



## LOWELL | MASSACHUSETTS

### BCJI 2012 PLANNING & IMPLEMENTATION AWARD (\$900,000/36 Months)

**Lead Agency:** Lowell Police Department

*Among its accomplishments, the Lowell Byrne Criminal Justice Initiative team provided disconnected youth in the Centralville community an opportunity to engage and link with safe spaces and programs.*

The city of Lowell, Massachusetts is a working-class mill town about 45 minutes north of Boston. Lowell boasts a diverse population: Nearly a third of its residents are immigrants or refugees, including the second highest Cambodian population in the U.S. The Centralville community, which was awarded a Byrne Criminal Justice Innovation (BCJI) grant in 2012, is one of 11 distinct neighborhoods in Lowell. Located in the northeastern area of the city, Centralville has about 14 percent of Lowell's population and is separated from downtown Lowell and the rest of the city by the Merrimack River.

Centralville has historically been a middle-class, low-crime area, but during the late 2000s, as the economy soured throughout Lowell, the community saw an uptick in unemployment and abandoned properties. The City of Lowell identified 481 vacant housing units throughout Centralville—22 percent of all foreclosures in Lowell in 2011—and the neighborhood filed 21 percent of the sanitary code complaints citywide and 22 percent of its building, zoning, and trash complaints.

Crime has also been an issue in Centralville. In 2011, the Lowell Police Department's (LPD) Crime Analysis and Intelligence Unit (CAIU) identified the neighborhood as having the highest crime rate in Lowell, with 20 percent of the city's total crime, including 18 percent of its aggravated assaults and thefts. Youth crime also presented a major challenge. Centralville had the second highest arrest rate within the city, and a contributing factor was a high truancy rate for students living in the neighborhood.

As Centerville's BCJI initiative began, its architects made addressing blight and providing positive alternatives for youth priorities in its efforts to reduce crime. When the BCJI Initiative was done, the program had engaged hundreds of Centralville youth that previously felt disconnected from community and city-based programming activities. Due to its collaborative BCJI strategy, youth had a safe environment to be a kid, gain valuable work experiences, and become a leader in the community.

Efforts aimed at fighting blight in Centralville never came to fruition—in part because the foreclosure crisis abated in the community. However, the BCJI team was able to pivot to other methods of supporting a stronger community. In addition, the LPD incorporated a more proactive, preventative approach to policing in Centerville. Crime rates in the target area fell during the implementa-

## The BCJI Approach

These powerful themes run through all BCJI projects.

### DATA-DRIVEN

BCJI targets crime hot spots – often streets, properties or public spaces in communities that have struggled with crime for years. Researchers are engaged in the day-to-day work, helping partners examine problems, assess evidence-based solutions, and monitor progress.



### COMMUNITY-ORIENTED

BCJI champions active roles for residents in identifying problems, selecting strategies and creating safe and healthy environments.



### SPURS REVITALIZATION

BCJI tackles problem properties, unsafe streets and parks, unemployment, transit barriers and service gaps related to crime.



### BUILDS PARTNERSHIPS

BCJI taps the resources of public, nonprofit and community leaders to bring more resources and different approaches to bear on longstanding crime challenges for lasting change.



tion phase of the initiative, including a steep drop at two of the identified crime hot spots in the neighborhood.

Many of the Lowell Centralville BCJI project successes were a direct result of programmatic partners working closely to ensure that each understood their role and how they could help each other achieve success. LPD forged new connections with residents, local businesses and service-based agencies that they will collaborate with in future endeavors. That type of momentum is one of the BCJI team's most important successes: Several of the initiatives that were created and thrived during the implementation period have been sustained by other funding sources after BCJI ended.

### Collaborations and Communication

*As Centralville began its BCJI planning phase, the partners identified three specific areas of need—law enforcement, youth, and revitalization.*

Even before the BCJI initiative began in Centerville, the BCJI lead agency, the LPD had a lengthy history of working with research partners to review and provide input on crime prevention and reduction efforts. LPD also has been forward thinking in ensuring that its Crime Analysis and Intelligence Unit (CAIU) had actively provided the department with data to make better-informed personnel and strategic resource decisions. This focus on data-driven decision-making helped the LPD attract federal and state grants to reduce crime and violence in the city and engage individuals that have been involved in the criminal justice system.

