

# ITGA PRESIDENTIAL EXCELLENCE AWARD

2018 Submission

## ORGANIZATION/PARTNERSHIP INFORMATION

### PARTNERSHIP ORGANIZATIONS

Office of Student & Community Relations, University of Vermont (UVM)

UVM Community Coalition

Isham Street Gardening and Other Optimistic Doings (ISGOOD) Neighborhood Group

### PRINCIPAL CONTACT

John Mejia, ISGOOD Member, Community Coalition Member, and UVM OSCRC Staff

(802) 922-5397 | john.mejia@uvm.edu

## PROJECT INFORMATION

### PROJECT NAME

ISGOOD Neighborhood Revitalization Project

### INCEPTION DATE & PROJECTED END DATE

2009; no projected end date

### MAIN PARTNERS INVOLVED IN THE PROJECT

#### COMMUNITY:

ISGOOD Members

Isham Street Residents

Isham Street Landlords

Burlington Health and Rehabilitation Center (BHRC)

#### UVM:

UVM Office of Student & Community Relations (OSCR)

UVM Community Coalition

UVM CDAE120 - Strategic Writing Class

UVM TRIO Upward Bound

UVM Service TREK

UVM Student Government Association (SGA)

#### CITY:

Burlington Mayor's Office

Burlington Community Justice Center (CJC)

Burlington Department of Public Works (DPW)

Burlington Police Department (BPD)

Burlington Code Enforcement

Burlington Community & Economic Development (CEDO)

### FUNDING SOURCES

UVM Neighborhood Grants

AARP Grant

Vermont Community Garden Network Grant

New England Grassroots Environmental Fund Grant

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"The key is to inspire someone to do something greater, to unlock our optimistic doings. Start with just acknowledging people who live around you. They notice what you do too, so become a role model; invite people in, ask for their ideas."

– Brian Cina, ISGOOD Co-Founder

## PROGRAM INFORMATION

### SUMMARY

The Office of Student & Community Relations, which co-chairs the Community Coalition with the Student Government Association, developed a street strategy to address quality-of-life issues in high-density, student neighborhoods. Isham Street was one of the first streets chosen because it was one of the most negatively impacted neighborhoods (students make up over 90% of residents on the street). ISGOOD, which stands for Isham Street Gardening and Other Optimistic Doings, is a grassroots neighborhood organization supported from its inception by OSCR. The goal of neighborhood interaction through gardening and cleanup initiatives to improve the quality-of-life on their street. Some of the systemic and cyclical issues derived from the street's layout: the street lacks green space and is dominated by tightly-packed single-family homes – 19 of the 21 houses have been converted in to multiple apartments. The majority of the tenants in the rentals are local college students. Lifestyle differences and high tenant turnover led to disconnection amongst the residents. Lack of upkeep and management by many absentee landlords contributed to disarray.

These dynamics motivated ISGOOD to find a way to connect residents, thereby increasing the vitality and safety of the street they share. The belief was that street improvements would be the catalyst for further community development, such as increasing a sense of place among residents, improving neighbor communications, and increasing the possibilities for positive interactions among residents – in essence, the creation of a community safety net. Neighbors would look out for each other, offer to lend a hand with shoveling and mowing, and engage in a myriad of other activities that bolster a sense of a healthy connected community. To actualize the vision that ISGOOD created with residents and partners, a five-phase action plan was developed.

### ISGOOD 5-PHASE ACTION PLAN

**Phase 1:** Establish gardens and bump-outs **COMPLETED**

**Phase 2:** Use AARP grant to make the entire east side of the street a garden; add signage **COMPLETED**

**Phase 3:** West side gardens & community mural **IN PROGRESS**

**Phase 4:** Rain garden with BHRC **IN PLANNING STAGES**

**Phase 5:** Connect to other gardens to create a Citywide Garden Walk **IN PLANNING STAGES**

### TARGET COMMUNITY

Since the 1980s, many of the neighborhoods near the University of Vermont (UVM) and Burlington's other colleges have experienced significant growth in student renters and a significant decrease of homeowners and multiple-year renters. Students make up more than 90 percent of Isham Street residents. They, along with the longer-term residents and the inhabitants of the Burlington Health and Rehabilitation Center (BHRC) at the south end of Isham Street, comprise this community. Over time, this area became plagued by trash, absentee property owners, social noise, property degradation, and crime.

