

**The Bill Blackwood
Law Enforcement Management Institute of Texas**



Community Policing Advancements



**A Leadership White Paper
Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
Required for Graduation from the
Leadership Command College**



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July 2013**

ABSTRACT

There are many different communities in the United States where community policing programs have been implemented. The success of the programs in each of these communities varies, depending on the methods and guidelines for which they were implemented. Communities where policing agencies, community partnerships, and local governments have worked together to provide widespread support have experienced lots of successes, many advancements, and improvements in how programs are managed. With these improvements, policing agencies have seen reductions in crime in areas of communities which, in previous time periods, seemed hopeless. Well run community policing programs have also been a catalyst for the revitalization of areas where the quality of life in communities was deteriorating.

Police agencies should continue to improve community policing programs because the benefits to communities, police agencies, and local governments have been so widespread that many communities are now much safer and more citizen friendly. Articles from journals, books, internet sites, and government documents were used in preparation of this document. Counterpoints were located and explored but were also rebutted. Community policing programs provide very valuable training to patrol officers and supervisors, and this training enables all personnel to improve their crime fighting and crime prevention skills. These programs have also allowed for the more effective deployment of police patrols in target areas.

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INTRODUCTION

Community policing is a strategy designed to partner police agencies and community partnerships in order to foster better community relations between citizens and police officers in the communities in which they serve. Police agencies are improving their working relationships with citizen groups by establishing stronger community ties and becoming more adept at applying community policing programs in order to solve crime concerns in communities across the country. In addition, these agencies are sometimes making changes to their organizational structure in order to accommodate these programs (Diamond & Mead Weiss, 2009). These agencies have realized that the previous traditional policing techniques do not work in many situations and new approaches are now needed.

Community groups are citizen committees that team up with members of police agencies at all levels in order to develop and focus on crime issues and concerns in an organized approach. Law enforcement officers can utilize these resources as a valuable tool when they confront community issues (Diamond & Mead Weiss, 2009). These partnerships are usually developed through the regular daily interactions of community policing officers and citizens who live and work in the targeted areas.

Community policing strategies also encourage the development of cooperative relationships between law enforcement and community members to combat crime and address citizen concerns about crime (Guerette, 2009). Many of the community policing programs were developed in response to the ever growing needs of communities which were experiencing phenomenal growth rates and even faster crime rates. As citizens all over America began moving from smaller communities to larger ones, the interactions of

the citizens of those new areas of growth increased the number of contacts of citizens with each other and these contacts were sometimes very negative. The communities, even though they were larger in size, were not always prepared for the influx of citizens or the problems that accompanied them.

Many neighborhoods and local businesses changed and citizens began moving away from inner city communities over the last few decades. Eventually, the living conditions in some communities deteriorated, and some of the industries that had attracted the new residents began to close or to move on to new areas, new communities, and sometimes other states. This left some neighborhoods partially uninhabited, and the high incidence of vacant structures and the poor up keep of homes and property led to a breeding ground for some violent crimes, robberies, drug activity, prostitution, assaults, and homicides (Braga & Weisburd, 2010). Communities began to experience different social pressures as neighborhoods and communities changed. With these changes, the values and mores of the new residents became more evident. The interactions of residents sometimes led to conflicts between more established community members and newer residents. Some of the new residents experienced higher unemployment rates, and due to their plight, they saw society as an opportunity to mold the minds and change the values of society in their own direction. Citizens were becoming victims more often, and police agencies found themselves trying to combat crime from all of the new issues they were presented with as best they could (Braga & Weisburd, 2010).

In response to these changing pressures on society, law enforcement professionals began looking at the causes for increases in crime and what practices

they were using or should be using to combat them. It was readily apparent that policing agencies were not going to have all the resources that they were going to need, and as time went by, traditional law enforcement policing techniques did not seem to have the same successful effect that they had been able to achieve in the past. The society as a whole was changing rapidly, and police agencies saw that in order to stay productive, they needed to change; they sought the help of citizens and community groups to be successful.

