

SAFE Ambassadors

FINAL REPORT
FOR 2020



Executive Summary

This year we adopted a new name: SAFE Ambassadors—with the acronym SAFE standing for Streets Are For Everybody. As the Chicago Department of Transportation’s (CDOT) traffic safety education and engagement team, we continue to highlight bicycling as an accessible, sustainable way to get around just as we did during the years we were dubbed the Bicycling Ambassadors. We also continue to work with children to make pedestrian safety part of their everyday lives like we did as Safe Routes Ambassadors. The new identity is a nod to the extra roles we have embraced in recent years, including engaging with seniors, and supporting the City of Chicago’s goal of eliminating death and serious injury from traffic crashes with its Vision Zero initiative. Our goal is to make Chicago’s streets safer for all users, be they people walking, biking or driving.

The Pedestrian & Bicycle Safety Education program began in 2001 and is funded through a federal Section 402 safety grant administered by the Illinois Department of Transportation, with additional funding and support from CDOT and the Divvy bike share system, and valuable sponsorship dollars from Lyft and AAA.

Chicago’s SAFE Ambassadors aim to educate and encourage all city residents in how to safely walk, bike, drive, and use public transit such as the CTA. Since Chicago traffic safety is a 24-hour-a-day/365-day-a-year concern, SAFE Ambassadors is a year-round program that is overseen and supported by 2 full-time program managers, 3 full-time year-round Ambassadors and 10 part-time seasonal Ambassadors.



220
TOTAL
EVENTS



101
IN VISION ZERO
HIGH-CRASH AREAS

Our Reach

Achieving our safety goals requires many different approaches. Traditionally, we have worked to meet our goals by attending a host of community bike rides, health fairs and public events throughout the city's 234 square miles. Of course, the Covid-19 pandemic changed everything. While we appeared at and assisted with community rides with a racial equity focus and health-safety protocols, a large percentage of our work from March through September of 2020 involved pivoting to translate our messages into digital version. We ramped up our social media presence and created videos to continue to engage with the public. During the first part of the fiscal year, we visited public, private and charter schools as usual, providing students, staff members and parents with walking and biking safety presentations and workshops.

In partnership with the Chicago Park District, which operated on a limited basis due to Covid-19, we provided fewer educational safety presentations and workshops than usual for students attending summer day camps. We continued to offer complimentary Learn to Ride classes on the West and South sides to provide Chicago residents with the opportunity to gain a new life skill in a safe and controlled environment. Finally, we interacted with residents on Chicago's Shared Streets—roads closed to through traffic to allow socially-distanced exercising; hosted bike light giveaways during the dusk hours at popular bike commuting spots; and partnered with e-scooter companies to distribute and fit free helmets.

With all sanitized hands on deck for FY 2020, the SAFE Ambassadors team attended and participated in over 200 events, including those we were able to conduct with bilingual portions—mostly Spanish, and also Polish and Mandarin for specific events. This resulted in the direct education of over 8,965 people on how to walk, bike, drive and take transit more safely.



8,965+ People Educated

6,073 Children & Teens



2,892 Adults & Seniors



204 Classrooms

52 Park, Senior & Community Events



Vision Zero Engagement



Vision Zero Chicago is the City of Chicago's commitment and approach to eliminating fatalities and serious injuries from traffic crashes.

The City and the SAFE Ambassadors believe that even one life lost in a traffic crash is unacceptable. We all have the right to walk, bike, take public transit, and drive on streets that are safe for everyone--regardless of who we are or where we live.

With the proper engagement and education from the VZC outreach team, we can work together to eliminate traffic deaths and life-altering injuries by 2026. The Vision Zero initiative is building a partnership between City leadership and the public to prioritize human life and the safety of our streets.

Traffic safety is a shared responsibility. VZC and the SAFE Ambassadors are committed to reducing traffic crashes that cause death and serious injury through an equitable distribution of resources and inclusive community engagement.

