



UVM TODAY

International Town-Gown Group Gives Top Award to UVM

Office of Student and Community Relations Program Recognized for Improving Quality of Life in Burlington Student Neighborhood



Students, neighbors and Office of Student and Community Relations staff create one of the nine Neighborhood Grant-funded greenbelt gardens on Isham Street. (Photo: John Meija)

The University of Vermont's Office of Student and Community Relations has received the Presidential Excellence Award from the International Town Gown Association for its work on Burlington's Isham Street. The program the office implemented there led to large decreases in noise tickets, vandalism and burglaries after it was launched in 2012.

In its award letter the association, the leading higher education organization focusing on colleges' relationships with their communities, described the office and its staff as "trail blazers in doing new and innovative work."

"I'm thrilled at the much deserved recognition UVM's Office of Student and Community Relations has received from such an important group in the higher education community relations field," said University of Vermont president Tom Sullivan. "The office's work is both innovative and vitally important. UVM and Burlington are each strengthened by the other. It is critical that we have a healthy relationship based on mutual understanding and respect. This program provides a blueprint for achieving just that kind of healthy interrelationship."

"I couldn't be more proud of the work our office has done, in conjunction with our partners, to improve student-resident relations in Burlington," said Gail Shamponis, director of the Office of Student and Community Relations. "The Isham Street program is unique in its approach and grounded in community development, restorative approaches, social justice and the collective wisdom of residents."

Strategy: Working together on neighborhood projects

The Isham Street initiative grew out of a strategy developed in 2010 by the Office of Student and Community Relations, UVM's Student Government Association and city and community groups -- organized as an entity called the UVM Community Coalition -- to address quality-of-life issues in high density student

neighborhoods.

The strategy's underlying approach was to find ways for students and neighbors to get to know one another by organizing neighborhood activities and events.

Isham Street was chosen to pilot the program because students make up over 90 percent of residents on the street and quality of life for non-students was a significant issue.

As they began implementing the Isham Street strategy eight years ago, Champnois and her UVM colleagues found a sympathetic viewpoint and willing partner in a grassroots neighborhood group called ISGOOD, for Isham Street Gardening and Other Optimistic Doings. Champnois' office supported ISGOOD from its inception with funding from its Neighborhood Grants program.

ISGOOD co-founders Brian Cina and Phil Hammerslough believed that neighborhood interaction through gardening and cleanup initiatives would greatly improve the quality-of-life on their street.

The group and students on the street jointly organized a series of projects that have continued annually. Examples of these projects include the following:

- Former Isham Street resident and UVM student Sabina Parker worked with the Office of Student and Community Relations and ISGOOD on a New England Seeds grant and was awarded \$2,500 to build planters on land donated by landlords for flowers and vegetables on the west side of the street. The project was completed in the spring of 2018.
- Each year UVM Community Coalition members dedicate their April meeting to doing a project in a neighborhood. This April they did a clean-up on Isham Street and prepared greenbelts and landlord donated gardens for planting.
- ISGOOD was awarded a \$2,000 grant from AARP, used in 2014 and 2015 to create greenbelt gardens along the entire length of the east side of Isham Street and to purchase vegetables for the landlord donated community garden.

Impact: large decreases in noise tickets, vandalism, burglaries

The Isham Street program has achieved impressive results. From 2012 to 2015, the most recent year statistics are available, Burlington Police Department data show a 68 percent decrease in noise tickets, 86 percent decrease in vandalism and 60 percent decrease in burglaries on the street. On surrounding streets with similar make-ups, Hickok and Greene, there was little to no change in these categories.

"Since our first block party in 2010, the culture of the street has evolved," said Hammerslough. "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."

"Isham Street is the weakest link, and its efforts can ripple upwards to other neighborhoods," Cina said. "If Isham can do it, many others can too."

Champnois said the Isham Street model will be expanded to Hickok Place, where students and neighbors have already begun working on a greenbelt with Neighborhood Grant funding, and Greene Street next year.

The Isham Street project has also been recognized by the city of Burlington. Under Mayor Miro Weinberger's guidance, the work of the Office of Student and Community Relations, the UVM Community Coalition and ISGOOD were cited as a local best practice in the Neighborhood Project Request for Proposals and Draft Plan.

In 2016 Champnois won the Peter Clavelle award from the City of Burlington, which recognizes individuals whose leadership has advanced social equity, environmental stewardship, quality education or economic growth and vitality in Burlington.

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