

Public Safety in Jackson and Hinds County

Support & Scale Up Data-Driven Local Solutions to Local Challenges That Are Working Right Now

1. What are we doing now to increase public safety, and is it working?

Answer: Jackson's *Credible Messenger Initiative (Strong Arms of JXN), Operation Good Cure Violence Program, and Safe Streets Cure Violence Programs* are community-based interventions in Jackson that are proven to improve public safety.¹ They are modeled after road-tested and data-driven national programs that have been tailored to fit Jackson's local context. A core operational component these Jackson programs is to continuously gather data on effectiveness and revise as need to obtain better outcomes. **These programs have consistently demonstrated a measurable effectiveness at reducing incidents of violence and youth recidivism in Jackson.**

2. What is the Strong Arms of JXN Program?

Answer: It is a wrap-around community-based diversion program for youth in Hinds County's youth court system. It is an intensive, long-term, multiple days per week, mentorship program that is centered around addressing root causes of violence and addressing the stress in families and communities that create the conditions for violence. It is a "credible messenger" program, which means it is run by people who have experienced the life and the pressures, often in the same neighborhoods, as the people they serve. Many have previously been incarcerated, and all have are committed to helping to rebuild the communities they came from.²

3. What is Operation Good Cure Violence Program?

Answer: It is a "violence interrupter" program focused on rapid response to violence in the community, with the goal of preventing retaliatory violence and recidivism. Residents in communities with high incidents of violence know this team—many members are from the neighborhoods they serve—as expert mediators and mentors. In a 44-block radius in South Jackson, Operation Good has worked to build the level of trust needed for effective intervention. As of June 2022, the organization reported 389 days without a gun-related death in the 44-block radius target intervention zone.³ Neighborhoods in cities like Baltimore, Chicago, New York City, and Philadelphia saw shootings decrease by more than 30% after implementing this same Cure Violence model.

4. What research is being done now to build even better data-driven solutions?

Answer: In 2020, a team of community advocates and UMMC investigators were awarded a 5-year, \$5.5 million dollar grant from the NIH's National Institute on Minority Health and Health Disparities to study the effectiveness of different models of hospital-based violence intervention programs in Jackson, Mississippi.⁴

5. How are counties with higher homicide rates than Hinds County addressing violence?

Answer: Hinds County welcomes collaboration with other Mississippi counties experiencing serious violent crime.⁵ Although Hinds County (31.7 gun homicides per 100,000 citizens) has among the highest homicide rates by county in the state, it is not the highest: Leflore County (38.6), Washington County (34.2), Holmes County (32.3) are higher.⁶ The most recent mass shooting in Mississippi occurred in Coldwater, MS (Tate County), on February 17th, 2023 (Gun Violence Archive).

ENDNOTES

¹ See, e.g., <https://evictionlab.org/map/#/2016?geography=states&type=er>. These violence prevention programs can be enhanced and expanded to other communities in Jackson to reduce violence more effectively than policing. In addition to those discussed here, there are many other programs in Jackson that are working. For example, **Mississippi Public Health Institute’s Congregational Outreach Program (CROP) is a faith-based program** focused on substance use and mental health treatment that seeks to address conditions that create community violence.

² See, e.g., <https://www.aecf.org/blog/in-mississippi-credible-messengers-promote-community-safety-and-youth-success>; <https://www.mississippifreepress.org/20045/strong-arms-of-jxn-credible-messengers-work-use-experiences-to-prevent-violence>.

³ See, e.g., <https://www.wlbt.com/2022/06/04/operation-good-is-taking-new-approach-violence-prevention-one-south-jackson-neighborhood/>; <https://www.wjtv.com/news/crime-crisis-focused-on-solutions/jackson-organization-received-100k-for-violence-intervention-programs/>.

⁴ See, e.g., <https://www.umc.edu/Research/Centers-and-Institutes/External-Designation-Centers/Mississippi-Center-for-Clinical-and-Translational-Research/News-Archive/2022/10/Violence-research.html>; <https://mississippitoday.org/2022/12/26/ummc-joins-fight-against-gun-and-domestic-violence/>. The UMMC team members on this grant are Lei Zhang, PhD, Professor and Associate Dean for Research at UMMC’s School of Nursing, who previously spent 20 years working at the Mississippi Department of Health; Laura Vearrier, MD DBe, Associate Professor of Emergency Medicine with board certification in Addiction Medicine and a doctorate in bioethics; Matthew Kutcher, and MD MS, Associate Professor of Surgery and Emergency Medicine, as well as the co-director of UMMC’s Surgical Intensive Care Unit and the chair of the Mississippi Committee on Trauma. The community team leader and co-investigator on the grant is Rukia Lumumba, JD, co-founder and executive director of People’s Advocacy Institute, with 20 years of experience in community-based violence prevention and implementing alternatives to incarceration.

⁵ **Violence in Mississippi is a statewide problem and a structural problem.**

- Mississippi has the highest age-adjusted firearm mortality rate in the US (2020 CDC data)
- Someone is killed with a gun in the state of Mississippi every 15 hours (Gifford Law Center)
- Gun violence costs the state of Mississippi \$3.2 billion/year, or \$1,076 per resident annually (Giffords Law Center)

Increased spending on social and public health services—not increased policing—is proven to reduce violence. See, e.g., Spending on social and public health services and its association with homicide in the USA: an ecological study. Sipsma HL, Canavan ME, Rogan E, et al. *BMJ Open*. 2017;7:e016379. doi:10.1136/bmjopen-2017-016379. According to the US Department of Health and Human Services, social determinants of health that likely impact the risk for firearm injury include:

- Economic stability (Employment, income food security, housing stability);
- Education access and quality (Job training, language skills, literacy, early childhood education, college enrollment);
- Healthcare access and quality (Healthcare facilities, primary care, health insurance, health literacy, screening, substance abuse treatment);
- Neighborhood and built environment (Safe housing, transportation, clean water);
- Social and community context (Structural racism, civic participation, workplace conditions, incarceration).

