

The Added Value of Long-Term Investment in Neighborhoods

Two Case Studies from the Good Neighborhoods Initiative



This report is a part of **Kids Matter Here:** **An Analytic Review of the 10-year Good Neighborhoods Initiative.**

The Skillman Foundation's Good Neighborhoods Initiative was a \$100-million commitment to six Detroit neighborhoods, spanning from 2006–2016. To best understand the outcomes of the long-term neighborhood-based work, the Foundation worked with a variety of evaluators, residents, stakeholders, grant partners, staff, Trustees and community allies to form a series of analyses and dialogues.

The goals of the Analytic Review are to synthesize what the decade of work has accomplished, inform decisions about the Foundation's work going forward, and build and share knowledge locally and nationally. This report is one of the many interconnected products that will be available on the Foundation's website at www.skillman.org/GNI as they are developed through spring of 2017.

The Added Value of Long-Term Investment in Neighborhoods

Two Case Studies from the Skillman Foundation's Good Neighborhoods Initiative

By David Scheie

What difference can 10 years of steady, responsive philanthropic support make to a resourceful but distressed neighborhood? What is the added value of long-term investment in neighborhoods? These are the questions probed in the two case studies at the heart of this essay. The purpose is not evaluative but rather to give the reader a sense of the texture and dynamics of the work over time.

Introduction

Recognizing the central role that communities play in shaping children's well-being, the Skillman Foundation made a bold and unusual commitment in 2006. It dedicated a substantial share of its attention and resources over the next 10 years to locally-led improvement efforts in six Detroit neighborhoods, in what it called its Good Neighborhoods initiative. A more common philanthropic approach is to announce a three or five year project, conceptualized by professional specialists and implemented by large agencies, which attempts to import a new idea into a low income neighborhood. These projects may start with a big splash, drawing attention to the sponsor's Big Idea, but often fade away after a few years. Residents of these neighborhoods watch these projects come and go. These projects often rely on a narrative in which the residents of struggling neighborhoods are objects of pity rather than subjects of dignity and respect. Their suffering is sensationalized, and their resourcefulness and resilience are minimized.

Skillman chose a different path with its Good Neighborhoods initiative. It believed that if improvement strategies were rooted in the ideas and energies of local residents as respected partners to local organizations, there was a greater chance that efforts would be successful and durable.

Skillman committed to stay present in these neighborhoods for at least 10 years, and to lead with listening and

dialogue as a champion of resident voice and collaborative approaches. It would set its agenda for children responsively, supporting priorities voiced by residents themselves in dialogue with schools, agencies, faith organizations and local businesses.

Accordingly, Skillman encouraged residents to be bold, to be proactive and assertive in expressing their ideas for neighborhood betterment and to participate in networks with institutions to pursue solutions. Skillman supported the emergence and evolution of local improvement efforts in multiple forms through multiple ways over the past decade.

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These case studies show the interplay between resident initiative, organizational action and Skillman Foundation support in two of the Good Neighborhoods, **Cody Rouge** and **Southwest Detroit**. Both cases were developed collaboratively by consultant David Scheie and a team of leaders in each neighborhood.

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In Cody Rouge, the team included Kenyetta Campbell and Rebecca Bare, longtime Cody residents who also have worked for several years as staff for the Cody Rouge Community Action Alliance, a coordinating leadership organization created with Skillman support. Kevin Bryant, who lives on the block where he grew up just outside of Cody Rouge and who, as a staff member of Black Family

Development, Inc., has nurtured block clubs in Cody Rouge since 2011 with Skillman support, also participated in the case study team.

In Southwest, the team consisted of Maria Salinas, Elizabeth Lopez and Consuela Valdez. Maria is the counterpart to Kenyetta Campbell: a longtime Southwest resident who for several years has been executive director of the Congress of Communities, the coordinating organization formed in Southwest with Skillman support. Elizabeth is a resident leader, chair of the Southwest Safety Alliance and a board member of the Congress of Communities among other roles. Consuela is a resident who has worked at CoC since 2013.

Both cases examine resident-led efforts to increase safety in their neighborhoods. In Cody Rouge, where there are many vacant properties, the story also focuses on reducing blight and making physical improvements.

The cases show some of the different ways that neighborhood residents have worked to improve conditions in their community: using their own voices, talents and energies, and mobilizing other assets. They show some of the diverse partners with which residents have collaborated: public and nonprofit agencies, faith organizations, universities, corporations and volunteers from throughout metro Detroit.

The cases give some taste of what it's been like to live in these neighborhoods over the past decade: the kinds of events and experiences that catalyze resident action, the challenges that wear people down, and the values and relationships that help sustain the long-haul work of making change. They show some of the building blocks of neighborhood vitality: the networks and organizations, formal and informal, through which people find support, build power, take action, and help one another.

