



Case for Support
August 8, 2014

Introduction

Trudy came to the grocery store one day, list in her purse. She planned to do her weekly shopping....a few necessities for her, donuts for her grandkids' visit the next day, and maybe even a treat for her dog. Just the innocent, ordinary stuff of everyday life.

Two teenage girls sneaked up behind Trudy in the parking lot. One gave a violent shove, and sent Trudy crashing face first to the hard cement. As she lay there, dazed and bleeding, the other one kicked her in the head so hard she passed out. The girls snagged Trudy's purse and took off running.

Trudy almost died from the head wounds she sustained. She never saw the girls, so she couldn't even help law enforcement catch the people who did this to her.

But the girls didn't escape for long. Someone saw them running, and heard about the attack. They put two and two together, and called Silent Observer. Based on the tipster's description of the girls and where they ran, law enforcement tracked down the attackers and arrested them. Eventually, they were convicted and sent to prison.

Trudy eventually healed, and she's working through her emotional trauma. She says, "I am so grateful that someone had the courage to call in what they knew. Thanks to that brave person - whoever he or she is - those two girls are behind bars, where they belong."

Justice. Closure. Keeping criminals off the streets. That is what Silent Observer is all about.

Our Role in the Community

How prevalent is crime in Kent County? It's a sad but little-known fact: lawbreaking activity happens everywhere. There's the serious crime, like murder and robbery, that we all see on the evening news. But that's just the tip of the iceberg. The more prevalent crimes don't even make the news. Narcotics are dealt everywhere, every day, from the city core to upscale suburban neighborhoods. School crime is climbing rapidly. Drugs, guns, underage drinking, and plots to damage property or hurt other students are present in every school district, without exception. Many people are blissfully ignorant of what is happening right in their own neighborhood! Unfortunately, there is no place where crime doesn't happen.

Silent Observer is a local non-profit organization that is funded through donations for the protection of every citizen. Every dollar stays right here, and serves only Kent County. It's a resource for every single resident of this community who wants to live, go to school and work in a safe place. That includes urban and suburban homeowners; children, adults and seniors. One community member says, "I want to sit on my front porch at night without fear. So when I

know something about a crime, I call Silent Observer. When people share what they know, criminals get taken off the streets, and can't hurt anyone else."

Silent Observer contributes to a safe community by providing one simple thing: confidential reporting. Anyone can call, text or email Silent Observer with a crime tip. Their information will be completely confidential. There is no other anonymous way to report information about crime. Anyone who contacts law enforcement can be called to testify. However, anyone who calls Silent Observer is protected by state law.

Why is this reporting mechanism important? Law enforcement can't be everywhere at once. It's impossible to solve every single crime in a county of more than 600,000 people. However, imagine what would happen if each community member reported what they knew. Law enforcement would seem to have "eyes in the back of their heads." They would know exactly how to investigate, track down and punish people who break the law. Maybe criminals would even decide that crime does not pay in Kent County!

Silent Observer is like a pair of binoculars for law enforcement. They receive more than 2,200 tips each year. Some of those calls are made by people whispering in fear, lest they be overheard and become victims themselves. Many of those tips zoom attention directly in on the people who have committed a crime. These calls come from neighbors, family members and peers who do what their consciences know is right. When tipsters tell what they know, they bring crime out into the light of day. There, it can be seen and punished, and criminals are taken off the street so they don't hurt anyone else.

What We Accomplish

Through its anonymous reporting service, Silent Observer accomplishes three important things for the community.

First, it gives people a way to do what's right without putting themselves at risk. Is there really a risk in reporting what you know to the authorities? You bet there is! How many kids in a school are going to put themselves at risk by spilling the beans on a drug dealer? How many mothers are going to call the police when a fugitive child comes home, knowing they could face that child's unforgiving hatred from the witness stand someday? How many passers-by are going to report an assault in progress if their name could be shared with violent criminals via the evening news?

Retaliation is real. Fortunately, the legal standard of confidentiality has been tested and stands firm. Those who call Silent Observer can never, will never, be identified. The system protects them from vengeful classmates, hateful neighbors, and unforgiving family members. That protection gives people the courage to do what they know is right.

Second, Silent Observer supplies law enforcement with critical information for solving crimes. One officer says, "We can go from zero to 100 with one good tip. There are lots of ways to build a case if we just know where to start." Silent Observer has a 40-year track record of success in Kent County. Tips from Silent Observer have helped law enforcement recover more than \$4 million in cash, drugs and stolen property. Tips have also led to more than 2,300 arrests. People who call Silent Observer help law enforcement focus in on the right people. In this way, they help law enforcement build a case to prosecute the criminal and take him or her off the streets.

And third, Silent Observer provides justice and closure for victims. Crime victims suffer in many ways. First, the crime itself violates their person or their possessions. Then the necessary but painful process of investigation and building a case keeps the pain fresh. Only when the criminal is captured, convicted and put away does the victim find closure. Tips from Silent Observer help to speed up that cycle and bring justice for the victims of crime.

Conclusion

If you saw a break-in at a neighbor's house, would you report it? If you caught the license plate number in a hit-and-run accident, would you share it? If you saw something that could help law enforcement find stolen goods, would you call it in?

These may seem like silly questions at first. Who wouldn't share? But what if sharing meant retaliation from other gang members because your call sent one of them to jail? What if the hit-and-run driver lived in your neighborhood and saw you standing there as he drove away? What if one of the thieves was part of your family? Would you still report what you know to law enforcement without worry?

The answer is not so easy under those circumstances. However, thanks to Silent Observer, we don't have to make that choice. Anonymous reporting puts self-protection on equal footing with conscience. Silent Observer protects those who want to do the right thing. It provides essential tips for law enforcement within the protective cloak of anonymity. And it directs the spotlight of discovery on those who break the law, so that victims find closure and criminals are stopped.

Although people can earn a reward if their tip leads to a conviction, the truth is that very few people ever claim those dollars. Even students don't report for the money. It's not about the money at all. Reporting is about self-respect, and doing what's right, in a system that provides personal safety for the reporter.

As community members, we have only two choices. We can fight crime by extending the reach and effectiveness of law enforcement through valid, timely tips. We have this choice because very few crimes happen in a vacuum. Someone almost always sees or knows something. Or we can hide our heads in the sand and pretend we know nothing. In that case, the wise words of Seneca, an ancient Roman philosopher, seem to apply. "He who does not prevent a crime when he can, encourages it."