

The Gun Violence Initiative at the Institute for Public Health
Five-Year Report



The following report gives an overview of the evolution of the Gun Violence Initiative at the Institute for Public Health at Washington University in St. Louis. The Initiative has connected the Washington University community to current research on violence prevention, convened community partners to address gun violence, and catalyzed innovative solutions to reduce gun violence in the St. Louis region.

Launched on April 21st, 2015, the [Gun Violence Initiative](#) began as a one year-long initiative spearheaded by Chancellor Emeritus, Mark S. Wrighton and Risa Zwerling Wrighton. Under the leadership of the Institute for Public Health, the Initiative has grown while remaining loyal to the initial goals. The Initiative aims to: 1) raise awareness of the issue; 2) identify gaps in available data and research that Washington University could potentially help address; 3) provide policymakers and the public with better information to guide decision-making; and, 4) find actionable measures that reduce gun violence.

Getting Started

Several events and meetings were coordinated to raise awareness of gun violence, convene community leaders, assess crime trends, learn about interventions that were already in place, and provide the community with the latest information and data. These events, spanning the Danforth and Medical School campuses, included a dual library exhibit at Olin Library and Becker Medical Library; workshops on evidence-based interventions, gun policy and trauma injury management; and, an art exhibit in the Sam Fox School of Design and Visual Arts entitled, [Guns in the Hands of Artists](#). By the end of 2015, the Gun Violence Initiative had partnered with more than 25 stakeholder agencies in the St. Louis area, engaged Institute Faculty Scholars in gun violence-related topics, and awarded seed funding for research.



The Guns in the Hands of Artists exhibition featured at the Sam Fox School in September 2015.



May 27, 2015 | A Coordinated Response to Gun Violence, Part 1 | Jason Purnell, Brown School and Chancellor Emeritus Mark Wrighton | A meeting for learning current trends in crime in the St. Louis region (guest: Rick Rosenfeld, UMSL criminologist).



Sept. 16-Nov. 21, 2015 | Guns in the Hands of Artists | Dean Carmon Colangelo, Sam Fox School of Design and Visual Arts | The exhibition examines the role of guns in American culture through art (curator: Jonathan Ferrara, Jonathan Ferrara Gallery)



Sept. 16, 2015 | Guns in the Hands of Artists Panel Discussion | STL StoryStitchers Teen Council | The council opened a panel discussion about the exhibit by performing rap compositions they wrote based on the circuit attorney's "10 ways individuals can combat gun violence."



Sept. 21-Oct. 2, 2015 | Dual Library Exhibits | Gun violence prevention research and resources showcased at the John M. Olin Library on the Danforth Campus, and the Bernard Becker Medical Library on the Medical Campus. The exhibits included a display with key books and articles with the latest research relating to gun violence prevention.



Sept. 25, 2015 | A Coordinated Response to Gun Violence, Part 2 | Jason Purnell, Brown School and Chancellor Emeritus Mark Wrighton | After months of research, this follow-up meeting focused on interventions being implemented in the St. Louis region to reduce gun violence death and injury, and raising stakeholder commitment for a coordinated approach.



Nov. 12, 2015 | Preventing Gun Violence: Evidence-Based Optimism in a Realistic World | Dean Edward Lawlor, Brown School | A workshop, with the University of Chicago's Crime Lab, on how social policies and crime interventions are working (guests: Harold Pollack & Roseanna Ander, Chicago Crime Lab).

Establishing the St. Louis Area Violence Prevention Commission

In early 2016, the St. Louis region had no shortage of programs and non-profit agencies committed to violence prevention. However, the community was interested in intentional coordination and cross-sector collaboration. As the second leading cause of death in the U.S., gun violence disproportionately affects communities of color and the poor. Therefore, it was important to convene a determined network of community stakeholders and government entities to address the issue head on.