The cases also show how Skillman worked in many ways as an investor and ally to these local improvement efforts: providing funds; helping them access coaching and training; helping to broker partnerships with major local, regional and national institutions; and consistently advocating and modeling ongoing learning, strategic networking, and purposeful collaboration. Sometimes Skillman initiated certain efforts; at other times, Skillman responded to ideas voiced by neighborhood leaders. Often, Skillman staff and neighborhood leaders puzzled, learned and innovated together.

Many of the most significant innovations for improving safety and reducing blight did not surface until five, seven or more years after Skillman began its Good Neighborhoods work. These stories help to show how patient, long-term support, nourished through ongoing dialogue and co-learning, can generate results not available from more rigid, short-term funding initiatives.



CASE ONE

Working to Reduce Blight and Increase Safety in Cody Rouge

By David Scheie with Kenyetta Campbell, Rebecca Bare and Kevin Bryant

Beginning to Talk and Address Challenges Together

The process of community organizing that began in Cody Rouge in 2007 with Skillman Foundation support identified community safety as a priority issue, along with strong families, quality education and economic development/employment. At a youth summit in early 2008 sponsored by the Cody Rouge Youth Council (newly formed as a vehicle to amplify youth voice and leadership), safety was named as the neighborhood's critical challenge.

Residents, block clubs, the Faith Alliance, the Youth Council, and other stakeholders began talking together about how to address this concern. They started sharing information on crime hot spots, to better target resident and police patrols. They worked to expand the number of residents willing to keep an eye on their streets, especially when children and youth were walking to and from schools and youth programs. Recognizing that abandoned houses and properties were safety hazards, both as sites for criminal activities and because many were structurally unsound, the Youth Council began documenting properties to board up or tear down.

This view was reinforced that spring when seven youth were shot while waiting at a bus stop near Cody High School. Faith Alliance leaders organized a peace march and vigil at that bus stop to reclaim it as a safe space. Youth, block club leaders and others joined in the event. Building on that, the Youth Council launched a Keep Cody Rouge Clean and Safe Campaign, calling on neighbors and stakeholders to join in a clean-up day in May 2008 targeting that area. The Campaign boarded up empty houses and removed trash, mowed grass and trimmed bushes at abandoned properties.

Growing Smarter, Expanding Capacity

Over the next few years, youth and resident leaders built skills and experience and the neighborhood expanded its structural capacity to deal with blight and safety.

The organizing process led to creation of the Cody Rouge Community Action Alliance (CRCAA) in 2009 as a nonprofit coordinating organization with a board elected by residents, youth and stakeholders, and funding from the Skillman Foundation. Kenyetta Campbell, a resident and 1991



Participants in the Cody Rouge Safety March speak out for change.

Community leader Dr. Pat Butler, emphasized the value of teamwork in achieving change.



graduate of Cody High School who had been the Good Neighborhoods organizer since 2007, was named executive director.

An important resident leader during these years was Dr. Pat Butler. As a retired educator, she became active in the CRCAA education team. She had founded a church in the neighborhood in 2005, and was active in the Faith Alliance. She also was involved in the Warrendale Association in south-central Cody Rouge where she lived. When the Cody Rouge Community Action Alliance formed, she was elected its first board chair. She worked closely with Kenyetta to guide and develop the Alliance. "For three years, I preached: it's going to take teamwork to change this neighborhood," Dr. Butler recalled.

Dr. Butler, Kenyetta and block club leaders in 2009 formed the Neighborhood Partners, in which presidents of the eight block club associations which collectively cover the neighborhood began meeting monthly to coordinate efforts. Neighborhood Partners joined with the Youth Council to sponsor Keep Cody Rouge Clean and Safe. The Campaign evolved into a signature collaborative project. Each year the two groups identify priority areas for that year's clean-up. The number of volunteers pitching in has grown from 30 in 2008 to 170 in 2016, including local residents and volunteers from suburban and local churches, agencies and corporations, according to Kenyetta. The Campaign cleans up local parks and service drives along with vacant residential and commercial properties.

In the past four years, Cody Rouge has expanded the scale of its blight and safety work by leveraging residents' efforts with contributions from outside partners and assistance from the Skillman Foundation.



Keep Cody Rouge Clean and Safe annual clean-up effort has seen increased participation.

To strengthen crime-fighting efforts, CRCAA reached out to the University of Michigan Technical Assistance Center (UMTAC), which Skillman supported as a resource for Good Neighborhoods groups. Through UMTAC, the Alliance obtained an intern to collect and analyze neighborhood crime data so that the Youth Council and Neighborhood Partners could better target and monitor progress on crime hot spots.

