

Neighborhood C.A.R.E. Program

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Washington University in St. Louis is a mid-size, private university located in the St. Louis metropolitan area. It has 14,000 students enrolled, with the student body comprised of approximately half graduate students and half undergraduate students. The university has capacity to house about 4,000 undergraduate students on its main campus, and the remaining undergraduate students live in the neighborhoods surrounding the campus. All graduate students live off-campus, as Washington University does not offer on-campus housing for graduate students. Around the year 2000, the university began purchasing residential properties off campus in three of the nearby neighborhoods where Washington University students were already residing. The primary intent was to ensure that the neighborhoods around the university remained attractive and safe for students. The three neighborhoods, each with distinct characteristics, are Parkview Gardens, Skinker DeBaliviere and Rosedale Heights/Ames Place. This case study outlines events and activities within the Rosedale Heights/Ames Place neighborhood.

At the time of purchases in the Rosedale Heights area, it was primarily multi-family residences, with a mix of permanent residents and university students. Over the next five to seven years, it became the preferred housing area for undergraduate students, concentrating more than 500 undergraduates into a compact area. During this time frame, the neighborhood also experienced a significant traffic pattern change with the construction and operation of a light rail line adjacent to the campus. This change focused students into two primary walking routes directing them through the single-family neighborhood of Ames Place to reach Rosedale Heights and the Delmar Loop, a commercial and entertainment district frequented by students and local residents.

With the increase in undergraduate student density and change in travel routes, some common student behavior issues arose. These included late night noise, especially from groups of students walking back and forth to campus, off-campus parties, trash, parking, and minor vandalism. These issues were more pronounced during the early months of the academic year and also in the spring with the onset of pleasant weather. Every fall semester, Washington University officials would receive complaints from neighbors about the student behavior issues. There were no structures in place to systemically address these issues, although staff members in Residential Life and Community Relations would often make efforts to address the issues and concerns, with only limited success.

In 2010, the issues between students and the permanent residents of Rosedale Heights reached a tipping point. Following a municipal election, residents were successful in getting the local police department to enforce a “zero-tolerance” policy, resulting in the arrest of students for excessive noise, off-campus party antics, and other city ordinance violations. Students responded with outrage, attending a city council meeting to protest what they viewed as unfair treatment. Parents called university officials and demanded they advocate on behalf of the students.

As the Spring semester ended, university officials came together to develop a multi-pronged interdepartmental approach to address the on-going student/permanent resident concerns. Departments represented included Government and Community Relations, Residential Life, Washington University Police Department, the Office of Vice Chancellor of Students (which included Campus Life and Greek Life representatives), and Quadrangle Housing, the university’s off-campus housing affiliate. Non-university stakeholders of the initial group included permanent residents, neighborhood associations, local businesses, nonprofit organizations and local government officials from the city of University City, Missouri.

First named The Neighborhood Initiative, the mission of this collaborative effort and its resulting programs was to improve permanent neighbor and student relations; promote student engagement in the surrounding community; improve student conduct off-campus; and enhance connections between permanent neighbors and the Washington University-Danforth campus.

The Neighborhood Initiative consisted of a five-pronged approach, each of which are outlined in the remainder of this case study. These five prongs are:

1. A student education campaign
2. The creation of a Neighborhood Liaison Program
3. The creation of a Neighborhood Council
4. An increase in communications with campus neighbors
5. An increase in police presence by the Washington University Police Department

Student Education Campaign

A major factor addressed by the Neighborhood Initiative involved developing a plan to educate Washington University students about their relationships with the neighborhoods surrounding their campus. It was determined that the inappropriate behavior problems most often stemmed from the on-campus students venturing into the surrounding neighborhoods to attend parties and visit people or businesses located in the Delmar Loop. It was decided that a focus on the newest students (freshmen) would help create improved awareness and foster a culture of good citizenship when going off campus. With the help of students, stakeholders and a professional graphic designer, the team developed the *Think Beyond the Bubble* education campaign. Targeted educational components were added to freshman orientation programs for discussing neighborhood relations and issues. They specifically included instructions regarding the safest and most neighbor-friendly walking routes to The Loop. Communication with this target audience also included direct presentations to student leaders, with an emphasis on the Greek community.