⁶ See, e.g., “About Underlying Cause of Death, 1999-2020,” CDC WONDER database.

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In Mississippi, Credible Messengers Promote Community Safety and Youth Success

Posted February 28, 2022, By the Annie E. Casey Foundation



From left: Strong Arms of JXN's John Knight, Terun Moore and Benny Ivey

A program called [Strong Arms of JXN](#) is working with young people to reduce community violence in Jackson, Mississippi.

Launched in 2018, the initiative relies on credible messengers — people with life experience and strong community ties — to mentor youth and steer them away from destructive behaviors and crime. It's one of several Jackson-based community groups supported by the [People's Advocacy Institute](#), an Annie E. Casey Foundation grantee.

[Read about the Strong Arms of JXN in the Jackson Free Press](#)

"The city of Jackson exemplifies community partnership and the ecosystem necessary to support violence reduction strategies," says Burgundi Allison, a program associate within Casey's Center for Civic Sites and Community Change.

Interrupting a Cycle of Violence

In Strong Arms of JXN, formerly incarcerated adults use what they've learned to help youth avoid making the same mistakes. The program itself has two main objectives: 1) keep young people from dropping out of school; and 2) keep young people away from negative interactions with law enforcement. Both scenarios are precursors to later criminal activity, [research indicates](#).

Strong Arms of JXN's Co-director Benny Ivey and adult mentor John Knight share pasts scarred by drug and gang activity. After exiting prison, Knight got his life back on track and grew determined to dissuade young people from following in his earlier destructive footsteps.

Keeping Young People in Jackson Schools

In addition to his role with Strong Arms of JXN, Knight works as a peer counselor at Henley-Young Juvenile Justice Center, a local youth detention facility, and as the truancy director for the local youth court. In both settings, he talks with young people to learn about the challenges they're facing and to share his own story. He leverages school officials — and connects families with needed resources — en route to helping youth redirect their lives without police involvement.

"My job is to get all the information from the parents and set up meetings to see why these kids are not going to school, what we can do to help them get into school and what we can do to make them more interested in school," Knight says. "That's a battle, but it's a good battle to fight because, as you are in the process of trying to influence them to go to school, you could teach them things in the same process."

Partnering With Juvenile Courts

Through Knight's role as an on-site peer counselor, Strong Arms of JXN has started working with young people at Henley-Young Juvenile Justice Center. Youth Court Judge Carlyn M. Hicks, a vocal advocate of the program, has seen firsthand the group's ability to reach young people.

"I investigated this credible-messenger program myself," says Hicks, who remembers feeling "quite pleased," with Strong Arms of JXN's approach and impact.

Today, Hicks regularly refers youth to the initiative and notes that violence at Henley-Young has dramatically decreased since the program's arrival.

Making a Difference for Young People in Jackson

Seven youth have graduated from the program since 2021, and another class is now moving through the standard three-month mentoring period. Most graduates have remained out of trouble in school or with the law, says Ivey.

Jackson Mayor Chokwe Lumumba, whose sister helped introduce credible-messenger approaches in the city in 2016, attended the inaugural class's graduation ceremony. He liked what he saw.

As he surveyed the graduates, Lumumba remembers how he could "see new hope in their eyes, see people looking at them in a different way, hear them speak about how they wanted to be a part of the solution while also recognizing the challenge of what they were up against."

In the last year, Strong Arms of JXN has organized a work-readiness program called the Dignity Economy Fellowship. Seven participants between the ages of 18 to 25 completed the program, with two members finding full-time employment soon after. "One is driving an 18-wheeler now," says Ivey.

Strong Arms of JXN Looks Ahead

Strong Arms of JXN's success has earned it access to the Sykes Park Community Center. The new area will house training opportunities while also giving kids in Jackson a safe space to hang out. Knight and Ivey plan to outfit the location with video game consoles, air hockey tables and even an on-site rap studio — changes intended to spark more socializing among young participants.

The program is also working to address common obstacles that kept past participants from succeeding. For instance: Some youth lacked reliable transportation, which impacted their attendance. Strong Arms of JXN identified this challenge and hired a driver to give young people rides to and from the program.

"We are inspired by the transformative work that grassroots organizations like Strong Arms of JXN are doing with young people," says Pamela Lawrence, the Casey Foundation's director of National Community Strategies. "Casey recognizes that, by working with local organizations to tackle the root causes of crime and violence, we can work toward communities that are safer for everyone."

[Learn About Casey's Commitment to Improving Community Safety](#)

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Flood Warning Is In Effect



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Operation Good is taking a new approach to violence prevention in one south Jackson neighborhood



By [Courtney Ann Jackson](#)

Published: Jun. 3, 2022 at 8:22 PM CDT



JACKSON, Miss. (WLBT) - There's a lot of concern about gun violence in cities across the country. Operation Good is taking a different approach to violence prevention in a South Jackson neighborhood. It's a 24/7 job that a handful of people in the community have committed to taking on.

"It's been many situations that we've been called on. We have to go and talk to people, and we just stared down barrels of guns," said Operation Good violence interrupter Jason White. "The guns have gotten pulled on us."

White is a violence interrupter with Operation Good.

"You don't have to always call the police. The situation can be resolved before the police get involved in it," noted White.