Many members of the Youth Council and Neighborhood Partners learned resident empowerment and organizing skills through the new Good Neighborhoods Leadership Academy, created by the National Community Development Institute with support from the University of Michigan and the Skillman Foundation. They also got training from the U of M Urban Research Center in asset mapping and power mapping as tools for shaping neighborhood change strategies. They put their new expertise to use in 2011, when they confronted illegal dumping and other criminal activities around a deteriorated building in Rouge Park. Using these tools, they figured out that the Fire Department had resources to haul away dumped items from that area and persuaded the Fire Department to do that. The Alliance, its Youth Council and Neighborhood Partners grew more savvy at pressuring the City to demolish unsafe structures, especially targeting safe routes to school and to youth program sites.

The Community Action Alliance convinced Skillman to fund a second staff position. In January, 2011, they hired Rebecca Bare, another resident and Cody High graduate with experience in communications, administration and event organizing. This allowed the Alliance to increase outreach and facilitation with the Youth Council, Faith Alliance, Neighborhood Partners, and others inside and beyond the neighborhood.

Paying attention to the experience of their peers in other Good Neighborhoods, in 2011 Cody Rouge leaders convinced Skillman to expand block club support led

by Black Family Development, Inc. (BFDI) from Osborn neighborhood into Cody Rouge. Kevin Bryant, who had done that work in Osborn since 2008, transferred into Cody in June 2011. Similar to Kenyetta, Dr. Butler and Rebecca, Kevin had deep local roots: he lived on the same block where he grew up, just north of Cody Rouge.

Kevin opened an office in the Don Bosco Hall Community Resource Center, which with Skillman support had grown into a hub of youth and family activity in Cody Rouge. CRCAA was officed there, too, making it easy for the two to share information and coordinate efforts. “Kenyetta told me to use Don Bosco Hall as my hub and radiate out from there,” recalled Kevin.

“Dr. Butler encouraged me to attend Neighborhood Partners meetings. Keep attending the meetings, keep building block clubs—one block at a time, one neighbor at a time,” Kevin said. “How do we convince people of the benefits of working together? One key is to be consistent. And I was conscious of not over-promising.”

“Prior to Black Family Development coming on board, we were doing block club development and the Youth Council,” said Kenyetta. “When Kevin came, it took off to a whole other level...Kevin is an encourager. Lots of positive reinforcement. He encourages people to ask and act for what they want.”

In the past four years, Cody Rouge has expanded the scale of its blight and safety work by leveraging residents' efforts with contributions from outside partners and assistance from the Skillman Foundation.

Improving Physical Assets in the Community

In 2012, the neighborhood attracted the national nonprofit KaBOOM! to install a new playground in Cody, using residents and outside corporate and community volunteers.

That fall, the neighborhood became a site for the 100 Houses project launched by Detroit Free Press columnist Mitch Albom and Detroit Rescue Mission Ministries. With the Youth Council identifying houses to board up, and the Neighborhood Partners and CRCAA enlisting local volunteers to work alongside people from outside, over 600 people showed up on Oct. 27 and boarded up 185 houses near Cody High School.

Such success bred more success. In 2013, Cody Rouge Community Action Alliance was approached by the metro-area organization Life Remodeled to be its focus neighborhood for 2014. “They reached out to us,” Kenyetta said. “They heard we were ready.”

With a mission to “remodel lives one neighborhood at a time,” Life Remodeled mobilizes thousands of volunteers to work in a Detroit neighborhood for a week: improving a school or other community asset, repairing homes and cleaning up blight. CRCAA and its neighborhood networks worked for a year with Life Remodeled to plan the week of “remodeling” in August 2014. Extensive new science and athletic facilities were installed at Cody High School, 25 homes were repaired, 254 houses were boarded up, and blight was removed from 303 blocks. Lawn mowers and weed trimmers used by Life Remodeled partners for that week were donated to CRCAA, who shared them with the Neighborhood Partners for ongoing maintenance of vacant land in the neighborhood.

In 2016, General Motors began a partnership with Cody Rouge Community Action Alliance. This emerged through another Skillman connection, where a GM executive served on the Foundation’s board. Like Life Remodeled, GM committed volunteers, cash and material resources for a week of community improvement projects planned in partnership with CRCAA. “Grow Cody Rouge Week” was scheduled for mid-August to coincide with the neighborhood’s annual Family Fun Day and Back 2 School Rally. GM volunteers renovated six schools and the Stein Field athletic facilities, removed debris and beautified the yards of 75 older residents, and boarded and cleaned up 375 vacant homes. General Motors is continuing as an ongoing partner, sponsoring youth internships, funding various renovation projects, and providing volunteers for Keep Cody Rouge Clean and Safe days and other service projects.

Preventing Blight through Help for Homeowners

To prevent blight by helping residents stay in and care for their homes, the CRCAA began offering several types of assistance to homeowners, in collaboration with various partners.

