

Tackle violence as a public health problem

By Susan Lloyd | Aug. 24, 2013

From 2008 to 2012, 114 Milwaukee youths, under the age of 21, died violent deaths: 105 were homicide victims and nine committed suicide. Seven in 10 (71%) were killed by a firearm, making gun violence the leading cause of death for young people in Milwaukee. Many of these victims lived in neighborhoods where, since 2008, the [Zilber Family Foundation](#) has invested in resident-led efforts to improve the quality of community life.

As a result of those efforts, we have learned from people who live and work in some of Milwaukee's most beleaguered neighborhoods about the consequences of gun violence, criminal behavior and social disorder. We've seen the effects of shootings and homicides, when minor disagreement meets a lethal weapon. We've learned about the effects of non-fatal gun injuries, such as traumatic brain and spinal cord injuries, post-traumatic stress and other psychological disorders and the trauma of witnessing the shooting death of a friend, classmate or sibling. We've seen how perceptions and fear of crime lead to the withdrawal of ordinary citizens from neighborhood life, further eroding the social cohesion, trust among neighbors and shared expectations about public order that are essential to community safety.

As a community, we know what to do. We can deal with crime and violence for what it is — a significant public health problem. Together, we can solve it by aligning existing efforts, expanding effective approaches and filling gaps. We have enough information and knowledge to launch a comprehensive public health initiative, one that will better protect our citizens and strengthen our neighborhoods. For starters, city leaders and citizens alike must step up and act on the evidence about the risks, consequences and social costs of crime. Along with several foundations and nonprofits, the Zilber Family Foundation is working closely with beat officers and residents to reduce crime and violence.

All of us must do more. Law enforcement, school officials, child care providers, pediatricians and other health professionals must provide parents and other adults with reliable information and practical guidance on how to minimize exposure to violence. Media must go beyond the familiar stories of guns, drugs and crime to convey accurate information about the probability of victimization and help put an end to fear-mongering.

Business and civic leaders, nonprofit providers, neighborhood groups and ordinary citizens must double their efforts that produce significant improvements in community safety. We must lift up the value of local law enforcement partnerships with residents and community groups and provide more funding for block watches, organizing and other activities that promote neighborliness and put "more eyes on the streets."

We must advocate for stronger policies and shift resources to address nuisance properties and create safe public spaces. For the city's youth, we must deliver a wider and more appealing array of after-school and summer programs that keep them safe and involve caring adults in their lives. The University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee's [Zilber School of Public Health](#), the [Helen Bader School of Social Welfare](#), the [Medical College of Wisconsin](#) and other research institutions must be tapped to evaluate programs and recommend changes in policy and practice.

As a community, we know what to do. We just need to work together and do whatever it takes.

Susan Lloyd is executive director of the Zilber Family Foundation.

Collective Efficacy in Milwaukee's Zilber Neighborhood Initiative

by Susan Lloyd

Rob Sampson is one of those academics from whom we can learn much as we seek to end urban poverty. From his recent book, *Great American City: Chicago and the Enduring Neighborhood Effect*, to his Boden Lecture, Sampson has given us the theory and data we need, as practitioners and policy makers, to address some of the "large challenges" of urban poverty.

Sampson's discussion of crime is but one example of research and analysis usefully applied. Considering both theory and evidence to explain crime rates, Sampson discounts the popular "broken windows" model of crime in favor of a "social escalation" model, saying that unresolved personal conflicts (such as between father and son, husband and wife, landlord and tenant), not signs of disorder (such as graffiti or broken windows), are the more likely source of increased crime. The social escalation model helps make the case that problem-based policing and restorative justice programs are smart allocations of limited public resources.

More generally—and more locally—Sampson's theory of collective efficacy, depending on the shared expectations for social control and cohesion among neighborhood residents, provides the framework for several practical initiatives underway in Milwaukee. The federally funded Building Neighborhood Capacity Program, augmented by matching grants from the Greater Milwaukee Foundation and Northwestern Mutual Foundation, focuses on resident engagement. The program organizes residents in very distressed neighborhoods to identify and address local concerns, and it then builds on their relationships to plan and undertake community improvement projects. The restored Moody Park in the Amani neighborhood, and the resident-led Friends of Moody Park to maintain it, illustrate collective efficacy in action.