During the reform era of policing, from the 1930s to 1970s, the philosophy of good policing focused on visibility of patrols, quick response time, and the success of follow-up investigations (Sozer, 2009). As time went by, citizens became unhappy with the effectiveness of police services and repeatedly expressed their disapproval to the local political officials and members of police departments. Local governmental and police agencies, educators, and community leaders have been collaborating together in order to formulate plans to allow police and citizens to work closer together to solve crime concerns and instill better relationships between law enforcement and members of the community (Sozer, 2009).

Therefore, community policing strategies were developed and implemented. City leaders and police officials have been working towards the goal of determining the best possible programs of community policing and implementing those programs in a way that best addresses the needs of the community and uses the various branches of local government in an organized team approach. This cooperative approach improves the likelihood of success (Diamond & Mead Weiss, 2009).

Police agencies should continue to implement and improve policing programs because they have benefitted many areas in communities and have made them safer and more citizens friendly. Police departments that have developed community policing policies have been able to increase local support for their programs, and in so doing, they have reduced the amount of fear that was previously present in some communities. This new atmosphere has also allowed communities to experience improved quality of life for its citizens and more efficient use of police resources. A reduction in the number and frequency of locations where crime can develop may then be realized (as cited by Mitchell, 2011).

Police agencies and community groups are continuing to work on local crime and community related problem solving initiatives, and as a result of these working relationships, police agencies have learned how to more effectively do their jobs. Problem-solving strategies have allowed these agencies to really fine tune their crime fighting efforts. They have even created new training protocols for officers and other members of governmental agencies where they can begin to specialize in different areas of community policing. Some areas where these specialties have been helpful are: foot patrols, bicycle patrol units, traffic enforcement units, patrol officers, drug enforcement squads, code enforcement departments, fire inspectors, and community prosecutors.

The Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS) Office of the U.S. Justice Department has stated that law enforcement agencies have utilized community policing strategies to develop solutions to community crime concerns, social ills and the wide spread belief about crime in communities (Guerette, 2009). Allender (2004) wrote that

the more police agencies interact with citizens, the more likely trust will be developed. The more trust that is developed between the police and the community, the better and friendlier the exchange of information, which can lead to reduced levels of crime (as cited by Mitchell, 2011).

POSITION

Community policing programs help reduce crime by allowing police agencies to develop strategies to reduce crime. According to the Community Policing 2.0 report of the Dallas Police Department, the community policing partnerships have benefitted the city in several areas (Brown, 2012). The Dallas Police Department reported the 8th consecutive year of crime reduction, from 2003-2011, has experienced a 38.8 % overall reduction in crime in the past eight years, and in 2011, the City of Dallas recorded the tenth consecutive year of violent crime reduction. In addition, the City of Dallas had two consecutive years in which there were 10% reductions in murder, 2010 and 2011, for a total of 20% reduction in two years (Brown, 2012).

Patrol operations plans target specific goals of crime prevention and crime reduction. They also allow departments to concentrate resources in targeted areas in order to gain the greatest result possible by planning for and achieving maximum impact. The operations are normally planned with the community needs in mind and quite often information such as citizen complaints, surveys, and intelligence that has been gathered in the targeted areas will be used to help plan the operations. This allows police officers to go into an area better informed and with information in-hand on what the problems are and what the best way will be to address the problems. In addition, officers will normally go into the areas with more resources than are

traditionally available and will be able to work on the problems for longer periods of time. Traditionally, police agencies use regular patrol techniques, which do not get the best support from citizens and community groups. These traditional patrol procedures have not been very successful in many of the more crime ridden areas of some communities.

Cities are now advancing in their community policing programs. Some are developing a new approach called "community governance". At its most basic level, it takes the cooperation of multiple agencies of city government to another level. This team approach makes it much easier to get problems solved because the major stakeholders of the local governmental agency and the police department work in a coordinated effort to solve community concerns together (Diamond & Mead Weiss, 2009).