Operation Good has four violence interrupters working in the community currently. They may hear shots, hear from word of mouth about a potential issue, or get word that people already have guns drawn, and they respond.

"It's a dangerous job," added White. "But somebody has to do it, and most of the time, we know some of the people, and we can get to them. We'll talk to them. We'll talk to this side and this side and see what's going on, and we get to get together. We're talking make arrangement agreement, where we get him together, and we're coming together as a whole to talk about it and squash the problem before it keeps going on."

They've worked to build up trust in this 44-block radius in South Jackson. Maybe you're wondering how well this approach has worked. By the organization's count, they had 389 days without a gun-related death in that zone. That running count ended when a 15-year-old was killed on Woody Drive in April, which brings us to the other part of how Operation Good is working with young people.

"Because as a teenager, I know how it was when I'm walking around during the summer, and I don't have money in my pockets," described Operation Good outreach project organizer and event coordinator Kametrica Finch. "And I see my friends, guess what, that's gonna make these teens go and do something they don't need to do. So we're giving them other opportunities to make money, then guess what we're keeping them out of trouble and out of jail."

They're up to around 25 young people working to revitalize the area, doing yard work, and meeting mentors.

willing to open up about their concerns or what they're hearing around the streets that could lead to violence being stopped.

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Mississippi gove...

Playing
in
5
seconds

CRIME CRISIS: FOCUSED ON SOLUTIONS

Jackson organization received \$100K for violence intervention programs

by: [Kaitlin Howell](#)

Posted: Sep 10, 2021 / 11:50 AM CDT

Updated: Sep 10, 2021 / 04:16 PM CDT

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JACKSON, Miss. (WJTV) – On Friday, leaders with the Everytown for Gun Safety Support Fund announced the Jackson organization [Operation Good Cure Violence Program](#) has been awarded an \$100,000 support grant.

This is part of the first round of grant funding from the Everytown Community Safety Fund, which is a new initiative dedicated to supporting community-based violence intervention programs.

[Jackson police to offer free coaching, mentorship for boys ages 6-10](#) >

“As the neighborhoods that the Operation Good Cure Violence Program works in know firsthand, community-based gun violence prevention saves lives,” said Jackson Mayor Chokwe Antar Lumumba. “With cities across the country facing increased gun violence, community based solutions and interventions are more crucial than ever. Everytown’s investment in the Operation Good Cure Violence Program will significantly boost its capacity to disrupt the spread of violence in our city and allow them to make an even greater

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From left: John Knight, Terun Moore and Benny Ivey have all experienced life in prison and now mentor criminal-justice-system-involved young people as credible messengers with the Strong Arms of JXN. Photo courtesy Strong Arms of Jxn

Strong Arms Of JXN: Credible Messengers Use Experiences To Prevent Violence



<https://www.mississippifreepress.org/author/kayode-crown>

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JANUARY 25, 2022([HTTPS://WWW.MISSISSIPPIFREEPRESS.ORG/DATE/2022/01/25](https://www.mississippifreepress.org/date/2022/01/25))

The message warmed John Knight’s heart. One of his young mentees wanted Knight, a formerly incarcerated facilitator of the capital city’s Strong Arms of JXN credible-messengers program, to know how much his focus on school and performance has improved since his involvement in the program.

After Knight examined the report card the young man sent over, he told him he was happy for him. “I’m very proud of you,” Knight told him.

‘I’m proud of myself,’ the young man answered.

“Now you are talking,” Knight says he responded. “When you (are) proud of yourself for doing something that you could have been doing, but you chose not to because you were doing some other things, that lets me know that you’re growing and you’re listening.”

Knight grew up getting in trouble in the Washington Addition (<https://www.jacksonfreepress.com/news/2016/apr/20/hunger-live-struggle-interrupt-cycle-violence/>), once a thriving neighborhood south of Jackson State University that fell into crime patterns due to systemic disparities and poverty. But the last time he left prison, Knight was determined to reach young people (<http://jxnpulse.com/2017/09/digging-deeper-confronting-youth-crimes-causes-solutions/>) to convince them not to follow the same destructive path he did.

Transitioning from being a drug dealer and street-gang leader (<https://www.jacksonfreepress.com/news/2020/oct/05/ending-viral-violence-strong-arms-jackson-holds-ra/>) in Jackson to a mentor who encourages at-risk youngsters, Knight has realized his ambition lies in assisting the future generation (<https://www.jacksonfreepress.com/news/2016/apr/20/hunger-live-struggle-interrupt-cycle-violence/>) and helping them avoid lives of crime and imprisonment. He now works daily to interrupt crime and violence that spreads like a virus (<https://www.jacksonfreepress.com/news/2016/may/04/ceasefire-city-how-police-can-and-cannot-deter-gun/>) without early intervention, and before police get involved if possible.

Preventing Dropouts Prevents Violence

Plain-spoken John Knight is part of the Strong Arms of JXN (<https://www.facebook.com/strongarmsjxn/>) organization, which launched in 2018 (<https://www.jacksonfreepress.com/news/2018/dec/13/former-criminals-training-stop-violence-jackson-15/>). He serves in two capacities in Hinds County: as a peer counselor at Henley-Young Juvenile Justice Center and as the truancy director for the youth court. The Strong Arms of JXN gathers formerly incarcerated individuals devoted to showing young people alternate paths from the ones they at one point chose and have since turned away from.

Preventing dropouts, as well as negative police contacts with juveniles, are both key components to preventing violence in Jackson, a BOTEC Analysis study of the capital city’s crime reported in 2016. Both are top precursors, the experts warned, to a young person committing worse crime and violence as an adult.