To expand the ability of residents to earn incomes, in 2013 CRCAA began partnering with Prosper US Detroit to offer entrepreneur training for Cody Rouge residents. By



Rebecca Bare (far right) and Kenyetta Campbell (right center) of Cody Rouge Community Action Alliance celebrate with new homeowners.

mid-2016 there were 61 Prosper US Cody Rouge graduates, with 30 of them operating their own businesses.

To help homeowners avoid losing their homes through tax foreclosure, in 2014 the CRCAA started a Delinquent Property Tax Program with Skillman support. Through mid-2016 the program had helped 11 residents retain their homes by resolving a total of \$51,000 in back taxes.

To help residents maintain their homes, in 2015 the CRCAA began to partner with the Local Initiative Support Corporation (LISC) and the City, becoming an intake center for a LISC/City home renovation no-interest loan program. It processed 132 applications in its first year.

To help people become homeowners, the Alliance began offering home buyer education classes, with 17 graduates and one home purchased through mid-2016.

To expand the supply of decent homes for sale, the Alliance purchased and completely renovated two houses, making them available for re-sale in early 2016.

Improving Crime Prevention with More Collaboration and Better Data

Crime reduction efforts have grown more sophisticated over the past four years. The neighborhood’s success in developing leadership action networks such as the Community Action Alliance, Faith Alliance, Youth Council, Neighborhood Partners and Don Bosco Hall Community Resource Center contributed to Cody Rouge being chosen in 2011 as one of two pilot areas for a Detroit Youth Violence Prevention Initiative launched by the U.S. Department of Justice and then-Mayor Dave Bing. The Skillman Foundation was the lead philanthropic partner in this broad-based initiative (the other pilot area chosen was Osborn-Denby on the east side, where Osborn was also a Skillman Good Neighborhood). In 2012 Skillman expanded support for

Peace marches have become more systematic as well... Police officers regularly participate along with faith leaders and residents.

Black Family Development's block club work in Cody, enabling Zenobia Awada to work as safety coordinator alongside Kevin Bryant for a year.

The Community Action Alliance and its partners collaborated with Brothers on Patrol to expand resident safety patrols and target them more strategically on safe routes to schools and youth programs. At first, in 2013, United Way funded this; since 2014, Skillman has been the main funder.

In 2014, Cody Rouge began implementing the new CompStat program, which uses crime data more rigorously and also increases collaboration between residents and law enforcement agencies. In CompStat, the Center for Urban Studies at Wayne State University analyzes neighborhood crime data to identify hot spots and trends, and brings these data to monthly neighborhood meetings where residents, stakeholders, police and other criminal justice personnel can focus their collective efforts on those high-crime areas. County, state, federal, transit and Detroit Public Schools law enforcement officers join DPD and residents at these monthly neighborhood-level crime-solving conversations.

Paula Trilety, who is active in Neighborhood Partners as president of the West Outer Drive Civic Association (WODCA), often attends CompStat meetings. "All the law enforcement agencies meet with community residents and the Cody Rouge Alliance," Trilety said. "We follow the crime stats from Wayne State and target efforts in certain areas to reduce crime, and we monitor the results."

The Wayne State analyses have revealed useful clues. "We identified when crimes tend to happen: we learned that a lot happens on Sundays, while people are at church," said Trilety.

In June 2016, Neighborhood Partners began sponsoring Ceasefire, a gang intervention program that was piloted in Osborn as part of the Youth Violence Prevention Initiative.



"Police, community leaders, clergy and gang members come together. Bring in these known gang affiliates. Talk to them about how detrimental gang activity is to the community," explained Trilety. "We tell them,

'We want you to change. We want you to become productive members of the community. We have people that want to help you get jobs.' We have mothers of kids who were killed by gangs talk to them. This is a powerful program."

Peace marches have become more systematic as well. The Neighborhood Partners and Black Family Development now organize marches in all areas of Cody Rouge without waiting for an incident first. Locations are chosen partly on CompStat data, and often are in highly blighted areas. Police officers regularly participate along with faith leaders and residents. "We pass out flyers about how to reduce crime and reduce domestic violence," said Trilety.

Skillman Contributions to These Efforts

One key underlying all of these efforts, according to Trilety, is that "since Skillman, everyone knows everyone better." The early coaching and convening by the National Community Development Institute, training and brokering from the University of Michigan Technical Assistance Center, networking events and coaching provided by the Community Connections small grants program, co-location of youth programs and organizations in the Don Bosco Hall Community Resource Center, and the presence and advice of Skillman Foundation staff themselves all have reinforced this collaborative mindset.

As neighborhood strategies have evolved, Skillman has been flexibly responsive, for example by supporting CRCAA's Delinquent Property Tax Program. Skillman representatives and neighborhood leaders have learned together. Many innovations in Cody Rouge began in other Skillman neighborhoods, such as Black Family Development block club organizing and the new Ceasefire program. Skillman helped these ideas spread from one neighborhood to the next.

