



Stop the Violence

Student Interns: **Rachel Gray**, University of Pennsylvania School of Social Policy & Practice; **Ujashi Shah**, University of Pennsylvania Perelman School of Medicine

Academic Preceptors: **Christopher B. Renjilian**, MD, pediatric sports medicine specialist and attending physician with the Division of Adolescent Medicine and the Division of Orthopaedics at Children's Hospital of Philadelphia; **Hillary Bogner**, MS MSCE, Associate Professor at the University of Pennsylvania Department of Family Medicine, Senior Scholar at the University of Pennsylvania Department of Biostatistics, Epidemiology and Informatics; **Zvi D. Gellis**, Ph.D. Professor & Director at the Center for Mental Health & Aging Research Ann Nolan Reese Penn Endowed Geriatrics MSW Scholars Program, Cohen Veterans Network MSW Scholars Program, School of Social Policy & Practice at the University of Pennsylvania

Community Preceptor: **Dorothy Johnson-Speight**, Ph.D, MHS, LPC, founder and National Executive Director of Mothers In Charge, Inc. (MIC)

COMMUNITY PARTNER

Mothers in Charge, Inc. is a violence prevention, education and intervention-based organization that advocates for and assists mothers, children, families, and community organizations affected by gun violence. It supports individuals and communities through programs like grief support, participatory defense, anger management, mentoring of at-risk youth, public education, and art therapy for trauma.
Website: <https://www.mothersincharge.org/>

BACKGROUND/CONTEXT

- Crisis of gun violence is inflicting death, injuries, trauma, and other consequences on the United States
 - Firearms have become a leading cause of death for children and adolescents, so interventions at the national and local levels are vital to mitigate the problem and support affected individuals
- Philadelphia is one of many cities experiencing a recent spike in gun violence, and one of the few that has particularly struggled with the surge
 - For the year of 2023, the city has already seen 817 nonfatal and 214 fatal shooting victims as of July 23rd (Although a 22% decrease from the last year, it is still a large number of affected lives)
- Problem is complicated by the intersection of structural racism and residential segregation, which is why organizations like Mothers in Charge are necessary to support at-risk and highly impacted communities through prevention, advocacy, resources, and research

TEAM'S EXPERIENCE

- Observed services such as grief support and anger management on a weekly basis
- Engaged with community members and were responsible for creating documents that promoted events and the newsletter for the summer
- Assisted youth at the Juvenile Justice Center in creating their art pieces for an art healing therapy program
- Conducted research for and composed white papers on the topics of gun violence and trauma-informed care.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS/ CHALLENGES/ JOYS

Accomplishments

- Contributed in groups, forums, and community events
- Worked on tangible material for long-term use at MIC (i.e., newsletter, invitations, flyers)

Joys

- Forming relationships with the staff and clients at Mothers in Charge
- Working with specific populations (i.e., JJC, previously incarcerated folks)

Challenges

- Emotional toll of listening to the heavy topics, grief, and trauma

REFLECTION

Ujashi Shah: "This was such an eye-opening experience because I got a chance to work directly with and learn from people affected by the gun violence crisis in Philadelphia. The staff at Mothers in Charge were so welcoming from the beginning and I believe that I built strong, lasting relationships and became a part of this community. Not only did I get a chance to engage in activities I was interested in, including community engagement and public health research, I also learned valuable skills and lessons from people with lived experience and training that I hope to bring to my future career serving as a medical provider. I plan on continuing to do work in the realm of gun violence prevention and restorative justice."

Rachel Gray: "I loved my experience at Mothers in Charge. It was not an easy site to be at in terms of learning from folks' traumatic experiences, but it was necessary for gaining an in-depth understanding of the state of gun violence, specifically in Philadelphia. I learned so much from the staff, who are also mostly made up of people who have been impacted by gun violence and/or have dealt with previous incarceration. We had the amazing opportunity to sit in on a lot of groups that I would not have otherwise been given the opportunity to experience, and these groups really made all the difference in my experience. Real bonds were made with staff and clients alike, and the experience was invaluable and will weigh a lot in how I think about certain systems while continuing to pursue social work."