In August 2021, Youth Court Judge Carlyn M. Hicks (<https://courts.ms.gov/news/2021/08.09.21Hinds%20YC%20truancy%20intervention.php>) established a truancy early-intervention program. If a child misses 18 days of school, truancy officers for Jackson Public Schools, the Hinds County School District and the Clinton Public School District notify the Youth Court. Then Knight, as the truancy director, will contact school officials and connect the families with resources to help the children remain in school, thus making it a more positive experience than a police officer

knocking on their doors.

“My job is to get all the information from the parents and set up meetings to see why these kids are not going to school, what we can do to help them get into school and what we can do to make them more interested in school because some of these kids are not even interested in going to school,” Knight said.

“So that’s a battle, but it’s a good battle to fight because as you are in the process of trying to influence them to go to school, you could teach them things in the same process.”

The approach also limits those negative police interactions that contribute to young people getting in worse trouble later, as the BOTEC researchers warned.

‘Keep Them from Losing Their Lives’

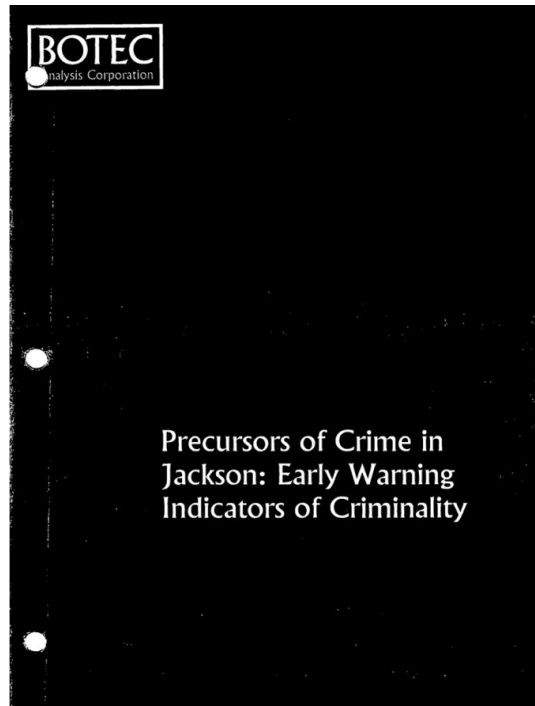
As peer counselor, John Knight respectfully converses with young people, asks them questions about their lives and shows them how to avoid pitfalls, all strategies in line with the Strong Arms of JXN credible-messenger model, which is based on the Cure Violence violence-interruption approach (<http://cureviolence.org>), which has met with success in cities across the country.

“That’s the whole goal of our program—we are trying to keep them from losing their lives to the prison system or to someone taking their lives on the streets,” he said.

After Henley-Young Juvenile Justice Center Operations Manager Eddie Burnside and Judge Hicks heard his story, Knight said they allowed him to start working at the facility some months ago. He now goes to his office there every day.

Judge Hicks told the Mississippi Free Press by phone on Jan. 13 that having rehabilitated people mentor young people who have been in the criminal-justice system in the past is impactful.

She has seen the impact that the Strong Arms of JXN Credible Messenger Program (<https://www.facebook.com/strongarmsjxn/>) had on young people the court referred to it since 2021 as well as their work at the Henley-Young Juvenile Justice Center. The judge said she scrutinized the group before her court got involved.



(https://www.mississippifreepress.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/Precursors_of_Crime_in_Jackson_Early_Warning_Indicators_of_Criminality.pdf)

A little-reported 2016 BOTEC Analysis study of Jackson crime, which the Mississippi approved and funded, found that a small population of young people are at high risk of committing violence due to precursors like dropping out of school and negative interactions with police as minors. It advised prevention solutions beyond policing. Click on image to view full pdf.



Benny Ivey is the co-director of the Strong Arms of JXN Credible Messenger Program. He uses his experiences as a former gang leader and drug addict and dealer, inside and outside of prison, to mentor others on how to avoid the life he lived. Photo by Imani Khayyam / Courtesy Jackson Free Press

“I investigated this credible-messenger program myself,” she said. “And I was quite pleased with how they took individuals who had lived experience, and who had shown themselves to be rehabilitated, and are now in the community doing work to ensure that young people who are at risk of becoming delinquents don’t follow that same path.”

“Since their involvement, the rates of violent incidents (at the Henley-Young Juvenile Justice Center) have decreased dramatically,” she added.

Benny Ivey, co-director of the Strong Arms of JXN credible-messenger program (<https://www.bennyivey.com>), told the Mississippi Free Press on the phone on Thursday, Jan. 13, that the organization regularly goes to the Henley-Young Juvenile Justice Center. Ivey was formerly incarcerated in a juvenile detention center and later in adult prisons for crimes ranging from cooking meth to aggravated assault. (<https://www.jacksonfreepress.com/news/2018/jun/27/brotherhood-destruction-addiction-fueled-journey-h/>)

The former Central Mississippi Regional Captain of the Simon City Royals (<https://www.theguardian.com/society/2018/apr/05/white-gangs-rise-simon-city-royals-mississippi-chicago>), a white street and prison gang, said he began to get clean from meth addiction and the street life in 2010 and has remained so since then.

“We go into Henley-Young, and we mentor the youth there twice a week,” he said. “We now have an office at Henley Young in which we have our credible messenger—John Knight—who is there every day.”

