



Preventing Gun Violence: Inclusion?

A dialogue with Arne Duncan and Megan Ranney, moderated by Maribel Duran

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Megan Ranney:

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Samantha Cherry:

On the Value of Leadership podcast we make space for leading thinkers and doers to explore the gray area that often exists in solving society's greatest challenges. On this episode, we'll be in dialogue on one such issue for the United States' gun violence. In 2020, there were 600 mass shootings across the U.S., up from 461 in 2019. Gun sales are also on the rise, and every day it seems our phones buzz with a new report of a gun-related incident or death. With this glaring loss of life, why is it so hard to address? How do we go beyond the binary of gun control versus gun rights and get to the crux of this issue to save lives? Today, you'll hear from two leaders, both Aspen Global Leadership Network Fellows, taking approaches to reduce gun violence across the country. Arne Duncan was the U.S. Secretary of Education under the Obama administration. A native of Chicago South Side, he grew up in communities impacted by gun violence.

Samantha Cherry

After his tenure in public service, Duncan returned to his hometown with a sharpened focus on this issue and co-founded Chicago CRED, short for Creating Real Economic Destiny, an organization taking a holistic approach to reduce gun violence with a unique mix of street outreach, life coaching and counseling, violence prevention, workforce development, and advocacy. Megan Ranney is an emergency room physician and co-founder of the American Foundation for the Firearm Injury Reduction in Medicine, otherwise known as AFFIRM, an organization that is a part of the Aspen Institute's Health, Medicine & Society Program working to prevent firearm injuries and death with a public health approach.

We've gathered them to hear what they have to say on what leaders in our communities are doing wrong and right in addressing the seemingly intractable issue, and what action is really needed to get to the root causes of gun violence. This dialogue is moderated by Maribel Duran, the inaugural managing director on Equity and Inclusion at the Aspen Institute. As a Chicago native who began her career at the Chicago public schools, Maribel shares Arne's personal connection to gun violence as she saw it impact her community and students up close. In 2009, Maribel went to join Arne in the Obama administration as the special assistant in the Office of the Secretary and served eight years at the U.S. Department of Education.

Maribel Duran:

It is so good to be with you today. You both have unique approaches to the issue of reducing gun violence in the United States. I'd like to start this conversation, if I may, with each of you speaking briefly about the work you're doing in this space, and if possible, the earliest memory you have about when you first became aware of this issue. Megan, we'll start with you.

Megan Ranney:

So, my approach to the issue of firearm injury is approaching it as that, as firearm injury, rather than as gun violence, which means that I approach it by redefining it as a health or public health problem. I try to take it out of the ongoing debate between gun rights and gun control, and rather talk about firearm injuries as similar to car crash injuries, or drownings, or any other type of public health problem that we can apply the public health approach to, and then solve. We reduced the rate of car crash deaths by more than 70% over the last 40 years, not by banning cars, but by making cars safer, by educating parents about car seats, by increasing both knowledge and policies around drunk driving, and by not demonizing car owners, but rather working to make roads, cars and driving safer.

Megan Ranney:

And my entire approach to firearm injury is the same as that injury prevention approach that I would take to cars, which is it's about understanding both the mechanism, the firearm, and understanding what the drivers of injury are. And we know that driving drunk is more likely to lead to serious crash. We know that driving without a seatbelt is more likely to lead to severe injury. And so, my approach is about looking for the same things for firearms, and then finding ways to modify them. And inherent in that approach is partnership. Partnership with communities that are affected by firearm injury, whether they be urban or rural, whether they be men or women, regardless of whether they themselves are gun owners or non-gun owners.

Megan Ranney:

And it's also about partnership with the larger firearm owning community, and taking a culturally competent approach to how we have these discussions and how we reduce risk. In terms of your question about when I first became aware of firearm injury as a part problem, it was honestly in high school when a girl in my high school class was shot and killed. The issue has then reoccurred throughout my life. And I would say that where I became determined to make this a primary focus was during my residency. As you know I'm an emergency physician. And as case after case of preventable firearm injury and death came through the doors of my ER, I started to become determined to explore how we could change it.

Maribel Duran:

Thank you, Megan. I appreciate that very much. Arne, how about you?

