



Transcript: Celebrating Safe Communities: An Interview With Ann Harkins

The Bureau of Justice Assistance (BJA) Justice Podcast Series is designed to provide the latest information in justice innovations, practices, and perspectives from the field of criminal justice. In this edition, Rebecca Rose, BJA Senior Policy Advisor for Strategic Initiatives, interviews Ann Harkins, President and CEO of the National Crime Prevention Council about the Celebrate Safe Communities Initiative and National Crime Prevention Month.

Rebecca Rose: Hello. I'm Rebecca Rose, Senior Policy Advisor for Strategic Initiatives with the Bureau of Justice Assistance, and I want to welcome you to another edition of BJA's podcast series. In this edition, I'm joined by Ann Harkins, President and CEO of the National Crime Prevention Council, or NCPC, the home of the iconic character, McGruff the Crime Dog. NCPC's primary mission is to help people keep themselves, their families, and their communities safe from crime. To achieve this, NCPC provides programs, training resources, and technical assistance to local communities to help them partner with law enforcement to prevent crime. Many of NCPC's resources are free and downloadable from their web site.

Ann, I want to thank you for joining us today. I want to start off today by talking about Celebrate Safe Communities, or what we often refer to as CSC, which is a joint effort from BJA and NCPC. Can you tell our listeners a little bit more about this program?

Ann Harkins: Thanks, Rebecca—first, for having me and for giving me an opportunity to talk about Celebrate Safe Communities. Celebrate Safe Communities is crime prevention done the right way: local folks working with local law enforcement to address local issues. And we are very proud to work with the Bureau of Justice Assistance on this initiative, especially at a time when law enforcement agencies and other crime prevention practitioners across the country are faced with budget cuts. We all need the community to come together and help us "take a bite out of crime."

Rebecca Rose: That's great, Ann, and how long has CSC been running? I understand—if I'm correct—that it started in Wisconsin.

Ann Harkins: Yes it did. It was a great event called McGruff Fest in Ashwaubenon, Wisconsin, where nine law enforcement agencies came together and put together a great community celebration around safety—anti-drunk driving, all of the federal law enforcement agencies were represented, safe

and secure ID kits to help people keep themselves safe. That sort of became the beta test for Celebrate Safe Communities. And we were very proud that the next year the Bureau of Justice Assistance asked us to work with the National Sheriffs' Association to spread that concept across the country.

Rebecca Rose: Well, that's very exciting, and it's been a long and great partnership. And as I understand it, you know, and as we all know, CSC continues to grow even more each year. Can you tell us a little bit about how this 3-day celebration turned into a year-round initiative?

Ann Harkins: Yes, Crime Prevention Month is October, and so when it first started the idea was [that] we would take 3 or 4 days to do Celebrate Safe Communities events to kick off Crime Prevention Month, and we soon decided, in conjunction with BJA, that all of us want to celebrate safe communities every day of the year. So it has expanded; we've now reached over half a million people in 30 states and we're very proud of it.

Rebecca Rose: Great! Now, what events have CSC registrants held in the past, and what are you expecting this October?

Ann Harkins: Well, we're expecting more of the same and we're always pleased because communities—just as I said at the beginning—it's local folks working to address local problems, and so they come up with great ideas and then we share them with other communities so that they can do that too. Two hundred fifty-three sites have participated in 39 states last year in 2010. And several—that year, because it was McGruff's 30th birthday—many of them had birthday parties.

In Greenwood, South Carolina, more than 40 neighborhoods joined police officers for cookouts, parades, flashlight walks, and anti-crime and -drug rallies. Some have created really creative names. There's a "Prevention Convention" in Eugene, Oregon. There's a community in New England that has "Cups with the Cops," where on Saturday morning you can go in and have a cup of coffee with the local police. Many events range from safety fairs to—because it's in October—Halloween events, and this year we've added a component where we have a particular theme for each week in October. So, general safety fairs—there's an event in Charlotte, North Carolina, this year called "Drive To Save Lives." We have business partners; Kwikset, Lowe's, Home Depot, and Target are among those supporting local events, particularly home safety, and folks are working on the issues that affect their community.

Rebecca Rose: That is just really exciting, Ann. So give us a little information about how CSC has changed and grown over the last few years.

Ann Harkins: Well, we've been able to increase the number of states and sites participating each year, and when people register to participate and celebrate safe communities, they get free stuff, and we have had some very moving testimonials from people—I can remember a woman in Kentucky last year writing that their budgets are so strapped that just the availability of a grab bag or Halloween bags or balloons for kids helps the crime prevention practitioner make more for their community. So people have been very grateful and they're very creative, so it's just a really exciting program.

