

Building Safe Communities

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CITIZEN INVOLVEMENT IN CONNECTICUT

Connecticut has the distinction of being the location of two Safe Communities coalitions that exemplify citizen involvement. Both started as a result of family tragedies that prompted residents to take a stand for traffic safety. The Norwich Safe Communities Coalition (NSCC) was founded by Stuart and Judith Deglin, whose two children were struck and killed by a car while crossing a street in front of Norwich High School. In the same month that Samantha and Randy Deglin were killed, a young woman, Casey Kennedy, was hit and killed by an automobile on a rural road in neighboring Montville. Her mother, Joan Phillips, called Judy Deglin, which led to the formation of the Montville Safe Communities Coalition (MSCC); MSCC now coordinates many of its activities with NSCC in an effort to improve traffic safety countywide.

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CITIZEN INVOLVEMENT AND SAFE COMMUNITIES

Citizen involvement is a fundamental element of the Safe Communities approach. It is essential to both the success and the stability of programs. Citizen participation helps programs respond to community needs and concerns. It enhances program effectiveness and promotes the perception that programs are *owned* by communities, rather than imposed on them with no regard for their opinions and interests.

What is citizen involvement? "Citizen involvement" is the participation of people who live, work, and go to school in a community. These people



Greater Dallas Injury Prevention Center Booth at Los Altos Community Fair

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are affected by traffic safety problems and can play an important role in solving those problems. They are involved as individuals, rather than representatives of other organizations (e.g., Safe Communities partners, such as police departments, corporations, hospitals, and traffic safety agencies). While citizen participants have jobs and professional interests, they are not coming to the table as representatives of any organizations, but rather as individuals interested in community safety. *(continued on page 2)*

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CITIZEN INVOLVEMENT

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Citizen participation has many benefits. Citizens will know where the people in their communities go for guidance and support and how these channels can be used for traffic safety activities. Each group will have something unique to contribute. Senior citizens can provide important insights into the dangers that exist for their age group. High school students can explain how to best reach their peers.

Citizen involvement should be a component in every aspect of a Safe Communities program. The knowledge of community residents can help identify dangers that data collection can later confirm or refute (or for which there is no data), both speeding and economizing the problem identification process. Participants who are recent immigrants, ethnic minorities, parents of infants, seniors, bicyclists, joggers, and schoolchildren all perceive the world and the way their peers move through it in ways that can provide valuable insights for problem identification and program design. These participants can act as “key informants,” providing qualitative data that can help prioritize the problems identified by data analysis.

Working with our government, doctors, police, and others, we can make our roads safer for our children and make our communities healthier places to live. Together, we can create unique solutions to our specific community safety problems.

— Robin LaRiviere, Easthampton, Mass.

Citizen involvement can help a Safe Communities program expand its partnerships. Many citizens who join Safe Communities coalitions are affiliated with organizations that can be called on for support, including parent-teacher associations, religious groups, fraternal organizations, businesses, unions, and such youth programs as the Boy and Girl Scouts.

Citizens also bring individual resources to a coalition. Some will have writing skills and can author public safety announcements or grants. Those with artistic talent can design brochures or signs. Those who are handy with tools can build displays for health fairs or bicycle rodeos. Amateur photographers can help produce public education materials or document dangerous intersections. The computer-literate can search the Web for resources or assist with data analysis or program evaluation.

Citizen involvement can also help create self-sustainability. The participation of citizens provides an ongoing base of enthusiasm, ideas, and labor. The more people and energy a program has, the less it risks “burning out” a small core of supporters. The more people involved, the more activities can be divided among working groups. More participants also means more connections to local organizations that can provide resources and make the coalition’s activities less dependent on state and federal funding. Public support of traffic safety efforts can encourage local governments to fund coalition activities or traffic safety efforts of partners (such as police departments).

Citizen involvement and input into a Safe Communities program are crucial to ensure that the program successfully serves the needs of the community. Citizen involvement should not be an afterthought. Much like evaluation, individual involvement should be built into the front end of a program.

— from *Getting Started: A Guide to Developing Safe Communities*

Safe Communities programs need to give back to the citizens and community organizations from which they draw strength. They should share the results of program monitoring and evaluation with citizen participants and the larger community. Showing the community and citizen participants that a Safe Communities program makes a difference is an important method

of maintaining enthusiasm and attracting new support. Citizen participants can help spread the word by writing op-ed pieces for local newspapers, granting interviews to TV or radio stations, and making presentations at schools, Elks Lodges, Rotary Clubs, neighborhood organizations, and church groups.

Garnering citizen involvement is not always easy. But, as Allen Bolton, former Director of the Greater Dallas Injury Prevention Center, said in the first issue of *Building Safe Communities*, “If you don’t have [citizen involvement], you don’t have a Safe Communities program.”

