

Greening Spaces as an Intimate Partner Violence Prevention Strategy in Michigan



In 2018, the Michigan Coalition to End Domestic and Sexual Violence (MCEDSV) initiated a five-year effort focused on “greening” to prevent intimate partner violence (IPV). Greening spaces is increasing utilization and equitable access to parks, gardens and other types of vegetation to create a warm and welcoming environment in the community. While MCEDSV has focused on violence prevention for years, this is the first time they’re specifically digging into the relationship between the physical/built environment and IPV perpetration. This expansion is funded through a Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) DELTA IMPACT grant. They have identified three different locations in Michigan (Detroit, Kalamazoo, and Houghton County) to implement their greening efforts over the course of five years. MCEDSV will build relationships with these communities, support community-lead improvement in the quantity and quality of community green spaces, and create an implementation guide for other cities to use.

The relationship between greening and domestic violence

The connection between green spaces and intimate partner violence is not obvious to everyone. However, one study in public housing clearly shows a link: residents living in buildings close to green conditions, like grass and trees, reported significantly lower rates of partner violence in the past year compared to residents living near barren conditions.¹ The study unpacks this link and explains levels of mental fatigue were much higher in barren areas which may contribute to aggression. Additional research draws connections between green spaces and collective efficacy (mutual trust and willingness to help each other), as well as green spaces and reductions in community violence; collective efficacy and community violence are both known risk factors for domestic violence.² The Michigan Coalition to End Domestic and Sexual Violence (MCEDSV) believes that improving conditions within communities through greening can increase community connection and social cohesion. Community connection and social cohesion are protective factors for intimate partner violence. MCEDSV DELTA Impact prevention efforts focus on increasing protective factors, like green spaces, while decreasing risk factors, like alcohol outlet density and predatory payday lending. While

¹ Kuo, F. E., & Sullivan, W. C. (2001). Aggression and violence in the inner city effects of environment via mental fatigue. *Environment and Behavior*, 33(4), 543-571.

² Niolon, P. H., Kearns, M., Dills, J., Rambo, K., Irving, S., Armstead, T., & Gilbert, L. (2017). *Preventing Intimate Partner Violence Across the Lifespan: A Technical Package of Programs, Policies, and Practices*. Atlanta, GA: National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

greening efforts, alone, will not prevent intimate partner violence, greening can influence a range of factors that support safe relationships and can have an important, positive impact on communities.

Selecting locations in partnership with residents to focus on areas with a concentration of risk factors

MCEDSV, in collaboration with the State Prevention Leadership Team, has chosen three specific communities in which to implement their greening work. Given Michigan's geographical diversity, MCEDSV is conducting this work in both urban and rural settings. While two of the locations, Detroit and Kalamazoo, are urban, Houghton County is a rural area in Michigan's upper peninsula. MCEDSV was very deliberate when selecting the communities on which to focus. Amanda Barratt, senior program director at MCEDSV says, "We wanted to focus on areas that had a high prevalence of alcohol outlet density and that also had a high utilization of predatory payday lending because these are risk factors for intimate partner violence." MCEDSV also specifically selected the three locations because they believe greening efforts in these areas can be sustained through community partnerships after grant funding ends.

The five-year plan: Staggering implementation to increase effectiveness

MCEDSV's greening efforts are designed to take place over the course of five years, with different components occurring each year within the three chosen implementation locations. The first year of work in each city is dedicated to relationship building and ensuring efforts are community-led, the second year is dedicated to beginning the process of implementation, and the remaining time to continued implementation and sustainability. MCEDSV is staggering implementation by starting work first in Detroit, then Kalamazoo, and finally Houghton County. The first year focused solely on relationship building in Detroit, while the second-year centers on both commencing implementation in Detroit and relationship building in Kalamazoo. The third year will involve continued implementation in Detroit, beginning implementation in Kalamazoo, and relationship building in Houghton County. Staggering implementation allows MCEDSV to incorporate lessons learned as they go, and is intended to make the work more effective and less overwhelming for MCEDSV and their community implementation teams.

Ongoing greening efforts in Detroit

In Detroit, MCEDSV has begun the processes of relationship building and implementation of greening spaces. In line with MCEDSV's values of community engagement, resident leadership is prioritized to ensure greening efforts are equitably implemented, truly meet the needs of the community, and do not promote

gentrification.³ MCEDSV purposefully partners with folks whose initiatives are community-centered, community-led, and have consistent feedback from those most impacted by greening work.

During the first year in Detroit, MCEDSV built relationships with various types of groups, including the City of Detroit Parks and Recreation Department, community development agencies, urban gardening organizations, and organized groups of community members. Through these partnerships, MCEDSV is supporting the development of new green spaces, as well as renovating, revitalizing, and maintaining existing green spaces.

Creating Spaces Detroit is one example a community driven project that MCEDSV is looking to grow partnerships with. Creating Spaces Detroit was started by community members in the Northwest side of Detroit. They created a path, fire pit, and gazebo and are renovating an adjacent rundown house to transform the site into a community meeting place.



Caption: A vacant lot became a park and community meeting space, thanks to renovation efforts by Creating Space Detroit. Photo provided by Michigan Coalition to End Domestic and Sexual Violence.

MCEDSV recently partnered with Peace Tree Parks. This grassroots agency is educating communities and residents about urban gardening with goals of creating both public and private residence gardens and providing locals with fresh, organic produce. They intend not only to create urban gardens but to give communities and individuals the skills and knowledge to construct their own gardens.

³ Wolch, Jennifer R., Jason Byrne, and Joshua P. Newell. "Urban green space, public health, and environmental justice: The challenge of making cities 'just green enough'." *Landscape and urban planning* 125 (2014): 234-244.



Caption: Peace Tree Parks non-profit organization instructs residents and communities on how to create urban gardens, like the one pictured above. Photo provided by Michigan Coalition to End Domestic and Sexual Violence.

Throughout the process of relationship-building, MCEDSV's community organizer in Detroit, Phalgun Siddapureddy, has observed people do see the connection between green spaces and effects on physical and mental health but they haven't considered the connection with gender-based violence. However, she has been met with interest from agencies and individuals who want to learn how their efforts can act as protective factors for safe relationships. MCEDSV will continue sharing and spreading knowledge on the role of greening in violence prevention as implementation progresses.

Throughout the process of relationship-building, MCEDSV's community organizers in Detroit, have observed that, many people do see the connection between green spaces and the effects on physical and mental health, but do not immediately connect these spaces with gender-based violence.

How the coalition is thinking about evaluation and the future of the work

Though MCEDSV only started its greening efforts in 2018, evaluation measures to assess its success and goals for the program's future have already been created. MCEDSV will examine how the quality and quantity of green space changes over the course of the program's five years of implementation, as well as which neighborhoods within Detroit, Kalamazoo, and Houghton County benefit from greening. They want to identify whether certain neighborhoods disproportionately receive greater investment or benefit more than others from greening efforts because they want to impact the most vulnerable populations and not contribute to gentrification.⁴ MCEDSV will create an implementation toolkit for other communities; the toolkit will include the lessons they learned and the relationship-building and implementation strategies they employed. MCEDSV hopes this will help lay a foundation for future equitable and community-focused greening efforts to occur across the nation.

⁴ Wolch, Jennifer R., Jason Byrne, and Joshua P. Newell. "Urban green space, public health, and environmental justice: The challenge of making cities 'just green enough'." *Landscape and urban planning* 125 (2014): 234-244.

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