To that end, in February 2016, [United Way of Greater St. Louis](#) and Washington University [launched the St. Louis Area Violence Prevention Collaborative](#) (STLVPC). Partial funding from the institute supported hiring personnel in the early days of STLVPC to coordinate the effort. This hire is now supported by other partners and is based out of the [St. Louis MHB](#) (formerly St. Louis Mental Health Board). Initially, the

partnership aimed to provide support and resources to local violence-related initiatives and unite their efforts to reduce gun violence in the region. Today, STLVPC stands for [St. Louis Area Violence Prevention Commission](#) and has expanded its objectives to include promoting evidence-based and data-driven approaches to gun violence that center on community voice. STLVPC pursues this by promoting coordinated interventions and a well-resourced support system among area governments, institutions, and agencies that serve individuals and families most at risk of violent crime. The Gun Violence Initiative is one of more than 100 STLVPC members that span healthcare, public health, law enforcement, local government, universities, neighborhood groups, and social services and advocacy groups.



“By pooling our collective knowledge and resources at a common table, we will ultimately strengthen our impact.” - Jason Purnell, PhD, MPH, associate professor at the Brown School, an Institute Faculty Scholar, and leader of Health Equity Works.

STLVPC now has a strong leadership council, which includes Institute staff. Its work is largely divided into six distinct, but interconnected committees: 1) community engagement; 2) service and delivery; 3) policy and systems change; 4) racial equity; 5) youth violence prevention; and, 6) evaluation. The Institute for Public Health champions STLVPC by providing infrastructure support, data approaches to programming and research expertise related to feasibility and implementation of interventions such as the Cardiff Model, Cure Violence, and a hospital-based violence intervention program.

What is the Cardiff Violence Prevention Model?

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, “the Cardiff Model is a multi-agency approach to violence prevention that relies on the strategic use of information from health and law enforcement organizations to improve policing and community violence prevention

One of STLVPC’s first tasks was to identify, map and advance coordination of resources that support violence reduction. Through funding from the United Way of Greater St. Louis and the Institute for Public Health, STLVPC deployed an evidence-based tool to assess, at both individual program and system levels, the needs and gaps among service providers that engage with victims and perpetrators of gun violence. The [Risk-Need-Responsivity \(RNR\) Simulation Tool](#), developed by Faye S. Taxman, PhD, at George Mason University, was used to help stakeholders determine the quality and capacity of St. Louis-area services. In August 2017, STLVPC reconvened stakeholders to learn about the results of the [St. Louis Risk-Need-Responsivity Assessment](#). This assessment identified the needs of individuals in the region, pinpointed gaps in services, and highlighted programs and services that should be expanded for a more efficient and effective allocation of regional resources.

Analyzing Crime Trends in St. Louis

With funding support from the Institute and partner engagement through STLVPC, a community-academic partnership was created between St. Louis MHB, the [Department of Criminology and Criminal Justice at the University of Missouri-St. Louis](#), the Institute for Public Health, the [Brown School](#), and its [Social System Design Lab](#) at Washington University in St. Louis. The project, [Crime Trends](#), evaluated the relationship between crime and funding for violence prevention in the City of St. Louis.

The research team collected crime, funding and program data for violence prevention between 1995 and 2008, noting a period of significant crime reduction in the City of St. Louis in the early 2000s. They created visualization maps of crime trends and they conducted interviews to explore the relationship between crime and funding.



*Tamsen Reed, MSW/MPH
presents on Crime Trends*

Takeaways from this project demonstrated that: 1) leadership as a vital component for sustainable outcomes; 2) cooperation among and within agencies creates shared responsibility, information, and resources for achieving results; and, 3) sustainable funding provides and infrastructure for continued collaboration and resource development. Tamsen Reed, MSW/MPH and member of the *Crime Trends* project team presented the findings at a STLVPC meeting and later went on to publish a [piece](#) in the St. Louis Post-Dispatch. Today, members of this team continue to identify evidence-based, data-driven approaches that will help prevent violence in the St. Louis region.

Student Engagement

Over the course of the Gun Violence Initiative, we engaged students across the University and in the greater St. Louis area to think more critically about gun violence. Some of this work is highlighted here.

Public Health Challenge on Gun Violence (September 2016)

The Gun Violence Initiative partnered with the [Skandalaris Center for Interdisciplinary Innovation and Entrepreneurship](#) to host an immersive [Public Health Challenge](#). For three days, multidisciplinary teams of Washington University students developed social and entrepreneurial concepts to reduce gun violence in St. Louis. During a weekend idea and solution development session, five teams competed to win seed funding to put their ideas into action. During the competition, experienced faculty and advisors, local entrepreneurs, and community members, who had been impacted by gun violence, took time to mentor the teams.



