

# CLEVELAND, OHIO

## Active Living by Design – Slavic Village Development

Slavic Village Development (SVD) is a community development corporation located in Cleveland, Ohio that works with the Broadway neighborhood. With a population consisting of mostly working class, middle to lower income families, Slavic Village Development was faced with the challenge of improving a community that undergoing increasing foreclosures and perceptions of a lack of safety. In 2003, SVD received a grant from the Active Living by Design program to begin an initiative to rebrand Broadway as “a community on the move”.

When Slavic Village Development first began, they were primarily focused on bricks and mortar. However, as the number of brown fields increased in the neighborhood due to foreclosures, there were concerns voiced by various members of the SVD staff and other community members on how to redevelop these spaces and reintegrate them into the neighborhood. Through these conversations, the focus of SVD shifted to addressing the issue of how they could re-mold the physical development and health of the neighborhood through policy, programming, and the built environment. SVD began to look at the health and wholeness of the relationships within the community from a multiple systems level, and thus underwent an organizational change that



The refurbished Morgana Run Trail provides a space for active living and alternative means of transportation

included working collaboratively various across agencies, such as City Planning and the City Department of Public Health.

One of the first big initiatives undertaken by Slavic Village Development was the development of the Morgana Run Trail. In hopes of developing a neighborhood infrastructure that supported active living and provided opportunities for community members to engage in physical activity, SVD converted unused industrial railroad tracks into an off-road trail. Spanning over 2.5 miles, the trail runs through the neighborhood and provides a safe place for the community to be physically active and provides an alternative means for traveling to such things as work, school, or shopping areas.

With an increased number of vacant lots and homes being foreclosed, SVD needed to discover a way to improve the physical appearance and integrity of these spaces to foster a sense of safety within the community. SVD began the creation of neighborhood green spaces by converting these vacant spaces into such things as a golf course, an outdoor education area and park, and an athletic field. Because of this, SVD was able to repurpose these vacant lots to provide a means for the



Individuals from all age groups enjoy safe routes to bike on

community to become more physically active and interact with one another.

SVD highlights that two of the biggest barriers that they face are time and perceptions of safety. Many of the households are low-income single mothers, who do not have the time to take their children out and who believe that the neighborhood is too unsafe to let their children play outside. However, SVD and those within the community are aware of the relationship between physical activity, health, and community safety. Thus, they began offering such activities as community line-dancing classes. This provided a multi-aged activity that acted as a way for parents, grandparents, kids, and other community members to engage in physical activity and build relationships with another—fostering a sense of community and safety.



Community members from all ages gather to promote “Safe Routes to School”

Slavic Village development imagines a neighborhood connected both internally and externally through bike paths and multipurpose trails—a place where individuals can feel safe walking to the grocery store or to school. With the aim of creating a sense of safety so that parents are willing to let their children walk to school, SVD began a Safe Routes to School program. This program has not only improved pedestrian safety and bicycle safety, but also offers promotional activities to engage parents and neighborhood residents, and provides “stranger danger” education.



High school students enjoying the community gardens that have been created

Slavic Village Development notes that their successes in the community would not be possible without the aid of community members and the various agencies that they have collaborated with. The Active Living by Design steering committee consisted of people from city planning, county planning, the City Department of Public Health, Clevelanders on the Move, and the Boys & Girls club, who have all worked together to ensure that the goals of SVD are met. With the help of community groups such as Friends of the Trail and local community garden groups, SVD has been able to maintain the various projects and programs that have been initiated. Because of this, the number of children who walk to school has increased.

The community members of the neighborhoods have also taken a strong interest in improving the quality of health of their community. Therefore, SVD has also focused their efforts in helping these community members and groups transform their ideas of community improvement into realities. Leveraging the Active Living by Design grant dollars, SVD developed a small community-based grant program that would provide up to \$2000 to support physical activity programming for youth and seniors. SVD also refers community groups to a small grassroots grant program called Neighborhood Connections that give grants to ideas that improve the neighborhood, such as vacant lot

reuse ideas. By helping them find the necessary recourse and funds to create their projects, SVD has fostered a sense of community involvement and investment in improving health and physical activity.

Rather than let their neighborhood's health and physical appear decline, Slavic Village Development has turned community challenges, such as the foreclosure crisis, into opportunities to develop the community. From creating bike paths to parks, Slavic Village Development has transformed Broadway from an unsafe and declining neighborhood into a place where community members not only feel safe, but actively engage in physical activity and the improvement of their community. Slavic Village Development plans on continuing their work, and future neighborhood development plans include strategic land assembly for active and passive green space, creating community gardens and a skate park.



The community holds a wide variety of events and activities to engage residents to become more involved and to build a sense of unity

#### For more information:

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