Arne Duncan:

Yeah. Well, we need so many different approaches and we have so far to go. I just so appreciate what Megan and her team are doing. So, mine is a different approach with exactly the same aim, I think, of just trying to keep people safe. I've started a small nonprofit here in Chicago called Chicago CRED. We've actually been at it for five years now. It's amazing how fast time flies. And we just, unfortunately, Maribel, as you know, we have a state of emergency, a state of crisis in our hometown here in Chicago, where we

are six times more violent than New York, three or four times more violent than LA. And it doesn't have to be this way, it shouldn't be this way, and the amount of fear and trauma that our kids in the South and West Sides are going up with is pretty extraordinary. We just directly with most of the young men, but increasingly young women who are most at risk of shooting and being shot.

Arne Duncan:

The good news is we're working with the right guys, the bad news is they are 3000 times more likely to be shot than the average Chicago citizen, and we're just trying to give men and women a reason to put down the guns. And they're five parts of our program. We have an outreach component, which is our HR function. We're out in the streets recruiting folks into the program. Once people come in, everyone has a life coach. And we always say that experience can be the best teacher, just doesn't have to be your own experience, and you can learn from the experience of others. Everyone has a clinician, and I can't overstate the impact of a lifetime of trauma. Working through that trauma is just absolutely critical and just an ongoing effort. And we have an education team. We've had lots and lots of folks get their high school diplomas, which has been really amazing.

Arne Duncan:

And then a job piece. And our goal is to move folks from the illegal economy, which here in Chicago, unfortunately not always, but way too often leads to violence to the legal economy. And so, with our partners we're serving about 500 men on the South and West Sides. The city is off about 50% in violence. Over the past two years, our guys are 50% less likely to be involved in a 48% reduction in victimization. So we are not the answer, but we think we are frankly a pretty important part of the answer. We just have to continue to scale and work of a lot more folks. Let's say we're 70, 75% effective, but we're reaching at most 10% of those who are impacted. And so, while we are saving individual lives and transforming lives, and that's hugely important.

Arne Duncan:

So this virus is still spreading through our communities, and so we have to serve a lot more. And the last second part of your question, when I first became aware that this issue. That's a tough question. My earliest memories at four or five is my mother's afterschool program. The Blackstone Rangers wanted to use the church where she was working as an arsenal. They wanted to store their guns now there, and the minister said they couldn't, so they fire bombed the church. And so we had to move everything down the block to a different church. And so my earliest memory is carrying crates of books down the block to the other place. So I think that was probably my earliest exposure.

Maribel Duran:

Thanks for sharing that, Arne. And Megan you talked about the education piece, and Arne in some ways you were educated in a way that perhaps you had no choice but to start learning at an early age and understand how this impacts many people's lives across, certainly Chicago, but across the country and across the globe. My earliest memory was my neighbor who at 15 was shot and killed as well, but it became much more of the norm. And so the way out in the conversation leading out of that statistic is critically important. There are some policies that a high majority of Americans support, like preventing people with mental illnesses from purchasing guns and background checks with over 80% indicating so. But favorability drops with policies like a federal database for tracking gun sales and bans on weapons. What would you say the values intention here are around gun violence, gun safety and firearm injury prevention and gun rights?

Megan Ranney:

It's interesting. I think there's a segment of us that think that policy fixes everything, and policy is certainly an important in part of public health and injury prevention, but it is never sufficient. Just look at texting and driving, right? Many of our cities and states have rules against or laws against texting and driving, and yet if you're driving down a city street or the highway you sure as heck are going to see someone with their phone out in front of them because those laws are not enforced and there's not cultural buy-in. We've seen the same thing around mask mandates, and the degree to which in some states mandates have actually created more opposition to masks than perhaps existed prior. And I think there's that same tension in the policies around firearm injury. I'm going to be honest, many of the policies that are debated right now have no evidence behind them. There are some that have been shown to significantly decrease firearm suicide, which PS, represents two-thirds of firearm deaths across this country, as well as firearm homicide.

Megan Ranney:

Those are laws around things like removing firearms from people who've been convicted of domestic violence, or some background check laws. There are also other laws such as stand-your-ground, which have been shown to be associated with an increase, particularly in firearm homicide. But a lot of the policies that are being intubated, we've got nothing on one side or the other. And so my approach to policy is there are certainly some policies that make sense and which will make a difference, but equally important is getting that cultural buy-in, because if you pass a law that's not going to be enforced by the police, or that's not going to be followed by the populace, all it does is create a group of folks who thinks that they don't need to follow the laws. And so I think that policy needs to be balanced with the rest of the approach.