Skillman's steady, multi-year financial support of the Cody Rouge Community Action Alliance has been vital, of course, to the growth and impact of this core, facilitative organization. In recent years, Skillman has also helped the Alliance form relationships with other resource institutions. By 2015, close to a third of the Alliance's funding came from other sources. CRCAA leaders credit Skillman with helping them connect with the Kellogg Foundation, United Way and General Motors.



CASE TWO

Grassroots Action to Increase Safety in Southwest Detroit

By David Scheie with Elizabeth Valdez, Maria Salinas and Consuela Lopez

Safety has been a primary concern of Southwest Detroit residents and stakeholders ever since the Skillman Foundation began supporting local dialogue and action in 2006. When the Skillman process gradually distilled neighborhood interests into four priority areas, safety was one of these, along with health, education and preparedness for life. Task forces formed around each of these four issues. Early on, the Safety Task Force worked to improve safe routes to school in the neighborhood. When the community engagement process led to formation of the Congress of Communities (CoC) in 2010 as Southwest Detroit's ongoing vehicle for collaborative leadership among residents, youth and stakeholders, the task forces became CoC's four main committees.

Other resident-led groups also became active in community improvement efforts, such as Detroit Southwest Pride which organized clean-ups to reduce the blight of abandoned and neglected properties. Elizabeth Valdez, a single mother raising her two daughters in the neighborhood, was one of the co-founders of Southwest Pride in 2011.

Despite these efforts, youth violence continued. Many young lives were lost. Heartfelt conversations occurred over many table tops in the neighborhood: how can we reduce this violence, and increase safety?

A Grassroots Response to Violence

In August 2011, two more violent incidents occurred, this time near where Southwest Pride was doing clean-ups. "One was a shooting of a young guy I knew personally," remembered Elizabeth. "He was about my younger brother's age. In the other case, a taco truck driver was shot." For Elizabeth, this struck too close to home. "We started talking on Facebook, saying, we need to do something! A few of us called a meeting, and three of us showed up."

Despite their small numbers, they were determined to do something. They decided to organize a peace march for Sept. 11, 2011, going from Patton Park down Vernor Avenue to a rally and candlelight vigil in Clark Park in the heart of the neighborhood. They reached out to Detroit Hispanic Development Corporation (DHDC), one of the prominent community-based nonprofit organizations in the neighborhood. "We got the residents and youth together, and DHDC got the speakers," Elizabeth recalled. The residents distributed flyers and publicized the march on social media. Over 300 people showed up for the march and rally.

One of the speakers DHDC recruited was Maria Salinas, executive director of the Congress of Communities. As Maria spoke, she mentioned the CoC Safety Committee

with its regular monthly meetings. “Let’s all get together, bring your concerns and ideas to the table,” Elizabeth remembered hearing Maria say. Elizabeth decided to go to the next Safety Committee meeting.

“A lot of people were at the end of their wits,” said Maria. “They wanted to be involved. I had worked in this community for 30 years at that time, and I saw that people wanted to step up, give of their time, do something.

“There was lots of violence as our city was going through dismantling—our economy, our school system, our politics,” Maria said, recalling the housing foreclosure crisis, the corruption trial of former mayor Kwame Kilpatrick, the City’s takeover by the state and eventual bankruptcy, and the takeover of Detroit Public Schools by a state-appointed emergency manager as well. “Residents were at their wits’ end—and every weekend, it seemed, we were losing a kid to violence.”

At the Safety Committee meeting in late September, people talked of the need for more police patrolling. Unwilling to wait for police action, Elizabeth and about 10 other members of Detroit Southwest Pride began organizing civilian patrols. “We began taking note of things we saw,” Elizabeth said. “A lot of people wanted to be involved.”

Over the next several months, with assistance from CoC organizer Adam Thibodeau, the patrol group developed some infrastructure. It evolved into the West Vernor Civilian Patrol Group, freeing Southwest Pride to continue focusing on its clean-ups and other community service and youth development activities. Southwest Pride also worked for physical infrastructure improvements such as better lighting in the neighborhood.

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—Maria Salinas



The Southwest community responded to ongoing tragedies with a Peace March which was attended by more than 300 citizens.

CoC and DHDC provided spaces where residents and stakeholders could talk about how to deal with safety concerns. “We provided the venue, we always had food,” Maria said. “It was a neutral, safe space.

“There might be conversation about schools, or immigration, but it always centered on safety. The natural leaders of this area were driving the conversation. People knew Liz and her team as real, viable leaders.”

“We all stuck together and kept pushing forward,” said Elizabeth.

