

# HOSPITALS AGAINST VIOLENCE



## CASE STUDY

# TENDERLOIN HEALTH IMPROVEMENT PARTNERSHIP

San Francisco



Children, youth and seniors all come out for 4 Corner Friday when they know the streets will be safe and positively activated.

## Grass-Roots Effort Activates Safety Improvements and Neighborliness

By Bob Kehoe

### Overview

About four years ago, when the forces of gentrification and revitalization of San Francisco's Market Street shopping district were in full swing, those in the nearby impoverished Tenderloin neighborhood felt a different kind of change.

Drug trade in the Tenderloin, already strong before the Market Street renovations, was escalating. Dealers were becoming more territorial in claiming

the sidewalks as their places of business. The suspicion among some Tenderloin activists was that many of the dealers and buyers were being driven into the Tenderloin — the city's poorest and most crime-affected area — because there was nowhere else to go.

"The level of antisocial behavior and drug dealing on the 200 block of Golden Gate Avenue, where our union hall is located, went up dramatically. It got to the point where there were 20 to 25 people dealing drugs — largely, [the opioid] oxycodone — directly in front of

the union hall every day,” says Kim Jackson, Tenderloin Community liaison, Unite Here, Local 2.

Union members and staff became fearful of the environment around the hall. Some came to union leadership and asked to work from home and to meet in other locations.

“We knew we had to do something. It was an existential crisis for our organization. You can’t have a union hall if members won’t come,” Jackson says.

Around this time, service and business owners on the 100 block of Golden Gate Avenue began organizing a block-safety group. The group came to the union hall and asked its leaders if they’d be willing to meet with Captain Jason Cherniss at the Tenderloin police station to seek ways to improve neighborhood safety.

## Impact

Out of that discussion came two remarkably simple yet significant steps that began to change the community culture in the Tenderloin, Jackson says.

“The captain asked us to start an ‘activation’ on the sidewalk in front of our buildings. Basically, you hang out in a positive way, such as sweeping. We did that and he backed us up in the same positive way. He



4 Corner Friday affords quiet time to reflect or engage in an art project with neighbors.



Former Tenderloin Police Captain Teresa Ewins in front of an inspirational mural in the Tenderloin.

sent two officers because it was pretty scary in the beginning. The dealers didn’t want to give up ground,” Jackson says.

Captain Cherniss also asked businesses to raise their window shades and open their windows to the sidewalk. They complied and within two months there was a noticeable drop in drug traffic on Golden Gate Avenue in front of the building that participated in the daily activation, Jackson says.

The Golden Gate Safety Group’s effort led to another way to “activate” the sidewalks, a program known as 4 Corner Friday. On the first Friday of every month from 3:00 p.m. to 4:30 p.m., business owners, employees and residents go outside to perform a positive activity on their respective corners. Some pass out cookies, popcorn or other treats to those passing by. Large bunches of balloons also mark the corners, brightening the atmosphere. The random acts of kindness have created safer spaces on the sidewalks.

The Saint Francis Foundation-led Tenderloin Health Improvement Partnership, which was part of the Golden Gate Safety Group, supported the initiative by purchasing T-shirts, balloons and other items as part of their efforts to strengthen the community and improve safety in the neighborhood. Jennifer Kiss, vice president of programs at the Saint Francis Foundation and TLHIP director, says 4 Corner Friday has had a multi-level impact on the community.

“We supported it with some resources so it could



Tenderloin neighbors and local organizations come out on the 4th Friday of each month to participate in the positive community activation known as 4 Corner Friday.

have some shape and form,” Kiss says. “When the community came out for their activation, they found that not only did the negative activity get displaced, but it built a [sense of] community with neighbors.”

Jackson agrees, noting the 4 Corner Friday conversations that take place among Tenderloin residents bring about better mutual understanding and respect.

“It’s a starting point for conversation between people who are afraid of each other and who are different from each other. It creates a connection between these different groups of people which, in my experience, allows for other conversations to take place such as the need to keep the sidewalks safe,” Jackson says.

What started off as a small community led effort across four intersections has now swelled across the Tenderloin neighborhood.

“People are out and they’re positive and they’re engaging with each other and kids are out and seniors can walk around. Participants wear these bright 4 Corner Friday T-shirts and you can look up and down the block and see them and it makes people feel safe,” Kiss says. “We have a large business community on the outskirts of this neighborhood and 4 Corner Friday makes people from outside the community feel like they can come into the Tenderloin and see what’s going on.”

## Lessons learned

The safety-group meetings and positive activation activities have proven to be effective communi-

ty-building strategies to empower neighborhood organizations, businesses, corporations, the police department and residents to design and test interventions. These efforts also spurred deeper discussions about defining what community safety is and helped participants to identify and share best practices in being good neighbors.

In addition, following police guidance on how to initiate communications with those who were impinging on neighborhood safety and getting the assurance of police support when sidewalk activations were taking place changed the calculus of safety on the blocks affected.

## Future goals

Capitalizing on the success of 4 Corner Friday is a primary objective for the future. Expanding positive activation activities to adjacent blocks will continue to improve community safety across the neighborhood. Leaders also will focus on aligning the work of the Golden Gate Safety Group with other neighborhood initiatives such as the Tenderloin Wellness Trail and park renovations.

## CONTACTS

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