CONNECTICUT

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NSCC's activities are overseen by a 16-member core committee. Five members of this committee do not represent any government agency or private organization; they are citizens concerned with the safety of their towns and their children.

NSCC collected data on traffic injuries in Norwich. The analysis of this data was used by the core committee to select eight priority traffic safety projects, each of which is being implemented by a working group composed of community residents and representatives from local organizational partners (including the Norwich Police Department, the Connecticut State Police, and the Uncas Health District). One project has targeted the high crash rate along Route 82, which leads directly from Interstate 95 to downtown Norwich. Another working group

is creating and disseminating a brochure that describes routes to the casinos that avoid the small rural roads, which were never intended for the volume of traffic generated by the casinos. The 20 members of the casino brochure working group include citizen representatives from all five of the affected towns, as well as the Mohegan and



Seat belt spot check in Norwich, Connecticut

Mashantucket Pequot Tribal Councils (who own and operate the casinos). The Tribal Nations were especially interested in combating the impression that many of the speeders on local roads are nonresidents drawn to the area by the casinos. NSCC data showed that the vast majority of speeding citations in Norwich are issued to local residents.

Other projects include a speed monitoring program, increased speeding and seat belt enforcement efforts, a public awareness campaign, and a number of school-based programs, including efforts to improve pedestrian and bus safety. The efforts of the NSCC also resulted in a series of articles on traffic safety published in the *Norwich Bulletin*. This series was later reprinted as a special supplement, evidence of the type of support the media will give to a traffic safety program that has a broad base of community support.

Both the Norwich and Montville coalitions are continuing to design and implement new and exciting projects. Each is working with local schools to integrate traffic and pedestrian safety education into the K-12 curriculum. Having the presidents of the Norwich and Montville Parent-Teacher Organizations on the core committee helps generate public and district support. Joan Phillips of the Montville Safe Communities Coalition points out that, "People are busy. It's hard to get them involved. We ran programs in the schools and sent materials home with the children. We participated in a Children's Safety Fair, which was held on a weekend. Parents brought their kids, and this gave us an opportunity to talk with the parents. People with young children want to live in a safe community."

For more information on the Norwich and Montville Safe Communities Coalitions, contact Richard Ross, Uncas Health District, 372 West Main St., Second Floor, Norwich, CT 06360-5450. Telephone: (860) 823-1189.

RICHARD ROSS ON CITIZEN INVOLVEMENT

Richard Ross, coordinator of the Norwich and Montville (CT) Safe Communities Coalitions, spoke with BSC about citizen involvement:

The advantage of citizen involvement is that it makes the program a public project. Our projects are implemented by working groups, many of whose members are private citizens. The town councils know that our projects have substantial public support. This is essential. The police chief in Norwich, for example, is very conscious of traffic safety. The support that he gets from NSCC enables him to engage in projects that otherwise might take months or years to get approved. He wanted to increase the police presence along Route 82. NSCC's ability to use the data to pinpoint this road as a problem made it a priority for the community and allowed him to immediately assign more officers to that area.

There are essential roles for local agencies in Safe Communities programs. Agencies are an important source of expertise. Agencies can write and receive grants. But agencies should see their role as supporting Safe Communities programs. The program should be owned by the community. Once you say to citizens that they will have the power to make the decisions, they will become involved. And citizen involvement is the baseline for a Safe Communities program. If you don't have it, you won't have an effective program.

photo courtesy of the Norwich Bulletin

THE RULES OF ENGAGEMENT

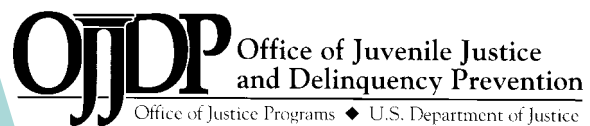
BSC recently spoke with David Thompson of San Diego Safe Communities 2000 and Martha Stowe of the Greater Dallas Injury Prevention Center. The following are some principles of citizen involvement extracted from these conversations:

- Start with citizens who have credibility within the community. They can lend “weight” to a program. Citizens who are already formal or informal community leaders can help identify others who may be willing to participate. Networking through citizens or other partners can be an effective way of recruiting participants.
- Recruit citizens who are or have been active in other injury prevention or traffic safety efforts. Their motivation, experience, and knowledge will be valuable assets.
- Try to find citizen participants who reflect the groups that live in the community. Recruit people from different ethnic backgrounds, age groups, and income levels; they have strengths and skills to contribute. Focus groups can be a valuable method of assessing the community’s perception of its injury problems and how these problems can be addressed.
- Have clear and compelling goals that create a vision of how the community can be made a safer place to live. Citizens are more likely to become involved if they believe their efforts will make a difference.
- Understand and explain that government agencies cannot solve injury problems alone. Safe Communities does not just come into a community and solve problems. Its success requires the active participation of citizens.
- Collect and analyze local data and present it to citizens in a clear and understandable manner. Citizens are more likely to participate if they have information on their own communities, rather than just state or national data. But also pay attention to citizens’ perceptions of community injury problems. Data can then be used to confirm, disprove, or refine these perceptions. While data is important, injury prevention activities cannot be completely data-driven. Programs need to respect community priorities.
- Keep the public informed. Work with local media and community groups to spread the word about Safe Communities. Showing the community that Safe Communities makes a difference is an effective way of attracting additional citizen participants, coalition partners, and resources. Informed and enthusiastic public support can make a critical difference to program success and sustainability.