Of the 220 events the SAFE Ambassadors attended, 46% of them were in high-priority Vision Zero High-Crash Areas. We worked with organizations to engage in any way we could, attending community bike rides such as the Juneteenth celebration hosted by Roll N Peace in the Englewood neighborhood. In fact, all of the community bike rides attended by SAFE Ambassadors were in Vision Zero High-Crash Areas. We provided additional support through helmet fittings and ride-marshaling to help ensure participants' safety. Furthermore, we partnered with the scooter company Spin to provide free helmets and helmet fittings for the Belmont Cragin and Humboldt Park communities, as well as distributing headlights and taillights donated to our program.

Public Engagement



During the fall, winter and spring, our biggest focus is on our in-class presentations and visits to senior facilities. As spring gives way to summer, our program really begins to shift and build in preparation for a busy summer. This usually entails attending community events, block parties, park activities, bike rides—any place we are requested to be, and can engage with the public and provide resources to inspire people to be safer on our streets.

Community Bike Rides

We were pleased to take part in and support community bike rides this season. Our role at these events is to help ensure participants' safety by being ride marshals. We attended Think Outside Da Block's Juneteenth ride and its Roll N Peace 6 in Englewood; the 24th Ward bike ride; Equiticity's Street Love Ride, Austin Peace Ride, and Bikes, Birds & Environmental Justice tour; and the Major Taylor Trail ride by We Keep You Rollin'. These bike-centric events drew hundreds of people and provided a way for communities to be together outside, and experience the power and joy of riding safely on the street with others.

Shared Streets

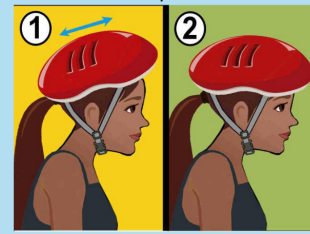
This spring and summer the City of Chicago introduced Shared Streets, giving the right of way to pedestrians and cyclists in the street with motor vehicles having to take a back seat. The Ambassadors frequented the Shared Streets, helping to educate Chicagoans and reinforce the new modal hierarchy found on that particular stretch of street. At the Shared Streets, we would engage with people using the street and living near it, collecting feedback in the form of a survey for CDOT.



Online Engagement

Are you a SAFE rider?

Which picture shows the proper helmet position?



Picture 2—that's right! The helmet should be positioned level, not tilted on the head.

Look up! You should see the bottom of the helmet.

To support our health care workers, now more than ever it's important to be a SAFE rider.



With far fewer events to attend this year, the Ambassadors pivoted to creating a greater presence online and devising more content for digital engagement. What we did this year:

Posting daily on Facebook and Instagram

We increased the number of likes on our Facebook page by 11% at the beginning of spring. This is in an effort to continue to engage with the public and create more interest in our online profiles to further publicize our future work and events we envision hosting. We also took to trying our hands at graphic production for social media posting, creating content about locking your bike, how to choose the right bike, ABC Quick Check, and more.

Community bike shop profiles

During National Bike Month in May, we highlighted community bike shops on our Facebook and Instagram pages. In these summaries, we shared a brief description of each shop and what makes it special. For example, Working Bikes shipping over 6,500 bikes a year to projects in Latin America and Africa. Our most successful post highlighted Bikes N' Roses and garnered more than 6,300 views!

Social Media Videos

Over the summer, we produced short videos to share on social media. These less-than-1-minute spots were made to not only entertain but also impart bike-riding tips to consider. Our Ambassador videos included the humorous "Lock It Remix" (how to properly lock your bike) and the more straightforwardly informational, such as our "ABC Quick Check" video. These videos were made available to our social media manager, as well to CDOT at the agency's request.

