

0355 CHILDREN'S VILLAGE: AN INNOVATIVE APPROACH TO COMMUNITY SAFETY

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10.1136/ip.2010.029215.355

In 1986 fire and police officers in Western Maryland, USA recognised the need to create a centralised life safety education centre for children. A number of events precipitated the development of the centre: approval of the Board of Education, volunteer efforts from a local contractor to coordinate the construction of the project, and community support for the concept of a central life safety education resource. The facility opened in 1991. The curriculum includes comprehensive traffic, pedestrian, bicycle safety and other personal safety skills. The highlight of the visit is the opportunity to operate a miniature electric vehicle around the small scale streets and allows students to encounter their peers who may be acting as pedestrians or bicycle operators and reinforces the need for practicing proper safety behaviour. The core theme is injuries are understandable, predictable and almost always preventable. At present, approximately 2000 second grade students from 76 public and 8 private schools visit the Children's Village facility each year. The centre is in continuous operation, 5 days per week, throughout the entire school term. Children's Village has earned national recognition for its success story. There are currently 16 documented cases where former students have saved lives as a direct result of lessons learned at the centre, and significant residential fires have dropped over 50% since the program began. In this presentation, we will discuss in depth the inception of Children's Village, how the program works and the proven results of having an intensive safety-related education in early childhood.