

# Neighbors in Action

Creating Safer and Healthier  
Communities

---



Neighbors  
in Action

## Acknowledgments

Many passionate people contributed to this document and the 20-year history of the Crown Heights Community Mediation Center, which going forward will be known as Neighbors in Action.

Thank you to Ife Charles for her genius. It is her joyful, loving spirit that guides our work. Thanks to Jillian Shagan for her patience through every type of turbulence.

Thank you to all the previous staff members, volunteers, and interns, including our founding project director, Sheryl Goldstein. A special thanks to Chris Watler, Juan Ramos, Marlon Peterson and Brian Cunningham. Thank you to Community Boards 3, 8, 9, and to all our neighbors on Kingston Avenue, Gates Avenue, and St. Johns Place.

We could not have had the courage, creativity, or results in the world of community driven anti-gun violence work without the founding members of the S.O.S. team: David Bookhart, Lisa Jones, Derick Scott, Reverend Ken Bogan, Achisamach Yisreal, and Lavon Walker, may he rest in peace and power.

– Amy Ellenbogen  
Project Director, Neighbors in Action

Cover Photo Credit: Stephen Yang

To learn more about Neighbors in Action, visit [neighborsinaction.org](http://neighborsinaction.org).

2018

# Neighbors in Action

The goal of Neighbors in Action is to build safer and healthier communities. Throughout our programming in Crown Heights and Bedford-Stuyvesant, Neighbors in Action seeks to amplify local strengths, foster community leadership, and provide opportunities for local residents to be strategically involved in the improvement of their own neighborhood. Neighbors in Action focuses on five key programmatic areas:

- Promoting Community Safety
- Healing
- Aiding Neighbors
- Investing in Young People
- Placemaking

We work to create communities where violence is neither needed nor wanted, neighbors have increased autonomy and decision-making capabilities, and the people who want to lead have the skills to do so.

## Origins

Neighbors in Action grows out of the Crown Heights Community Mediation Center. Launched by the Center for Court Innovation in 1998, the Mediation Center sought to improve intergroup relations, address interpersonal disputes, and build the capacity of residents to solve their own problems. Two decades later, the Mediation Center has grown to include multiple sites in central Brooklyn and a variety of

youth development, violence prevention, and community-building programs. The Mediation Center has demonstrated how neighborhoods once torn apart by violence can become peaceful, vibrant communities through the collaborative efforts of local residents, nonprofit organizations, businesses, elected officials, and faith-based leaders. Neighbors in Action is the next step in this evolution. Starting in 2018, the Crown Heights Community Mediation Center will become Neighbors in Action to honor its expanded geographic and programmatic focus.

*Brooklyn  
Borough  
President  
Howard  
Golden at the  
opening of the  
Crown Heights  
Community  
Mediation  
Center in 1998.*



# Philosophy

Neighbors in Action focuses on addressing harm. Because we recognize that individual, inter-generational, and historical trauma can stand in the way of healthy neighborhoods, healing is a central focus. On an individual level, we provide basic survival services, helping people with benefits, housing, and legal problems. On a neighborhood level, we look to advance homegrown solutions to difficult challenges. And, in all of our work, we place a special emphasis on people who have been the most historically marginalized and disenfranchised.

Our goal is to help create neighborhoods where residents feel safe and are able to make positive life choices. As sociologist Patrick Sharkey and others have documented, non-profits have a key role to play in helping to produce safe communities where residents are able to thrive, rather than simply survive. Neighbors in Action aims to enhance residents' relationships with one another and increase their ability to address problems in their community. In the process, we seek to uphold the following qualities:

## ■ Healing-Focused

Recognizing and understanding trauma enables people to begin healing. Our programming is designed to acknowledge the effects of individual and collective pain, intergenerational and historical trauma—and embrace the possibility of collective healing. Neighbors in Action staff are intentional in program design and implementation to ensure that all people, particularly those who are the most marginalized, feel welcome, safe, and valued.

- **Strength-Based**

In every neighbor and every neighborhood, there are talents, resources, and assets for overcoming individual and communal challenges. Neighbors in Action seeks to leverage those strengths in order to address community problems. A strength-based approach does not ignore problems; rather, it seeks to amplify resilience and resourcefulness.