Rebecca Rose: Great, and as I mentioned earlier in the podcast, that we have been really happy to be partners with NCPC on this event and for October National Crime Prevention Month. Can you just talk a little bit more about the partnership between BJA and NCPC with regard to Celebrating Safe Communities?

Ann Harkins: Yes, I should probably first say that BJA, or its predecessor agencies, founded NCPC 29 years ago, starting with the McGruff "Take a Bite Out of Crime" campaign, and we have worked together for many years on the National Citizen's Crime Prevention Campaign helping people keep themselves safe where they live, work, and play. Celebrate Safe Communities is an outgrowth of that, and it does celebrate the importance of local participation in crime prevention.

Rebecca Rose: Great. Now we have mentioned that CSC is closely tied with National Crime Prevention Month, which takes place every October. Can you tell our listeners a little bit about this connection and what Crime Prevention Month is all about?

Ann Harkins: I'd love to. In 1984, October was designated as Crime Prevention Month through a Presidential Proclamation. Since that time, we have worked with law enforcement, government agencies, community leaders, civic groups, businesses, schools, and other organizations to help them spread the word about crime prevention. Crime prevention saves money and it saves lives. And that's what we all want to do. I have yet to meet the police officer, the sheriff, the prosecutor, the attorney general—state or federal—who wouldn't rather prevent a crime than have to investigate and prosecute one. Another tie to Crime Prevention Month is that every year—it's a signature NCPC publication—the *Crime Prevention Month Kit*, and we distribute more than 40,000 of them each year, and it gives people ideas for how they can celebrate safe communities, how they can prevent crime in their communities, and we've been very grateful to the CTIA—the Wireless Foundation has sponsored that in the last 3 years.

Rebecca Rose: Great. That's very exciting. Now, as you mentioned, last year's theme was focused on McGruff's 30th birthday, and many communities had birthday parties in celebration of that. What can we expect during this year's Crime Prevention Month, and what are some of the key themes this year?

Ann Harkins: We are focusing on one theme per week. So, we're focusing on home safety in the first week. The second week is crime reporting and community engagement. As you know, Rebecca, there are anti-snitching codes of conduct among people in various communities across the country, and getting people more involved in their community and helping them understand that working with law enforcement helps keep the entire community safer is a big push all year round at NCPC, but in particular in the second week. School and campus safety [is] for the third week, and drug abuse prevention "red ribbon" week [is] for the fourth week.

Rebecca Rose: So, how does a local community get involved in Celebrate Safe Communities?

Ann Harkins: Go to our web site www.celebratesafecommunities.org. Simply click on event registration, sign up for some free materials, and celebrate your safe community.

Rebecca Rose: Great! And this is all just wonderful information. So, once a community has registered to participate in the program, what resources are available to registered CSC sites?

Ann Harkins: There are materials you get and there are also materials on the web site. You can get, for example, a proclamation to ask your local mayor or your state governor to honor Celebrate Safe Communities. There are sample press releases and sample—even radio public service advertising announcements that you can pull off the web site, so there are great tools and tips on how to celebrate safe communities, and the big thing is to focus on the particular crime or the particular issue that is working fear among your community and turn that around to celebrate safety.

Rebecca Rose: Wonderful. So, I have one final question, and I think a very important question, so can we expect to see McGruff at CSC events nationwide?

Ann Harkins: You bet! McGruff enjoys 83 percent recognition. People truly love him, and his "Take a Bite Out of Crime" message is an important one. What it means is, everybody, whether it's a 7-year-old child or a 107-year-old person in a neighborhood, he or she can help keep their community safe by watching out and helping out, by being involved in their community, by having a good relationship with law enforcement, and by celebrating that safe community with their neighbors.

Rebecca Rose: Great, Ann. And I just want to say, thank you so much for being here today. We're very excited about the upcoming month of October and the National Crime Prevention Month and Celebrating Safe Communities. This has been a fascinating conversation, and I'm sure a lot of our local communities will be anxious to register and get involved with the Celebrate Safe Communities initiatives and the Crime Prevention Month activities. I just want to repeat this information for our listeners. To register for a CSC event or to get involved in CSC, please visit www.celebratesafecommunities.org.

Thank you again, Ann.

Ann Harkins: Thank you, Rebecca!

Closing: Thank you for taking the time to join us for this conversation. If you found the discussion interesting, we encourage you to visit the BJA web site for more innovative ideas and best practices at www.ojp.gov/BJA.

From all of us here at BJA, thank you for tuning in to today's podcast. We hope you will join us again for another edition of BJA's Justice Podcast Series.

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