



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Background

The idea of reparations to repair the harm done to Black people in America by chattel slavery, legal discrimination, and numerous harmful policies has been around for decades. As the movement gained greater steam in recent years, in 2021, the Chicago Urban League requested and received funding from the Illinois Criminal Justice Information Authority's (ICJIA) Restore, Reinvest, Renew (R3) initiative to facilitate community-led research on the concept of community reparations. Our Research & Policy Center put a call out to members of 10 South Side communities in our area to form a planning committee to lead this work. Those 10 communities fell into R3 zones that were defined by ICJIA.

The planning committee planned and led this research. They aimed to develop 1) a definition of "community reparations" for the 10 communities and 2) a framework for instituting community reparations. They focused on reparations for the harm done to South Side communities by the government's War on Drugs. Their research was conducted in 2021 and 2022. Through a series of interviews, surveys, and community discussions with more than 200 participants, the project found that South Side residents had many concerns about reparations at the community level.

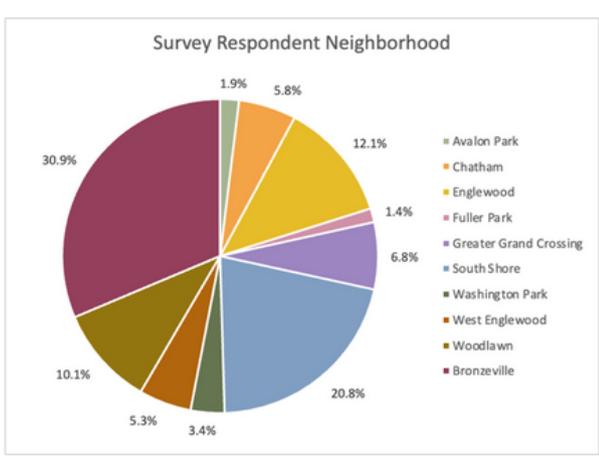
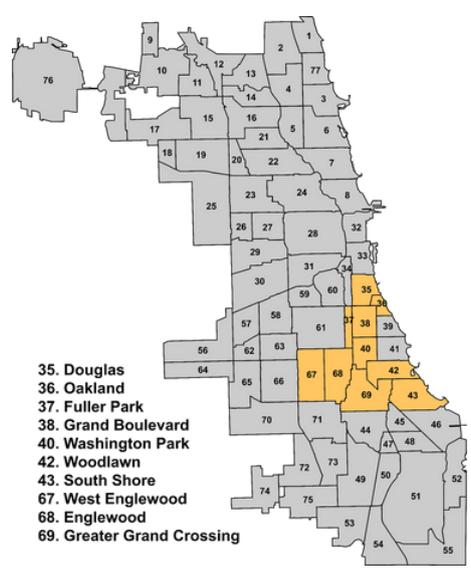
While they ultimately concluded that reparations should be for individuals, the research revealed insights about what South Side residents want for their communities. A summary of their report follows.

Reparations are for Individuals

Introduction

In an effort to honor the history of Chicago's Black South Side and restore communities damaged by the War on Drugs, this assessment originally sought to develop a framework for community-level reparations through community-defined means of repair. These community-rooted suggestions stem from participatory action research conducted by the South Side Community Reparations Coalition (SSCRC), founded by the Chicago Urban League with the aim of developing recommendations for the utilization of Restore, Reinvest, Renew (R3) Illinois Criminal Justice Information Authority (ICJIA) grant funds collected from cannabis tax money.

ICJIA funds programs in the following areas: Civil Legal Aid, Economic Development, Reentry, Youth Development and Violence Prevention. Recommendations are also dictated by these areas of need. The SSCRC focused on ten majority-Black community areas on the South Side of Chicago: Douglas, Oakland, Grand Boulevard, Fuller Park, Washington Park, Woodlawn, South Shore, Greater Grand Crossing, Englewood, and West Englewood.



Summary of Report Findings

Our research included five areas of focus: civil legal aid, community economic development, reentry, violence prevention, and youth development.