### OBJECTIVES

- Increase the quality-of-life on the street by providing residents opportunities to do meaningful and creative work together, celebrate successes, increase safety, expand green space, and foster neighborliness and inclusiveness
- Collaborate and coordinate initiatives and assessment efforts with the Burlington Police Department (BPD) and other city departments, UVM, and the UVM Community Coalition
- Increase the tenancy of student

– Jarrod Szydlowski,  
UVM OSCR Student Staff &  
ISGOOD Member 2010-2011

- renters on the street from one to two years
- Improve the condition of housing on the street
- Make educational and training opportunities readily available to residents through gardening and other efforts
- Put the street on a Neighborhood Gardening Map of the City of Burlington
- Improve storm water issues by creating a storm water pond that will also contribute to the gardening plan for the street
- Collaborate with the BHRC to create a multi-generational community on the street
- Work with Upward Bound/TRIO/SSS to create a multi-generational community involved on the street
- Bring the knowledge and skills developed through the ISGOOD program to other neighborhoods struggling with quality-of-life issues

### PROGRAM STRATEGY

Student residency is transient in nature and, as a result, students often feel little attachment to a neighborhood. Engaging students in gardening activities creates a greater sense of community and immediately increases their investment in the street. Unlike other activities, gardening provides an avenue for people to see a visible legacy of their involvement. Anecdotally, the number of students that stay for an additional year on Isham Street has increased. The positive feedback loop created by ISGOOD's urban gardening strategy has leveraged other proactive efforts on the street, such as sidewalk

“Street-side gardens are only one facet of ISGOOD’s initiative, which is to fully address the street’s physical infrastructure and, consequently, its culture. Isham Street’s original design is just not conducive to fostering a sense of neighborhood.”

“Since our first block party in 2010, the culture of the street has evolved. You can see the change. It’s palpable. Students say hello to each other, they say hello to us. We talk. There’s sharing going on.”

– Phil Hammerslough, ISGOOD Co-Founder

and street repair, property owners improving their houses, and more tenants renewing leases.

### PARTNERSHIP PHILOSOPHY

OSCR uses theory to practice to inform our work. One of the principle practices is doing things *with* and not *to* or *for* people, which is rooted in Restorative Practices.<sup>1</sup> The precepts of Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) 2.0, including reducing crime by dealing with the cultural, social, and emotional needs of people at the specific locales where crime is or may be most acute,<sup>2</sup> have also shaped the work of OSCR. Research also shows that community gardens have the potential to increase the social web and decrease crime.<sup>3</sup> Finally, engaging the residents in decision-making and implementation of positive, visible change in order to create collective efficacy.<sup>4</sup> By sharing these theories with Community Coalition and ISGOOD we have helped create a culture that is strengthened by these frameworks.

### ELEMENTS THAT MAKE ISGOOD UNUSUALLY EFFECTIVE & CREATIVE

ISGOOD believes in the wisdom, knowledge, and creativity of residents to respond to challenges and create opportunities on their streets that lead to healthier, safer, and more engaged environments. The role of institutional partners is to support the residents in carrying out their vision. For example, Isham Street residents created a vision for the street with a five-phase plan, which they presented to partners, who in turn provided resources (funding, technical support, people power) to achieve the plan. Sustainability of the efforts is much more likely when people are invested in their street, have the opportunity to play a leading role in making change, and have the support of partners. Using a community-based participatory action research philosophy brings the individual wisdom of residents to bear collectively on the issues facing the community.

### EXEMPLIFYING CONSTRUCTIVE ENGAGEMENT

The results of a safety survey done by the BPD's Neighborhood Safety Planning Initiative Team demonstrated that residents were much more interested and supportive of activities that promoted community development in their neighborhoods than they were in neighborhood watch-type initiatives.

