

Significant Progress: Illinois State Police Public Safety Enforcement Group Partners With East St. Louis Stakeholders

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EAST ST. LOUIS - The Illinois State Police (ISP) Public Safety Enforcement Group (PSEG), an investigative unit utilizing a community-based, trauma-informed approach to violent crime reduction partnering with East St. Louis stakeholders saw a decrease in homicides at a time when homicides are spiking across the country as well as a significant increase in homicide clearance rates during the first year of operation compared to the year before its implementation.

In an unprecedented partnership, over 20 ISP PSEG officers have worked side by side with East St. Louis police officers to provide swift and professional investigations on all reported violent crimes in the City of East St. Louis to make the community safer and more just. The East St. Louis community has responded very positively to this new type of police engagement that focuses on bringing consequences to violent offenders involved in murders, non-fatal shootings, aggravated batteries, carjackings, robberies, kidnappings, sexual assaults and domestic violence, while focusing wraparound resources on victims to disrupt the cycle of violence and trauma.

ISP PSEG and the East St. Louis Police Department (ESL PD) have partnered with community organizations playing a crucial role in addressing the trauma wrought by violent crime in the city. The Wraparound Wellness Center (WWC) of District 189 provides trauma services to the children of East St. Louis who have witnessed or been victimized by violent crime. Before the WWC, no such full-spectrum, trauma-informed programs were available to children exposed to violence. For example, following a homicide this spring, WWC personnel responded to the crime scene and provided real-time trauma services to a four-year-old child covered in the victim's blood.

Another partner, the Community Life Line Family Resource Center, also provides trauma services to victims of violent crime and their families. Families who have lost a loved one to murder can gather at the community center to meet trauma service providers as well as the investigating officers assigned to their loved one's case. These meetings have forged strong relationships based on trust and respect between families and officers and connected grieving families with invaluable trauma services.

In January of 2022, the Illinois Department of Human Services will commence a violent crime community engagement / deflection pilot program in East St. Louis, partnering with the PSEG Initiative and ESL PD as well as the WWC and Community Life Line Resource Center. "Community engagement specialists," employed and trained by TASC, Inc. (Treatment Alternatives for Safe Communities), will work with PSEG and the ESL PD, along with service providers throughout the Metro East who helped to build the program, to ensure victims of violent crime and their families receive the assistance and resources they need in a timely manner.

"Our belief in the PSEG model is simple and based on evidence: the best way for police to build trust and credibility with the community is by passionately investigating all violent crimes so victims and their families see that the police truly care about them. The community has responded by engaging with our officers in a way we simply haven't seen before," said ISP Director Brendan F. Kelly. "The unique partnerships with the Wraparound Wellness Center of District 189 and Community Life Line Family Resource Center are making a measurable difference."

“The commitment to caring for the needs of children and families impacted by violence whether as a victim, family member of a victim, or witness is critical to breaking the cycle of violence,” said Wyvetta Granger, Executive Director of Community Life Line. “Working to bring PSEG investigators together with grieving families has built bridges and shown them that law enforcement is committed to getting them answers.”

“Responding to children who have witnessed or experienced trauma or violence and helping their family members who often struggle with basic necessities like food, housing, mental health services or social services is critical to restoring stability in their lives,” said Dr. Tiffany Gholson, Director, Parent and Student Support Services, School District 189. “We wrap our arms around these children and their families to ensure that they have the support that they need during unspeakable times. As a school district who already knows and has relationships with the children and their families, we can remove many of the traditional barriers in seeking help and support--like access, transportation, and stigma.”

Since October 20, 2020, PSEG agents have opened over 389 investigations and assisted with scores of additional criminal investigations. For example, the number of domestic violence investigations leading to charges the first year of the PSEG Initiative increased by over 100 percent compared to the year before the PSEG Initiative began.

PSEG has worked 20 murders. PSEG has solved or cleared 11 of the 20 cases (current clearance rate of 55 percent), and 10 of those 11 have been charged (current charge rate of 50 percent). In 2020, there was a clearance rate of 40 percent on East St. Louis homicides.

From October 19, 2019, to October 18, 2020, there were 41 homicides (year before PSEG Initiative). From October 19, 2020, to October 18, 2021, there were 31 homicides (first year of PSEG Initiative: 24 percent reduction in homicides).

During the PSEG Initiative, there has also been a reduction in non-fatal shootings. On December 21, 2020, there were 125 non-fatal, reported shootings for that year (PSEG began on 10/19/20). As of December 21, 2021, there were 110 non-fatal, shootings for the year (12 percent reduction in non-fatal shootings).

Finally, a recent incident dramatically demonstrates the humanity of these officers and their commitment to the East St. Louis community. PSEG Initiative officers played a critical role in saving the life of a three-year-old boy after he was shot by an AK-47 during a mass shooting on September 9, 2021. The child was brought to these officers by his mother, and they performed life-saving measures while rushing the child themselves to a hospital in St. Louis.