

An Open Letter from Safeways Founders

Safeways was piloted by a grant from the US Department of Justice in 2006, and was based on data from the Memphis Police Department and other sources that was analyzed by our research centers, then at the University of Memphis. Our analysis at the Center for Community Criminology and Research (better known as C3R) and the Center for Community Building and Neighborhood Action (CBANA) revealed that crime and other social risk factors clustered in and around apartment properties.

Along with the data, we were also inspired by the vision of Pierce Ledbetter, CEO of LEDIC Asset Management, whose own concerns about crime and quality of life in apartment properties encouraged him to approach the City of Memphis about how he might take action. He was directed our way, where we were already involved with the privately funded Southeast Memphis Initiative and its offspring – the Southeast Memphis Community Development Corporation. The original grant involved us as researchers and strategists, LEDIC as the private sector pilot partner (at Autumn Ridge and then Kensington Manor properties), the CDC as a partner in mobilizing service delivery for residents, and of course the Memphis Police Department, the Shelby County Sheriff's Department and the Shelby County District Attorney General for law enforcement innovations.

Our concept was that community building and human capital development would most effectively take place in a setting where residents felt safe, non-residents with ill intent were kept at bay, and where interventions for children, youth, and families would be reinforced by “reaching families where they live.” The vision thus brought together both law enforcement stakeholders and innovations and human services practitioners and innovation in a unified effort.

The law enforcement-human services partnership made Safeways different. The traditional model for law enforcement focused on suppressing crime, while human services indirectly addressed long term crime prevention through social services to “at risk” families. Social services practitioners not uncommonly characterized law enforcement as a punitive assault on already vulnerable people, while law enforcement was sometimes guilty of equating social services interventions with well-meaning but likely misguided efforts to “hug a thug.” Of course these are overgeneralizations. We found strong interest among both law enforcement and social service providers in working together, where we reasoned that youth development – for example, through an emphasis on mentorship and academic support – would have a clearer path without having to compete with the appeal of “belonging” in a neighborhood-centered gang.

The idea was to make apartment communities a safe and especially receptive environment for youth development and economic mobility strategies and other supportive quality of life efforts. Apartment owners and managers would collaborate with law enforcement and support resident services to reach families where they live. As Safeways partners, they would agree to a set of apartment management best practices, including implementation of Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) standards, application of designated practices for leasing and property supervision, and generally becoming better

educated on how to work with law enforcement on the one hand and social service initiatives on the other. Outreach to owners and managers grew during the next several years through meetings and trainings sponsored with the Mt. Moriah and Ridgeway Station precincts in southeast Memphis, then at the Old Allen Station precinct in Frayser-Raleigh.

Operation: Safe Community embraced the Safeways strategy and a host of organizations became involved, including those with a site-based approach to reaching families where they live. Agape Child and Family Services developed its Powerlines Community network in response to Safeways insights, where Powerlines would assign site-based “connectors” to work with residents in apartment communities (providing “site-based services.”) Similarly, Safeways linked with already existing site-based service providers such as the Neighborhood Christian Center, and partnered with other providers who would agree to come on site in apartment communities to offer outreach, education, training, and other forms of support. Notably, the Network for Overcoming Violence (NOVA, the Shelby County implementation of the US Department of Justice’s “Defending Childhood Against Violence Initiative”) partnered with Safeways to intervene in situations involving domestic violence and other forms of violence in apartment communities. Ultimately, apartment properties meeting designated standards would be certified as Safeways Apartment Communities. The initiative would be sustained through a model where owners agreed to “buy in” to Certification with a unit based certification fee. ALCO Management and Makowsky, Ringel, Greenberg began meeting with LEDIC and the Safeways team in 2010 to brainstorm ideas and confront barriers. Meanwhile, the DOJ funding had been phased out as the concept continued to be developed.

The year 2012 was a very big year in the evolution of Safeways: ALCO and MRG signed on, along with original partner LEDIC, to the formalized Safeways Certification strategy. These three founding private sector partners moved us toward the sustainable business model we had envisioned. Along with Shelby County government’s contribution through the NOVA partnership, the Memphis’ Mayor’s Innovation Delivery Team signed on with City support in 2012 and The Plough Foundation rounded out support for major expansion of Safeways to begin in 2013. Operation: Safe Community was instrumental in securing City and Plough support, and continues to feature Safeways as an especially promising strategy well-positioned to contribute toward longer-term crime prevention.

Fifteen LEDIC, ALCO and MRG properties were in the process of being certified in 2013, while the strategic plan and business model projects thirty-three new properties brought into the 2014 Certification process through outreach to new ownership groups. Safeways is also developing a process where troubled properties can be assigned to work with the strategy through the District Attorney’s General’s formal nuisance abatement process.

We are gratified to have been involved in the conceptualization and implementation of Safeways, and to see its development into a multi-faceted initiative to enhance community safety, build the sense of community, and develop human capital among residents of apartment properties.

Retired from the University as of August 2013, we will continue to be involved with

Safeways as consulting partners for research and strategy through our newly rolled-out Strategic City Solutions Consulting. The Safeways database, already being used to identify priorities for law enforcement and human services interventions and track progress on crime reduction, is being enhanced with social indicators data. We are working with the Memphis Police Department Real Time Crime Center to simplify extraction and mapping of crime data and reduce the labor intensity of ongoing data analysis, and will continue to follow community safety developments in other cities that could apply to our apartment communities here in Memphis and Shelby County. The ongoing success of Safeways is in good hands, and we are pleased to continue to be part of the process and to continue to work with such a committed and innovative staff and a truly amazing set of private sector and community partners!

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