

## East Liberty Crime Reduction Strategy: Indirect Benefits

The positive benefits resulting from the East Liberty Development Inc. (ELDI)'s revitalization strategy in the neighborhood extend far beyond crime reduction and property prices. A revitalized community, as exists in East Liberty, has the potential to increase prosperity for its residents through broader and richer economic opportunities, and even more importantly, to better position its residents' children for future success. This white paper, the fifth in a series, speaks directly to the latter.

Sociologists, criminologists and urban planners have long shown that the presence of violent crime can lead to neighborhood decline and a general deterioration in public life and economic conditions<sup>1,2</sup>. Other studies have specifically identified the strong negative effects of community violence on children. The trauma that a child experiences when exposed to violence has deep and long-lasting effects. Exposure to community violence negatively impacts children's cognitive skills, academic performance, attendance and educational attainment.<sup>3, 4, 5</sup> Furthermore, there is substantial variation in the level of exposure to violence within different neighborhoods in the same city. Consequently, while all parents want to keep their children safe, not all parents have the luxury of being able to choose a safe neighborhood in which to live.

In the Pittsburgh neighborhood of Homewood, a homogeneously low income, African American population lives in one of the city's most violent neighborhoods<sup>6</sup> served by the city's worst performing schools.<sup>7</sup> The neighborhood of Point Breeze, however, literally next door to Homewood, presents a mirror image in many ways. The largely white, prosperous and safe Point Breeze neighborhood is served by some of the city's best performing schools.<sup>8</sup> In response to this glaring inequity,

<sup>1</sup> Cullen, Julie Berry and Steven D. Levitt. 1999. "Crime, Urban Flight and the Consequences for Cities." *The Review of Economics and Statistics* 81(2); 159-169.

<sup>2</sup> Sampson, Robert J. 2012. *Great American City; Chicago and the Enduring Neighborhood Effect*. University of Chicago Press.

<sup>3</sup> Sharkey, Patrick and Robert Sampson. 2016. "Neighborhood Violence and Cognitive Functioning." In *Social Neuroscience: Brain, Mind and Society*, edited by Russell Schutt, Matcheri S. Keshavan, and Larry J Seidman. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

<sup>4</sup> Sharkey, Patrick. 2010. "The Acute Effect of Local Homicides on Children's Cognitive Performance." *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 107: 11733-11738.

<sup>5</sup> Harding, David J. 2009. "Collateral Consequences of Violence in Disadvantaged Neighborhoods." *Social Forces* 88(2): 757-782.

<sup>6</sup> Numeritics' Baseline Assessment Study for Homewood, Hazelwood and the South Hilltop Communities.

<sup>7</sup> A+ Schools Reports to the Community: <http://www.aplusschools.org/research-and-reports/report-to-the-community/>.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

dozens of supportive services agencies, community centers, and educational institutions have established deep and abiding roots in Homewood. But the fundamental realities of poverty, segregation and violence in Homewood persist after decades of efforts and millions spent.

Just two miles from Homewood in East Liberty, a steep and rapid decline in crime has transformed East Liberty into a safe, sustainable and relatively stable mixed income neighborhood.<sup>9</sup> This renaissance has been the subject of much discussion, including the preceding white papers published by Numeritics describing in detail the specifics of the crime reduction strategy undertaken by ELDI. As a result of this revitalization, community violence in East Liberty has been dramatically reduced.

East Liberty is now a neighborhood of choice, a place where families from higher crime neighborhoods often want to move to. The children of East Liberty are living in a much safer neighborhood today compared to a decade or two ago. We expect that the positive effects of this transition will generate significant long-term benefits well into the future for East Liberty residents. With this reduction of community violence in East Liberty, children can be children, parents can focus on parenting, teachers can focus on teaching, and poorly performing schools can improve. This observation buttresses existing studies that show that families who are moved to safe neighborhoods do better on a whole range of social indicators.<sup>10</sup> At the same time, despite the fact that East Liberty has the highest percentage of affordable and supportive housing<sup>11</sup> in all of Pittsburgh, there is a near zero vacancy rate in those units due to the neighborhood's increased desirability.

Rather than moving people from other neighborhoods to East Liberty, should we not instead consider how to improve safety in their own neighborhoods? Pittsburgh has an abundance of available housing due to years of population decline. There should be no reason why only certain neighborhoods have low crime rates, and no reason why only some children live in violence-free neighborhoods. Many Pittsburghers have long-lasting roots in their neighborhoods and would prefer to stay there if only they and their children did not have to be exposed to high levels of community violence. A program intervention that emphasizes community revitalization and reduced crime rates similar to what occurred in East Liberty has a much higher potential of improving City residents' lives compared to one focused on relocating households.

---

<sup>9</sup> Numeritics' Crime report and white paper series. Available online at [www.eastliberty.org/crime-study](http://www.eastliberty.org/crime-study).

<sup>10</sup> Raj Chetty & Nathaniel Hendren & Lawrence F. Katz. 2016. "The Effects of Exposure to Better Neighborhoods on Children: New Evidence from the Moving to Opportunity Experiment," *American Economic Review*, American Economic Association, vol. 106(4), pages 855-902.

<sup>11</sup> Approximately 30% of the housing in East Liberty is either affordable or supportive housing.

We believe that everyone deserves a safe neighborhood, and that by using a strategy that focuses on crime hot spots, coupled with place-based management and initiatives that promote neighborhood collective efficacy, there can be a disproportionate reduction of crime and community violence across City neighborhoods. East liberty's revitalization has shown how a high crime, predominantly African American neighborhood in Pittsburgh can significantly reduce its crime rate and become a highly desirable place to live.

This is a model that should be considered in other Pittsburgh neighborhoods with active involvement from current residents. Our children deserve nothing less than a childhood free from the trauma of community violence. However, applying this strategy to other City neighborhoods will require a significant rethinking on behalf of the City's residents with respect to the issues of crime, revitalization, housing and the provision of supportive services. Misinformed, inaccurate commentary tarnishes a neighborhood whose continued improvement is yielding positive externalities not only for its residents but also for the City at large.