Please click the links below to view our videos:

- "ABC Quick Check" in **English** and **Spanish**
- "Lock-it Remix" in **English** and **Spanish**



Safe Routes to School

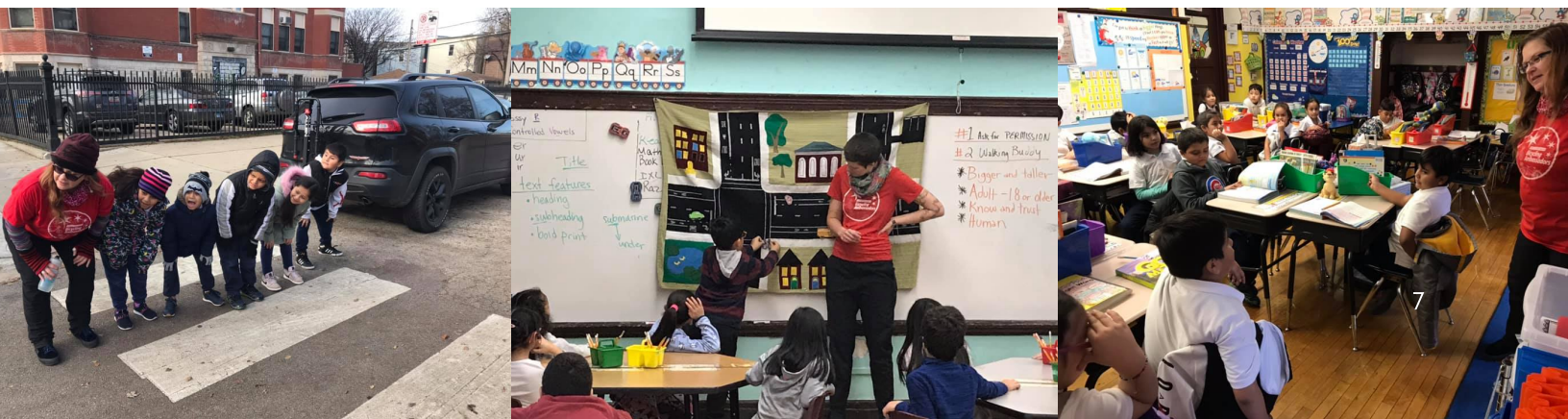
A key part of what we do is engage with young people in Chicago by going to their schools and presenting lessons on walking safety for 2nd graders, bicycling safety for 5th graders, and sharing the road for 10th graders in drivers ed classes. There are two main goals stemming from the Safe Routes to School Program:

- Educate, empower and encourage children, including those with disabilities, to walk and bicycle more.
- Make walking and cycling to school a safer and more appealing transportation alternative, thereby encouraging a healthy and active lifestyle.

We were able to attend schools and continue to provide our in-class presentations until the beginning of March. This fiscal year, we visited over 204 classrooms, educating over 5,000 kids in just 6 months!