Megan Ranney:

Another thing that I'll say around mental illness is that when folks look at mass shootings, which of course are the most public and horrifying episodes of firearm injury and gun violence that our country is exposed to, we make two fatal errors, no pun intended, in our evaluation of those mass shootings. The first is that we blame them on mental illness, because, oh, my gosh, you have to be crazy to go and shoot up a bunch of people. The reality is, is that those are often not tied to mental illness. Domestic violence is actually a far stronger correlate with being someone who commits a mass shooting than serious mental illness.

Megan Ranney:

And people who have serious mental illness are more likely to be victims of violence, either against themselves or others against them. So victims of kind of assault or victims of suicide than to commit violence against others. So that's the first flaw. The second flaw is that mass shootings, again, are a drop in the bucket of firearm injury and death in this country. The vast majority of firearm deaths are suicides. The vast majority of firearm injuries are assaults, which are often committed with handguns and very rarely have anything to do with mental illness.

Maribel Duran:

You touched on the policy and the need for a balanced approach, and oftentimes what one here is that it exists in a binary, but we know that preventing injury and death is a gray area. So, Arne, how do we create that cultural buy-in that Megan speaks about?

Arne Duncan:

Well, that's an amazing question and I'm not going to have an amazing answer to it. But what I honestly thought, Maribel, when we were in the Chicago public schools and tragically we were losing a child on average every two weeks to the gun violence. What I really thought was that we just didn't value black and brown lives, and that just wasn't a factor. And then obviously when we were in DC together, the worst day, and not speaking out of school here. President Obama's talked about it. Our worst day in DC, his worst day in the job was the day of the Sandy Hook massacre. And we never imagined 20 white babies and five teachers and a principal being killed. And he went down the next day, and the vice president, now the president, Biden, and I went down a couple days later. And I'll never forget spending time with those families and siblings. It's was unimaginable.

Arne Duncan:

And subsequent to that, we as a nation, we got zero done in terms of gun legislation. And I really have said I think that's our biggest failure. So what came to believe, and I hopefully I'm wrong, but I really came to believe that it's not black, white, Latino, we just value our guns now more than we value our children. And I don't want to say I gave up on the policy side, but coming out of the administration as a private citizen I didn't truly know what I could do on the policy side. And so what I thought I could do is give people a reason to put down the guns, that we have way too many guns and this is a national issue. Chicago has some of the strongest gun laws anywhere, but I always say we're not an island.

Arne Duncan:

We don't have a mode around us and the guns pour into us from Indiana, which is 25 minutes from where I live right now. So, we need to keep working on the policy side, we need to keep trying to change hearts and minds as Megan talked about, but I just didn't feel I could personally continue to wait on policy to change, and I just wanted to do what I could try and practically do. And I thought I had given the chaos, given the huge proliferation of guns. I didn't quite know what to do about that, but thought I had some ability to get people to do something different. So that's where I'm spending the vast majority of my time.

Megan Ranney:

And Arne if I can add in there, when I think about policy changes that can make a huge difference, so many of the policy changes that would make a dramatic difference in firearm injury and death in this country actually have nothing to do with guns, right? It's about mitigating our history of structural racism. It's about things like greening vacant lots, providing good educational opportunities, dealing with, as you mentioned, the generational ripple effect of exposure to trauma. If we really want to talk about stopping firearm injury and death in this country there are a lot of other things to talk about in addition to talking about the gun.

Arne Duncan:

No, it's a great, great point. I always say that the violence is actually just the final manifestation of all kinds of other structural failures, societal failures. And if we deal with those there are no healthy communities that have high levels of gun violence. And it's easy to say, it's easy to articulate, it's hard to do. All we're trying to do is just build some healthy communities.

Maribel Duran:

You touch on certainly the root causes. And Megan you expanded in saying that let's look at outside of the gun rights conversation. If you can dig down a little deeper, given what you've researched, and Arne what you've led through both of you, you start to really uncover some of these root causes. You

mentioned education, the inequity is there. You start to talk about systemic racism, and you start thinking about and seeing how this narrative plays out, what we pay attention to, what we fund. How can we help leaders certainly understand these root causes? How do you think about this in your own approaches?