Throughout the research process, we discussed the intersectionality of these areas. They are deeply connected and often support and impact each other.

While we separate these sections into distinct categories to help us consider solutions, we see themes as deeply linked.

• Civil Legal Aid

Civil legal aid is free legal support and representation on civil court matters for low- and middle-income people. Areas of legal support include Consumer Protection, Family, Income Maintenance, Housing, Health, Employment, Education, Criminal Record and other areas of law.

In our survey we found a significant need for legal aid services on the South Side of Chicago. Survey respondents expressed that over the past two years they have needed legal assistance related to: housing (17.6%), child support and or custody (16.7%), and sealing criminal records (12.3%). While the need in the past two years demonstrated in our survey was relatively low, we attribute that to the higher incomes of the majority of our survey respondents. We know that there is great need for legal aid on the South Side of the city; according to the Chicago Bar Foundation Investing in Justice Campaign 2022, “over 1 million people in Cook County qualify for legal aid, and about half of them will face a legal issue over the coming year.”^[1]

Although there is a significant need for legal aid among the residents of our ten community focus areas, there is a clear knowledge gap about how to access these services. Despite our relatively highly educated survey sample, only 42% of respondents stated that if they needed legal aid they would know where to get help and only 29% of survey respondents stated that they would know where to go if they needed to get a criminal record sealed.

• Community Economic Development

In our model, we balance the needs of the community and its economy. Economic development takes on four forms: professional development, small business, entrepreneurship support, and community investment. Community Development programs include community asset development programs, community capacity development programs, and community political advocacy.

Systemic racism has created a dearth of economic opportunity in these communities, and they are in deep need of economic development. We found that when economic development occurs it is most often to the benefit of

^[1] The Chicago Bar Foundation. (2022). *Why Supporting Legal Aid Matters - The Chicago Bar Foundation*. [chicagobarfoundation.org](https://chicagobarfoundation.org/pdf/campaign/facts-statistics-stories.pdf). Retrieved March 4, 2023, from <https://chicagobarfoundation.org/pdf/campaign/facts-statistics-stories.pdf>

outside actors and not community members. Survey respondents also showed significant concerns about a lack of a safety net and concerns about their future. 77% of respondents disagreed with the statement “I don’t worry about being able to retire.” 51% of respondents disagreed with the statement “I can rely on others in my family or community to support me during financial difficulties.”

Our survey and interviews also revealed that residents of the historic Black South Side struggle to find work inside or outside of their community. 18% of respondents agreed with the statement “it’s easy to find work or start a business.” Not only did respondents report difficulty finding work, but more specifically finding work at a living wage. Similarly, our research found few job opportunities for youth. 11% of respondents agreed with the statement “in my community there are lots of opportunities for young adults and teenagers to get a job.” And 10% agreed that there are apprenticeship programs in their community that help young people get a job at a living wage.



• Reentry

We conceptualized reentry services in two main categories: tailored community services and needs-based services.

In our survey, we also asked a subsample of respondents that had either reentered from prison or jail or had a close family member or friend who had reentered from prison or jail in the past two years about the services they needed and the services that were received. The greatest needs that people with experience reentering from prison or jail reported were employment opportunities, housing, mental health services, access to identification, and transportation services. There was also a diverse array of needs reported that could be related to the specific experiences of an individual.

• Youth Development

We conceptualized youth development through a positive youth development framework, taking into account social, ethical, emotional, physical and cognitive growth with consideration of youth age.

Youth programs and resources are critical for youth to thrive. When asked whether youth were given the necessary resources to thrive, 82% disagreed. This highlighted the urgency and need for youth-focused resources. Although 10% neither agreed nor disagreed, only 8% agreed that youth had resources they needed to thrive resulting in 92% of respondents not agreeing.

In areas of disinvestment and poverty, youth suffer. This creates “areas of low opportunity where people suffer a substantial impact to their social, emotional, physical, intellectual, and behavioral development” where youth lack the support they need.[2] When youth programs are more expensive, this compounds the issues youth already face by living in areas that are low in opportunities. Cost and lack of available options were named as major difficulties in accessing youth programs. Cost and lack of available options were also consistently cited as issues in both the survey and interviews.