Students speak with mentors, including law enforcement, medical staff, and behavioral experts.



Students listen to a panel of community members impacted by gun violence.

Following the competition, we worked with each team to help them move their ideas forward.

1. *Secure Gun Storage*, a venture partnership with entertainment venues to provide safe storage for guns (first place winner, \$1,000)
2. *Youth Developed, Youth Implemented*, an agency led by affected youth who will develop and implement initiatives to reduce gun violence (second place winner, \$750)
3. *Across the Arch*, using social media and other strategies to build strong relationships between law enforcement and the community (third place winner, \$500)
4. *Clinton-Peabody Boys' Club – Summer Experience*, a summer program for boys (ages 8-12) who reside in the Clinton-Peabody housing complex
5. *Plugged*, a mobile application that can be used on any smartphone or online interface to engage individuals prone to having thoughts of suicide.

Course on Gun Violence as a Public Health Issue (Fall 2016)

With the support of the Institute for Public Health and the School of Medicine's Office of Education, Ilana Rosman, MD, led [Gun Violence as a Public Health Issue](#), the first-ever course focused on gun violence. Faculty from Washington University and Saint Louis University, and experienced local experts volunteered as guest lecturers. The course addressed: 1) history of firearm access and legislation; 2) scope of the problem of gun violence in America; 3) violence intervention programs; and 4) the role of physicians in treating victims of gun violence and educating patients. For their final projects, students designed a proposal identifying ways that gun violence could be integrated into the standard medical school curriculum.

High School Students Tackle Systems of Gun Violence (June 2016)

The Institute for Public Health co-sponsored the Social System Design Lab's second annual [Changing Systems Student Summit](#). Approximately 15 interns with prior experience in system dynamics from Ritenour and Jennings High Schools designed and facilitated the summit. It brought together 28 high school students representing 19 schools in the City of St. Louis and St. Louis County to map out the underlying system that influences gun violence. They focused on cycles that perpetuate gun violence and identified ways to restructure the system. At the end of the four-day summit, students shared their



St. Louis high school students working with the Brown School's Social Design Lab to develop models to tackle gun violence.

findings with members of the Brown School, Institute for Public Health, and local community members and organizations.

Launching a Hospital-Based Violence Intervention Program in St. Louis

Once discharged from the hospital after a violent injury, [up to 50 percent](#) of patients will suffer violent re-injury.

Hospital-based violence intervention programs (HVIPs) provide an opportunity to reduce the effect of trauma and the possibility of re-injury. Since 2015, the Institute for Public Health has led a collaborative working group of

healthcare providers and thought leaders with the goal of designing and implementing a regional HVIP. In January 2018, the Institute for Public Health received a \$1.6M grant from Missouri Foundation for Health to support the launch of a regional St. Louis Area Hospital-Based Violence Intervention Program called [Life Outside of Violence \(LOV\)](#).



The LOV program is the first HVIP in the nation to incorporate three research universities (Washington University, Saint Louis University, and University of Missouri St. Louis), and four level-one trauma centers (Barnes-Jewish Hospital, SSM Health Saint Louis University Hospital, St. Louis Children's Hospital, and SSM Health Cardinal Glennon Children's Hospital.) The program hired case managers, who work with youth and young adults (ages 8 to 24), who are injured by gunshot, stabbing or assault. They also promote alternatives to violence to decrease incidences of retaliation, criminal involvement, re-injury and death. The Institute continues to coordinate this innovative program and is seeking additional funding to expand to neighboring regions.

“The focus is on reducing the toll on the community from productivity losses, diminished quality of life and toxic stress, reducing death and suffering, and bolstering healthy environments for individuals and families affected by violence.” -

-Victoria Anwuri, associate director, Institute for Public Health

“This kind of program is a wonderful example of the power and impact of research universities and hospitals working together to face head-on one of America’s greatest public health challenges. Interrupting the cycle of violence in our region is crucial, and I am pleased that Washington University’s Institute for Public Health has stepped forward to help lead such an effort.” --Chancellor Emeritus, Mark S.