Megan Ranney:

So I'll say there's a few things from my perspective, and I'm going to imagine that Arne has a slightly different twist on it, but there's going to be a lot of overlap. One of the first things is, to be completely honest, we know something about root causes, but not a lot, because we had virtually no federal funding to research the root causes of firearm injury from 1996 until 2020 when the CDC finally got appropriated money from Congress to fund firearm injury and prevention research for the first time since 1996. I am fortunate enough to be the recipient of one of the grants that was given out by the CDC in 2020 specifically to look at creating intervention programs for rural youth and for youth involved with 4-H Shooting Sports communities, but there is so much we don't know.

Megan Ranney:

So when we talk about root causes right now we're talking in real broad terms, and there's a lot more specificity that's needed. So that's the first thing, is we need data, right? We need real stuff that you can sink in your teeth into and that's actionable. The second thing is that we need narratives. And when I look at some of the things that I have done throughout my career in working on firearm injury, probably the most powerful is not the research that I'm doing. Maybe isn't even the community partnerships that I've created, which I'm so proud of. But when I look at the things that I have done that have been most impactful, it has been the sharing of stories. It was after Parkland getting a bunch of docs together to share stories about victims of firearm injury that we've treated and our personal stories.

Megan Ranney:

And then, of course, in a fall of 2018 helping to co-lead the This Is Our Lane campaign, where physicians, nurses, paramedics, respiratory therapists, social workers from across the country shared on social media, their stories about why firearm injury is our lane in the healthcare system. And then tragically one of our own colleagues, Dr. Tamara O'Neal, was shot and killed walking out of Mercy Hospital. Her ex-fiancee met her at the door. So she was walking out of the ER, killed her, a pharmacist, and a police officer. I think her story crystallized the degree to which this is all of us. And so we need that data, but we also need those stories, because at the end of the day when you're talking to policy makers or to the folks who sit in the halls of power, those personal stories matter just as much, if not more, than the statistics.

Arne Duncan:

Just to build on, Megan, that's such an important point. And I basically don't go speak anywhere by myself anymore. I just sort of take our guys and I interview them and their stories are so just extraordinarily real and raw, and compelling and honest. They've been to DC and San Diego, and I'm going to go to Boston in a couple weeks. And just having people hear the stories it is so complex and complicated. This is the greatest work I've ever done. There's very little black and white. It's unbelievably complex. Who's a hero or who's a villain is very complicated, and how do the police fit into this? Some are heroes, some are villains, but just sort of meeting people where they are and learning not to judge and just figuring out who can contribute and how. Secondly, folks often say, "Oh, that's great. You're giving people a second chance."

Arne Duncan:

And I actually reject that. I think in the vast majority of cases it's a first chance, that every system in our guys' lives, their families, their schools, their nonprofits, their churches failed them, and we're giving them a chance late in life, 17, 18, 19, 20. Some are older, 25, 26. They made irrational choice, which folks have a hard time understanding, to pick up a gun for a whole host of reasons, almost none of which were aggressive. It was all sort of around fear and protection and what we call playing defense. I say all the time that our guys who are often perceived, and I understand it, as a threat, as part of the problem, I really think they are the solution, and it's our job to walk with them, learn from them, empower them, and they're going to lead us to a better place.

Arne Duncan:

But it's super complicated, it's very counterintuitive, it's frankly scary to lots of folks, but the only way to break that down... Again, we have all the data, we have all the analytics. We track data relentlessly and how we position outreach workers and where we go is all data driven. Non-aggression [...] peace treaties is hugely, hugely important, but what Megan started with that that is critical but it's insufficient. And having people start to understand the humanity of folks who have done some things that unfortunately have had tragic consequences for the community and for themselves, but are now absolutely key. We can't win this without their leadership, without their intellectual strength and their hearts and their compassion.

Maribel Duran:

Arne, you speak about your guys. Give us a sense of who your guys are. Paint a picture for us, ages, little bit of background. How do you meet them? How do they get to know about your program?

Arne Duncan:

Every story is different. I don't ever want to oversimplify. And again, we try and go with the data. So, 80% of the violence in Chicago is driven by 15 neighborhoods, and it's on the South and West Side. So that's where we focus 75 to 80% of those shooting being shot, or young black men, 17 to 24, and the profile of the victim and the perpetrators is literally the same person. And so that's our sweet spot. We have guys much older. We now have a women's program, which is really, really important. We have three groups of teens, because unfortunately teens 13, 14, 15 are increasingly involved in shooting and the carjackings here. So we're not sort of set in stone, we just sort of go where the need is. So how do we get folks? It's all word of mouth. Again, no one's mandated, no probation officer, or judge mandates anyone. This is all street outreach who have relationships with the different clicks and because of their credibility to bring folks in.