• Violence Prevention

Types of violence found in communities can be self-inflicted, interpersonal, or collective. Violence prevention responses include primary violence prevention, secondary violence prevention and tertiary violence prevention.

Community members' concerns about violence are well founded. A review of Chicago police data shows an increase in violent crime in our 10 focus community areas from 271.11 incidents per 10,000 residents in 2019 to 293.4 incidents per 10,000 residents in 2021. While this is still not the highest in the past 5 years, there has been a significant increase in crime. Fatal and non-fatal shooting data, however, shows the highest rate of shootings in the past 5 years, showing a significant increase from 2019 to 2020 and a continued rise in 2021.

In interviews, many people discussed policing as another form of violence in their community. Community members often felt abandoned by police, who often had extremely long response times -- if they responded at all in Black neighborhoods -- and generally did not help people who reported problems. In fact, community members felt that police often could not resolve problems and more often made them worse.

Conclusion

Our intention was to research the concept of community-level reparations and provide a community-led definition of community-level reparations. After engaging in a participatory research process with community members in the 10 areas, we found that a non-profit, grant-based model cannot be considered reparations. Concerns about gentrification as well as the co-optation of reparations were central to these conclusions. The conceptualization of

[2]Chicago Youth Programs. (2023, January 31). CYP. Retrieved March 4, 2023, from <https://chicagoyouthprograms.org/>

community-level reparations is in conflict with community desires for reparations as well as the limitations of grant-funded efforts that focus on under-researched and under-defined concepts of reparations and community.

Community members were concerned that once “reparations” resources were put into their communities, the land they were living on would be invaded by outside communities usurping their access to vital resources. Gentrification was particularly a concern with economic development efforts and the complexities that come with new business and new homeowners entering the community. One participant also noted the complexity of having more black businesses and homeowners also contributing to gentrification and harm to already established communities.

Reparations is a long-standing effort that in recent years has picked up increasing traction locally and globally. As a policy approach, reparations for Black people have been proposed as a way to address the enduring problems of anti-black racism related to colonization. As calls for reparations grow and more efforts are made, the way people think about reparations remains vulnerable to co-optation. As one community member stated, “Everybody is taking the word reparations and just applying it to all kinds of things.”

We believe it is important to display voices of dissent in this process to help shape future reparations efforts, especially since we found that community members were extremely concerned about the co-optation of reparations. Due to fears of co-optation, community members were concerned about oppressive people and institutions outside of the community benefiting. As one participant at a community meeting shared: “They will make sure they profit from reparations.”

These community fears ultimately led to the abandonment of a reparations framework for this project. We share this process in the hopes of encouraging more community collaboration and voices of dissent around reparations efforts.

Ultimately, we concluded that the funding structure of community areas was not in alignment with community members' definition of community. In addition, many key informants cited they had moved to multiple areas of the city and that the South Side community was not exclusive to neighborhood and land. Given this, the conceptualization of community-level reparations as based on geographic location proved to be a major limitation. This limitation ultimately contributed to discarding the community-level reparations framework. In addition, our findings call into question the future legitimacy of geography-based reparations efforts given potential population changes.

Community Voices

The following quotes represent a sample of what research participants said about reparations. These sentiments ultimately led to the report's focus on reparations for individuals.

"Reparations is a menu of options that we need to discuss... because what works for my family may not work for yours."

"Reparations is not saying I'm going to take a pool of money and give it to these organizations; we've done that before."

"I find it extremely problematic for a definition of reparations to be rooted in anything other than individuals receiving repair because it's not the physical geographic communities or locations that have been harmed."

"The term 'reparations' is not appropriate because it is not given to individuals"

"Will we get it? I don't mean just in the form of money; I mean in the form of respect and accountability."

"Reparations is when we get proper treatment."

"Reparations is you owe people for the way that you treated them."