Wrighton

LOV staff hopes to enroll 600 participants over three years. In the past year, program staff has observed that LOV participants disengage from violence and improve school performance. As the program progresses, the Institute researchers closely evaluate results, and its early success signals the opportunity for LOV to become a national model for violence prevention.

“Violence in St. Louis is pervasive. In some communities, people use violence for survival. They often expect to die a violent death and not live past a young age. Violence is truly a public health issue.” --Kateri Chapman-Kramer, project manager for Life Outside of Violence, Institute for Public Health

Counseling on Access to Lethal Means (CALM)

Data from a [research project led by Kristen Mueller, MD](#), an emergency department physician and Institute Faculty Scholar, suggests that emergency department physicians document patients’ access to firearms in only three percent of suicidal patient encounters. Quality-improvement initiatives are needed to better address firearm access and storage in those patients presenting to the emergency department in suicidal crisis. To this end, in 2018, the Institute for Public Health provided funding for a feasibility study to pilot test this intervention in the Barnes-Jewish Hospital emergency department.

[Counseling on Access to Lethal Means](#) (CALM) is a curriculum developed by the [Suicide Prevention Resource Center](#) that trains counselors in how to help patients at risk for suicide and their families, reduce their access to lethal means, particularly (but not exclusively) firearms. This program covers several components, such as: background data on suicide and lethal means; an introduction to firearm lethality; and, a mock counseling session on temporarily storing dangerous items patients may have at home, such as guns and prescription medication.

Through a partnership between Washington University, Barnes-Jewish Hospital, and the [Lock It for Love](#) program from Women’s Voices Raised for Social Justice, patients and families were offered free gun locks and offered outpatient counseling from [Provident Behavioral Health](#).

Suicide Prevention

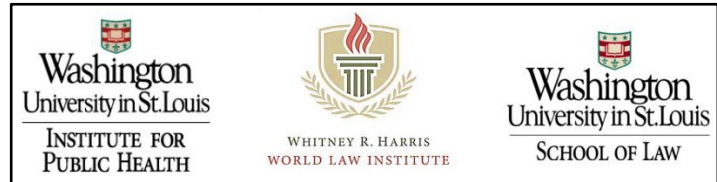
[According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#), from 2014 to 2018, almost two-thirds of gun-related deaths were suicides. The Gun Violence Initiative is a founding member of the St. Louis Suicide Prevention Coalition, whose mission is to convene local suicide prevention champions to support a vision of a St. Louis community that is suicide-safe. It provides training, treatment and advocacy. The Gun Violence Initiative supported two Suicide Prevention Summits; one in 2018, and another in 2019. The goal of the events was to introduce the coalition to the St. Louis community and discuss approaches to suicide prevention, intervention advocacy, training, and access to treatment for the general community, schools, and health providers.

Making an Impact on Gun Violence and Human Rights

Research suggests that the failure of the U.S. government to exercise due diligence in preventing and reducing gun-related violence may violate the government’s obligations under several international instruments to protect human rights. In Fall 2017, led by [Leila Sadat](#), JD, the [Whitney R. Harris World Law Institute](#) at Washington University School of Law launched its [Gun Violence and Human Rights Project](#) to examine U.S. government responses to gun violence in light of U.S. obligations under international human rights law. As part of this project, law students and the Harris Institute Fellow, Madaline George, conducted in-depth research articulating mechanisms to rectify the crisis and suggest international forums that could examine the issue. In February 2018, the Harris Institute presented its

[initial findings](#) at an Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) hearing on the “Regulation of Gun Sales and Social Violence in the United States” in Bogotá, Colombia. In January 2019, the Institute submitted [The U.S. Gun Violence Crisis as a Violation of U.S. Obligations under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights \(ICCPR\)](#) ahead of the United Nations Human Rights Committee’s review of the U.S.

During Fall 2019, the Institute for Public Health and the Journal of Law and Policy at the School of Law published a [special symposium edition](#) on gun violence. This volume contains Leila Sadat and Madaline



George's article [Gun Violence and Human Rights](#). The article provides an overview of the U.S. gun violence crisis, surveys the patchwork of federal and state gun control laws, and considers U.S. obligations to protect its population based on human rights law.