Some communities have experienced a high incidence of crime due to the locations within those areas where crimes seem to be on the increase. These areas also seem to be suffering from neglect on a major scale because of the large number of vacant buildings and the huge number of deteriorating properties (Braga & Weisburd, 2010). Community policing in many of the areas allowed police agencies to create policies that were designed to address crime issues specifically in troubled areas. This was the justification for community policing in many areas, and community leaders sought assistance from police officials to work harder to make communities safe once again. These strategies not only invited citizen input, but they also caused police officers and police agencies to rethink how they would approach crime issues from now on.

Community policing is usually designed to have minimal impact on the local government budget; in fact, one of its primary goals is to make better use of community resources. It remains the police department's responsibility to create the environment, marshal the resources and engage the public in a crime mitigation effort (Goldstein, 1997). Many American families do not need to turn on their television sets to experience the threat of violence. They hear the sound of gunfire nightly and witness shootings, stabbings, and fistfights in their homes and on streets (Marans, 1995). These occurrences are all too real in many American communities, yet these stories are replayed in many communities every day and every night. The problems citizens have endured daily, for years, are prompting many communities to be more proactive to reduce crime. The programs that are now needed are in the process of being developed and the call for more police action to meet and combat new community concerns and crime problems continues.

In a community-based, collaborative setting, the redefining of the duties and responsibilities police officers in community policing began to occur. Instead of traditional policing approaches, the police agencies began to utilize new problem solving methods solving by allowing police officers and members of the local communities to work together to combat crime and develop strategies for solving crime related issues. Quality of life issues could then be addressed in an orderly and safe manner. In addition, community based health and counseling agencies were being used more and more as a necessary resource to combat social issues (Marans, 1995). Crime programs are beginning to show success even as new issues are being discovered. Success was found in cities such as Nashville ,Tennessee (Metropolitan-

Nashville Police Department), Philadelphia, Pennsylvania police department, and the Harris County Precinct 4 Constable's Office, Harris County, Texas (Houston) (Stevens, 2001). Each of these communities has experienced success in many of the community policing programs they have initiated. Agencies implementing community policing to a greater extent addressed all three core functions (crime control, order maintenance, and service provision) of policing successfully (Sozer, 2009).

Officers who routinely patrol communities in the target areas of communities have been very effective in establishing strong community ties in those areas. Attending neighborhood association meetings, attending church gatherings, and speaking at local schools are all forms of building community relations. When citizens and police officers work together and know each other on a first name basis, they are building good relations. These relationships help make the overall community stronger and allow for better cooperation when working on community problems (Sozer, 2009).

Throughout the country, large cities have undergone significant changes in the racial and ethnic make-up of their populations. Additionally, many of the large cities have witnessed both the gentrification and diversity of older neighborhoods (Kratcoski & Dukes, 1995). It is therefore vitally important to consider strongly the area for the implementing of the program and with built in training for officers to quickly identify the issues to be addressed and formulate a plan of operation for addressing and handling neighborhood problems.

With this new plan of action, neighborhoods are made safer and efforts are usually able to begin revitalizing the neighborhoods and restoring life to the community at large. Crime hot spots are often populated by specific targets that repeatedly attract

offenders. While focusing on repeat victims may be a particularly valuable way to detect and apprehend highly active offenders, it also provides a way to better focus police efforts at hot spots (Braga & Weisburd, 2010).

New approaches to addressing quality of life issues are leading to more improved communications and cooperation between police agencies and citizen groups. The deployment of personnel from various other city departments has helped to deliver city services in a shorter time frame. This new found approach has improved customer service and has also reduced the level of fear of citizens. Citizens are now empowered to report rundown properties, code violations, abandoned cars, and streets in need of repairs to city departments sooner (Mitchell, 2011). As the quality of life in the targeted communities begins to return, the citizens begin to take notice of the changes in the community and become even more active, in many instances, to support the changes, community policing programs and the community partnerships that helped initiate movement to rid the communities of crime. Yet, these programs and joint efforts between community stakeholders and the police require constant monitoring and continual improving since things change over time. The policy implication is police need to address the underlying conditions that cause a place to be attractive to criminals. Policing efforts would then require policing beyond traditional law enforcement responses to crime such as heightened presence and increased arrests (Braga & Weisburd, 2010).

