

PROFILES OF EFFECTIVE PRACTICE IN NEIGHBOURHOOD RENEWAL CORPORATIONS

WEST BROADWAY COMMUNITY ORGANIZATION (WBCO)

www.westbroadway.mb.ca

CREATING A NEIGHBOURHOOD SAFETY PLAN

Before Greg Macpherson became the Executive Director of WBCO, he earned his stripes as a rental and safety coordinator at WBCO and Spence Neighbourhood Association. Under Greg's watch, WBCO developed a comprehensive five-year safety plan. The safety plan seeks to address significant community issues such as graffiti, break-ins, and violence through preventative measures like youth programming and environmental improvements. He came into the role of Safety Coordinator with a long list of plans and ideas for the West Broadway neighbourhood, but soon realized that the funding for community oriented prevention projects was difficult to come by, and the most easily funded programs were community patrols. However, doing some research and using a holistic approach has led to more multifaceted and effective action on improving neighbourhood safety.

Researching to Inform Practice

Fortunately, developing a wider ranging and more in-depth safety program that addresses root causes of safety concerns can begin from your desk with a single initiative. This requires some important legwork at the onset, but having solid information about your community's broader safety needs and priorities can then open doors to additional funding streams.

To launch this process, Greg consulted data and resources from Statistics Canada, the City of Winnipeg, and the Winnipeg Police Service. Similar sources exist for many municipalities, although potential changes to the short-form census may make it increasingly difficult to compile this kind of data.

Through his comprehensive neighbourhood research, Greg has gained a much better understanding of West Broadway's demography and priorities. He also discovered value in learning West Broadway's history of informal and grassroots organizing around issues of security that took place long before the formal safety plan or the WBCO were created. In addition, identifying community members that are informally active in cleaning up empty lots, boarding up windows, or organizing groups like Neighbourhood Watches can help you build relationships with citizens who will be instrumental in carrying out community safety work. Tapping into existing networks can also increase knowledge of the history of successful and failed safety-related actions.

WBCO's safety philosophy is to start with what is feasible, use that opportunity to inform yourself about the safety realities in your community, mobilize those who are already active on safety issues in the community, and then build on this

knowledge and capacity to develop a full safety strategy.

Consultation Enriches Research

Demographic, statistical, and reported crime data are very useful for understanding the root causes and challenges facing your community. However, beyond these numbers are the real experiences people have with crime – perceived or actual. To learn more about this, WBCO went through an extensive consultation process with the West Broadway community.

They began with an online survey to collect information from the community at a minimal cost. To ensure representation of lower income and vulnerable demographics that may not have a computer or internet access, they also completed many personal interviews. Through the interviewing process, WBCO staff ensured the participation of people in marginalized shelter situations, such as rooming houses. Alongside these individual responses, they also held a number of community consultations and block safety audits to get the business and organizational communities involved, as well as to gain a better physical sense of the neighbourhood and the safety issues.

Balancing Perceptions and Reality

From this in-depth consultation process, WBCO began to realize that the perception of crime or the perceived lack of safety (legitimate or not) is of nearly the same importance to people in the community as the actual prevalence of crime. Recognizing that these perceptions are often rooted in feelings of isolation, distrust, and fear, WBCO focuses on community development solutions rather than simply increasing security. They host barbecues, feasts, community gatherings, and partner with other organizations to facilitate relationships between residents and make it easy for people to connect. One profound outcome of this strategy has been establishing a mechanism for encouraging positive interactions between room-

ing house tenants and landlords.

Dealing with the perceptions of crime and building stronger relationships must be accompanied by concrete actions that address real safety issues. A program providing lock and deadbolts to people living in insecure conditions was an early initiative that WBCO used to immediately improve safety.

This kind of simple yet impactful action is essential, as crime often happens to and among residents of marginalized housing. Improving the safety of living conditions for vulnerable community members will have an immediate impact, and will also help the NRC form relationships with the people actually involved in or impacted by crime – not just those who are worried about it.

Become a ‘Translator’ for the Community

Healthy relationships with law enforcement officials, business owners, and neighbourhood residents are also important in building a safer community. NRC’s are well situated to act as a liaison between these often segmented groups of people. Greg recommends thinking about yourself as a translator who can talk to community members, police, and business owners in their respective ‘languages’. Business owners can be encouraged to engage youth, to volunteer, and become familiar with the local community development initiatives as a way to build trust and tenure in the community at large.

Working as an intermediary to get police on board with a community safety plan is also valuable. Find out if your local policing body has any community based task forces or initiatives, as those would be good points of entry for building partnerships. The community policing department in Winnipeg, for example, is a valuable partner for NRCs to work with on local safety concerns.

Being respectful of police culture, as well as inviting police to every community event can help facilitate stronger relationships. In turn, stronger

“If you’re serious about making a dent in safety concerns, the people living in rooming houses need help now.”

relationships with the police department can also lead to gentler and more community-oriented policing strategies. This is particularly important when police are dealing with vulnerable or marginalized populations who are almost always over-represented in crime statistics.

Effective and Meaningful Action

WBCO improves safety by keeping kids active and engaged. In Greg's research, he found that a large percentage of crime takes place in the first few hours after school. Particularly in neighbourhoods with lots of kids and a lack of available resources or new funding options (plus a large percentage of working and single-parent families), it is important to build on existing capacity and activities available for youth. Support established programming and encourage local people to get involved in these programs as volunteers. As residents become more familiar with local children, the less anxious or suspicious they will be of them. And, as young people become more familiar with the local adults, the more they will be likely to respect the neighbourhood and the people in it.

Making visible, physical improvements also improves resident perceptions of the safety of their neighbourhood. "Crime prevention through environmental design" (CPTED) training is available to businesses and police to improve security through environmental design and physical improvements.

In addition, recognizing that limited resources might lead to small-scale strategies at the onset, focus on parts of the community that are the most in need of immediate improvement. According to Greg, this 'broken window theory' is effective be-

cause, "if you can change the visual representation of the community, it will begin to change the real experience of the community."

Healthy, Connected, Inclusive Communities are Safe Communities

Although WBCO has invested a great deal in safety measures, what really makes their approach effective is that they apply a safety lens across their broad spectrum of community development programs and initiatives such as housing, community gardening, and employment development work. By mobilizing people through community consultation, engagement events, and youth programming; by creating tangible business, residential, and streetscape improvement; and by nurturing effective partnerships with police, schools, and businesses, WBCO is able to address safety in collaborative, constructive, and positive ways.

To see the WBCO Safety Plan, and their safety related programs and resources go to <http://www.westbroadway.mb.ca/safety>. If you open the West Broadway Safety Plan 2010 link, and check out the Bibliography, you can see the different sources Greg used in preparing the plan.

*Find out about CPTED here:
(<http://www.cptedtraining.net/>).*

Canadian CED Network | Manitoba

**FIND THE OTHER 14 PROFILES AT:
WWW.CCEDNET-RCDEC.CA/MANITOBA/NRCFILES**