The primary means of communication with the on-campus community was a poster campaign, starting with four messages which focused on noise, parties, alcohol use, trash, and vandalism. All of the posters featured the *Think Beyond the Bubble* logo with the tag line, *Smart students make*

great neighbors. Colorful and humorous, the posters were designed to educate and entertain while appealing to the intellectual acumen of the typical Washington University student.

Students living off-campus in the Rosedale Heights neighborhood were mailed correspondence, including letters from the City Manager and the local Police Chief. Additional information enclosed in the mail included a listing of local ordinances, a brochure on having parties, and information about trash and recycling. These students then received an additional letter from the Dean of Students which outlined the expected conduct for Washington University students who lived off-campus. The initial contact by postal mail was followed by regular contact via emails from the Neighborhood Liaison (detailed below) assigned to the Rosedale Heights neighborhood.

Creation of the Neighborhood Liaison Program

The second prong of the Neighborhood Initiative approach was the creation of the Neighborhood Liaison position. The concept of this position came from then Vice Chancellor for Students, James McLeod. He fondly remembered a senior member of his own college community named Belvin, who helped maintain order in a firm but friendly manner. The initiative stakeholders, including Washington University, determined they would create their own “Belvin” in the form of a neighborhood liaison.

This proactive approach established a Washington University staff member as a resident of Rosedale Heights/Ames Place. This full-time staff member would commit to an additional ten hours of work each week to serve as the university’s eyes and ears in the neighborhood. They would serve as an advocate for both students and neighbors. The staff member would provide student education on neighborhood relations and also help students get involved in the neighborhood. They would plan activities which promoted positive interactions between the students and the permanent residents. Acting as the neighborhood liaison, this person would be the chairperson of the newly formed Neighborhood Voice, a monthly meeting for neighborhood stakeholders and students. The Neighborhood Liaison position was supported by Washington University, with compensation for the position in the form of a fully-subsidized apartment in the neighborhood provided by Quadrangle Housing. Budget and oversight for the position were provided by multiple offices that were a part of the interdepartmental planning team.

Creation of the Neighborhood Council

The Neighborhood Liaison position was critical in the creation of The Neighborhood Voice, an organization newly formed to address student and permanent resident relations. The Neighborhood Voice council meetings were created to provide a forum for the Rosedale Heights and Ames Place neighbors to communicate with Washington University officials and students. Students throughout the neighborhood were encouraged to be a part of this neighborhood council. They met monthly in the evening and provided dinner in advance of the meeting to encourage fellowship and conversation.

The Neighborhood Voice Council members worked with the Washington University team to create a variety of events promoting positive relations. These included a fall and spring block party, with BBQ food provided by the students, and games and activities for neighborhood children. Interventions also included adding aspects of neighborhood relations to a variety of student-based activities, including the *Freshman Explore The Loop* and the *Sophomore Big Night Out*. As large groups of

students came through the neighborhoods, staff and neighbors would welcome them, provide information and gifts (bubble gum and soap bubbles to reinforce the *Think Beyond the Bubble* campaign), and help reinforce the idea that these neighborhoods had many families of all types and age ranges, and not just college students. Interventions also included improving the coordinated management of large university events that often impacted neighborhoods, such as the bi-annual WILD concert on campus and student move-in and move-out days.

Increased Communications with Neighbors

The office of Government and Community Relations, in conjunction with the Neighborhood Liaison, took the lead on providing more active communication with the neighbors in Rosedale Heights and Ames Place. Mailings were sent to neighbors at the beginning of both semesters and the end of the academic year, sharing with them the communications provided to students and inviting residents to participate in the Neighborhood Voice meetings, with dates of upcoming block parties and other campus events of interest.

The Neighborhood Initiative Team helped to plan new activities and promoted existing events on campus that encouraged the participation of neighboring residents. These included a neighborhood tailgate party and football game, Neighbor Day at Bear's Basketball, and invitations to Community Days at the Mildred Lane Kemper Art Museum on the Danforth Campus. Neighbors were invited to participate in a new move-out initiative called *Lightening Your Load*. The event was aimed at diverting recyclables and reusable items from the trash dumpsters by providing an easy access drop-off location, or having items picked up by vehicles circulating throughout the neighborhood. Neighbors were invited to participate and many took advantage of the opportunity to "clean house."

