

The seeds were planted in 2012, on a community march through the Auburn Gresham community. Seeds of love, seeds of trust, seeds of faith. And what did those seeds bring forth? Peace, unity, trust, relationships, and Saint Sabina's Peace League Basketball Program.

In June 2012, Isiah Thomas, former NBA Player and Coach, joined Saint Sabina for one of its community peace walks. It was on that march that a common bond was shared between the guys on the various blocks, a love for basketball. There was noticed excitement during conversations about the game today and where it has come from, there was passion, smiles abound, and a spark of an idea came forth. What if the game of basketball could be used to build unity, relationships, trust, to give these brothers hope for something better, finishing high school, or enrolling in a GED Program, and help finding a job? What if the simple game of basketball could become a game changer in Auburn Gresham?



This idea birthed our 1st Annual Peace Tournament. That day, September 22, 2012, 48 young men from different blocks came together and showed the world that peace does indeed stand a chance. A filled beyond capacity gymnasium was rocked by tremendous competition, exuberant play, and non-stop action. And even though there were opposing players who just a week earlier had been in a shoot-out with one another, there was not any violence or even the chance for it. At the end of the day all wondered how can we take this moment and make it last, how can we make these young men believe in peace and themselves long term.

After several weeks of planning and commitments from the guys on the streets, we began our yearlong league, which runs on Monday nights, consisting of two 12 week sessions and one 6 week session made up of 8 teams for each session playing ball. In the planning stages we realized that while playing ball was good for building relationships it did not help these young men get off the corner, stemming the violence in our community called for a multifaceted approach. So we also decided to build a life skills class into each Monday night session, and actively enroll the young men in an education or job program through our Employment Resource Center. And we began our PeaceMakers Program, a group of young men who actively go out and do gang mediation/intervention.

Through all these efforts violent crime in this immediate area has dropped drastically, over 80%. And hundreds of young brothers have received jobs, completed GED classes over the last three years.