Maribel Duran:

You both touched on just how incredibly difficult and complex figuring this out is. Megan, you talk about demystifying the narratives around this particular issue. And I started listing, you talked about mental illness, you talk about domestic violence, domestic abuse, generational trauma. There's the health inequities, education gaps that, Arne, you've spent, I would say, most of your life working on. You also talk about irrational choices. So we have policies, we have data, we have stories. Is it a rational choice that leaders are choosing not to pay attention to the root cause? What is it about these particular issues, this underlying issues, and perhaps a little bit about these root causes, that we perhaps are afraid to understand, to tell a little bit more truths around? And what would you say to that? About how leaders currently face and try to address all of these inequities and issues that you talk about.

Megan Ranney:

So I think that one of the big issue is his hopelessness, right? It's what Arne said. That he gave up on policy after Sandy Hook. I think whether you're coming from the right or the left, there's a sense that this is an issue that cannot be solved. I deeply disagree with that, but I think that the path that we have been taking to create solutions is a false one. It's part of the reason that I co-founded the American Foundation for the Firearm Injury Reduction in Medicine, also known as AFFIRM, which is now part of the Aspen Institute. So it's now a firm at the Aspen Institute, which brings together firearm owners and non-owners, and brings together health professionals and public health professionals, survivors, and families, to try to create a different path forward that is based in community in risk reduction, and in having open and honest conversations about the fact that firearm injury happens, period. I mean, that in and of itself is a huge discussion to have.

Megan Ranney:

And then the next part which is huge in and of itself is the acknowledgement that it can be prevented. And whether I am having that discussion with Arne's guys or with my local Nonviolence Institute here in Providence, or whether I'm having that discussion with a group of hunters or farmers, or guys that own firearms for self protection or police officers. The acknowledgement that firearm injury happens and it can be prevented is in and of itself a radical reframing of the conversation. And is something that I am so committed to, because if we can't acknowledge the problem and then acknowledge that there might be some sort of hope on the other side, of course, no one's going to do anything. Who wants to go out and put our neck on the line for something that's not going to make a difference?

Megan Ranney:

So I think it starts with that discussion and then it, of course, has to follow by having evidence behind it. It has to follow by things like CRED working with Northwestern and creating data to show what a difference they make. By my working with 4-H Shooting Sports and showing that we can help kids be ambassadors for true firearm safety in their community. Those are the types of things where we can then get policy makers to go out and put things on the line. And I will say here, one more thing, and then I'll welcome Arne's comments, is that President Biden is doing this. He made some great announcements, kind of say in the first week of November, around firearm suicide prevention, as well as community violence prevention. He is taking things that do have evidence behind them and putting the weight of his office behind them to help put them in place. And I think that that's our way forward.

Arne Duncan:

Two quick dots, one sort of local and one sort of more broad. And again, Megan is so [inaudible 00:26:44] about how you need to reframe and articulate things. So, here in Chicago, we're trying to talk about increasing public safety. And increasing public safety with most of public, that means more police. But here in Chicago, again, we're so much more violent than New York and LA and we actually have more police than both for those. So in our local context, more police has not led to more safety. And we all need safety. The violence here, Maribel, is spreading to my community everywhere. And so, just trying to get the public to think about if we had more of what we had at scale, more social workers, more clinicians, more outreach workers, more life coaches, more job developers, could that lead to a significant, a dramatic increase in public safety. I'm actually convinced that it could.

Again, that can be a little scary. To be clear, this is not defund the police or anything like this, it's just rethinking public safety. And the police have an important role to play. Police here have build trust. One of the biggest drivers of violence here in Chicago is, unfortunately, almost nothing gets solved. Only about 18% of incidents with a gun lead to any kind of arrest. So 82% go unsolved. And so probably the biggest

driver, frankly, is retaliation. We don't feel justice and criminal justice system, you seek street justice. A huge amount of our time is spent, unfortunately, trying to stop the next shooting, talking to guys who have lost a family member, lost someone around their block.