Mayor: ‘New Hope in Their Eyes’

Mayor Chokwe A. Lumumba (<https://www.facebook.com/CityofJackson/videos/482128820055076>) has seen the



John Knight, who grew up in a life of crime in the Washington Additions, is the truancy director with Henley-Young Detention Center. He engages with young people to reduce violence inside the center and outside once they leave the facility. Photo by Imani Khayyam / Courtesy Jackson Free Press

impact of credible-messenger involvement with young Jacksonians as necessary to stem and prevent criminality.

“I thank these gentlemen that are using their lived experience for our gain, their lived experience through some of the things that they were less proud of that they were involved in at one point in time, to now use that as a means to push forward,” he said at a Jan. 10, 2022, press conference.

Judge Hicks said, based on recommendations, she refers children to the mentorship program. “And once they are released from the detention center, they connect with those young people in the community,” she said.

In this way, Strong Arms of JXN build a chain of assistance and redirection for young people to deter the viral spread of violence one of them might commit later.

Ivey told the Mississippi Free Press that since the program began training sessions last year, it had graduated one group, and another is undergoing the same three-month mentoring program.

Out of 10 juveniles from 13 to 17 years old, who were sent to the Strong Arms organization last year for that session, seven showed up, and most have not gone back into the criminal-justice system, Ivey stated. He said some did not show up because of transportation problems—a very common problem for young people trying to connect with helpful programs in Jackson—but now, the group has hired somebody for that purpose.

“Out of the seven, I think one young man went back to the detention center a couple of times for marijuana use,” Ivey said. “He wasn’t committing crimes, and he wasn’t breaking into stuff or stealing or shooting or stuff like that; he was just continuously



Hinds County Youth Court Judge Carlyn Hicks said incidents of violence at the Henley-Young Juvenile Justice Center have diminished since the Strong Arms of JXN became involved there. Photo by Trip Burns/courtesy Jackson Free Press

smoking marijuana, and he was in drug court.”

“We had one young man that actually caught a charge and went to jail, but that’s it,” he added. “All the rest of our young men, they had been doing good; they’ve been staying out of trouble; they hadn’t been going and getting locked up.”

The mayor said he was at the graduation exercise for the first group (<https://www.facebook.com/strongarmsjxn/posts/468216404732357>) and said he witnessed the program’s impact on the participants.

“I had the opportunity to join them at a graduation exercise for some young people who had that early experience, with some negative experiences, and being involved with the criminal-justice system—on the wrong side of that.” After going through the Strong Arms program, Lumumba added, he could “see new hope in their eyes, see people looking at them in a different way, hear them speak about how they wanted to be a part of the solution while also recognizing the challenge of what they were up against.”

Lumumba’s sister, Rukia Lumumba, helped bring the credible-messenger approach to Jackson starting in 2016.

Last year, the credible-messenger program also organized a work-readiness program with 10 participants—18-to-25-year-olds—graduating, called Dignity Economy Fellowship.

Ivey said that out of 10 participants that started out, seven graduated, two with full-time employment. “One went all the way and got his (Commercial Driver’s License) and is driving an 18-wheeler now,” he added.

Moving to Sykes Park Community Center



City of Jackson Mayor Chokwe A. Lumumba commended the Strong Arms of JXN Credible Messenger’s program at a press briefing on Monday, Jan. 10. Photo courtesy Chokwe A. Lumumba

The Strong Arms of JXN recently got the key to the Sykes Park Community Center (520 Sykes Road) from the City of Jackson, and is now holding the training programs there.

“I already purchased two PlayStation 4s, and we’re going to purchase two big flat-screens to put on the wall with some furniture around them so that young people can hang out and play games with each other,” Ivey said. “We’re going to put a rap studio in one little corner of the community center; we’re going to have to buy those items needed to do that—a little mixing board,

microphone and stuff like that.”

Pool, air-hockey and ping-pong tables will also make the environment more inviting, he said.



Hinds County Youth Court Judge Carlyn Hicks said incidents of violence at the Henley-Young Juvenile Justice Center have diminished since the Strong Arms of JXN became involved there. Photo by Ken Gordon Photography / courtesy Carlyn Hicks

Parental Involvement Needed, If Possible

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[Benny Ivey said seven people have shown up for the latest mentorship session,](https://givebutler.com/mmp/donate)

“This is how it worked the last time when we had our young men referred to us—if 20 are referred to us, we get 10 working in Ivey’s program because we just don’t get the participation from a lot of parents that we want,” he said. “A big disconnect in the community right now is the lack of participation from parents and guardians.”
 (https://www.mississippifreepress.org)

“It seems to be that this new group that we have just started, we’ve had a lot more parents show up with these kids,” he added. “So we’re hoping that we have more parental involvement with this one.”

At the Jan. 10 press briefing, the group’s co-director and co-founder, Terun Moore



Strong Arms of JXN Co-director Terun Moore spoke at a press briefing on Monday, Jan. 10, 2022, saying that the group’s programs are about showing love to disadvantaged young people in the capital city. That, in turn, can help prevent crime and violence. Photo by Kayode Crown

(https://www.facebook.com/CityofJackson/videos/482128820055076), also formerly incarcerated, said that the programs they create are avenues to show love to the young people in the city.

Moore got a life sentence for an attempted robbery as a teenager that resulted in a death at Jackson’s Lake Hico Park. The life sentence was found invalid in 2001 due to his underage status, and he got out of prison in 2017 after serving 19 years (https://www.jacksonfreepress.com/news/2018/dec/13/former-criminals-training-stop-violence-jackson-15/).

“We have got to reach our young people, but we need other community people to partner in and really try to love our children and not point the blame at them or feel like we need to do something after they get in trouble, but reach them before they get in trouble,” he said.