In September 2019, the Harris Institute and the Institute for Public Health submitted a [joint stakeholder report](#) on gun violence and human rights to the United Nations Human Rights Council as part of the Third Universal Periodic Review of the U.S. government’s human rights record. In April of 2020, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights released its [Summary of Stakeholders’ Submissions on the United States of America](#). The joint report was one of only eleven submissions cited in the summary in relation to issues of gun violence.

The summary highlights several issues including the disproportionate effect of gun violence on racial and ethnic minorities and its impact on children and adolescents, the frequency of mass and school shootings, the close relationship between firearms and domestic violence, and the legal impediments to industry oversight and preventative research. The United Nations’ report also references several recommendations made by the institutes, including to “improve and expand the background check system to cover all firearms transactions, adopt a ban on assault-style semi-automatic rifles and high-capacity magazines, and support safe storage laws.”

The United Nations’ Summary Report is a critical tool for representatives from other countries in their preparation for the review of the U.S. Each country has the opportunity to ask the U.S. questions on human rights protections and abuses, and to make specific recommendations at the conclusion of the review. The Council is currently scheduled to hold its review of the U.S. in November 2020.

[Joining the Center for Community Health Partnership and Research](#)

In Fall 2017, the Gun Violence Initiative became housed within the Center for Community Health Partnership and Research (CCHPR) at the Institute for Public Health. The Center aims to reduce disparities and improve health and wellness in the region by supporting collaborations between community and university partners. By leveraging the Center’s resources, the Gun Violence Initiative advances and integrates its work into the community.

To further the integration, the Center for Community Health Partnership and Research, the Gun Violence Initiative, and the St. Louis Area Violence Prevention Commission (STLVPC) will be hosting a [Pitch Partners](#) event with a focus on gun violence prevention in Fall 2020. Pitch Partners provides attendees the opportunity to present public health-related project ideas in order to identify potential

partners and receive critical feedback. In addition to facilitating better communication between academia and the community regarding best practices, those in attendance learn about current Washington University community initiatives and research. Through this Pitch Partners event, Gun Violence Initiative staff will continue to spread awareness about ongoing violence prevention efforts and support innovative approaches to preventing violence in the St. Louis region.

*“During the past five years, we have connected with more than 100 community partners who are actively working to prevent gun violence and are applying evidence-informed interventions into their practices. **Our goal is to support innovative research and unify hundreds, if not thousands, of people working toward solutions.**” --Poli Rijos, lead for the Gun Violence Initiative, Institute for Public Health*

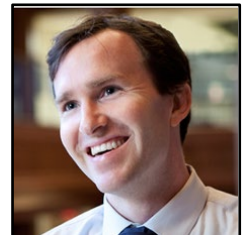
The Institute for Public Health and the Gun Violence Initiative are committed to addressing one of our greatest public health challenges: death and injury as a result of gun violence. As stated five years ago, the Initiative will continue to work to develop greater understanding and awareness of the issue; identify gaps in available data and research and explore ways in which Washington University can help address those gaps; relay information to policymakers and the public to guide decision making; and finally, find actionable measures that would lead to the reduction of deaths and injuries. Larry J. Shapiro Director of the Institute for Public Health, Bill Powderly, MD, describes the Initiative’s role today as showing “that conversations about this divisive topic is possible, and that higher education institutions can provide a space for it.”

Engagement with Faculty Scholars

PATRICK J. FOWLER, PhD

Associate Professor, Brown School

Dr. Fowler’s research aims to prevent family homelessness and its deleterious effects on child development. His interests also include policy and program evaluation, prevention science, and violence exposure. Dr. Fowler was the principal investigator for the *Crime Trends* team and has also studied the relationship between public and private investments and firearm related crime in the St. Louis region between 2000 and 2010.



KRISTEN L. MUELLER, MD

Assistant Professor of Emergency Medicine, School of Medicine

Dr. Mueller is an active member of the Gun Violence Initiative and is engaged in research on firearm violence and injury prevention. She serves as the physician liaison for [Life Outside Violence](#). She has been awarded the National Network of Hospital-based Violence Intervention Programs’ Marla Becker Scholarship in recognition for her work. Dr. Mueller has served as the Education Co-Chair for the Gun Violence Prevention Task Force through the American Medical Women’s Association.



