roll your window down, look, and keep going. So, I mean, who getting the money? You know, the people selling the caskets, I'm sure they don't have a problem with it. It's just us. They're not the ones getting put in the casket.

It's sad. I don't hear nothing about no school shooting, mass shooting, white or black. It's still sad because most of them innocent. They didn't have nothing to do with nothing. Could you imagine somebody running in here right now with assault rifles? What are you going to do? It's unimaginable. We never think it could happen to us.

And that's why the program is so good because we don't got guys that just think they're invincible anymore. They may have came to the program thinking they were invincible, and then they started thinking, you know what, I do have kids. I can do something better.

And that's what everybody got to do. Sometimes you got to look within that mirror. That mirror means a lot. That mirror you look at every morning means don't wash you face only. Talk to yourself. Talk to yourself.

MR. SHARMA: Hi. Anand Sharma with the Center for the Study of Social Policy. You mentioned working with community organizations, and just curious about some of the strengths that those community organizations bring and also some of the biggest capacity-building needs to be able to allow other organizations to do this kind of work. Thank you.

MR. DUNCAN: Why don't you start out?

MS. JONES: So, yeah, one of the things that I realized in doing this work is that there are some resources in our community. I think one of the biggest challenges has been connecting the youth to these resources.

I can remember just going to my local park and being able to participate in a number of different things that I carry with me through the course of my career. Everything that I did from volleyball, tap, modern dance, all of those great services that I got as a kid carried me in life. And at that time, they weren't calling that person, that instructor, a mentor. It was just the volleyball coach or whatever.

I'm going to answer your question. I think it's just so important that we figure out better ways to connect our kids to all of these resources. Because a child that is connected is less likely to be involved in incidents of violence.

And my agency is a very small agency. And we have pretty much networked with larger agencies in the community that would get funding. But, again, the biggest challenge has been that that funding was just so small, you know, just only touch just the tip of an issue with a kid. And so you're just giving some kid a little money for the summer, but their major issues still continue.

And I think that we have to think about various ways to help build capacity with smaller agencies because a lot of times there are smaller agencies that are doing big work. And so Chicago CRED has been definitely a huge part of helping us build capacity.

I think that once this is over, we'll be able to sustain ourselves even longer and to continue to help a lot of young people in the community.

And also, whenever -- our agency has always -- it didn't matter the size of funding we get. We always figured out a way to share with other agencies in our community. If someone gave us something, we would bring as many as 8 to 10 partners in, so that everybody -- because we can't serve all the children, but those 8 partners are serving 100 kids one way or another. So now we're serving 800 kids as opposed to us just serving 50 kids in our agency.

So building capacity is huge. People working together is huge. Thank you for your question.

MR. JONES: I want to add one quick thing to that, though. If it happens and they don't give us the money, sometime, some kind of way we make it happen. It's the work. We're dedicated to this work. We've done it many times.

MS. JONES: Or you do it without the money.

MR. JONES: Exactly.

MS. JONES: And we have.

MR. JONES: Right.

MR. DUNCAN: I know we have to close. We could talk all day here. Just three quick final thoughts.

First, I always say programs don't change lives, it's relationships. And it's not just these three with relationships towards the other three. What our young men do to support each other and move in a different way is remarkable.

Another guy not here basically had his family massacred this summer at a family picnic, horrific. And it was his peers who kept him from retaliating, and life coaches. But it's relationships, not programs that always change lives.

Secondly, people often say, oh, it's great you're giving guys a second chance. I think honestly, for many of our guys, it's a first chance. And they're making a rational choice now because they never had other better rational choices. No one has to work with us. No one's assigned by the courts or probation officers. For every cohort we have, people say how do you find guys, we have massive waiting lists. What's your waiting list right now, the next group?

MR. JONES: About 75 people.

MR. DUNCAN: Looking to get in. We have another one of our cohorts

has 168 on the waiting list and we're trying to scale fast and reach a lot more guys because they are looking to get help.

And the final thing I'll say is, and I think you guys feel this today, that these guys aren't the problem in Chicago. They're actually the solution and I'm actually wildly optimistic about where we're going to go as a city. And us here are going to try and do our little part to help. It's going to be these young guys putting down their guns, talking to their friends, bringing in the next group that ultimately is going to lead the city to a wildly different place.

And I can't prove it. We'll come back. But four or five years from now, I'm convinced as a city we're going to be dramatically better and it's because of their leadership. Please give them a round of applause. (Applause)

* * * * *

CERTIFICATE OF NOTARY PUBLIC

I, Carleton J. Anderson, III do hereby certify that the forgoing electronic file when originally transmitted was reduced to text at my direction; that said transcript is a true record of the proceedings therein referenced; that I am neither counsel for, related to, nor employed by any of the parties to the action in which these proceedings were taken; and, furthermore, that I am neither a relative or employee of any attorney or counsel employed by the parties hereto, nor financially or otherwise interested in the outcome of this action.

Carleton J. Anderson, III

(Signature and Seal on File)

Notary Public in and for the Commonwealth of Virginia

Commission No. 351998

Expires: November 30, 2020