Arne Duncan:

Unfortunately, we've had guys whose children have been shot, which is one of the hardest stuff we've dealt with, and having them not revert to a lifetime returning on the streets and not retaliate is hugely important. So that's one set of reframing around public safety. The larger one is folks like Megan do incredibly hard things. Researchers find a cure for cancer, find a cure for whatever it might be. This one is not actually intellectually that hard. And basically every other country has solved this much better, not solved, but done a much, much better job, just don't have anywhere near the rates of death that we have. And just so a concrete example, as you know, Maribel, my wife's from Australia and in '96 there was a mass shooting in actually her home state of Tasmania, Port Arthur.

Arne Duncan:

And at that point, the prime minister who was conservative, sort of equivalent of a Republican prime minister, put in place gun legislation. And for the next 20 years of in Australia they did not have a single mass shooting. You just going to sort of think about the gift that he gave his children, to the country. He ended up losing his job in part because he did that, but that was that's leadership, Maribel. You asked about leadership, that's courage. We have failed to do that. And mass shootings here are almost a daily occurrence now. It's just something that our kids grow up with. And it doesn't have to be that way, is not that way in other countries. It's not that we've lacked the intellectual capacity here, we have lacked the courage to keep our kids and our communities safe.

Megan Ranney:

Arne, I love your points about trust and courage. And as you guys both know I'm coming straight off of my executive seminar from Aspen, and I think about the degree to which our social contract has broken down around this issue, right? People are no longer showing up and believing in the larger self, the larger kind of community, but rather it's each person out for themselves right now, which to me feels like the underlying driver of so much of this.

Maribel Duran:

As you were speaking to, Arne, I think about accountability. And you both talked about the sense of hope, or in some cases hopelessness. How do the people that you've worked with, particularly in the community level, those people who have been most impacted by gun violence, how do they feel in what the narrative is in the public discourse? How does it resonate with them? Do they see themselves in it? What frustrates them perhaps if you can speak to what you've heard at the ground level about how they feel?

Arne Duncan:

Yeah. And I want to be real clear, I'm not at all hopeless on this issue. It's been a really tough two years here. I'm actually more hopeful than I've ever been, because we're seeing the results and we're seeing the impact, so it's really a hunger and desire, and frankly, frustration, that we're not able to scale and sort of get the kind of public investments in this. So we have done it all through philanthropy, which has been amazing, but we have to get the state and county and city, and we need all those levels of government to sort of invest and sort of take this type of work to scale. So I don't want to begin to speak for the whole community. They feel their lives aren't valued. Our guys say all the time that long as they're shooting each other nobody cares, but if someone gets shot in a more middle class, frankly, more white neighborhood,

those solve rates are much higher. So our guys will say, "As long as we're shooting each other, nobody cares." And that's their perception of reality.

Megan Ranney:

So, I'll speak not on behalf of, because as Arne says, I could never do that, but the communities that I work with really kind of go across the full spectrum of firearm injury. So there's the folks, largely black and brown young men, who live in generally urban areas who Arne has already well articulated, kind of that sense. There are healthcare providers. And I will say that their perception is a sense that this is hopeless. We show up, we patch up the wounds, we sometimes save people we often don't. Nobody addresses the underlying trauma and we just kind of send them on their way. And so there's a sense of hopelessness there that is shifting a little with the increasing funding and attention to research and to the things that healthcare providers can do, but as Arne says, it needs resources.

Megan Ranney:

And then I'll also say on the part of firearm owners, I... Again, AFFIRM and the Aspen Institute core value is inclusivity and community. And firearm owners feel that they are demonized, and do not feel that they have the opportunity to be part of the solution, which I think is just a huge miss on our part, because depending on which survey you look at, somewhere between 30 and 40% of adult Americans own a firearm. And we can't cut more than a third of our adult citizenry out of the discussion and hope to make progress. So I think it is critically important for us to elevate and include all voices. We need voices from across the spectrum, people that own firearms for a wide variety of reasons. And honestly, self protection is the most common reason I hear no matter which group I'm working with.

Maribel Duran:

We covered a lot today. And we know that we weren't going to solve these issues in one conversation and a hundred or a thousand. We began to talk about the weight and the necessary partnerships. And Arne you talked about it. It needs to be counties, cities, states, whole of government, paying attention to this, the importance of elevating the missing voices, perhaps, and the missing stories and the public discourse and narrative. And we talk a lot about hope. We also know that this is the Aspen Institute and we talk a lot about leadership. So I wonder what values do you hold close as you do this work?