“The Faculty Scholar Program at the Institute for Public Health and the Gun Violence Initiative have provided invaluable support through mentorship, particularly from Drs. Bill Powderly and Randi Foraker, as well as Victoria Anwuri and Poli Rijos.

Through their ongoing guidance, I have transitioned from full-time clinical practice to become an academic clinician-researcher. In direct response to this mentorship from Institute leaders, I recently applied for my first federal funding opportunity and have bolstered my skills for future research grant applications. These collaborative projects are yielding practice innovations to help improve safety from firearm-related suicide and violence for emergency department patients at the bedside.”

LJ PUNCH, MD

Associate Professor of Anesthesiology, School of Medicine

Dr. Punch’s focus is on resident education in gun violence management and prevention, as well as community engagement with agencies focused on limiting the impact of gun violence. They have led educational sessions to share their insight and perspective of as a trauma surgeon. Dr. Punch established [Stop the Bleed STL](#) as an effort of the non-profit agency, Power4STL, to engage and educate the St. Louis community about how to respond to gun violence. In September 2019, Dr. Punch gave a deposition at the U.S. House of Representatives Ways and Means Oversight Subcommittee Hearing on [The Public Health Consequences and Costs of Gun Violence](#).



JASON Q. PURNELL, PhD, MPH

Associate Professor, Brown School

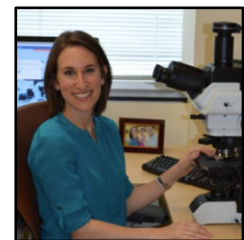
Dr. Purnell leads [Health Equity Works](#), formerly called For the Sake of All, which focuses on the health and well-being of African Americans in St. Louis using a social determinants lens. Health Equity Works is also concerned with both effective communication and dissemination as well as influencing community and policy stakeholders to enact recommended changes at the local and state levels. Purnell is particularly interested in pairing financial interventions with evidence-based health behavior change strategies and intervening within school settings to influence health and educational outcomes.



ILANA S. ROSMAN, MD

*Associate Professor of Dermatology and Pathology,
Director, Washington University Dermatopathology Center, School of Medicine*

Dr. Rosman served as a co-chair of the American Medical Women’s Association Gun Violence Prevention Task Force. She was involved in educating on gun violence prevention with the principal goal of developing educational materials and curriculum for medical students and residents regarding gun violence as a public health issue.



LEILA N. SADAT, JD

*James Carr Professor of International Criminal Law
Director, Whitney R. Harris World Law Institute, School of Law*

Professor Sadat is an internationally recognized authority and prolific writer in the fields of public international law, international criminal law, human rights and foreign affairs. In 2018, she launched the Gun Violence Project to examine U.S. government responses to gun violence considering U.S. obligations under international human rights law.



Intern Spotlights

Alexandra Liss, BA, WashU Class of 2018

"Through a year-long internship with the Gun Violence Initiative at the Institute for Public Health, I had the opportunity to work with academics, professionals, community members, and students. This invaluable experience included broad exposure to their work and varied responsibilities. I built a resource matrix and facilitated community conversations. I gained in-depth knowledge of the issue from different perspectives, including those of community members, law enforcement, social service, and academia. I learned how to reconcile diverse experiences and opinions and how to balance theory and research with the practicalities of limited resources and the realities of community experience. Through the pursuit of a doctorate in public health, I plan on continuing this work with a specific focus in violence prevention, a path that I didn't even know existed when I started working with the Institute for Public Health."

Victoria Grace Assokom-Siakam, BA, WashU Class of 2020

"I am an International and Area Studies major with a concentration in Development. When people ask me what this entails, I usually respond that it involves studying the political, economic, and social contexts that inform and determine the effectiveness of potential solutions to problems communities face. Throughout my college experience, my work with the Gun Violence Initiative has allowed me to learn about and contribute to work that analyzes gaps in laws, policies, and services, and how WashU and various stakeholders in the community can come together to implement means of reducing and preventing gun violence."

Some of the projects that I have been involved with include the Public Health Challenge to Reduce Gun Violence, Pitch Partners, Cardiff and a multitude of other projects in progress or realized in order to increase awareness and bridge the gap between research and the community. I am grateful for the Institute staff, but in particular, to Poli Rijos for giving me the opportunity to learn and grow and help address the public health issue of gun violence in St. Louis."