After the initial three months in the mentoring program, the participants go into the alumni-support component for another months-long mentoring session, Ivey told the Mississippi Free Press. He said they focus on building relationships.

“We want them to understand that we want to be like their big brothers; we want them to know that they can believe us, they can trust us, they can confide in us, and they can lean on us,” he added. “And you know, that’s one big thing that these young men are lacking in their lives, and that’s love.”



“We want to be a conduit of love to these young men, and so we can maybe hopefully change the trajectory of their paths.”

Henley-Young Juvenile Justice Center peer counselor Knight’s experience, and what he modeled for others,

After Henley-Young Juvenile Justice Center Operations Manager Eddie Burnside (pictured) and Hinds County Youth Court Judge Carlyn Hicks heard John Knight, a credible messenger with the Strong Arms of JXN, they allowed him to start working at the detention facility. Photo courtesy Eddie Burnside

(<https://www.jacksonfreepress.com/news/2016/apr/20/hunger-live-struggle-interrupt-cycle-violence/>) included suffering a pill overdose, getting shot six times and serving an eight-and-a-half-year sentence at the Mississippi State Penitentiary in Parchman, as well as working on a Hinds County farm. He explains that many young people get into trouble because they are trying to emulate the behaviors of others.

“A lot of these kids don’t just wake up today and say, ‘I want to be a criminal today. I want to rob somebody. I want to carjack somebody. I want to break into somebody’s house,’” he told the Mississippi Free Press. “This is a process that will happen over the course of years or a period of time, maybe some months of seeing somebody else doing it. They think it’s cool.”

“So these young men that we deal with, some of them have been stuck, and some of them are about to be stuck,” he added. “So we use the best of our training and abilities to get them unstuck and get them back on the right road.” *Learn more about the Strong Arms of JXN and how you can help here*

(<https://www.peoplesadvocacyinstitute.com/credible-messenger-program>).



Kayode Crown

(<https://www.mississippifreepress.org/author/kayode-crown>).

Senior Reporter Kayode Crown was born in Nigeria, where he



CONTINUING COVERAGE Legislative Guide 2023 Shaky science, fractured families Health Crisis

JUSTICE

UMMC researchers join fight against gun and domestic violence

 by **Mina Corpuz**
December 26, 2022



University of Mississippi Medical Center in Jackson, Miss., Thursday, April 28, 2022. Credit: Eric Shelton/Mississippi Today

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Gun and domestic violence research at the University of Mississippi Medical Center is seeking to better understand the causes of both and find ways to help those scarred by their impact.

Two federal grants awarded in September totaling \$7.5 million from the National Institutes of Health and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services are funding the research.

“Each grant will enhance the other,” Dr. Lei Zhang, professor and associate dean in UMMC’s School of Nursing, said in a statement. “Gun violence and intimate partner violence are deeply interconnected.”

Mississippi has the highest firearm mortality rate in the country (28.6 per 100,000 population), according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and the highest prevalence of domestic violence, based on data from 2009-2015 collected through the Pregnancy Risk Assessment Monitoring System.

One grant will establish the Mississippi Violence Injury Prevention Program at UMMC to address gun violence involving 11 investigators from multiple departments, including emergency medicine, psychiatry and preventative medicine.

Zhang said the program represents a mindset change in how gunshot victims are treated. The focus will be more holistic and community based and on prevention.

Dr. Matthew Kutcher, an associate professor of surgery, trauma and critical care, said another focus is addressing underlying conditions that lead to violence such as poverty, structural racism, housing insecurity and more.

“(W)ithout addressing the root causes that keep our state at the top of the list for gun violence, we’re chasing the problem from behind,” Kutcher, the co-principal investigator, said in a

statement.

Examples of community-based resources can include the dispatch of credible messengers to prevent violence retaliation, mentorship from community members who have experienced violence and treatment for post traumatic stress disorder.

Rukia Lumumba, executive director of People's Advocacy Institute and community outreach organizer of the program, said hospital-based violence intervention programs have been proven to improve public safety.

The oldest such program was developed in Oakland, California, in 1994. A 10-year evaluation by Giffords Law Center found that participants in the program were 70 percent less likely to be arrested and 60 percent less likely to have criminal involvement than a control group and produced a cost savings to hospitals of \$1.5 million annually.

The next grant will train substance use disorder providers about domestic violence and how those issues intersect during pregnancy and after birth.

Mississippi has the highest prevalence of physical domestic violence before pregnancy and the second highest during pregnancy, according to the PRAMS data.

Dr. Michelle Owens, professor of obstetrics and gynecology, said one of the goals is to strengthen the ability of providers to identify and help people who are at risk of domestic violence or are experiencing it.

She said an integrated approach and community partnership will help bridge gaps and provide wraparound support for survivors of domestic violence and substance use disorder.

The goal is to “(empower) them to take the steps to secure their health, safety and a better future for themselves and their families,” Owens said in a statement.

The Mississippi Coalition Against Domestic Violence is a partner on UMMC's grant and will develop training, said Executive Director Wendy Mahoney.

Those who experience trauma and coercion from domestic violence often turn to substance use as a coping mechanism, she said.

“(The research) is a great thing because of the intersectionality of domestic violence,” Mahoney said. “It intersects with almost every aspect of life. I don’t think people look at it that way, but the intersectionality is quite vast.”

She said it is great that this research is happening in the state, and she hopes to see others look into other ways domestic violence intersect with other issues including gun violence, housing, other health issues and mental health.