Building Relationships between Residents and Police

An incident in the fall of 2012 revealed a gulf of mistrust between residents and the police. A young woman was found dead in Patton Park. Rumors flew that it might be the work of a serial rapist and murderer, possibly even a cannibal. The Congress of Communities called a community meeting and brought the police to share what was known from the crime investigation. The police said there was no evidence of sexual assault, nor of this being the work of a serial killer. However, many residents refused to believe the police’s version.

“That was an a-ha for us: there was no relationship, no trust between residents and the police,” said Maria. The CoC Safety Committee decided to make building trust between Southwest residents and police a priority. They asked police officers to begin attending the monthly Safety Committee meetings. “That’s when the bridge-building began. Officers coming to our meetings gave residents a venue to bitch about safety problems and police performance, and it gave officers a chance to vent some of their challenges.”

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Maria encouraged Elizabeth to step up into a larger leadership role. She urged her to run for the Congress of Communities board seat designated for the Safety Committee chair, at the CoC elections in early 2013. Elizabeth took that step and was elected, becoming chair of the Safety Committee.

Shortly thereafter, the committee decided to recast itself as the Safety Alliance. This reflected their recognition that fostering an alliance between residents, youth, stakeholders and the police and other public law enforcement and criminal justice agencies had become one of their core strategies for increasing safety in the neighborhood. Elizabeth and other resident leaders went through the civilian police academy and FBI academy, to gain a better understanding of how these law enforcement agencies do their job.

Skillman supported the budding alliance between residents and police by paying for neighborhood police officers to be issued cell phones and iPads. Skillman also funded a collaborative effort between the Safety Alliance, Detroit Police Department, a data-mapping center at Wayne State University, and the AmeriCorps Urban Safety (AMUS) program. The Wayne State center used DPD crime data to generate maps showing crime “hot spots” in the neighborhood. They brought the maps and statistics to monthly Safety Alliance meetings for joint strategizing between residents and police on how to cool off the hot spots. AMUS workers went door to door around the hot spots to open dialogue and mobilize neighbors to work more effectively with police to reduce criminal activities.

“We always kind of knew where drug activity and other criminal activities were going on, but now we had the data to prove it,” said Maria. “Our crime prevention efforts became more targeted, more intentional, and we got some successes. Violence, robberies, and drug activity declined in some areas.

“As we were seeing some successes, it generated momentum. When residents came to meetings and heard this, it made them feel that they were moving the needle, they were making a difference.”

“And residents felt more comfortable talking with police,” Elizabeth added.

Safety Alliance leaders had the cell phone numbers of the neighborhood police officers. This enabled them to call anytime, whether to share information about suspicious activity or to fact-check rumors of crime in the neighborhood. “That was power,” said Maria. “It started building trust, building relationships with the police officers.”

Youth Speak Up

To build trust between police and youth, CoC and the Safety Alliance tapped the resources of BUOY (Businesses United with Officers and Youth). This city-wide organization funded recreational outings such as bowling for police officers and youth together. “This was in 2013 and 2014, when Ferguson and other ‘Please Don’t Shoot’ incidents were happening nationally,” Maria said. Because of the friendly interactions, youth felt confident to talk with police on this explosive topic. “Kids took the opportunity to tell the neighborhood police officers how they felt about racial profiling.” Later, at a citywide event, Maria saw some Southwest youth talking to police even though youth from other neighborhoods were afraid to approach them. “That let me know that what we were doing was changing the system,” she said.

The Congress of Communities persuaded Skillman in 2014 to fund a safety coordinator position, through the agency Black Family Development, for a year. “We were the only one of the six Good Neighborhoods that fought to have this, and we hired someone from the community to do this,” said Maria. The coordinator, Marina Chavez, had formerly worked at Southwest Detroit Environmental Vision. “This was perfect! Now we had a staff member to build on everything we had rolled out, and make it more effective,” said Maria. “She was the driver of the BUOY trips: getting all the parental permission slips, arranging all the logistics. The Police Department kept coming back to us because she was making it easy. She also was talking to parents to get them engaged in our safety and other work.”

Sadly, BUOY stopped funding these youth-police trips. “That disappointed our police officers and youth,” Maria said. And Skillman funding for the safety coordinator position ended after a year. However, Marina Chavez then got hired as safety coordinator for Urban Neighborhood Initiatives, in the

The Listen Up event generated a vision for “Southwest Solutionaries,” as youth wrote on wall sheets about what they saw as problems and what they wanted to see changed in the neighborhood.

Springwells Village neighborhood within Southwest Detroit. “She works closely in support of Liz and our Safety Alliance,” said Maria.