Megan Ranney:

To me community is a huge value. And you can define community in a thousand different ways, but that is probably the most strongly held value that I have when it comes to addressing this issue. There is a belief in truth and in data. I mean, I'm a deep believer in evidence and in research, and I hold that dear. But I'll also say that a driving value is that of liberty. And I think of liberty as defined in a lot of different ways. There is the way that we typically think about gun rights in terms of liberty, but I also think of it in terms of freedom from fear. And when you think back to our declaration of independence, right? It's life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. And Liberty follows life. And so you got to have liberty, you have to have the ability to live a healthy trauma-free life. And so I think about how do we redefine liberty around this issue? But we can't escape it, because if we try to pretend that that's not part of our discussion, we're never going to be able to move forward.

Arne Duncan:

It's a deep question to end on. You got me thinking here, so I had a couple. I don't know if the values or statements, maybe one is just, for me, the importance of being proximate and Brian Stevenson is one of my heroes. And you can't do this from a downtown office, you can't do this from some place, and just

being in streets, in community, frankly, putting yourself in situations that are scary, that are dangerous. You can't be part of this if you're not in the streets. And so just being proximate and listening is hugely important. Secondly, the amount of trauma that everyone, including our team, experiences is tremendous. And just understanding that, and trying to take care of each other, take care of our guys, how to keep going through that, how to heal, but also how to feel it.

Arne Duncan:

I always am most scared of our guys, not when they're angry or upset, but when they're numb, that's when things go really haywire. And so as much as I hate the heartbreak and I hate the pain, I also prefer that to be numb and want to embrace that and learn from it and grow through it and use that as fuel to get better. The third theme for me would be redemption. Some of the most important folks doing this work have also inflicted the most damage on the community. And it's easy to throw them away, it's easy to say, "Lock them up forever," but they are leading us to where we need to go. And so this idea of taking people where they are, not what are they doing today? Or what are they doing tomorrow? And that redemption is possible. And then the final one, the huge hope is that transformation is possible.

Arne Duncan:

The joy of our work is we could see men and women every day who have been through a tremendous amount, who are making incredibly courageous decisions to do been radically different. Many are born leaders, and they're just leading in a different direction. And so, I get the joys. I get to see every day what is possible when we provide opportunity, when we provide supports, when you give people a sense of what else they can do with their lives. And just to close we're taking a team down in New Orleans in two days to go help clean up down there. We did month ago. And just to see our men and women giving back and working so hard. And you see that it's the power of humanity, and it's unbelievably humbling and important and inspiring lesson.

Maribel Duran:

I don't think I could have ended that any better. We often talk about the opposite of love it's not hate, it is fear. And as I hear both of you speak, the antidote to all of this is the hope and the visibility of these stories, the visibility of your work and your tremendous leadership and courage, and taking this on day after day up against so many things that perhaps feel overwhelming is just incredible. So I appreciate you both taking the time and for the work that you do more importantly. Thank you.

Samantha Cherry:

That's it for this episode of the Value of Leadership. After listening to this dialogue, we're reminding ourselves that there are ways to break free of the two-sided and perhaps false binary that dominates the discourse around guns in the United States. And as our guest said, one conversation, one organization, or even one solution isn't stop gun violence, but this type of open-minded and humanistic approach could be exactly what we need to get unstuck on the issue. To learn more on CRED, visit chicagocred.org, and you can learn more about AFFIRM on the Aspen Institute's website. Both will be linked in our show notes along with recent studies on gun violence prevention to continue your thinking on this issue.

Samantha Cherry:

The Value of Leadership is a podcast from the Aspen Institute's Aspen Global Leadership Network, AGLN. AGLN's mission is to develop authentic high integrity leaders people who are to proactively confronting societal challenges individually and collectively, in order to create a more just, free, and equitable society. And Fellows are putting their values to work all across the globe. To learn more about the network and the work of our Fellows, visit agln.aspeninstitute.org. Thanks to everyone who made this episode possible, our guests Arne Duncan and Megan Ranney, our moderator Maribel Duran, and special thanks to Phil Javellana and Colby Hartburg. I'm Samantha Cherry, and thank you for listening.