The cooperation which derives from the partnering of different government agencies also provides a benefit to the community policing program. This team effort, sometimes called community governance, has these and some other benefits:

Each part of city government works in conjunction with other city departments. Members of different community groups and individual citizens are asked to work on community and crime issues together by leveraging their resources. These cooperative efforts improve the quality of life and safety of the community members and encourage team members to solve problems in an organized approach with city departments (Diamond & Mead Weiss, 2009).

The improved communications among police and municipal agencies and departments, citizens, community groups, and other stakeholders can be one of the most beneficial assets of the whole community policing program. This cooperative effort can also lead to better coordination within the police department in the planning and deployment of police personnel. Pease and Laycock (1996) stated that repeat victimization provides two types of opportunities for crime prevention: crime deflection and detection of offenders. Crime deflection involves turning offenders away from crime targets, and repeat victimization gives law enforcement an opportunity to predict crimes and detects offenders (Braga & Weisburd, 2010).

Some special units of the police department are also strategically deployed and staffed with personnel who are specially trained to work with community stakeholders to continue to cultivate working relationships with citizens. These units can then prove their value by solving and preventing crimes (Skogan, 2004). The crimes that occur in this area are quite often repetitive in nature, and this fact sometimes dictates that an above average police response over some period of time will be needed. However, with the deployment of police resources in a better planned, more directed manner, policing agencies can then get a better return on their investment. The problem solving by

officers, such as boarding up frequented abandoned property, can reduce the need to constantly answer needless calls to locations. Drug buys, saturation patrols, and arrests are tactics that are also used (Skogan, 2004).

COUNTER POSITION

Police officers in many police agencies will never embrace community policing because they see it as a major step away from traditional policing. These officers still believe their organizations should remain attached to the policies of the past without risking the chance of losing the values of the past. They believe that it actually diminishes the ability of police officers to successfully confront and stand up to criminal elements, and they fear it gives too much influence to community groups and neighborhood stakeholders. They want policing to remain at a safe distance from citizens just because they see the old ways as the best ways. This traditional line of thinking among police officers believes that police departments should not change to these new procedures. Many groups in society do not want continued police presence. Studies showed that wealthier households use police more frequently than low-income households for less serious crimes, and low income households use police for more violent crime and social disorder (Peak & Glensor, 1999).

Police officers will be required to participate in numerous community policing surveys in which members of the community will help conduct citizen interview operations (surveys) in target areas to gather information on what is going on in an area, such as crime, neighborhood issues, and intelligence on suspects. This perspective focuses on survey questionnaires and interviews with residents of neighborhoods to determine what their concerns are and what their perceptions are

about public safety needs. They also believe community policing cannot be successful without a problem-solving component (Stevens, 2001). Officers believe that this officer friendly approach effort has no place in the crime prevention or policing.

Police officers will be required to attend a number of community and citizen awareness meetings, taking them away from their street patrol duties and making them miss valuable time from regular routine patrol duties. There has been failure to engage and elicit commitment from police managers and supervisors. Quite often, police management and street officers are disconnected or hostile to change. Many people would rather live with a problem than adopt a new solution (Goldstein, 1997).

Community policing programs have patrol operations that sometimes displace crime, causing gains in reduction in one area that are offset or changed or increased in the adjacent areas. The operations conducted by community policing officers sometimes allow criminals to move to nearby adjacent displacement areas where they remained until it was safe to return to their safe havens. Criminals are familiar with the normal patrol techniques of police, and they normally move from one location or area to a safer location when there is increased police presence in the areas where they normally operate. Depending on the nature of the crimes they are involved in, criminals will quite often return to locations with which they are familiar, since most of the areas and people they victimize are in concentrated areas (Guerette, 2009).