May 2014 was another hot period in Southwest Detroit. There were eight violent deaths in three weeks, mostly of young people, including someone murdered at a Cinco de Mayo celebration. In response, the Safety Alliance organized a youth “Listen Up” session at LA SED (another prominent nonprofit organization in Southwest). “This was an opportunity for youth to talk about what was on their mind. The youth talked, and the adults could not talk. They had to listen,” said Maria. Teachers, police officers, and staff from many agencies and schools all came to listen. AmeriCorps workers came from many different organizations: AMUS, City Year, Public Allies, VISTA. Consuela Lopez attended as CoC’s AmeriCorps worker.

The Listen Up event generated a vision for “Southwest Solutionaries,” as youth wrote on wall sheets about what they saw as problems and what they wanted to see changed in the neighborhood, such as better opportunities for college



Maria Salinas, executive director of the Congress of Communities, and Southwest resident.

4th Precinct’s Commander Whitney Walton, Officer Juan Lebron and WVCPG member’s Elizabeth Valdez, Nicole Marie Fisher, and Linda Curmi.



and for jobs, and getting the buses to come on time. “For me, that’s like my blueprint,” said Consuela in 2016, still working for CoC. “I look at it all the time.”

A Neighborhood “Safety Hub”

To further facilitate relationships and collaboration between diverse law enforcement officers and neighborhood residents, in 2015-2016 the Safety Alliance, Congress of Communities and West Vernor Civilian Patrol Group worked to organize a “Safety Hub” in a vacant space next to the CoC office. Fighting crime had become a close-to-home challenge for CoC, because drug-selling and prostitution were occurring next door and upstairs in their building. Consuela and others convinced the landlord to donate the vacant storefront to the Civilian Patrol Group as a Safety Hub, which opened on June 1, 2016.

The Hub is a space where all law enforcement officers, whether from DPD, the transit police, Crimestoppers, the FBI, or Detroit Public Schools safety officers, can take breaks, write reports, use restrooms, and exchange information with each other and with resident leaders. Civilian Patrol Group volunteers are also welcome to use it. Crime statistics and hot spot maps are posted in the Hub for concerned residents and law enforcement officers to see, to facilitate joint problem-solving. “We encourage residents to come and air their concerns, and look at the crime statistics and reports,” said Elizabeth. Resident leaders would like to open similar safety hubs in Mexicantown, 48217 and Chadsey Condon, too.

As a result of all these efforts, violent and property crimes have decreased in Southwest faster than in the city as a whole, 2012-2015, according to official crime data. Violent crime incident rates declined by 30% in Southwest compared to 16% citywide, and property crimes dropped by 31% compared to 27% citywide.

Flexible, Responsive Investments by Skillman

The Skillman Foundation's long-term and multi-faceted support deserves some of the credit for these gains. Skillman supported the process of community meetings and "table top conversations" that identified safety as a widespread concern and helped action networks form. Skillman's multi-year support for the Congress of Communities allowed it to flourish as a coordinating leadership organization in the neighborhood.

In addition to providing stable funding, Maria voiced appreciation for the leadership training that Skillman helped her access. "Skillman invested in the executive directors. We got the training we needed to stay positive" during the difficult years when so much of the city was being dismantled," she said.

Skillman supported multiple collaborative strategies: improving neighborhood policing, the data-driven crime prevention efforts involving Wayne State, AMUS and the Safety Alliance; the safety coordinator through Black Family Development.

More recently, Skillman has helped CoC build relationships with other funders and expand its base of financial support. "Now Skillman is not our major funder anymore," Maria said. "Until two years ago, I didn't know who Kellogg [the W.K. Kellogg Foundation] was. Now they are our biggest funder!"

Community Leadership in Multiple Generations, Across Communities

Elizabeth Valdez' daughters have also chosen to be active in the community. Her older daughter has worked for immigration reform through the organization One Michigan. "They had a 'March without Fear for the Undocumented,'" said Elizabeth. "I supported her in that. I marched with her. Fighting for the undocumented was really important. We had neighbors who were undocumented. She became good friends with our neighbors." Elizabeth' older daughter also served on the CoC youth council.



West Vernor Civilian Patrol Group members: Elizabeth Valdez, John Lopez, Nicole Marie Fisher, Linda Cortez, and Sandra Patterson.

Her younger daughter has been active in some of the safety work. She was friends with the young man killed on Cinco de Mayo in 2014, so these concerns are very personal for her. She also joined the CoC youth council two years ago, and is currently one of its most active members.

Reflecting on her own experiences as a community leader, Elizabeth said, "For me, taking a stand, taking that first step, has really made a difference." Her neighbors recognize her as someone to turn to when violence or other troubles arise. "People know I represent something positive. I don't give up easily. I'm a very hopeful person. My faith is very strong.

"I'm a people person," Elizabeth continued. "I've met a lot of people along the way that care about the same things that I do. I believe that strong unity is very important. I think it's important to build these connections and come together, and encourage all the things that we're doing here. Come and see: come on patrol with us. Come and see our Safety Hub!"