Sampson's insights and research results also influenced the development of the Zilber Neighborhood Initiative. The initiative was started in 2008 by Joseph J. Zilber, a Marquette lawyer from the class of 1941. It is a \$50 million philanthropic program to support resident leadership development, community planning, and local action in three Milwaukee neighborhoods over a 10-year term. The Zilber initiative makes grants to local organizations to develop and carry out plans to improve the quality of community life, support activities that increase neighborliness and strengthen social relationships, and develop the organizational capacity of local nonprofits to stimulate and sustain community action.

Since the start of the Zilber Neighborhood Initiative, the foundation has awarded \$30.5 million in grants to support the revitalization of 110 square blocks on the city's north side and 170 square blocks on Milwaukee's south side. In turn, these grants have attracted \$54.4 million in other investments to the neighborhoods, including \$48.3 million in revenue, \$6 million of in-kind donations, and more than \$100,000 in volunteer service.

In eight short years, these efforts to increase collective efficacy and strengthen community organizations in Milwaukee neighborhoods have produced important results:

- crime reduced
- more than 300 homes and other properties restored to productive use, with nearly \$25 million in commercial-corridor investment alone
- new schools, community centers, and health services attracted to the neighborhoods
- dozens of jobs and businesses created or established in landscaping, snow removal, home repair, health care, elder care, child care, janitorial services, and food services
- hundreds of community gardens and farmers' markets established, improving access to healthy food
- 75 acres of green space restored to public use, including new and refurbished playgrounds, pocket parks, and fruit orchards

Sampson has pointed the way forward, showing the "nuts and bolts of *why* and *how* neighborhoods matter." We have the opportunity, and the obligation, to heed Sampson's call for "durable investments" in policies that attend to the social processes as well as the physical conditions in urban neighborhoods. The Zilber Neighborhood Initiative is seizing that opportunity.



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FIGURE 12: BUILDING CROSS-SECTOR PARTNERSHIP FROM THE CORE: MILWAUKEE

Milwaukee's cross-sector partnership built on a pre-existing alliance that began in 2010 when representatives of several local foundations met to discuss the status of community development in the city. Using a scan commissioned 10 years earlier, they studied who was funding what and where the gaps were. Soon the group engaged national consultant Paul Brophy to conduct a fresh assessment and suggest how funders could collectively promote community development.

Brophy recommended forming a partnership of civic and business leaders who could bring their perspective on the city's economy to the work in neighborhoods. A small group, now known as the Community Development Funders Alliance (CDFA), coalesced around the goal of "creating a common agenda for Milwaukee neighborhoods." It was driven by three funders: Susan Lloyd, executive director of the local Zilber Family Foundation and former director of the MacArthur Foundation's investment in Chicago's New Communities initiative; Kathryn Dunn, vice president of the Greater Milwaukee Foundation; and John Kordsmeier, president of the Northwestern Mutual Foundation.

Later, when several sector leaders in Milwaukee received letters inviting them to participate in BNCP, Lloyd, Dunn and Kordsmeier seized the opportunity to further expand the group. They invited leaders from city government and agencies, the United Way and other organizations to make the group a real cross-sector partnership. Mayor Tom Barrett and Police Chief Edward Flynn responded enthusiastically, and Flynn designated Inspector Bill Jessup, and subsequently Inspector Mary Hoerig, to represent the agency in the group. The police department had recently received a federal Byrne Criminal Justice Innovation Program grant, which supports community strategies to address crime, and the BNCP partnership "fit Chief Flynn's philosophy that police have a role in making neighborhoods capable of sustaining civic life," Hoerig says.