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RESEARCH CENTERS AND INSTITUTES EXTERNAL DESIGNATION CENTERS
 MISSISSIPPI CENTER FOR CLINICAL AND TRANSLATIONAL RESEARCH NEWS ARCHIVE 2022 OCTOBER

Violence research focus of \$7.5M grants to School of Nursing

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 10, 2022**

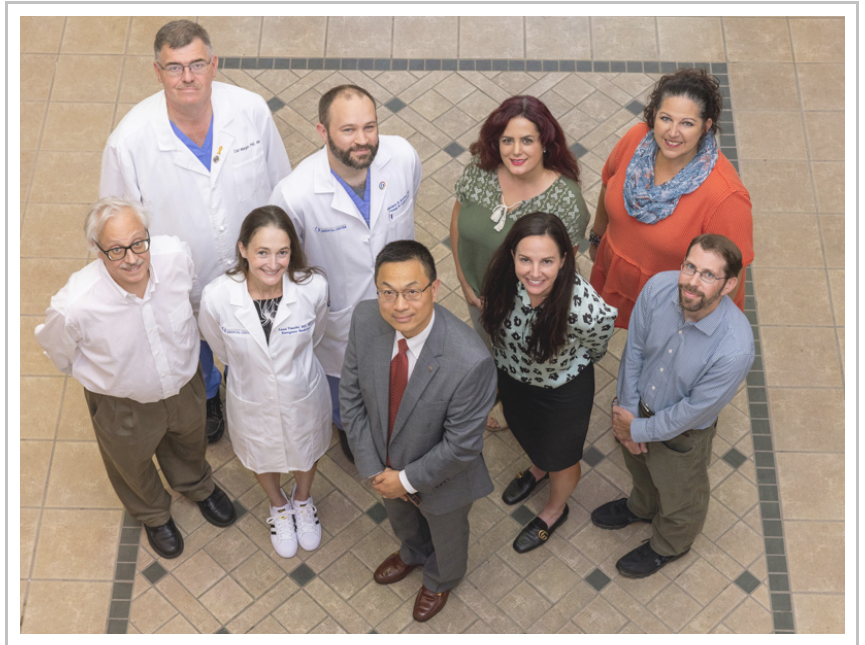
By: Andrea Wright Dilworth,
 awdilworth@umc.edu

The month of September was particularly fruitful for Dr. Lei Zhang, professor and associate dean for research and scholarship in the School of Nursing.

In the span of five days, he was awarded two grants: \$5.5 million from the National Institutes of Health to establish the Mississippi Violence Injury Prevention Program, and \$2 million from the Department of Health and Human Services to help prevent domestic violence against women.

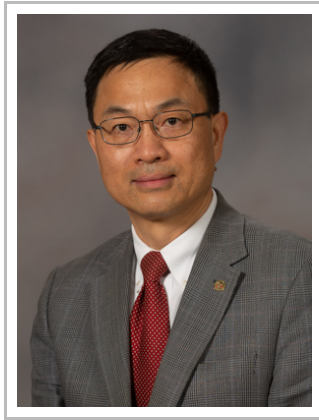
That both are related to violence is no coincidence, said Zhang, who partnered with multidisciplinary teams, both internal and external, in preparing the grants.

“Each grant will enhance the other,” said Zhang. “Gun violence and intimate partner violence are deeply interconnected. IPV perpetrators often use firearms to emotionally abuse and coercively control victims.”



[\(/news/News_Articles/2022/10/Images/Zhang-Research-Team_01.jpg\)](/news/News_Articles/2022/10/Images/Zhang-Research-Team_01.jpg)

Dr. Lei Zhang, center, joined by co-investigators on the VIP program, left, and intimate partner violence initiative, right. Pictured are, front row, from left, Dr. Bill Hillegass, Vearrier, Zhang, Dr. Erin Dehon and Dr. Andrew Voluse. Back row, from left, are Dr. Carl Mangum, Kutcher, Dr. Masoumeh Karimi and Dr. Tara Price.



Mississippi had the highest firearm mortality rate in the nation in 2020

(/News/News_Articles/2022/10/Images/Lei-Zhang.jpg)
Zhang

(https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/pressroom/sosmap/firearm_mortality/firearm.htm), and Jackson's homicide rate was three times higher than the rest of the state and 15 times higher than the nation in 2021. Mississippi also has the highest prevalence of IPV, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

"Substance use is a risk factor for both gun violence and IPV, so I feel we need to tackle them together," said Zhang.

Violence Injury Prevention Program

The NIH grant, awarded over five years, will consist of two parts. During the first two years, researchers will survey patients on the root causes of their injuries, which include economic stress, housing instability, adverse childhood experiences and mental health issues. In the last three years, the team will help develop community- and hospital-based resources to address those causes and integrate them into outreach efforts and patient care.

The VIP program represents a change in mindset in the treatment gunshot victims receive, said Zhang, going beyond patching up bullet holes and discharging patients to return to the circumstances that contributed to their injuries.

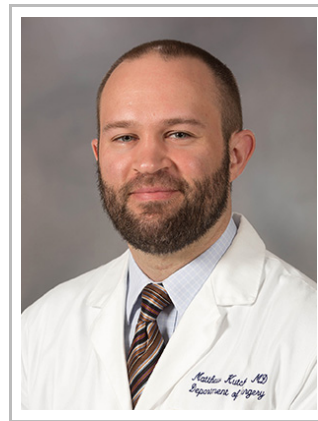
"This program will help transition our ability to care for victims from a reactive, physical injury-focused approach to a more holistic, community-based focus," said Zhang. "In addition to increasing survival with high-quality medical and surgical care, it aims to decrease the incidence

of gunshot wounds in the first place. We think this approach will work because it relies not on doctors and hospitals telling patients what to do, but instead on hospital and community providers coming together to address the needs identified by communities injured by gun violence.”

