

Promising Practices

The Impact of Place-Based Community Engagement: Seattle's Rainier Beach—A Beautiful Safe Place for Youth

In 2011, researchers from [George Mason University's Center for Evidence-Based Crime Policy \(CEBCP\)](#) presented at public meetings hosted by Seattle, Washington's City Council to share research on how crime is highly concentrated in particular places or hot spots, and how improving the characteristics of these hot spots could be more effective than arresting individuals. Crime involving youth is even more highly concentrated and place specific. A year later, community members indicated their interest in attempting a hot spot approach to crime reduction and worked in conjunction with CEBCP, The Office of the City Auditor, the Seattle Youth Violence Prevention Initiative and the Seattle Neighborhood Group to apply for federal funding for the implementation of data-driven, place-based, non-arrest intervention strategies. The creation of task forces for each hotspot, comprised of a diverse group of community members who lived, worked and/or attended school in that area, allowed the community itself to drive this project and its implementation.

The planning and early implementation phases of this project, called [A Beautiful Safe Place for Youth \(ABSPY\)](#) were intensive, occurring from 2013-2016, in which community members diligently developed strategies, informed by research, and tailored interventions to the needs of each hot spot. Interventions were regularly adjusted and adapted to address needs and challenges. The name of the program points toward the community's vision of creating safe spaces for young people to grow and thrive in the Rainier Beach neighborhood of Seattle.

How is the Program Funded?



Originally, this program was funded by a \$1 million [Byrne Criminal Justice Innovation program grant](#), from the Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Assistance. This grant, awarded in the beginning stages of this program, required a year-long planning process. Funding since the end of the federal award has been provided by the city of Seattle.



Key Program Interventions

A community problem-solving process was followed in the planning stages of this program, and community members identified evidence-informed interventions to reduce youth victimization and crime through non-arrest methods. All interventions are highly specific to individualized needs, both for the Rainier Beach neighborhood and for each hot spot. The five hotspots, identified in 2012, are as follows: Rose Street, Rainier and Henderson, Rainier Beach Light Rail Station, Lake Washington and Our Safe Way. Although ABSPY has changed over time, ongoing program interventions include:

Corner Greeter Events

Youth-led stands set up within hotspots that offer snacks, activities and information and engage community members in places people previously perceived as unsafe or undesirable.

Safe Passage

This intervention, led by the Boys and Girls Club of King County, provides encouragement and supervision to youth as they leave school. Since 2020, this intervention has also included hosting community healing spaces.

Business Engagement

Goals behind this intervention include learning about local business owners' biggest concerns and challenges, encouraging positive interactions between business owners in hotspots and helping businesses prevent and report crime.

Crime Prevention through Environmental Design

The physical landscape and environment of the hotspots is altered to improve perceptions of community spaces and reduce crime.

Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports and Restorative Practices

Present in both school and community settings and supported by a grant from the National Institute of Justice, this intervention prioritizes setting expectations for youth behavior, resolving conflicts and supporting youth in need of services.

Evaluation Processes

CEBCP completed a program evaluation in [2016](#) and has produced annual updates every year. In conducting evaluations, CEBCP compares crime data in the identified hotspots to matched comparison sites, the Rainier Beach neighborhood as a whole, and Seattle Police Department's South Precinct. One part of this process has been conducting [community surveys](#), which were held in person from 2014–2019 and online since 2020 due to COVID. Questions included rating statements such as “there are positive activities for youth here” and “people and groups from the community are working hard to make this place safe.”

The [2021 evaluation](#) update includes the following highlights:

- In most instances, crime, especially crimes involving youth, is trending downward in Rainier Beach and crime in ABSPY hotspots is trending downward.
- Community members perceive the hotspots as safer due to the program and feel high levels of social cohesion.

In Conclusion

Overall, this program represents a promising approach to place-based interventions for youth and is unique in that it is entirely community-led. Evidence-informed strategies were tailored to places community members knew extremely well. It is important to note that ABSPY shouldn't be viewed as a quick model to replicate in other localities, but rather as an inspiration for an intentional community engagement and problem-solving process of identifying and implementing effective interventions that are both community and place driven.

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