

Community Partnership Award
Many Cultures, One Community – Keeping Skokie Safe

In April 2015, after significant research, discussion and deliberation, the Village of Skokie Public Safety Commission recommended a comprehensive public safety awareness campaign to the Village Board entitled *Many Cultures, One Community – Keeping Skokie Safe*. The campaign encompasses a variety of components that involve multiple Village departments and community partners, with an overall goal of keeping the community safe by engaging and educating residents, exploring community partnerships and employing myriad Village resources that contribute to a secure, aesthetically pleasing environment that is essential to community safety and pride. The program was launched with success in 2015, and continues each summer.

Program Development Process

In October 2014, the commission embarked on a six-month public safety awareness campaign development process that involved numerous facilitated discussions, presentations by Village staff and a Northwestern University professor with expertise in community policing.

Geographic Focus Area

The commission determined that focusing on a portion of the community would maximize the campaign's impact. The Skokie Police Department developed an analysis map showing several densely-populated, proximate, multi-family area neighborhoods with concentrations of various crimes including battery, aggravated battery, assault, robbery and burglary. On the map below, which depicts the center of the total 10.2-square-mile community, the neighborhoods shaded in yellow were the sole program focus for the summer 2015 pilot program. Those shaded in green were the focus in summer 2016, with continued attention to the 2015 neighborhoods. The program focused on all four neighborhoods in summer 2017 and will again in 2018.



“Many Cultures” Program Components

Police Department Neighborhood Visits – the Skokie Police Department’s Community Outreach Police Substation, or “COPS” vehicle, began making regular visits to the focus-area neighborhoods. During the first two years, the COPS vehicle schedule was published each week, and the vehicle would park on various streets and near neighborhood parks for three hours on weekday afternoons/early evening or weekend days or early evenings. Efforts were made to ensure residents that police were there not to observe, but to engage. During the visits, police officers set up a table with crime prevention literature, multi-lingual village program and service information as well as treats and prizes. Residents were able to express concerns to officers, sign up for email alerts and register for the Neighborhood Watch program. Officers also walked the neighborhoods, knocking on doors to greet residents and leave behind crime prevention literature. Between 2015 and 2017, Skokie police officers spent a total of nearly 1,250 hours in

the neighborhoods and made contact with more than 7,300 residents. In addition, executive management staff including the village manager, police chief, marketing director and elected officials walked the neighborhoods with the officers and engaged with residents.

Community Partner Involvement – a number of community partners assist with the Many Cultures campaign. The Skokie Park District hosts three to four free hot dog cook out events at focus area neighborhood parks in conjunction with a COPS vehicle visit. The events include free games and lots of food, and neighbors come out in droves. In addition, the park district completely reconstructed a focus-area playground in which the village funded and installed lighting. The Skokie Public Library holds periodic children’s story time and library card registration drives at the COPS vehicle. Asian Human Services, a local non-profit health care agency, sends staff to several COPS vehicle visits each year to educate residents about their free and reduced-cost health care services. Members of the faith community, including a very active, primarily Black congregation, have joined COPS vehicle visits. The village’s Human Relations Commission partners with a large parent group at a school district to host a neighborhood block party each summer, always in conjunction with a COPS vehicle visit.

Public Works Department – each year, the Public Works Department deploys seasonal staff and street department crews for maintenance in the focus area neighborhoods. Curbs and signposts are painted, potholes are filled and pavement markings are refreshed. The village’s five-year tree trimming cycle was accelerated for the focus area neighborhoods to maximize street light effectiveness, and an after-hours street light survey is conducted in the early summer each year to check for burned out bulbs and overgrowth obstructions. In 2016, the village added streetlights to east-west streets in two of the four areas which were well received by residents and, according to a 2017 survey, increased their sense of neighborhood safety.

Property Standards Inspections – the Village’s Property Standards Division, in partnership with the Police Department, enforces the Village’s Neighborhood Integrity Ordinance that became effective in 2014 to compel landlords to better maintain their buildings and properties, require crime-free lease riders and increase communication between landlords, inspectors and the police. Each summer since 2015, inspectors spend additional time in the focus area neighborhoods to ensure that landlords are maintaining properties as required. Warnings and citations are given for overgrowth of weeds, litter, peeling paint, broken windows, etc. The overall focus is on compliance and communication with landlords.

Health Department, Human Services Division and Beautification Commission – staff from the Village’s Health Department and Human Services Division, including social workers and public health nurses, join police officers at the COPS vehicle neighborhood visits to meet residents and distribute information about their myriad free and low-cost services for adults, children and families. Members of the village’s Beautification Commission organize a clean-up and beautification project in a focus area park each year, and are joined by Public Safety Commissioners in the effort.

Program Results

Now entering its fourth year, the Many Cultures initiative has brought about positive change in the community and, specifically, in the focus-area neighborhoods. From a police perspective, large groups of teens and youths in their early 20s that used to roam unsupervised and intimidate residents are no longer present.

When the program first began, the police reported a 22 percent reduction in calls for service in the focus areas comparing the summer months at the beginning to the end of the same summer. Graffiti reports from the focus areas are down. According to the village’s police chief for

operations, “There has been a positive change in the focus area since we began. The quality of life seems to be much better...much more positive with much less criminal-related tones.

Families are out, kids are out playing, parks are fun and not a place for conflict. The change is dramatic.”

Budget

- Police Department
 - COPS Vehicle - \$280,000 (Note: primary purpose of COPS vehicle is to serve as a mobile command unit, with community relations as an ancillary, but important, additional use.)
 - Overtime for neighborhood visits - \$20,000 to \$25,000 annually.
 - Giveaways, food, fliers, postcards, etc. - \$2,500 to \$4,000.
- Public Works – no overtime costs; seasonal employees utilized.
- Health Department and Human Services Division – no overtime costs; comp time given to participating employees.

Conclusion

The *Many Cultures, One Community – Keeping Skokie Safe* initiative has channeled myriad village and community resources at densely populated multi-family neighborhoods to improve safety, educate residents, contribute to an aesthetically pleasing environment and improve the quality of life for residents. Community partnerships are essential to the success of the initiative, and have grown in number and strength as a result of the program.