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IMPLEMENTATION OF A CITIZEN PATROL PROGRAM

A Policy Research Project
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ABSTRACT

Police Departments across the country have recognized the responsibility in safeguarding the life and property of its citizens. Most police officials have recognized that the job of fighting crime is awesome, and cannot be effectively confronted by the police alone.

The purpose of this research is to identify and suggest a more effective method of prevention used successfully by several law enforcement agencies. The method to be discussed is called "Citizen Patrol." The Fort Worth and Houston Police Department Citizen Patrol Programs will be contrasted in this research. These agencies have documentation to support the success of the programs in their respective agencies.

The recommendation of said proposal is that the Police and City Administrators review this proposal and consider its implementation as a pilot program initially, with the idea of expanding to virtually every neighborhood within the geographic boundaries of the city as resources become available.

Introduction

A major concern of law enforcement agencies across the country is the lack of manpower. Many departments operate with a very small number of officers actually patrolling the streets. These few officers frequently get dispatched from call to call, leaving the community without adequate coverage. A unique idea used in many cities to supplement the regular patrol is a volunteer "Citizen Patrol Program."

The purpose of this research is to identify cities or communities that have seen a decrease in crime as a result of using Citizen Patrols. The primary intent of the research is to provide police administrators with accurate and relevant information regarding the Citizen Patrol Programs. The research will serve as a guide for other departments during the development of policies relating to the implementation of Citizen Patrol Programs in their communities. This research will be conducted for the primary benefit of the Pasadena Police Department. However, the applicability of the results will be useful to other departments. Initially, the results of the research will be presented to the command staff of the Pasadena Police Department. Ultimately, the Pasadena City Council will be asked to review the resulting policy for approval. The methodology used during the research will be preserved and used to periodically review and possibly update the final policy.

The sources of information that will be used for this project

are Citizen Patrol Operating Procedure Manuals from other law enforcement agencies and personal interviews with agency coordinators. It will be instructive to determine how other departments are using Citizen Patrols. A review of these department policies will provide sample operating guidelines for a Citizen Patrol unit.

Theoretical and Historical Contexts

"In response to the rapid increase in crime in the 1960's and 1970's, many kinds of citizen initiative crime prevention groups that effectively reduce crime were created." Some of the specific examples are: "Block associations, Building Patrols, and Community Groups." In their article "Critical Issues In Criminal Justice," 1979, by R.G. Iacovetta and Dae H. Chang, they state "the most successful patrols have been those with a well-defined purpose, having a small patrol area, and protecting the community against external enemies." (Chang/Iacovetta 1979)

In 1985 the Houston Police Department started its Citizen Patrol Program as a state-funded model in several Houston Neighborhoods. Since that time it has become an effective, rapidly growing program. It is not a vigilante type program, but one comprised of concerned citizens who serve as the "eyes and ears" of the department. By definition, the Houston Police Department Citizens on Patrol (COP) is "an organization of private citizens

who have joined together in an effort to reduce neighborhood crime." The goals of the citizen patrol are:

- a. to provide an effective method of discouraging neighborhood crimes and neighborhood decline
- b. to promote a friendly neighborhood environment while respecting the privacy and rights of homeowners and home renters
- c. to encourage an awareness and provide improved communication among neighbors
- d. to upgrade the quality of life and property values in the area (Houston Police Department 1985)

In October, 1991, the Fort Worth Police Department instituted their Citizens On Patrol Program, which they named "Code Blue." The program was developed by the mayor and the chief of police in response to increasing crime rates and gang activity. By 1991, Fort Worth, population 434,399 (1990 census), had experienced several years of escalating crime rates. Compared to cities of similar size in the United States, the crime rate in Fort Worth ranked in the top five. (Fort Worth 1994) Although a few programs exist in other Texas cities and the nation, none are regarded as elaborate as the Code Blue Program. The objectives of the Code Blue Program are:

- a. to assist the police department through observation
- b. to help reduce crime in the neighborhoods
- c. to educate citizens on crime prevention
- d. to increase public presence in the neighborhood
- e. to unite residents for a dedicated reason
- f. to increase crime awareness among citizens of the neighborhoods
- g. to improve the quality of life in the neighborhood
- h. to provide a safe, secure environment for all neighborhood residents
- i. to make a difference in the neighborhoods (Fort Worth 1994)

Crime Prevention efforts in Pasadena neighborhoods have been similar to other cities with the standardized Neighborhood Watch

Programs. Pasadenians On Watch (POW) have assisted the Police Department with various groups since the mid 1970's. As in many other cities, some groups are more active than others. The effectiveness in reducing crime has been minimal.