Increasingly, Elizabeth is active city-wide as well as in Southwest Detroit. She participates in safety marches and rallies across the city, and is working on a peace initiative with a pastor on the East Side. "She's a real Detroiter," Consuela said of Elizabeth.

"I've met a lot of people along the way that care about the same things that I do... strong unity is very important...it's important to build these connections and come together, and encourage all the things that we're doing here. " —Elizabeth Valdez

In Closing

These cases show a productive interweaving of Skillman’s city-wide work with local efforts in these two neighborhoods. Skillman played an important role in developing the Detroit Youth Violence Prevention Initiative: collaborating with the City and the U.S. Department of Justice, drawing on good examples from other cities, and helping Cody Rouge and another Good Neighborhood become pilot areas with early access to these resources. It also helped bring the Detroit Police Department, other law enforcement agencies, and Wayne State University data analysts together with resident safety activists and the AmeriCorps Urban Safety (AMUS) program for a more collaborative and better-targeted approach to cooling off crime hot spots. It supported Black Family Development, Inc. to strengthen block clubs and coordinate safety efforts in both neighborhoods. All of these efforts were found useful and supportive of neighborhood aspirations by the residents interviewed for these case studies.

These cases also show that in Cody Rouge and Southwest, Skillman’s vision of developing a local coordinating leadership organization, staffed and governed substantially by residents, has proven effective. The process of community dialogue and visioning that took place in the early years, 2006-2009, was facilitated by local residents—Kenyetta and Maria, in these two neighborhoods—who were hired, guided and mentored by the California-based National Community Development Institute, which Skillman brought to Detroit.



Skillman’s steadfast support for local community betterment efforts was an important beacon of hope amid the corrosive forces damaging Detroit in the past decade.

The momentum and staying power shown in these two neighborhoods is due partly to the successful transition of these resident organizers into executive directors for the new coordinating leadership organizations Cody Rouge Community Action Alliance and Congress of Communities. Hiring locally, and helping talented local residents grow into these important facilitative roles, has proven fruitful. Both organizations play central roles in facilitating local efforts for community betterment that are increasingly sophisticated and multi-faceted.

Skillman’s steady, multi-year funding of core operations in these two organizations enabled these organizations to become effective as ongoing conveners, connectors, and advocates for local vision and action. Now, several years later, both organizations receive financial support from many sources—partly due to their track record and capacity, and partly because Skillman has helped them develop relationships with other funders. For CoC, Skillman is no longer its primary funder. Some of these expanded funder connections were serendipitous, as well, aided by factors such as when Skillman staff moved on to jobs at the Kellogg Foundation.

The past 10 years were a tough time for Detroit neighborhoods. This was particularly true from 2006 through about 2013, when the city was rocked economically and politically on so many levels. During these years, when so much of the city was being dismantled by market and political forces beyond the control of Detroit neighborhood residents, the Skillman Foundation’s steadfast support for local community betterment efforts was an important beacon

Residents of Southwest Detroit responded to violence in their neighborhood by coming together, listening, and working together.

of hope. This ongoing, neighborhood-level work was an important counterpoint to the negative forces that were so corrosive, and it built valuable skills, relationships and expertise in these neighborhoods.

More recently, there are signs of hope in Detroit. Under the new mayor and police chief, with assistance from the Skillman Foundation and skillful neighborhood leaders, city government is becoming more productive and neighborhood policing more nimble. The economy is growing. Crime is declining. Conversations in Southwest and Cody Rouge increasingly focus on how to incorporate new residents into the neighborhood social fabric, rather than simply how to cope with abandonment and decline.

In this evolving context, resident leadership and collaborative, creative action will continue to be important for Detroit neighborhoods. The groups, leaders and networks highlighted in these case studies will likely be important players in the next decade. The Skillman Foundation's skills, connections and credibility as a flexible ally to local efforts, which it has developed over the past decade, will likely make it an important contributor to the continuing rebirth of Detroit as well.



Kenyetta Campbell, long time Cody Rouge resident began her leadership as a neighborhood organizer is now executive director of Cody Rouge Community Action Alliance.

Cody Rouge teens participate in the 100 Homes Board Up Project.



Lessons Learned

- Hiring locally and helping talented local residents grow into larger roles increased momentum and staying power.
- Multi-year support enabled the new leadership organizations to become effective. Now they attract financial support from many sources.
- Skillman aided the aspirations of local residents by mobilizing regional and national institutions including the City, law enforcement agencies, universities, and major nonprofit organizations.
- The most significant innovations in improving safety and reducing blight did not surface until several years after Skillman began its Good Neighborhoods work.
- These cases show how patient support, nourished through ongoing dialogue and co-learning, can generate results not available from more rigid, short-term funding initiatives

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