Through this work, the LPD team had developed close ties with several community-based agencies that provide engagement services to youth and young adults. And other organizations in the community that provide employment support, educational and certificate programming, and mental health services had also increasingly begun to use these data-driven decision-making strategies.

As Centralville started its BCJI planning phase, the LPD and the City of Lowell drew on collaborative support from community organizations like the Centralville

Neighborhood Action Group (CNAG) and city agencies to identify specific areas of need, forming the Centralville Friends for Improvement, Revitalization & Enforcement (C-FIRE). The participating organizations broke into three subcommittees—law enforcement, youth, and revitalization—and each worked over six months to develop a detailed logic model (theory of change) to describe their vision, mission, current conditions, inputs, outputs (activities and participants), and measurable outcomes.

To support the planning, the research partner, the University of Massachusetts Lowell, analyzed available data such as temporal patterns in assaults, burglaries, drug offenses, and other crimes, as well as truancy rates and numbers of youth involved in social service programs in the community. The partners also supplemented existing information with data from a property condition survey, and discussions with Centralville residents about their vision and priorities.

The BCJI team agreed that Centralville's efforts should focus BCJI resources on:

- Expanding prevention and intervention-based programs for Centralville youth
- Working with the community to reduce factors and activities that often lead to crime, such as truancy or barriers to youth program participation
- Encouraging community development to promote revitalization and reinvestment throughout Centralville.

As implementation began, the initiative hit a hurdle that could have derailed forward progress: Residents and C-FIRE began pitching ideas outside the scope of BCJI funding. To address the issue, LPD worked closely with the group to ensure everyone was on the same page and clarify what BCJI could and could not support. The research team also worked with each of the subcommittees and the partnering organization to create a logic model to guide their efforts. These logic models provided a roadmap that documented the challenges to be addressed, where resources would be spent, how the resources would be allocated, and what data measures they would collect that would let the team know if they were achieving their desired results. This clarified the role of all partners, and helped the project team determine if and where they needed to alter their strategies.

### Connecting Youth to Resources

*The team worked to find the most effective solution to a long-standing problem for local youth: the isolation of Centralville from resources in downtown Lowell and the rest of the city.*

Over the years, one of the overarching challenges of engaging youth in the Centralville neighborhood has been that while there were many programs available in the city, the largest and most popular were located across the Merrimack River. If Centralville youth wanted to visit the Boys and Girls Club (BGC), the YMCA, or other youth events, it required a dedicated transportation plan.

When the BCJI team was gathering community input on local issues, many Centralville residents said a priority should be a BGC satellite location in the neighborhood. The steering committee, however, believed this solution would not provide the quality or quantity of programming that the youth had at the main facilities. The team arranged a tour of the existing facility for students and convened a meeting of BGC leaders with parents to discuss what services were offered at the main location versus what was feasible at a possible satellite facility.

With a better understanding of the differences between services of the main facility versus a satellite facility, all parties agreed to focus attention on finding ways to increase Centralville youth membership at the main BGC site. BCJI resources were used to hire a bus company to transport Centralville youth to the BGC club afterschool and return to the neighborhood in the evening. Once operational, an average of 60 youth were transported daily between Centralville and BGC, and over the course of the project, BGC reported 298 more youth memberships from Centralville, including 89 participating in leadership clubs.

The impact of the free transportation options for youth went beyond the BGC facility. Residents noticed Centerville youth were more likely to be socially engaged in citywide events, with 68 participating in six community service events sponsored by BGC, for example. Because of this success, Lowell identified other funding sources to maintain the bus service after the BCJI grant period ended.

Other efforts Lowell used to connect Centralville youth with BCJI programs produced positive outcomes as well. Youth agencies and the Parks & Recreation Department provided more summer youth programming and extracurricular activities in the community during the school year. Truancy prevention services included bilingual home visits with parents. Community-based partners conducted street outreach to connect disengaged neighborhood youth with wraparound services, including mental health counseling.