Pasadena has a population of approximately 120,000. In 1995 the department held its first Citizen Police Academy. Since then, the CPA alumni has formed and its members have volunteered to assist Neighborhood Watch in its effort to combat crime. This research proposal is a result of an increase in gang activity in the community and a need for a comprehensive program to patrol neighborhoods. The Fort Worth and Houston designs have been studied with a variety of information being used to assist in creating a proposal conducive to the needs of the City of Pasadena.

Review of Literature or Practice

The purpose of this section is to summarize the COP programs in the Fort Worth and Houston Police Departments.

The Fort Worth Citizens on Patrol Program is comprised of groups of private citizens interested in actively patrolling their own neighborhoods for the purpose of observing and reporting suspicious, criminal, or potentially dangerous activity. The program is coordinated by community relations officers (CROs). Briefly, these officers are responsible for:

- a. selecting and coordinating appropriate target areas for patrol activities
- b. scheduling educational programs
- c. issuing equipment
- d. providing advice or assistance
- e. evaluating patrol groups' efforts

- f. serving as a liaison between citizens and the Police Department
- g. arranging continuing education and providing information

The CRO's are assisted by the citizen group leaders. The patrol groups are organized in the following manner:

- a. Group leaders are responsible for organization and daily activities of all members.
- b. Group leaders are chosen by agreement between group members.
- c. The patrol group's daily involvement of members are supervised by group leaders.
- d. The patrol groups's patrol area is designated by natural boundaries.
- e. The daily roster and team assignments are maintained by the patrol group leaders.

The patrollers must adhere to the following guidelines:

- a. A base station is monitored at all times while one or more of the group's patrols are active. The base notifies the Police Department in cases where an immediate response is necessary.
- b. The base and the patrollers are supplied with 800mhz radios that are portable. The CROs have the capability of coming down to assist the patrollers.

As part of the training, every patroller must be aware of and follow the rules of conduct while on patrol:

- a. Participants are not empowered by the Fort Worth Police to any degree above other citizens.
- b. No badges or credentials are to be used.
- c. Firearms or other illegal weapons are prohibited.
- d. No use of "Kojak" lights or other emergency lights are permitted.
- e. Patrollers must obey all traffic laws. No pursuits or chases are permitted.
- f. Members will patrol in pairs or groups of three.
- g. Participants may observe activity in any public place, and they may observe activity on private property with the owner's permission.
- h. Participants are not to put themselves in a dangerous confrontation.
- i. Participants will not approach suspect's vehicles.
- j. No intoxicants may be consumed nor will participants be intoxicated.
- k. Do not approach a scene of a crime unless directed by officers. (Fort Worth Police Department 1994)

The Houston Police Department Citizen Patrol Program is coordinated by the Community Services Division. It is not a vigilante-type program, but is comprised of concerned citizens who serve as the "eyes and ears" of the department. The department provides the patrollers with citizen band radio equipment and training to help them achieve this task. The department's plan of action is mainly to improve and expand the program in the following ways:

- a. hold annual training workshops for all neighborhood patrols
- b. publish a monthly newsletter, called "Coordinator's Corner," to promote neighborhood cohesiveness

The guidelines for the patrollers are as follows:

- a. to observe and report situations that require emergency response by the police
- b. relay information to the base station operator to summon needed assistance
- c. use common sense carefully considering the ramifications of patroller's actions

Every patroller is trained and must adhere to the following rules:

- a. Personal safety shall be the most important aspect.
 - b. Patrollers shall not carry illegal weapons.
 - c. Patrollers are not to be involved in or commit any violent acts.
 - d. Patrollers shall not attempt to arrest anyone.
 - e. Patrollers shall not attempt to stop suspicious persons or vehicles.
 - f. Patrollers shall not imply to anyone that they are a peace officer or employee of the Houston Police Department.
 - g. Patrollers shall not threaten anyone.
 - h. No one under the age of 18 may patrol.
 - i. Patrollers shall not patrol under the influence of intoxicants.
 - j. Citizen patrollers must be trained prior to working alone.
- (Houston Police Department 1985)

The Citizen Patrol Programs in Houston and Fort Worth have basically the same modes of operation, with the exception of a few.

Listed below are the similarities and differences:

Similarities

- a. observing and reporting suspicious activities in neighborhoods is primary purpose
- b. making no contact with suspicious persons and vehicles
- c. obeying all traffic laws
- d. reporting activities to a base station operator
- e. prohibited possession of illegal weapons while patrolling
- f. making a written report of patrol activities
- g. using extreme caution and safety
- h. receiving training by police personnel before being allowed to patrol
- i. not representing themselves as a police officer or employee of the city
- j. no consumption of intoxicants before or during patrol

Differences

Houston Police Department:

- a. Citizen Band (CB) radios are used by patrollers and base stations.
- b. Initial and mandatory in-service training is provided by the Community Services Division. The patrollers are released to their neighborhoods independently upon completion of the training. (Houston Police Department 1985)

Fort Worth Police Department:

- a. The 800 megahertz radio system used by the police officers is also used by the patrollers and base stations.
- b. Initial and in-service training is provided by various officers within the Fort Worth Police Department. A Community Relations Officer (CRO) is assigned full-time to a geographic neighborhood to coordinate the citizen patrol. (Fort Worth Police Department 1994)

Fort Worth

Houston

Communications	800 Megahertz Radio	Citizen Band Radio
Police personnel/ Training	Full-time officer assigned to train & coordinate groups	Trained by police & released to patrol independently

¹ Indicates differences in COP programs in Fort Worth and Houston.