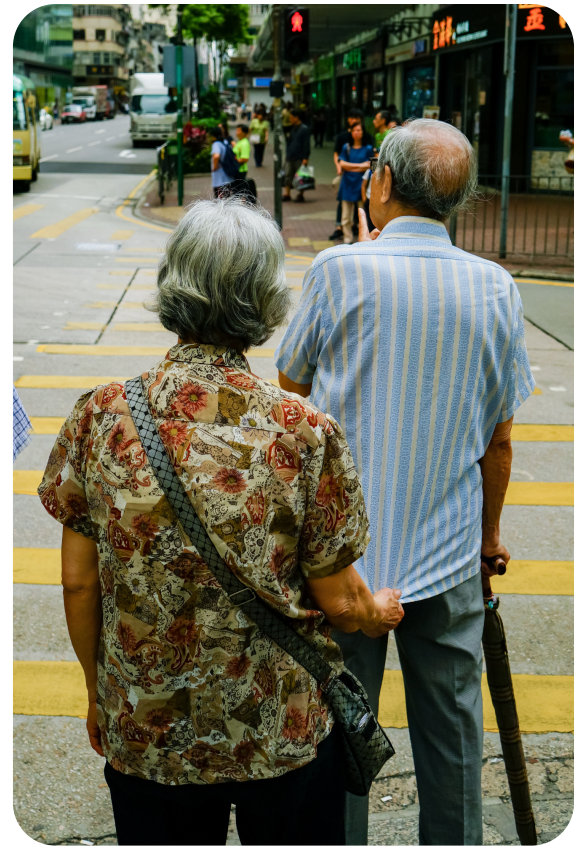
Covid-19 led us to evolve in how we educate young people. In an effort to continue our Safe Routes program, we began producing educational videos that mirror our traditional in-class presentations. During the stay-at-home order, we took on a new challenge of creating a set of walking safety lessons for the 2nd graders we could no longer teach in person. Despite little experience among the Ambassadors, we created seven video lessons with help from MUSE Community + Design. We created and adapted scripts for the new format, brainstormed idea boards, and analyzed how best to convey our messages by video. The project required adaptation and a willingness to change to make this succeed. As we end 2020, we are turning our creative energies toward our videos covering biking safety for 5th graders.

Please click the links to view a sample video: in [English](#) and [Spanish](#)



Safe Routes for Seniors

Safe Routes for Seniors is the SAFE Ambassador program's approach to providing transportation safety education tailored to the concerns of Chicago's 55 and better population. Seniors are among the most vulnerable roadway users and as such face unique transportation risks. At our events, we offer tools to navigate safe walking and transit options. Ambassadors engage participants by listening to their concerns and assisting them in assessing their communities' needs, supporting them to become informed about their local government, showing them how to report issues and concerns by using 311, and encouraging them to stay active in their communities.



Engagement is all about communication. Having experienced difficulties with language barriers in the past, we began our new season by developing methods to connect with seniors who don't speak English. We created a process to translate the custom local information flyer generated for each Safe Routes for Seniors event into Polish, Spanish and Mandarin, as needed. We also explored our options for collecting meaningful information as we tried out including a Senior Transportation Safety Survey.

Before the pandemic hit and visiting senior living facilities and community centers became unsafe, we developed and introduced a new Transportation Safety Bingo game. It offers a fun and engaging way to offer seniors resources and information, highlighting Complete Streets design elements that can make getting around their neighborhood safer, such as the countdown timer and curb extension pictured below. Although we had to cancel the majority of our senior sessions in 2020, we still got the chance to implement these new tools with 190 people at 14 Safe Routes for Seniors events. We continue to develop this program and are working on a safe way to offer senior community walks in 2021 that will highlight traffic safety, local infrastructure and community leadership.



Learn to Ride



This year—in partnership with Divvy, the Chicago Center for Green Technology, and Chicago Public Schools at Perkins Bass Elementary School—Chicago's SAFE Ambassadors offered residents a total of 34 Learn to Ride classes, including our newly developed, advanced road-skills class. More than 120 people of various ages learned a new life skill or refreshed the bike training they learned decades ago. Each class consisted of up to 6 participants who, within a 2-hour window, were afforded the opportunity to use a Divvy bike for free, receive a free helmet, and enjoy personalized safe-cycling instruction.



The *Chicago Sun-Times* came out to observe a class in mid-July and published a column profiling the program later that month. The classes, which employed social distancing and followed health protocols, were successful enough during a year of uncertainties that we extended Learn to Ride for an extra 4 weeks. Nearly 10% of our students came back for additional practice and instruction after their first basic-skills class. During the City's second e-scooter pilot, we also partnered with Spin and Bird to distribute and properly fit helmets for 227 residents: 64 children, 41 youths, 112 adults, and 10 seniors.

Learn to Ride



This year for the first time, we surveyed those who signed up for classes to gauge our effectiveness and plan for program improvements. Students' feedback on expectations met was overwhelmingly positive: One said, "I was blown away by the amazing instructors and I was riding my first class! Truly miracle workers!" and another admitted, "I was frightened of falling, so basically frightened of riding. Everyone was kind, patient and supportive."

