

THE
ECONOMIC
CLUB OF
CHICAGO

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The Club welcomed back Chicago native Arne Duncan, managing partner of Chicago CRED, for the Third Forum Luncheon of the 2017-2018 Program Year, located at The Chicago Club. Second Vice Chair Elizabeth Connelly served as moderator for the Q&A that took place after initial remarks.

Mr. Duncan, who formerly served as the United States Secretary of Education and the CEO of Chicago Public Schools, shared details on his latest professional endeavor: reducing Chicago gun violence. Chicago CRED – which stands for Creating Real Economic Destiny – seeks to reduce gun violence through recruiting men in the west and south sides of the city who are most likely to be perpetrators and victims of shootings, and transition them to jobs in the legal economy.

Presented significant facts:

- Chicago has more homicides and shootings than Los Angeles and New York combined.
- Chicago had 660 homicides last year. Based on population, to reach the same homicide rate in New York, 660 would need to be reduced to 92 homicides.
- In Chicago, only 26 percent of city homicides and 5 percent of shootings ever result in arrests.
- 75 percent of violence occurs in 15 neighborhoods. 75 percent of both the victims and the perpetrators of gun violence are young black men ages 17 to 24.
- Each homicide costs Chicago \$1.7 million.

Mr. Duncan emphasized that these facts exemplify how the city is in crisis, and Chicagoans are collectively failing at reducing gun violence. He believes this is rooted in the way society values lives differently.

“I am convinced that if most of those who were being shot and killed were of my complexion, my skin color; if they wore suits like me and they worked downtown; we would not have 660 homicides. It would just not be allowed to happen,” he said. “But because we value the lives of young black men and young Latino men differently than folks who look like me, this has somehow been acceptable or allowed to happen.”

Mr. Duncan also pointed out that for many young men in the program, this is their first chance at having an opportunity in the legal economy. He explained that many individuals in the program turned to the illegal economy in their neighborhoods in order to support themselves and family members.

“They make what I’ve come to believe is a pretty rational choice – to go work for the guy on the corner,” he said, adding that the average street-level drug dealer makes \$11 to \$13 an hour. “Unfortunately that decision, that path, leads inevitably to violence.”

With these factors in mind, Chicago CRED aims to find jobs with a targeted starting wage of \$12 to \$15 an hour for those men determined to be most at risk of being a victim or perpetrator of gun violence. In addition to a job, the organization also provides “wrap around services,” which include:

- Life coaching from individuals who have come from similar situations
- Training in soft and hard skills to be effective employees
- Trauma care for post-traumatic stress disorder
- Counseling for substance abuse
- Tutoring to attain a GED or high school diploma
- Help with securing housing

After Mr. Duncan’s remarks, Second Vice Chair moderated a question and answer session with the Chicago CRED founder, who acknowledged his guests at the luncheon that were individuals who both work for and participate in the program. He invited them to share their experiences in the program.

“Overall it was definitely a challenging transition. There’s so much you have to put into wanting to change your life and dedicating yourself to wanting to change and want better for yourself,” said one man. “But with the work program, it’s definitely a supporting cast, and everyone will put everything into you if they see you trying to help yourself.”