- **Inclusive**

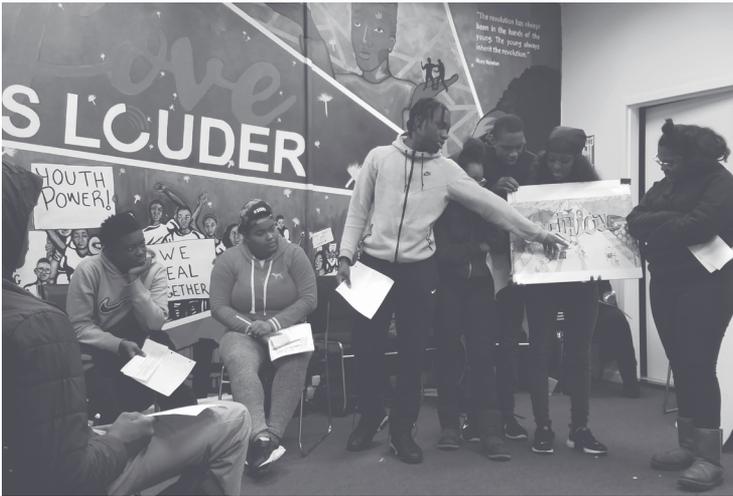
When people of different backgrounds come together to solve problems of mutual concern, they create neighborhoods that work. Our programs seek to bridge gaps and foster new relationships. All local residents are welcome to come to our offices to seek assistance and participate in solving problems.

- **Collaborative**

Isolation and exclusion undermine healthy neighborhoods. We seek to build meaningful relationships among neighbors. Neighbors in Action places emphasis not only on strong relationships among neighbors, but also on partnerships with other organizations and agencies to comprehensively address neighborhood problems.

## ■ Power-Building

Neighbors in Action seeks to invest in the leadership development of local residents, particularly the most marginalized and most at-risk. We work to build and spread civic responsibility, ensuring that leadership is widely distributed and increasing the capacity of neighbors to take action on the issues that are important to them. We will use accountability boards to review the direction of our programming to help ensure that it is truly responsive to community needs and priorities.



*Participants in our youth programs learn leadership skills and engage in peer-to-peer education.*

# Programming

In Crown Heights and Bedford-Stuyvesant, Neighbors in Action operates five overlapping and mutually-supportive programs:

- **Promoting Community Safety**

We mobilize local residents to promote peace and safety. Our *Save Our Streets* program, which takes a public health approach to ending gun violence, has been documented to reduce shootings.

- **Healing**

*Make It Happen* gives participants (all of whom are young men who have experienced violence in their lives) the tools they need to overcome trauma and to succeed. All programming takes into consideration collective or historical trauma and resilience in order to heal.

- **Aiding Neighbors**

We open our doors to anyone who wants to come in for help. Our neighbor services include helping people find jobs, apply for benefits, and access basic services. Through our *Legal Hand* program, we train local residents to provide legal information to their neighbors so they can resolve housing, family, immigration and other issues.

- **Investing in Young People**

We seek to engage local young people in meaningful educational, recreational, and artistic opportunities. Through *YO S.O.S.*, we train teens to become peer leaders. We also help prepare young adults for the world of work.

## ■ Placemaking

We seek to improve the physical environment of the community in ways that promote safety and public access. By helping to implement the *Mayor's Action Plan for Neighborhood Safety*, we are engaging public housing tenants in improving their physical environment. We plan street festivals and events in parks and other locations that encourage local residents to reinvigorate public spaces.

In the months to come, we will look to add additional components to our model, exploring how we can best reduce domestic violence, spread restorative justice, and cultivate civic leadership among local residents.



*Block parties create safe, fun spaces where residents can build community.*

## Outcomes

The goal of Neighbors in Action is to build stronger and healthier neighborhoods. We will look to measure the effectiveness of our efforts in a myriad of ways, including both quantitative and qualitative research. For example, researchers will use data from government sources to assess whether Neighbors in Action succeeds in reducing local crime. Public surveys will enable us to determine whether Neighbors in Action has an impact on public attitudes, including levels of trust and civic engagement among local residents. Researchers will also seek to track physical improvements, taking photographs and using other techniques to document whether we are able to create vibrant public spaces. Wherever possible, researchers will take a participatory approach to evaluation, engaging local residents in research design, implementation, and analysis.

*Youth are given opportunities to help organize community events and build positive relationships with their peers.*





**Neighbors  
in Action**

---

[info@neighborsinaction.org](mailto:info@neighborsinaction.org)

[neighborsinaction.org](http://neighborsinaction.org)