

East St. Louis Homicides Down 37 Percent, Non-Fatal Shootings Down 24 Percent After ISP Community-Based Approach

by Jayme Bufford

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EAST ST. LOUIS – The Illinois State Police (ISP) Public Safety Enforcement Group (PSEG), an investigative unit utilizing a community-based approach to violent crime

reduction, is celebrating its second anniversary. In October 2020, ISP and the East St. Louis Police Department began working all reported violent crime cases together to boost resources, ensure professionalism and integrity in investigations, and reduce crime.

PSEG also partnered with community organizations to address the trauma caused by violent crime in the city. The District 189 Wraparound Wellness Center provides trauma services to the children of East St. Louis who have witnessed or been victimized by violent crime. The Community LifeLine Family Resource Center is another partner that provides trauma services to victims of violent crime and their families.

“In order to prevent violence, we have to get at the root causes of crime—and that’s exactly what this community-based partnership does,” said Governor JB Pritzker. “Thanks to our extraordinary ISP Public Safety Enforcement Group officers and community organizations like the District 189 Wraparound Wellness Center and the Community LifeLine Family Resource Center, we are actively reducing violence in East St. Louis, while simultaneously supporting victims with the resources and services they need and deserve. Here in Illinois, we are setting a new standard for violence prevention — one that is equitable, community-centered, and justice-based.”

Compared to this time last year, homicides in East St. Louis are down 37% and non-fatal shootings are down 24%. From January 1, 2022 through October 1, 2022, PSEG worked 323 cases, including 65 domestic violence cases and 17 homicides in East St. Louis, compared to 27 homicides during the same period last year. From the beginning of this year through October 1, there have been 65 non-fatal shootings compared to 86 this time last year, a 24% decrease. So far this year, PSEG has seized 113 firearms.

“As ISP focuses on fighting crime, the PSEG model is one that is being studied nationwide. Agents are not only investigating crimes but also engaging the community,” said ISP Director Brendan F. Kelly. “There has been an overwhelmingly positive response from the community and statistics show this model is reducing violent crime. The partnerships with the District 189 Wraparound Wellness Center and Community LifeLine Family Resource Center are, without a doubt, making a difference.”

In 2022, PSEG has referred more than 80 youths to the Wrap Around Wellness Center for cases of youth violence, trauma, needed support systems, and mental health coping mechanisms.

“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 School District 189 Parent and Student Support Services Director Dr. Tiffany Gholson. “We wrap our arms around these children and their families to ensure

they have the support they need during unspeakable times. As a school district that 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.”

“As social problems continue to rise, and violence still exists, our entire community must work together. The partnership between Community LifeLine and the PSEG Unit allows us to bridge the gap between law enforcement and the community. We are noticing an improvement in community trust while addressing historical barriers between law enforcement and the Black community,” said Community LifeLine Executive Director Wyvetta Granger. “Community LifeLine can provide and connect the family to wraparound services and resources as they focus on healing. The ‘warm hand off,’ our referral process, allows the PSEG Unit to demonstrate compassion for our community and focus on investigating cases.

The East St. Louis community has responded positively to this new type of police engagement. This year, PSEG sponsored a team of middle school boys from the East St. Louis Area for the Metro East Baseball League, and in July, PSEG held its annual Field Day at Frank Holten Park with 20 kids from the Metro-East area.

Respectfully,

Trooper Jayme Bufford

Illinois State Police

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