There are arguments that have shown traditional policing techniques do not always work. Solutions for combating community problems requires an understanding of what the root causes are for why crimes occur and what factors or environmental conditions foster these causes. Partnerships with law enforcement and input from

different members and groups in the community can help in developing viable solutions to many local crime related problems (Goldstein, 1997). Routine traditional policing dictated that police regularly answered calls at locations, but they never looked to see why the calls kept happening. Officers quite often become increasingly frustrated answering the same type calls because they never seem to make any real resolutions (Braga & Weisburd, 2010).

Traditional officers and supervisors repeatedly complain about community policing officers attending meetings and being off the streets. They say it takes cops off the street when they should be working just like other officers, to fight crime. They believe the meetings are a waste of time. Goldstein (1979) stated that unless a realistic effort is made to determine why problems continue to occur, then there is an increased likelihood they will happen time and time again. With this practice, policing is on a ferris wheel. No matter how many times officers come out, they will still need to come back later, thus a cycle continues.

Community meetings are a great source of information, and they allow police officers to gather vital intelligence information which is then used to intelligently formulate a plan of action to not only identify the root cause to the crime or neighborhood problem, but also to form a plan to try to eliminate the problem, thereby eliminating or minimizing future calls. Police can become more effective in crime fighting if they develop better planned and well thought out responses to incidents and if they were to more closely examine the information that is available on current and previous incidents and the causes and conditions of these events (Goldstein, 1979).

Displacement of crime is not as apparent or does not occur as often as traditional police practices suggest. When crimes occur and police action drives violators from specific crime areas, displacement occurs. Some displacement also reduces the effect of police enforcement efforts because crime may recur later at another location, thereby minimizing crime control efforts (Repetto, 1976). Several scholars have suggested that instead of displacement, the complete opposite occurs. They state crime control benefits may be greater than expected and “spill over” (diffusion of benefits) occurs in places beyond the target areas (Clarke & Weisburd, 1994). Drug offenders who have addictions to drugs are more likely to move to a different area and continue their criminal behavior in other types of crimes if police enforcement efforts cause them to move. Their move may be only temporary because the violators may be reluctant to break laws and offend by using drugs if they feel uncomfortable about their new environment and new risks in the unfamiliar locations (Guerette, 2009).

CONCLUSION

Policing agencies should continue to improve community policing programs because they have greatly benefited and improved many communities and made them much safer areas and made them more citizen friendly (Brown, 2012). These new programs have been instrumental in helping to reduce crime in communities and selected areas, instrumental in improving the quality of life in neighborhoods, and helpful in creating a favorable atmosphere in communities which then enables the communities to be revitalized. This allows policing agencies to more efficiently and effectively deploy community policing officers in order to combat and deter crime.

Communities are improved when community policing programs are designed and implemented in a way to reduce crime. The community at large benefits because the crime itself has held back the positive progress that could have been achieved if the crime were not present. The use of police resources, damage to property, injuries, and losses by crime victims takes an enormous toll on communities. Crime also changes the direction and focus of communities for long periods of times if not addressed promptly.

Community policing programs, as part of an overall strategy of police agencies, also serve as catalysts to revitalize communities. These efforts are often sorely needed and without those many communities would not have been able to recover from the devastating effect crime has caused in many areas. Working hand in hand, officers and community groups have been able to forge lasting relationships and friendships, and these partnerships have been absolutely valuable and irreplaceable.

However, with the deployment of police resources in a better planned, more directed manner, policing agencies can then get a better return on their investment. Police agencies and local governments are going through difficult financial times, and it is vitally important today to use all funds, resources, and personnel wisely in order to maximize the rate of return for local governments and get the best use out of all personnel. Police officers and community members must continue to meet together, work together, and stand together to confront the new challenges of today and prepare for the challenges for tomorrow.

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