4,338 people were shot in Chicago in 2016. While the staggering physical effects of this violence are well known, the psychological effects are just as devastating. Residents living in violent environments can suffer post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) symptoms similar to those experienced by combat veterans.

Meanwhile, 350,000 veterans call Chicago home, and as many as one-third experience PTSD. Enter Peace Boulevard, a “church without walls,” to borrow a phrase from veterans’ organization Volunteers of America.

Peace Boulevard infills Chicago’s boulevard system with a therapeutic landscape that links veterans and residents to each other and the community through the reclamation of vacant lots. In partnership with local organizations, these lots evolve into healing gardens and restorative spaces for memorialization and reflection, where people can engage with nature, find social support and regain control over their lives and community.

Peace Boulevard offers healing to individuals, to the neighborhood and to Chicago, rebuilding connections and manifesting hope.
San Javier, a slum of Medellín was once the most violent neighborhood in the most violent city in the world. AgroArte (2002) was developed to show resistance to the gang and military warfare that consumed the town.

In an effort to heal the community, citizens, led by local rapper, El Aka, remade the roadsides and empty lots with gardens, artwork, music and memorials. Fifteen years later, the streets are lush with plant life and neighbors continue to meet every Saturday. Mornings are spent gardening. Afternoons and evenings are spent creating art, poetry and hip hop, bringing young and old into intergenerational exchange. AgroArte, short for “Agrarian Art,” has allowed citizens to reclaim and conserve memories of loved ones, while creating new social networks and empowering the community through horticulture and the arts.


Plastic bottles, reused as plant pots, bear the names of loved ones. “Sowing Memory” mural created by local graffiti artists.