Lloyd, Dunn, Kordsmeier and Hoerig became the

partnership's executive committee. Each partner brought a different perspective and value to the table. Lloyd's foundation was looking for ways to reach beyond the three communities in which it already invested. Dunn's foundation has a history of convening partnerships and is well-respected by city leaders. The mayor's office, with Hoerig's support, gave the cross-sector group "a gravitas it might not otherwise have had so quickly," Lloyd notes. Kordsmeier's foundation was retooling its strategy to shift from "giving a little money to lots of things" to making larger investments with greater impact. And, by publicly endorsing the cross-sector approach, the Northwestern Mutual Foundation—the state's largest corporate foundation and the philanthropic arm of the city's largest employer—moved the partnership forward.

The cross-sector partnership provides a venue for discussing neighborhoods from both a "people and place" perspective—a valuable resource in a city where relatively few philanthropies invest in neighborhoods, and most do not have a stated strategy for doing so. Partners have commissioned a neighborhood market analysis, developed an institute to help residents learn leadership skills and co-funded a small grants program to support local projects (with residents serving as reviewers and grant-makers). The partners also co-fund a news service that reports on 17 neighborhoods, including those in BNCP, from a resident perspective. While implementing these activities, the partners have contributed "not only dollars but mentoring, leadership and technical assistance," Hoerig says.

The cross-sector partnership has helped the executive committee members, their organizations and the city as well as neighborhood residents. "The four of us trust each other explicitly now, and that may not have happened if we weren't forced into making decisions, taking risks and doing things that matter together," Kordsmeier says. Participation in the partnership has also "transformed" the way Northwestern Mutual thinks about neighborhood residents, he adds:

“When we launched a significant new building project, the company committed to having minority-owned and small businesses participating in the project. Meetings were convened in multiple neighborhoods in Milwaukee, explaining the nature of the construction project, followed by a job fair at which residents were taken through the process to apply. If they didn’t have a driver’s license or GED credentials, people were there to help them. That type of focused collaboration hasn’t happened before.”

For the police department, the partnership provides connections to residents who can advocate for police during times of conflict and to other stakeholders with ties to key constituencies. When Chief Flynn wanted to reach pastors to discuss community violence, for instance, Hoerig turned to a funder in the partnership whose organization works closely with the faith community. The partners also see evidence that the group is influencing city government. The city has prioritized cleanup of foreclosed and vacant properties in the BNCP and Byrne program neighborhoods. And as the city was developing its new budget, two staff members met with the cross-sector partners to discuss plans for job development and blight remediation. “Now more than ever before, the city is positioned to reach out to private funders to preview something and give a reaction,” Lloyd observes.

The group has faced some challenges. Participation by the school system has not been as strong as originally hoped. At times, some of the public partners have had competing interests or different perspectives that have played out at the BNCP table. The bankers at the table have yet to become fully involved. And a person hired to direct the partnership didn’t stay, leaving group members to handle administrative and program tasks on their own.

Looking ahead, the executive committee hopes to merge the cross-sector partnership and the CDFA into a single entity that is seen as the go-to source

for broader, more strategic community development discussions. Committee members expect to develop more co-investment opportunities. They want to connect with state and national funders, and they hope to find an institutional partner to manage the group.

Meanwhile, the executive committee takes these lessons from creating the cross-sector partnership:

- Institutional readiness and individual leadership style matter. The departure of the partnership’s first director may have been as fortuitous as it was disruptive, an executive committee member suggests. “It may have been that we needed to get our act together before having a more permanent structure. It forced us to have conversations and develop a way of working together that has enhanced our ability to work on issues.”
- Expert facilitation is crucial, especially in the beginning. Brophy played an important role by “interpreting different institutional perspectives to the partners” in a tactful, confidential, accurate and trusted manner. Executive committee members agree.
- Partnering helps people share accountability for solutions as well as for problems. “In policing we like to know what goals we have to reach, and the chief constantly asks me what we have achieved. I have to say, ‘It’s a process, an evolution,’” Hoerig explains. “It’s taught us to be better partners because we realize we don’t have to solve all the problems at the table.”