Increased Police Presence by Washington University Police Department

The final prong of the overall approach to addressing student behavior issues was the active participation of the Washington University Police Department (WUPD). WUPD had always been active in the Rosedale Heights/Ames Place neighborhood, working closely with the University City Police Department in joint patrolling. WUPD increased its presence in the neighborhood by adding police officers to work specifically in off-campus neighborhoods. The University provided a Neighborhood Security Patrol, consisting of a security officer in a patrol car making rounds throughout the neighborhood from 6 p.m. to 2 a.m., providing information to both the municipal and university police departments if additional assistance was needed. The increased presence also included officers on foot and bicycle patrols. Officers also participated in the Neighborhood Voice meetings and made an effort to form relationships with neighborhood residents. WUPD officers took a proactive approach, working with and advising students in the neighborhood. For example, if WUPD officers noticed a party forming or noisy groups of students, officers would stop and counsel with the students about the observed behaviors and remind them of local ordinances and their responsibility to be good neighbors.

Program Growth 2011-2015

May 2011 marked the end of the first year of the Neighborhood Initiative. The year ended in a much calmer environment than the year before. The "zero-tolerance" policy was dropped and there were no more student protests. There was a noticeable decrease in the amount of neighbor

complaints and increase in trust and communications between permanent residents, Washington University staff members, and the students. Over the last four years, the Neighborhood Initiative has grown and changed but the five core elements have remained.

In 2012, the program was officially moved to Residential Life, with a Residential Life staff member taking on the responsibility of coordinating the program while maintaining a team approach. During this year, the Neighborhood Liaison program was expanded into two other neighborhoods where Washington University owns property: Parkview Gardens and Skinker DeBaliviere. The role of the Neighborhood Liaison is different in each neighborhood, based on the norms of that community. For example, in the Skinker DeBaliviere neighborhood, there is already an active community council. The role of the Liaison in that neighborhood is to engage students to participate in the existing vibrant life of that neighborhood, as well as to address student behavior concerns. In 2013, Residential Life created an Assistant Director position (and in 2014 upgraded it to an Associate Director Position), with a focus on student behavior issues and the responsibility for student well-being for all undergraduate students who live off-campus, not just those living within the Residential Life system. More systems were put in place to create clear expectations of student behavior, ensure follow-up with students who were cited for noise and other disturbances, and provide restorative response to conflict.

The *Think Beyond the Bubble* education campaign is still in full force, with the poster campaign increasing from the initial four to eight posters. New events have been added, including Community Conversations, Shop Local/Shop The Loop, as well as a strong presence in Delmar Loop events such as The Loop Ice Carnival and Style in The Loop. In 2014, the effort was rebranded as Neighborhood C.A.R.E.—which stands for Connect, Advocate, Respect and Engage.

Connect

- Connect students to neighbors, and neighbors to students
- Facilitate neighborhood access to the University and university-community access to neighborhood events and resources.

Advocate

- Collectively advocate for community needs, neighbor rights, student rights, neighborhood improvements
- Provide education around tenant rights and responsibilities, safety, law enforcement, and living safely in the neighborhood.

Respect

- Encourage getting to know neighbors and students as individuals
- Hold students accountable for actions and impact
- Educate all university students about respect in the neighborhood—*Think Beyond the Bubble*

Engage

- Promote being a good neighbor—Smart Students Make Great Neighbors
- Provide community service opportunities—students working in the community

The Neighborhood Care Team now consists of ten staff members across several departments. In addition, there is an advisory team made up of senior Washington University administrators, who receive updates and provide guidance to the team two or three times a year. The budget for

the program is still interdepartmental, with in-kind staff time, apartment rentals, and a cash budget for supplies associated with block parties and other special events. In Spring 2015, the Neighborhood C.A.R.E. Team grew its programming by adding two orientation sessions for students who planned to move off-campus in the fall, with the hope of improving student knowledge and student engagement in their new communities.