Mason Simmons, BA, WashU Class of 2021

“I stumbled upon the Gun Violence Initiative entirely by accident. I ended up meeting Poli Rijos, now my boss, and we discussed the wide array of things that the Initiative does each day to support making the world a better place. I was instantly hooked. Ultimately, I’ve had the chance to be closely involved with the Violence Prevention Commission, supporting the Community Engagement and Cardiff committees. I’ve loved engaging with partners on all sides of the gun violence issue, to learn about and support the work they are doing in the St. Louis community. I’ve also learned more about gun violence prevention programs, supplementary services, and agencies that respond to the mental health trauma associated with gun violence.

Now, I’m supporting the Public Health Data and Training Center to use data to understand the risk factors for gun violence in St. Louis. Overall, I have loved the chance to merge resources and data with community interaction. Applying the public health approach to gun violence has been so interesting and meaningful to me.”

Ibura DeHaan, 3-2 MPH Candidate, WashU Class of 2022

“Since joining the Gun Violence Initiative as an intern in January 2019, I have been tasked with updating our [Becker Medical Library Guide](#) and reading materials. In this process, I have been able to expand my understanding of gun violence as a public health issue as well as the policies and social structures that contribute to violence prevention. My experience with the Initiative has taught me the importance of collaboration with community partners in order to approach gun violence issues in the St. Louis community. Throughout my future career in public health, I hope to prioritize community engagement in whatever I do. I am grateful to the whole Gun Violence Initiative team for exposing me to such awesome work!”

Sawyer Franklin, MSW, WashU Class of 2020

“From January to July 2019, I had the privilege of being the practicum student for the Gun Violence Initiative, masterfully led by Poli Rijos. During my practicum, I assisted with the research and the beginnings of the regional implementation of the Cardiff Violence Prevention Model, an evidence-based, geo-mapping partnership between law enforcement and hospital systems. I also served on the Community Engagement Committee of the St. Louis Area Violence Prevention Commission (STLVPC).

While my primary academic and professional interest is direct clinical practice with youth who have experienced trauma, my practicum at the Initiative offered a crucial perspective on addressing trauma at the community level. I am grateful to have had the opportunity to learn from and engage with community members, local non-profit leaders, and policy makers doing this vital work. Thank you, Poli, for this fantastic opportunity.”

Nneka Molokwu, MPH, WashU Class of 2015, Former Research Technician at the Gun Violence Initiative

"I was a research technician for the Gun Violence Initiative tasked with compiling a report on Gun Violence as a Public Health Crisis in the U.S. and specifically, in the State of Missouri. I learned a lot from working on the Gun Violence Initiative and was honored to meet a lot of amazing people from different backgrounds and disciplines who are passionate about and invested in tackling this public health concern. Gun violence is a complex problem that can only be solved by assembling transdisciplinary teams of experts and stakeholders. Everyone belongs at the table. I am grateful for the opportunity I was given to work on the Initiative and look forward to reading about all the great things that the initiative will certainly accomplish."

Tamsen Reed, MSW/MPH, WashU Class of 2020

"During my time with the Gun Violence Initiative, I looked at the history and background of policy that preceded the 2003 drops in violent crime. Noticing that it wasn't just murders that dropped, but also rape and assault, support the theory that something unique was happening in crime prevention during that time. My practicum focused on examining the policies that were happening across all levels of government to see what factors may have played into that year's drop. A number of unique things occurred around that time, including an increase in collaboration between the city, county and federal agencies for law enforcement, an almost across-the-board change in leadership in St. Louis, and a large surge in funding for a violence prevention program called Project Safe Neighborhoods. The overview of previous work in St. Louis showed that interventions can be effective, but they require committed leaders, collaboration and support between stakeholders and communities, and sustained funding to promote those collaborations and leaders."

I loved working with this project because Poli Rijos and Anne Trolard were incredible mentors who taught me a lot about how we test hypotheses with data, and about how we communicate the meaning and value of our research into the broader community to improve lives. I also learned so much about how cities work and operate, and about how policy implementation can sometimes succeed or fail on circumstances beyond the policy itself or its outcomes."