Selected Policy Recommendations



Civil Legal Aid

- Provide Legal Aid Services Located in Communities
- Develop Legal Aid Services that reflect the needs of South Side residents
- Legal Aid Services that reflect the diversity of the Historic Black South Side
- Partnerships between community organizations and civil legal aid organizations
- Community Learning/Education Model



Community Economic Development

- Professional development programs that support the residents in gaining new skills needed for employment.
- Community Investment Programs that give resources to communities and bolster commercials and community markets.
- Housing Programs that show the importance of sustained investment in housing programs that center the needs of the most marginalized
- Small Business & Entrepreneurship support programs
- Public Banking Options
- Community Asset Development Programs
- Empty land and housing redevelopment
- Community Capacity Grants
- Community political advocacy programs



Reentry

- Programs that help reentering people find work at a living wage and build skills are critical.
- Fund programs that help reentering people continue education.
- Fund services that either operate transitional housing for reentering people or help connect reentering people with transitional housing.
- Mental health specific reentry services help support and provide health and wellness-based services tailored to support the specific needs of people with mental health issues re-entering into society
- Tailored Community Services for Vulnerable Populations
- Sober Living & Drug Use Service



Youth Development

- A Drastic Increase in Youth Program Funding
- Provide Free & Low-Cost Youth Programming

Selected Policy Recommendations cont'd

- Health Centers and Programming that address holistic health programs geared towards addressing youth development from early childhood to young adulthood
- Funding Youth Recreational Centers
- Provide access to Job and Workforce and Higher Education Programs



Violence Prevention Recommendations

- Sustained long-term interventions
- Fund community-based safety
- Invest in Primary Violence Prevention that address the conditions of collective violence including social, political and economic violence
- Creating more health and trauma support programs
- Creating more investment in entrepreneurial programs
- Ending the war on drugs
- Decriminalizing use of all substances
- Rolling back all criminal penalties for substance possession or abuse.
- Paying violence prevention workers a living wage is critical to this as they provide a vital role in stopping violence.[3]

General Recommendations



- **Truth and reconciliation work should be woven into all R3-funded projects.** This work lends particularly well to violence prevention, youth, and reentry work where restorative practices support program success. However, truth and reconciliation work can also be tied into economic development and civil legal aid programming. For example:

- We recommend that the R3 grant should require all programs serving the South Side of Chicago implement truth and reconciliation work and dedicate a portion of money to do so.
- The SSCRC asks for public acknowledgement of past harm that the city of Chicago has perpetrated against Black communities. This apology would be from the mayor, chief of police, and other city officials acknowledging harms of the War on Drugs to Chicago residents, as well as harms that happened during slavery, Jim Crow, the Great Migration and race riots.



- **Chicago Truth & Reconciliation Center** - The SSCRC requests the creation of a center, similar to the Chicago Torture Justice Center, that aims to educate people about the impact of the War on Drugs on Chicago residents. The center would operate as a museum to educate people about the role of Black people in Chicago and the systemic injustices that have been subjected to. In addition, the center should host programming centered around truth and reconciliation.

[3] Mascia, J. (2021, March 2). *The push to pay violence interrupters a living wage*. The Trace. Retrieved March 4, 2023, from <https://www.thetrace.org/2021/03/gun-violence-interruptor-pay-los-angeles-milwaukee-chicago/>

Selected Policy Recommendations cont'd



- **Guaranteed Income Programs** - Guaranteed income programs for all African Americans living in historically underserved communities in Chicago as a step towards restitution. Additional guaranteed income programs for formerly incarcerated people re-entering into society who have been victims of the war on drugs should also be considered. Further research and pilot programs should take into center the most marginalized needs and take into account income and need holistically.[4]



- **Future Research** - We recommend further reparations advocacy and research at a statewide and federal level and more policy research with recommendations on this topic. The collection of dissenting voices as well as agreement is invaluable to further reparations efforts, and we recommend that this process continues. One way to display this is to collect and display quotes and direct community voices as we did in displaying reparations quotations.

[4] Cook County Promise Guaranteed Income Pilot. Cook county promise guaranteed income pilot. (n.d.). Retrieved April 26, 2023, from <https://www.cookcountyil.gov/promise>