Housed in the School of Nursing, the program consists of 11 investigators from nursing, surgery, emergency medicine, psychiatry, preventive medicine, data science and two support staff.

Dr. Matthew Kutcher, associate professor of surgery-trauma and critical care, said the program extends the bond surgeons form with patients, allowing them to link patients and their families with services surgeons cannot provide: sending credible messengers immediately into the community to prevent retaliation, providing mentorship from community members recovering from violence, treating long-term post-traumatic stress disorder, and addressing the underlying conditions that led to the injury, including poverty, structural racism, housing insecurity, lack of transportation and need for substance abuse treatment.

“No matter how many well-trained physicians and surgeons, how much cutting-edge medical technology, and how much institutional and taxpayer financial support we bring to the care of firearm-injured patients,” said Kutcher, co-principal investigator, “without addressing the root causes that keep our state at the top of the list for gun violence, we’re chasing the problem from behind.



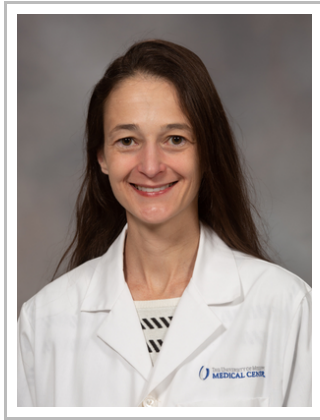
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Headshots/Matthew-Kutcher.jpg)

Kutcher

“This grant helps support an opportunity for us to turn this around, to make UMMC not just the state’s only Level 1 trauma center, but to make it into a national example of what health care can look like when it is tightly linked to the needs and voice of the community.”

Dr. Laura Vearrier, associate professor of emergency medicine and co-principal investigator, said it was critical that the ER be involved in the program because it is the entry point into the health care system for violently injured patients, and for some, the only interaction they have ever had.



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Headshots/Laura-Vearrier.jpg)

Vearrier

“There is also the concept of the ‘golden hours’ of trauma that occur after a patient has been injured,” said Vearrier. “In the immediate aftermath of trauma, patients experience complex emotions that may lead them to contemplate retaliation or consider lifestyle changes. This impressionable time opens an opportunity to facilitate positive change.”

PTSD, depression and other mental health conditions associated with firearm-related injuries can interfere with recovery, said Dr. Matthew Morris, associate professor of psychiatry and co-investigator.

“Posttraumatic stress symptoms and post-injury pain amplify one another in the aftermath of firearm injury,” said Morris. “Having a clinical psychologist on this multidisciplinary research team is important for understanding how mental health can influence firearm injury incidence and recovery.”



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Headshots/Matthew-Morris.jpg)

Morris

Hospital-based violence intervention programs have been proven to significantly improve public safety, said Rukia Lumumba, executive director of People’s Advocacy Institute and community outreach organizer of the program. “Through the support of the NIH, community-based organizations and Mississippi’s largest trauma hospital, we will come together to achieve similar outcomes here in Jackson and Mississippi.”

UMMC is one of four medical centers awarded NIH grants (<https://obssr.od.nih.gov/news-and-events/news/nih-research-prevent-firearm-injury-and-mortality>) in September to address gun violence, joining George Washington University, University of Michigan at Ann Arbor and

University of Chicago.

Women, intimate partner violence and substance use disorders

The HHS grant is a three-year project designed to train substance use disorder providers in intimate partner violence and address the intersection of intimate partner violence and substance use disorders during pregnancy and postpartum. Morris is also co-principal investigator on this grant, along with Dr. Michelle Owens, professor of obstetrics and gynecology.

Mississippi has the highest prevalence of any physical intimate partner violence, as well as before pregnancy, and second highest during pregnancy, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Often unreported, intimate partner violence affects as many as 50 percent of young, single, poor, minority pregnant women, said Zhang, and substance use disorder providers aren't necessarily trained to provide the needed resources.



Headshots/Michelle Owens.jpg

Owens

“Bridging these gaps through an integrated approach undergirded by community partnership will hopefully provide the necessary wrap-around support for those struggling with IPV, SUD and new motherhood, empowering them to take the steps to secure their health, safety and a better future for themselves and their families,” said Owens. “We also want to strengthen the ability of providers to identify and

readily assist those individuals who are victims or at risk of IPV.”

The SUD and IPV among Mississippi’s Moms – Initiative to Prevent and Treat program (SIMM Initiative) is one of five funded by the HHS (https://www.hhs.gov/about/news/2022/09/16/hhs-awards-more-than-3-point-6-million-to-bolster-support-training-on-substance-use-disorder-during-pregnancy-and-postpartum.html?utm_medium=email&utm_source=govdelivery) to develop statewide pilot projects that include partnerships with domestic and sexual violence organizations

at the state and local level. Others are the Domestic Violence Action Center in Hawaii, Hektoen Institute for Medical Research in Illinois, Texas A&M Health Science Center and Virginia Commonwealth University.

The team of investigators also includes telehealth, emergency medicine, psychiatry, the University of Mississippi and four community health partners.

Dr. Julie Sanford, dean of the School of Nursing, said the significance of Zhang's being awarded the two grants cannot be overstated.

"It is difficult to obtain one grant award of this magnitude, much less two," she said. "Violence is a particularly challenging problem for Mississippi, and these programs will help prevent the devastation that it causes. SON has invested heavily into growing our research mission. Under Dr. Zhang's leadership, we've made tremendous strides."



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Headshots/Julie-Sanford.jpg).

Sanford