ISGOOD Co-Founders Phil Hammerslough and Brian Cina shared that perspective and supported it through a set of working principles. Everyone is invited to participate, including residents, landlords, university and city institutions. All events are publicized to various venues such as door-to-door and through social media, so while individuals may not actively participate, there is a collective sense that the street is changing. Accessibility is incorporated so individuals of all abilities and identities can participate. Visioning and carrying out the phased plan is open to input from all partners and led by the residents. The story of the street is told through written, visual, and audio/video means to support different learning styles and to provide clarity to partners about how they can best support the initiatives. Assessment of the effort is built in to answer the questions, “Who is better off?” and, “How are they better off?” using the Results-Based Accountability process. Community is created and conflicts are worked through using a Restorative Practices approach. Built in to all the work is appreciation for and celebration of everyone's contributions, combined efforts, and tangible successes.



Find out more on how ISGOOD has improved life on Isham Street from Brian Cina, ISGOOD Co-Founder! (LIVE LINK TO VIDEO)

Critical structural support is also provided to ISGOOD through the UVM Community Coalition. Several public safety practitioners regularly contribute to the Community Coalition, including BPD, Burlington Code Enforcement, and UVM Police Services. BPD data, survey responses, and interviews

with Isham Street residents show that ISGOOD has been successful in creating a sense of well-being on the street.

### CRITICAL COLLABORATIONS & THE REALIZATION OF PROGRAM GOALS

The breakdown of community happens over time and is not restored easily or swiftly. It requires intentional effort among many partners to make and sustain change. The residents, supported by BPD, took the lead by forming a neighborhood group. As ISGOOD, they created an inclusive vision, developed a phased plan, invited in partners, and leveraged resources. The partners, in turn, assisted with carrying out the vision. Without the collaboration, residents would have had to struggle alone against a lot of barriers, including keeping their own energy and commitment going on a street that is transitory and has the reputation of being extremely chaotic and dangerous.

1. Additional information on Restorative Practices: <http://bit.ly/restorativepracticesprimer>

2. Additional information on Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design, 2.0: [http://bit.ly/cpted\\_2Gen](http://bit.ly/cpted_2Gen)

3. See: Moquin, et. al. *Cultivating community through gardening in Kenora, Ontario*. <http://bit.ly/cultivatingcommunitygardens>

4. Collective Efficacy: <http://bit.ly/collectiveefficacy>

## ISGOOD PROGRAM PARTNERS & ROLES

### ISGOOD MEMBERS & ISHAM STREET RESIDENTS

- Develop and implement with partners a vision for the street with goals and phases for the work
- Plan and carry out at least six events a year on the street; annual events include Spring Planting and Potluck, Halloween Pumpkin Decorating Contest and Party
- Provide outreach and education about ISGOOD to residents and current and potential partners
- Welcome new residents with OSCR and provide them with UVM's Welcome Bag of resources, including the Survival Guide for Off Campus Living
- Leverage resources for the effort (examples: AARP grant, UVM Neighborhood Grants)

### BURLINGTON POLICE DEPARTMENT (BPD)

- Provide guidance on using Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) 2.0
- Visit houses with a high number of calls for service; work with residents on issues
- Contact any landlords whose tenants receive municipal violations
- Provide data on (noise, burglary, vandalism) municipal violations
- Provide education and outreach; distribute of safety fliers and resource magnets
- Support ISGOOD through its role on the UVM Community Coalition and its participation in the Street Strategy



Mayor Miro Weinberger and representatives from UVM OSCR, BHRC, Burlington Code Enforcement, and Burlington Department of Public Works meet on Isham Street with members of ISGOOD several times a year for progress updates.

### LANDLORDS

- Maintain and improve properties
- Support ISGOOD efforts in various ways; examples: a landlord donated land, a fence, and raised beds for a blueberry and herbal garden, which also functions as an event space; communicate to tenants about recycling bins, recycling guidelines, and the Burlington noise ordinance

### UVM TRIO UPWARD BOUND

- During their six-week Summer College UVM TRIO Upward Bound students, who are high school students from Burlington and Winooski HS, do a community garden project on Isham Street working with BRHC seniors who start plants for Summer transplanting into greenbelt gardens.