The Houston Police Department's use of citizen band (CB) radios by the citizen patrol groups has some drawbacks. Although the cost of the CBs are very reasonable, the patrol distance is limited due to the poor reception of communications when the patrollers get away from the base station.

The Fort Worth model was successful in obtaining a city wide radio system in 1991. The citizen patrol groups use similar radios as the street officers. The radios are capable of communicating directly with the officers. The radio reception is very clear, which is essential in emergency situations. "The direct placing of an officer in a designated neighborhood with a specific citizen patrol group has provided excellent communications between the police and community" (Daggs 1996).

The major cost involved in setting up the citizen patrol is the purchase of 2-way radios. As previously discussed, Houston Police Department uses the Citizen Band Radios and Fort Worth uses the 800 megahertz system. Houston Police Department Community Services Officer Henry Alvarez quoted each CB radio to cost under \$100.00 (Alvarez 1996). Fort Worth Code Blue member, Claude Whitley, who helped organize the radio system, said that the hand held 800 mhz radios can be purchased for \$1,000.00 (Whitley 1996).

Although the radios used by the Fort Worth Police Department are 10 times the cost of the CBs used by the Houston Police Department, consideration should be given to:

- a. clarity in radio transmissions
- b. response time to calls for service
- c. safety of patrollers
- d. communications with officers
- e. larger range of patrol coverage

Discussion of Relevant Issues

Based on the research, the following key issues with respect to the Pasadena Police Department have been identified.

Defining the mission - It is critical that the Chief of Police implement policy describing the role of the Citizen Patrol Program. Effective communications between the police and community will identify expectations and alleviate most problems.

Establishing recruitment of members - "The most common method in recruiting new members is through word of mouth" (Hilson 1994). "The Citizen Police Academy Alumni Association is an excellent resource", (Mitchell 1996).

Training - Training should be administered to familiarize citizens with COP operations, rules of conduct, liability issues, and legal considerations. "A detailed training program should be given to citizens making them aware that the city will not be responsible for their actions" (Kapitan 1996).

Budgetary items - The main costs involved in implementing the program are manpower and radio communications.

- a. Manpower - A departmental coordinator should be selected and consideration given as to the involvement level of other officers.
- b. Radios - A decision should be made on the type and number of radios to be used.

Liability - The ultimate question of liability cannot be resolved without (short of) a court proceeding. Measures are taken by the city to attempt to limit liability through training and the execution of liability released by the program participants.

Officer acceptance - An assumption by some may be that volunteers would take away the police jobs or interfere with operations. Proper training

comparable to the CPA will help dispel misconceptions. Neighborhood groups should be encouraged to screen out citizens who see COP as a vehicle for "playing" police.

The Fort Worth and Houston Police Departments each consider the Citizen Patrol program to be a proven effective deterrent to crime. The success of each program is a direct result of the department's commitment to the Citizen Patrol program and the dedication of the program's many trained volunteers. The police and community together form an important partnership in the fight against neighborhood crime.

Conclusion/Recommendations

The purpose of this research was to identify effective methods of crime prevention and reduction using interested citizens. The specific motivator which prompted this research was an increase in gang activity in the City of Pasadena.

The training of two Citizen Police Academy classes in Pasadena has sparked the desire of concerned citizens to find a method to lend assistance to the patrol officers, existing Neighborhood Watch Groups, and the Department in general in the fight against crime.

This research has provided insight into the COP programs in the Cities of Fort Worth and Houston, where citizens have made a difference. These trained volunteers spend countless hours patrolling their neighborhoods in order to assist officers in making the city safe. This information will serve as a guide for the Pasadena Police Department and City Leaders in the development of policies relating to the implementation of a Citizen Patrol

Program. The implementation of a Citizen Patrol Program in the City of Pasadena will serve many purposes. The additional "eyes and ears" who are "observing and reporting" may have a deterrent effect on the crime rate. The presence of the patrollers in the neighborhoods will make it uncomfortable for the criminal at large. It is the recommendation of this writer that the Police and City Administrators review this proposal and consider its implementation as a pilot program in selective neighborhoods. If successful, it could be expanded to virtually every neighborhood within the geographic boundaries of the City of Pasadena as resources become available.

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