To ensure that resources were well-deployed, the BCJI team created a logic model that outlined how the partner activities would positively impact youth and measured the programs' effectiveness by requiring the partners to keep close track of data, such as dosage and engagement. Where programs were not reaching their goals, LPD worked with the research partner and programmatic partners to consider re-allocating funding.

### Revitalization Efforts

*The BCJI team looked for options for supporting local residents when foreclosure programs were less of a priority.*

Regular review of the revitalization logic model and new data played a key role for the Revitalization committee's efforts. During the planning stage, the focus was on foreclosure assistance. Lowell spent significant research partner resources on conducting a housing stock survey of Centerville to support strategies to address blight and abandoned properties.

By the time the implementation period was underway, however, the number of foreclosures in Centralville declined significantly. Larger scale efforts to partner with other city entities around community revitalization in the neighborhood were not as successful as hoped. For example, the Lowell BCJI team was unable to implement a mandatory landlord training program to address properties that had fallen into disrepair.

The C-FIRE? did find other avenues around community revitalization, though. As the committee began looking at additional options to engage and support Centralville residents, one of the main program partners, Coalition for a Better Acre, expanded their services to create a

counseling service for Centralville residents with a history of financial struggles. The program counseled residents on how they could improve their household budgeting, and steps to avoid foreclosure. Several families received mortgage modifications and received a mortgage forbearance while multiple residents met with a financial counselor to address credit issues.

The Revitalization committee also developed a new relationship with Mill City Grows (MCG), which works with Lowell residents across the city to increase community access to healthy food options through the development of urban food and distribution networks. For the BCJI program, MCG worked with Centralville residents to build an 18-bed community garden, which provided more than 8,200 pounds of fresh produce and was a vehicle to build relationships between older residents and youth in the neighborhood during the implementation period. MCG also provided workshops in Centralville on food storage, elements of a proper nutrition, home budgeting, and how to be a community leader.

### Police and Crime

#### *Hot spot patrols and other law enforcement programs helped drive down crime in Centralville.*

C-FIRE also focused efforts on increasing police patrols and contacts with residents and the business community in two hot spot locations. Officers were strategically deployed on foot and bicycle patrols and followed the evidence-based, hot spot patrol tenants that had been developed in Lowell in 2005. While officers made several arrests during their efforts, more than 90 percent of officers' time was spent on proactive patrol, where the officers were focused on community outreach and engagement and working with other city agencies to support efforts to identify and reduce blight and disrepair issues.

The captain that oversaw deployment of the overtime patrol relied heavily on CAIU to determine when and where to use proactive police patrols. Overall, BCJI funded 473

shifts and 2,861 additional hours of police patrols within Centralville over the two-year period. (Due to a departmental reorganization, the predominance of resources were spent in the second year of implementation).

The researchers' report noted that C-FIRE, along with other community-wide strategies and efforts, led to crime reduction in Centralville. Lowell is cautious in directly tying BCJI efforts to increases or decreases in crime activity—due to external factors other than the program itself, causality is always difficult to establish for crime statistics—but it noted that Centralville saw large reductions in several property related crimes. Property crime decreased overall by 13.2 percent, with burglaries in one hot spot plummeting 51.9 percent and larceny/theft down 10.5 percent.

Much of the decrease in crime can be linked to the LPD's proactive policing to prevent incidents before they happen, including educating residents and businesses of target-hardening opportunities such as a "lock it or lose it" campaign, flyers about how to reduce the likelihood of residential theft, and working closely with businesses to talk about how to prevent shoplifting.

Part I crime in Centralville declined 10 percent when analyzing the two-and-a-half years that BCJI was active (July 2013 – December 2015) as compared to prior two-and-a-half years. Notably, robberies declined 16 percent and burglaries decreased 32.5 percent. In one hot spot, the decline in Part I crimes was 24 percent, including a 22 percent reduction in aggravated assaults. Total Part II crimes in Centralville increased by 3 percent, reflecting the 21 percent increase in drug violations during the intervention—an expected result of the police saturation strategy focused on drugs.

In Centralville, the BCJI successes are attributable to the relationships and communication between law enforcement, community organizations, and residents. From this bedrock, the community was able to build flexibility, listen, and try new options to find the best solution to address issues such as how to best serve local youth and how to react to changing circumstances in foreclosure rates.

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