

When did the Byrne initiative start and how did it start?

In 2013, there were a number of grant opportunities through the U.S. Department of Justice's Byrne Criminal Justice Innovation (BCJI) program. The BCJI is a part of the Neighborhood Revitalization Initiative (NRI), which helps communities develop place-based, community-oriented strategies to change challenged neighborhoods into neighborhoods of opportunity. The City of Milwaukee applied for a BCJI grant through the Milwaukee Police Department, the Local Initiative Support Corporation (LISC), Safe and Sound, and Washington Park Partners and the grant proposal was accepted for Washington Park in 2013. District Attorney John Chisholm, who built Milwaukee's nationally recognized Community Prosecution Unit and is focused on building neighborhood collective efficacy, designated me to work on this project with the Milwaukee Police Department and our community partners.

Why Washington Park?

Washington Park has the appropriate blend of local stakeholders, resident leaders, law enforcement focus, and opportunity for positive change. With that foundation, the Washington Park community is an excellent place to collaboratively work to improve the overall quality of life in the community. Washington Park also had and continues to have a significant investment from its residents, Habitat for Humanity, Department of Neighborhood Services Commissioner Art Dahlberg, Washington Park Partners, Milwaukee Police Chief Edward Flynn, Milwaukee County District Attorney John Chisholm, Safe and Sound, and LISC.

Based on the work, what have you learned?

We have developed many important neighborhood improvement strategies, but the most important lesson learned by both representatives of law enforcement agencies and residents is that the fundamental building blocks of neighborhood improvement is consistent, effective communication and responsiveness. Understanding this, District 3 Commander Jason Smith and I have devoted significant time and resources into understanding the concerns of the community and creating multiple methods to communicate with businesses, residents, and community-based organizations. Nothing can create legal cynicism more than citizens reaching out to law enforcement and feeling that their voices are not being heard, and this can discourage citizen input. When we lose citizen engagement, law enforcement loses its ability to be its most effective.

I was told that letters were sent to homeowners in the neighborhood, what did the letters say?

We have a number of different landlord/property owner/business owner letters that serve multiple purposes. Generally, however, a letter from the District Attorney's Office has the following parts: (1) an explanation of the problematic activity; (2) a brief explanation of the process to abate the problems; and (3) a request to meet me to discuss how we can work together to abate the unwanted behavior. The meeting with the owners often leads to a positive result where we see a significant reduction in the unwanted behavior.

A letter from Captain Jason Smith is often the start of legally designating a property as a "nuisance." Captain Smith and I make significant attempts to gain compliance through informal methods, however, if we cannot succeed, we take the path of enforcement through the Department of Neighborhood Services and the City Attorney's Office, which can be a costly path for owners.

I was also told that areas with significant nuisance issue are going to be investigated, could you explain what qualifies as a significant nuisance issue?

A significant nuisance is not easily defined, which is why we heavily rely on communication with our residents and business owners. Residents are our eyes and ears to the problems that are occurring in their neighborhood. Anytime we hear from a resident that crime or nuisance issues are disturbing the quality of life on a block, we intervene and attempt to stop the activity. Resolution to the problems can sometimes be swift but often they take significant time to abate, so we try to keep concerned citizens informed on the process as we progress toward abatement.

How do Washington Park Partners and Safe and Sound contribute to the crime analysis?

WPP and Safe and Sound play a critical role in providing a connection between law enforcement and the community. WPP and Safe and Sound staff work hand-in-hand with the local community groups to increase resident engagement, gather information on problematic properties, and provide resources to citizens to help them resolve whatever issue they are facing. The WPP and Safe and Sound Community Prosecution

Coordinator, Mandy Potapenko keeps track of the resident complaints, inform the police and me as to the neighborhood concerns, and then in turn relay our interventions back to the community.

What's the plan to prevent crime/unwanted activity for the future?

We know that we must address crime and nuisance issues as a team, and when we have our team focused on a problem, we can intervene from multiple angles. Our Community Prosecution Unit consists of a Community Prosecutor, police officers, Department of Neighborhood Services inspectors, Department of Corrections agents, LISC, Washington Park Partners, City Attorney's Office, a Domestic Violence Victim Advocate, Safe and Sound, and, most importantly, residents and business owners. We have developed a person-based and place-based strategy where we can combine all of our partners' abilities and tools to lower unwanted behavior and increase quality of life.

What do you hope to accomplish with the analysis?

Our Washington Park work has assisted us in developing best practices for intervention tactics. For example, we've learned to analyze problematic issues through a block-by-block analysis. To understand what is truly occurring on a challenged block, we need to speak to residents and analyze the data connected to each house on that block. That data collection and analysis allows for the most effective intervention strategy by our Community Prosecution Team.