Outcomes

Washington University's Neighborhood C.A.R.E. program has just completed its fifth academic year. The University organized presence alone has had a positive change on the dynamics in the neighborhood. From the university's perspective there have been several positive outcomes.

First, an interdepartmental team is in place to address student behavior concerns off-campus. There are established protocols and responsibilities for contact with students, aimed at following up and holding students accountable. There are open lines of communication to handle complaints, with clear delineation of the follow-up with both the neighbors and the students. Another positive outcome for Washington University is that the organized neighborhoods know their Neighborhood Liaison contact and have a direct line to voice a concern or seek information from the university.

There is a reciprocal positive outcome for the community. In the Rosedale Heights/Ames Place neighborhood, The Neighborhood Voice has evolved into a true community organization. Many community leaders regularly attend the meetings, including the Mayor of University City and representatives of The Loop business district, who discuss Loop events and their impact on the neighborhood. The body addresses issues as diverse as rodent control to the impact of the construction for the installation of a fixed track trolley on Delmar Loop. Other nonprofit organizations choose to participate as a way to communicate with the neighbors about their upcoming activities.

Challenges/Barriers

Beyond initial community apprehension about the overall approach, the two largest challenges are student participation and student turnover. The original vision for The Neighborhood Voice was that there would be wide-spread student participation in the meetings. The original goal was to have a representative from each building in the neighborhood. It has been challenging to get consistent student participation, due to many factors. One is the wide range of activities students are already engaged in by the time they move off-campus. Another factor is that many students move off-campus to seek independence and do not want to be associated with an organized university group or activity.

Several strategies have been deployed to address these issues. Residential Advisors who live in off-campus Residential Life buildings regularly participate in The Neighborhood Voice meetings. In some years of this program, a student ambassador had been selected to try to increase student participation at Neighborhood Voice. During the 2015-2016 academic year, Greek Life will try to assist with this issue by requiring each Greek community with a substantial off-campus presence to appoint a representative to The Neighborhood Voice.

The second issue is student turnover. Neighborhood C.A.R.E. must be ever vigilant. Every year

the residency changes both on and off campus. There is always a new batch of freshmen to train and new off-campus students who want to test their freedom. It is important that we continue all of our activities, as well as find new and interesting ways to engage our target audiences.

What's Next

The Neighborhood C.A.R.E. Program will continue to grow in the upcoming academic year. With even more students living off-campus in Residential Life properties, the Residential Community Directors (RCDs) have become an important part of our team. We utilize the professional assistance of the RCDs along with their Resident Assistants to build and expand the work of the Neighborhood C.A.R.E. engagement initiative.

Also in 2015-2016, the Neighborhood Liaison for the Rosedale Heights/Ames Place neighborhood will be relocating to the Parkview Gardens neighborhood. Parkview Gardens is the location of a large university-owned student apartment complex which opened in the fall of 2014. It is also the location of many nonprofit organizations, community gardens and other community assets. We believe the Neighborhood Liaison can then assist in creating an organization specific to Parkview Gardens which can bring together students and permanent residents of this multi-cultural, multi-racial, and somewhat transient community. It is also hoped that the Neighborhood Liaison can plan programs to activate the large graduate student population who live in Parkview Gardens.

The Neighborhood Liaisons are professionals who play an important role in this program. Traditionally, the Liaisons have come from Washington University's Institute of Civic Engagement, the Community Service office, and from Student Affairs. In 2015-2016, the Gephardt Institute for Civic Engagement and the Community Service Office will merge and there will be an even greater focus on developing a culture of service and engagement among Washington University students. The Liaisons embedded in the community will have great opportunities for programming and outreach to off-campus students. We are looking forward to seeing how we can leverage these professional strengths and connections to benefit both the Gephardt Institute and the Neighborhood C.A.R.E. program.

The Washington University Neighborhood C.A.R.E. initiative has made progress in improving relations between students and permanent residents. It has brought together a team of people from a cross-section of the university who understand and are authorized to take actions to educate students, communicate with neighbors, solve problems, and more importantly, take a proactive approach to education and community outreach. Both the university and the community reap benefits from these programs, and Washington University seeks to enhance and build upon these existing programs as the number of undergraduate students living off-campus continues to increase.

Author

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