COMBATING UNDERAGE DRINKING

Thirty-five percent of motor vehicle fatalities involving persons between the ages of 15 and 20 are alcohol related. To address this and other problems caused by the abuse of alcohol by young people, the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) is overseeing a new \$25 million initiative to facilitate comprehensive and coordinated enforcement and underage alcohol-use prevention programs. Bloc grants of \$360,000 to each state and the District of Columbia will be used for efforts to reduce underage drinking.

In addition, \$5 million in grants will be awarded to support efforts to enforce state laws prohibiting the sale of alcoholic beverages to minors and preventing the purchase and consumption of alcoholic beverages by minors. More than \$1 million will be awarded to provide technical assistance and training to these programs.



OJJDP is encouraging applicants for these funds to partner with local organizations and coalitions interested in this issue.

For more information, contact the Juvenile Justice Clearinghouse, P.O. Box 6000, Rockville, MD 20849-6000. Telephone: (800) 638-8736; fax: (301) 519-5212; e-mail: <askncjrs@ncjrs.org>; WWW: <www.ncjrs.org/ojjhome.htm>.

SAFE COMMUNITIES CALENDAR

September 8–11, 1998, Santa Barbara: Pro Bike/Pro Walk '98: Creating Bicycle-Friendly and Walkable Communities. For more information, contact the Bicycle Federation of America, 1506 21st St., NW, Washington, DC 20036. Telephone: (202) 463-6622; fax: (202) 463-6625; e-mail: <pbpw98@aol.com>; WWW: <www.bikefed.org>.

September 14, 1998: Buckle Up America! (BUA) National Mobilization. National organizations are invited by NHTSA to identify ways in which they and their members can help increase seat belt and child safety seat use. Members should let their national office know that they support their organization's participation in this meeting and in BUA.



September 23, 1998: National Walk Our Children to School Day. For more information, contact Harold Thompson, National Safety Council, 1121 Spring Lake Drive, Itasca, IL 60143-3201. Telephone: (800) 621-7615, ext. 2383; fax: (630) 775-2185; e-mail: <thompsoh@nsc.org>.

October 1998: BUA Fall '98 Mobilization Summits will be held in 10 locations around the nation. For information on the summit in your area, contact your NHTSA Regional Office.



October 19–25, 1998: School Bus Safety Week. For information on activities in your area, contact your state's highway safety office.

November 15–19, 1998: Washington, D.C.: "Public Health and Managed Care," The American Public Health Association Annual Meeting. For more information, call (202) 789-5620 or visit the APHA website at <www.apha.org/convention/index.htm>.

NHTSA maintains a database of Safe Communities programs. If you have not registered your program with NHTSA, please contact:

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RESOURCES

Air Bags & On-Off Switches: Information for an Informed Decision is a new public information brochure on air bags, their advantages, and their proper use, and the new government regulations on on-off switches. To obtain copies, call the NHTSA Hotline at (800) 424-9393.

The Child and Adolescent Emergency Department Visit Databook details the incidence, characteristics, and payments of emergency department visits involving children and adolescents. It is available from Emergency Medical Services for Children, 2070 Chain Bridge Road, Suite 450, Vienna, VA 22182-2536. Telephone: (703) 902-1203; fax: (703) 821-2098; e-mail: <emsc@circol.com>. The databook can also be found on the World Wide Web at <www.pgh.aus.edu/childed>.

The Office of Minority Health (OMH) of the United States Department of Health and Human Services has created several resources on funding that may be of interest to Safe Communities coalitions. These include the April 1998 Funding Issue of their **Closing the Gap** newsletter and their **Funding Guide**. For more information, contact the OMH at (800) 444-6472 or browse their website at <www.omhrc.gov>.

The Campaign Safe & Sober Youth & Generation X Planner includes a wide range of materials on Buckle Up America! Week, impaired driving, occupant protection, and school bus, bicycle, and pedestrian safety. Other items in the planner include updated lists of State Bicycle and Pedestrian Coordinators, NHTSA Regional Offices, State Highway Safety Offices, a **Safety City** brochure, and a **Kids Aren't Cargo** flyer. To obtain the **Youth and Generation X Planner**, call the NHTSA Hotline at (888) 327-4236. The Planner can also be downloaded from the NHTSA website at <www.nhtsa.dot.gov/people/outreach/safesobr/15qp/web/index.html>.