Of those surveyed, 97% said they would recommend our classes to a friend and 10% bought a bike after class during a year when bikes for sale were very hard to come by.

To prepare for our next round of Learn to Ride classes, the Ambassadors are:

- Looking into expanding locations if the Chicago Park District is back to full functionality post-Covid;
- Starting in the spring and extending lessons further into the fall when the weather is fair;
- Planning to have a reliable supply of the newest Divvy bikes, which are a few inches smaller than the original blue bikes and less daunting for our smaller students (though we did have success with at least a half-dozen smaller students, thanks to flexible and innovative instruction); and
- Establishing ways to answer registered students' questions and encourage their appearance the day of class.

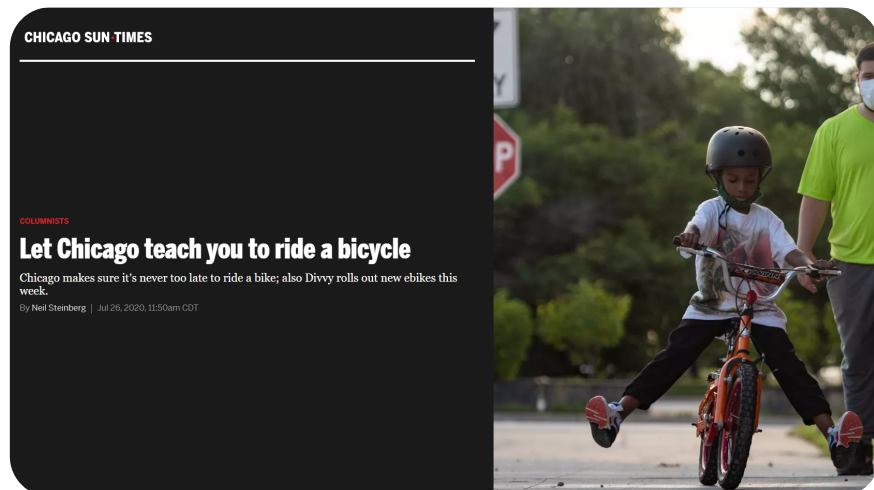
To register now for a Learn to Ride class in 2021, [click here](#).

Please follow this link to view the *Sun-Times* article.

What our students say:

"I was blown away by the amazing instructors and I was riding my first class! Truly miracle workers!"

"I was frightened of falling, so basically frightened of riding. Everyone was kind, patient and supportive."



Looking to the Future

How Covid-19 Affected Us

During 2019, the SAFE Ambassadors operated in an on-the-ground, at-event, face-to-face environment. But during 2020, the Covid-19 pandemic fundamentally changed the ways we perform engagement, forcing us to re-evaluate our approach and build a greater presence online and through creation of digital content. To ensure the safety of our Ambassadors and anyone we interacted with, masks were required at all times and the program provided hand sanitizer to each Ambassador. Additionally, during our Learn to Ride classes, we cleaned bikes with disinfectant before student use.

The pandemic inspired us to reimagine the program and emerge from the difficulties of 2020 and the changing work environment to provide a more diverse array of impactful programming for the future.

And Beyond ...

Building on our accomplishments of 2020, we plan to expand our reach in 2021 with new programming, including: more youth events, starting with virtual teen-transportation roundtable meetings in December; safety walks with seniors; expansion of advanced Learn to Ride and instructional commute-to-work rides; more developed digital tools and virtual outreach events; as well as new approaches to connecting with motorists, such as child-car-seat installation and education events.

*Top photo: A glimpse of a virtual team meeting in April.
Center: Emme set up an outdoor recording studio to allow for collaboration and social distancing during video production.
Bottom: The Divvy expansion to the Far South Side in July.*



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