### UVM OSCR

- Participate as an active member of ISGOOD; help plan ISGOOD meetings
- Assist with planning and implementing events through a Neighborhood Grants program and recruiting volunteers and other participants; example: purchased materials and helped create greenbelt gardens
- Develop assessment tools; examples: helped create, implement, and analyze a Neighborhood Safety and Community Involvement Survey with BPD's Neighborhood Safety Planning Initiative Team; produced participatory mapping and videography projects
- Provide technical support to assist ISGOOD with telling its story to community members, policymakers, and funders
- Work with the UVM Community Coalition, which is co-chaired by the Director of OSCR, to support ISGOOD's work as part of the Street Strategy

### UVM STUDENT GOVERNMENT ASSOCIATION (SGA)

- Organize student volunteers to do regular cleanups on the street and to assist with weeding and planting in the gardens
- Work with the UVM Community Coalition, which is co-chaired by SGA, to support ISGOOD's work as part of the Street Strategy

### UVM UNIVERSITY RELATIONS

- Provide resources for projects, such as funding for larger-capacity recycling totes for rental properties to reduce trash issues on street

### UVM COMMUNITY COALITION

(members include students, neighbors, landlords, City officials and staff, UVM and Champlain College staff and administrators)

- Supports ISGOOD's vision and phased plan by providing input, technical assistance, and resources such as people power for cleanups

### UVM COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT & APPLIED ECONOMICS (CDAE) STUDENTS

- Interview Isham Street residents about the impact that ISGOOD has had on their lives
- Develop articles for OSCR newsletter as well as audio/video from interviews with students, neighbors and policy makers

### BURLINGTON CODE ENFORCEMENT

- Work with landlords on improving their properties
- Carry out code inspection processes
- Act as a liaison to other City departments; examples: paperwork for recycling totes; SeeClickFix responses to neighbor issues

### BURLINGTON DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC WORKS

- Provide infrastructure support for streetscape; examples: bump-outs to increase green space and slow traffic, sidewalk and street repairs
- Provide technical support for storm water management

### BURLINGTON MAYOR'S OFFICE

- Increase access to City resources to support ISGOOD efforts, such as shifting Isham Street higher on the sidewalk and street repairs priority list
- Share information about ISGOOD and its initiatives with policy makers, community members, and funders

### BURLINGTON CEDO

- [At the request of the Mayor, CEDO added the Community Coalition and its Street Strategy as a local best practice in its Neighbor Plan](#)

### BURLINGTON PARKS, RECREATION, & WATERFRONT

- Provide technical assistance with plant choices for small greenbelts, water-retention, and natural pesticides

### BHRC

- Provide access and support to BHRC residents so they can participate in ISGOOD activities
- Provide resources; example: BHRC residents planted milkweed indoors and then assisted in transplanting the milkweed to the gardens to help Monarch Butterfly populations.

### NEIGHBORHOOD SAFETY PLANNING INITIATIVE TEAM

(BPD, residents of Burlington, Burlington Community Justice Center, Parallel Justice, City Council, Code Enforcement, UVM OSCR, Burlington Board of Health, Vermont Department of Health, and the Community Support Program)

- Utilized the experience of ISGOOD to provide leadership and insight to other fledgling neighborhood improvement projects in Burlington
- Provided technical assistance and training



The land, fence, and raised garden beds donated by a landlord created a functional gathering space ideal for community events.



Phil Hammerslough works with other ISGOOD members to organize at least six community events a year for Isham Street, bringing student and non-student neighbors together to maintain the greenbelt gardens.

## TANGIBLE ACHIEVEMENTS

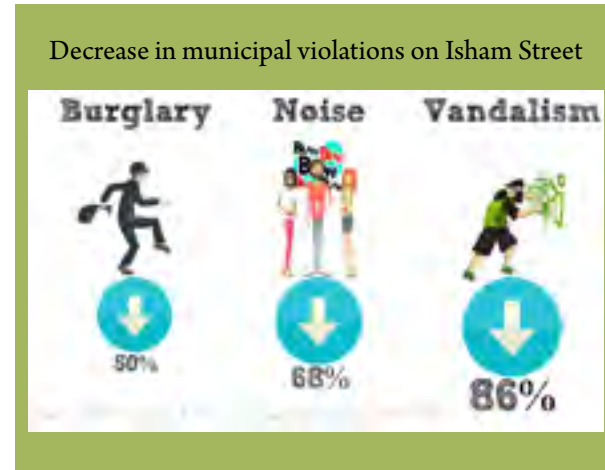
Burlington Police Deputy Chief Jay Lawson and his officers, whose jurisdiction includes Isham Street and the surrounding area, noted a dramatic difference in the look and feel of the street since ISGOOD was formed. They reported less blight and disruptive behavior and more evidence of good property maintenance. The improved “feel” of Isham Street is backed up by a reduction in noise violations, burglaries, and vandalism on the street, all of which remained the same on neighboring streets with no community organizations.

