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Local  
Efforts  
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Children

By Keith Robins

Chicagoan Bryan James vividly remembers walking home, when "all of a sudden shots were fired. My first natural reaction was to start running. As I began to run, I heard more shots, and then I felt a bullet rip through my leg. Once I made it to safety, I was simply happy to be alive.

"Here's what I don't get: I am not affiliated with gangs. I am a youth leader in my community, and enrolled in college," noted James, a 20-year-old student at Olive-Harvey College who recently participated on a listening panel sponsored by UCCAN to focus on teenagers and gun violence.

Given the documented, debilitating escalation of gun violence in Chicago this year, James' confusion and thinly veiled anger are palpable and actionable, underscoring the fact that in the first three months of 2012, homicides in Chicago are up 60 percent compared to the same period last year. That is precisely why the dramatic results of UCCAN's 2012 National Teen Gun Survey are instructive, eye opening and a roadmap to solutions.

For example, the survey reveals that more youth report both a lack of hope and that it is easy to access handguns, while increasing numbers say they have schoolmates who have been shot.

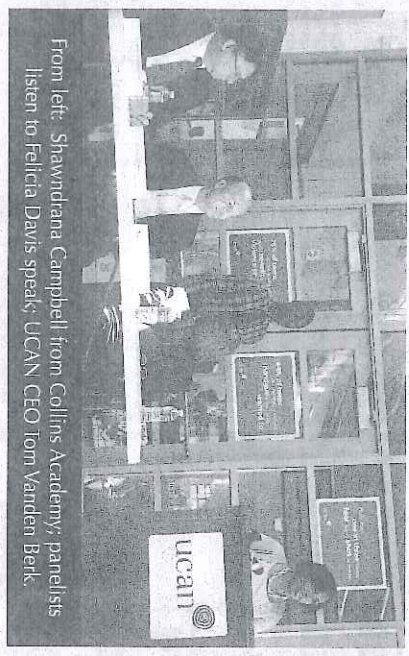
The national Teen Gun Survey was created and commissioned by UCCAN (<http://www.uccanichicago.org/>), a

To put faces on those disheartening statistics, several young people who have experienced gun violence shared their stories with a state of public officials recently at Honan Square in the North Lawndale community.

In attendance were Ald. Michael Chandler, Cook County Commissioner Robert Steele, Felicia Davis, first deputy chief of staff for Chicago Mayor Rahm Emanuel; Rev. Robin Hood of the North Lawndale Boxing League; and representatives of UCCAN, whose vision is that "youth who have suffered trauma can become our future leaders."

**Frightening Results**

Funded by The Joyce Foundation, UCCAN's survey indicated some fairly disturbing trends about youth fears,



From left: Shawndra Campbell from Collins Academy; panelists listen to Felicia Davis speak; UCCAN CEO Tom Vanden Berke

**UCCAN Survey Reveals Teens and Guns A Dangerous, But Fixable, Mix**

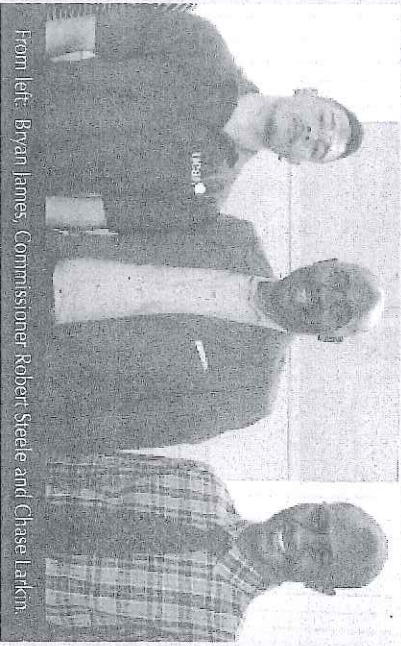
"How could something like this happen to me? Are any of us safe? It's outrageous how many of my friends fear that they will be the next victim - on their streets, in their schools and in their homes."

multi-faceted social service organization serving almost 14,000 at-risk children, youth and families in Chicago and annually. Teenage Research Unlimited conducted the survey, with a nationally representative sampling of 600 teens ages 13-18.

experiences and attitudes toward gun violence. A comparison of survey results from May 2009 to January 2012 showed that: • Teens are finding it increasingly easy to obtain a handgun, increasing 30 percent among all teens and a shocking 62 percent among African-American youth.

- 37 percent of teens fear being shot someday.
- Teens are becoming less hopeful that the problem of gun violence will be solved (a drop of six percent), with the most dramatic loss of hope among African-American youth.
- The percentage of youth who know someone who has been shot is on the rise among all racial and ethnic groups, increasing by 27 percent. The increase impacted all racial and ethnic groups: African-Americans 14 percent, Caucasians 42 percent, and Hispanics 5 percent.
- The percentage of youth who reported knowing more than one person who has been shot increased by 29 percent.
- The percentage of youth reporting that at least one student from their school had been killed by gun violence in the past year increased eight percent.

"The survey indicated that 76 percent of teens nationwide believe that young people would benefit from more violence prevention programs, and 64 percent believe that government officials are not doing enough to create common sense gun laws."



"These teens have made it pretty clear that they are angry, and that they want to finally put a stop to the violence that is plaguing their schools, their streets and their neighborhoods."

plugging their schools, their streets and their neighborhoods. Programs designed to prevent violence encompass just a small, but important, part of what UCAN does. Our kids deserve a safe environment, and it is the responsibility of all adults to make sure that happens."

### The City Initiative

That way of working also is the underpinning of UCAN's new CITY (Chicagoand Institute for Transforming Youth) initiative, a comprehensive approach to community care which fosters collaboration with existing neighborhood resources to strengthen communities one youth at a time.

CITY includes new programs and services for youth that will be offered at UCAN's new home and campus in North

because it is our moral obligation to keep kids safe. I commend UCAN and the young leaders with whom they work for their efforts in creating a life free of gun violence for our youth."

Ald. Chandler echoed these thoughts: "We have to do something about what is going on in our neighborhoods; we have to make our young people feel safe... We cannot accept anything less than solving the problem."

Shawndra Campbell, a Collins Academy High School senior and UCAN client, agreed. "I stand before you as a youth leader and express the hope that the death of Chicago youth will not be an event, and that we can solve this problem of gun violence and gun accessibility among Chicago's youth."

"We are dedicated to helping young people in Chicago who have experienced trauma to become future leaders and

In addition, the survey indicated that 76 percent of teens nationwide believe that young people would benefit from more violence prevention programs, and 64 percent believe that government officials are not doing enough to create common sense gun laws.

"UCAN is committed to listening to teens, and we conduct the Teen Gun Survey so we can better understand how gun violence is affecting them," said CEO Tom Vandan Berk. "These teens have made it pretty clear that they are angry, and that they want to finally put a stop to the violence that is

Lawndale at Filmore Street and Independence Boulevard, where a new 51,000-square Therapeutic Youth Home will be built and is expected to open in 2014.

UCAN's outreach to a variety of community leaders, other social service agencies and elected officials includes Cook County Commissioner Robert Steele, who said, "The results from the survey are disturbing, especially considering how gun violence disproportionately impacts our community."

"It is our hope that the results of this survey help to shed light on this problem and encourage everyone to take action,

escape the threat of gun violence, but everyone in the community needs to play a consistently active role to keep these teens safe," said Claude Robinson, UCAN Executive Vice President of External Affairs and Diversity.

"As Chicago continues to fight and suffer from far too many shootings that are tearing at the fabric of our city, we owe it to our teens to listen to them and to take action now."