### COLLABORATION BETWEEN ISGOOD & BPD: IMPACT ON NOISE, BURGLARIES, & VANDALISM

The most significant issue on Isham Street was noise. The efforts of ISGOOD and BPD resulted in notable improvements:

#### OTHER IMPACTS

- A vision was created for the street with a Five-Phase Plan
- The street is cleaner
- Sidewalk repairs were completed
- The street moved up on priority list for repaving
- Bump-outs were created to slow traffic
- Installation of greenbelt gardens and bump-out gardens
- A landlord donated land and built raised beds for a blueberry and herbal garden, which is now used for event space
- Morale of residents is higher; they have seen that change is possible and are feeling more supported by the City of Burlington and institutions like UVM
- Increase in number of tenants staying for two lease terms (traditionally, they sign up for one year)
- Individuals reported that they moved to the street because of the gardening efforts and how much better the street looks
- Increase in landlord investment in rental properties
- Decrease in misunderstandings, conflicts, and stereotyping between student- and non-student residents
- Infrastructure that allows for more conversations, shared decision-making, and connectedness on the street
- Residents are aware of ISGOOD activities: in a Spring 2013 Door-to-Door Survey, 73 percent of respondents said that they knew about ISGOOD; half of those respondents said that they had actively participated in an ISGOOD event
- Key partnerships; example: BHRC is a crucial partner as their building's size greatly impacts the feel of the street, and their residents experience health benefits from working in and seeing the gardens on their walks and from their windows



Why did Aurora choose to live on Isham Street for a second year & why is Ashley moving on to the street? (LIVE LINK TO VIDEO)

ISGOOD has made a significant difference on Isham Street. It is a model This model is already being used on two, near-by streets - Hickok Place and Green Street - with similar, early results.

## CONSTRUCTIVE ENGAGEMENT BETWEEN COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS AND PUBLIC SAFETY

It is clear that the success of ISGOOD's efforts is contingent upon the commitment and enthusiasm of the residents on the street. That commitment and enthusiasm is in turn contingent upon institutional support; this is a neighborhood that can experience a turnover of tenants up to three times a year and it takes a significant amount of energy to sustain the work. ISGOOD had a clear vision, discrete goals, and a phased plan that made it easier to access and leverage resources with the City of Burlington and UVM. The partnerships raise morale, lessen fatigue, and provide the kind of structural support that enables progress. By decreasing the need for quality-of-life calls, this work also

allows BPD to lower the volume of calls they get in absolute terms, increasing their resources to deal with higher-level crimes. Additionally, it provides more time to strategically work with residents to create environments on their street that lead to healthier and safer behaviors.

When the vision of the people who live on the street guides the work of other stakeholders, there is a greater chance for systemic, sustainable, and optimistic change.

**“Isham Street is the weakest link and its efforts can ripple upwards to other neighborhoods - if Isham can do it, many others can too.”**

– Brian Cina, ISGOOD Co-Founder



The partnership between ISGOOD and BHRC fosters a multigenerational connection over gardening.

**“When I garden, it feels like I am doing something good.”**

– Joan, BHRC resident

**“Thank you for your strong efforts continued through the years! I have always admired your home from the street and look forward to assisting in improving the rest of the block.”**

– Michael, Isham Street Landlord



One of the principle practices of ISGOOD is to collaborate with all the neighbors and other stakeholders and to provide accessible ways to participate, including creating maps as a Community-Based Participatory Action Research activity. See <http://bit.ly/mapsforcommunityorganizing>

**“As a result of ISGOOD's activities, people walk more slowly down the street, interact more readily, especially during events where they have the opportunity to meet in a positive context. In short, the street is a more sociable place and a more livable community.”**

– Phil Hammerslough, ISGOOD Co-Founder

