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**The Problems with Community Policing In Small Towns**

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**A Leadership White Paper  
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## **ABSTRACT**

The intent of this paper is to address the problems that small towns face when dealing with community policing. The research will concentrate on three fields: funding, police training, and community involvement. These three areas are paramount to the success of community policing programs. Books, criminal digests, internet sites, and research papers will be used to prove this point.

Community policing is a concept being used by every law enforcement agency in some fashion or another. Many agencies, especially the smaller agencies that are out of the normal realm of police activity, are not employing community policing to its fullest. There is not enough effort being put toward making community policing work as it should. To make it work to the best of its ability, a look should be taken at the areas that are the most important. A dissection of these areas should take place. Focusing on the mindset of those that participate in and stand to benefit from community policing is required to improve on a very good tool for the police and the community.

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## INTRODUCTION

Community policing is not a new concept for law enforcement. The concept of community policing was first introduced by Sir Robert Peel in London in the 1800s. Through the years, community policing has seen its successes and failures. There are still those critics who believe the community policing concept cannot work and the thought of it should be abandoned (Alpert & Piquero, 1998). These critics cite it is a waste of taxpayer dollars and lack of enthusiasm by police and the community as the reasons for the failures in community policing. The community policing concept should not be abandoned. Rather, it should be exercised to its fullest intent. Policing the community should begin with the people of the community through awareness and cooperation with law enforcement. Failing to take progressive action toward criminal activity in the community only enables those who commit these crimes. It is everyone's responsibility to make people who commit crimes accountable for their actions. These crimes will continue to grow more intense and more frequent if they go unnoticed and unenforced. Community policing helps those people who have either been a victim of criminal activity or even the people who have committed crimes become more involved with the police to achieve a safer environment for the community to live in. Some community policing programs reach out to those who have committed crimes and help them rehabilitate.

More effort should be taken to address the problems with community policing in small towns and making community policing work because it will help the community better understand the police, their efforts, and help reduce crime. This research is intended to inform law enforcement leaders, governing entities, police training agencies,

and the community about the importance of community policing. The success of community policing programs in small towns depends upon these entities working together and understanding the importance of their roles in community policing.

## **POSITION**

Research has shown that community policing has been tried and failed in many situations in the past years (Alpert & Piquero, 1998). There are several reasons why community policing programs have failed. Three such reasons are inadequate funding due to budget constraint on police departments, police officers' lack of enthusiasm to deliver the community policing message to the public, and importance of involving the community members with community policing programs. In situations where community policing has been successful, the agencies and individuals responsible for overseeing these tasks through have dedicated the appropriate time, resources, and money to the programs. Police agencies should diligently inform and seek out members of the community in an effort to form a partnership with the community.

One of the most difficult struggles to overcome in small town community policing is coming up with the money needed to fund community policing programs. There should be clear support for the implementation of these programs (Brown, 2007). The town councils that control the funding for community policing programs need to understand that funding should be allocated for community policing programs if these programs are to be successful. Where and how to allocate funding within a town government is a constantly fought battle. Each department within the local government fights for a piece of the proverbial pie. Each department is responsible for justifying their individual budgets. This tends to spawn the political game within the organization

where the influencing group tends to win over the others. In this situation it is best to have a strong, politically minded chief of police who can sell the needs of the police department and the needs of the community to the councils who make the decision on how much money will be allocated to that effort. A better form of government is one without influence and the justifications are weighed fairly (Mintzberg, 1989). With this in mind, the administrators with law enforcement agencies find themselves negotiating with town managers and town councils to get the funding they need to run their departments. Sometimes these battles are lost, especially in a time of economic turmoil.

The police officers on the streets are the citizens' first and sometimes only point of contact with the police department. These officers are the first point of influence for community policing programs. The way the officers conduct themselves reflect directly on the community policing ideas as well as the reputation of the department. A police officer with an "us verses them" attitude tends to reflect poorly on the community policing concept. On the other hand, a police officer willing to work with the citizens and work to get the citizens involved tends to reflect in the positive for community policing. Police academy training (TCLEOSE) and Field Training Officer (FTO) programs should be changed to further stress the community police mindset. Police officers should begin their first day on patrol with the correct community policing mindset and carry this mindset throughout their careers. All law enforcement officers, regardless of whether they are assigned to a community service unit, should receive biannual training to insure they are up to date with current community policing trends and concepts. The "us verses them" mentality should be retired. Officers have the mindset that they must

patrol their area from behind the wheel of a patrol vehicle. Officers should be encouraged to park the patrol vehicle and conduct foot patrols of neighborhoods and high crime areas. This will increase the one-on-one contact with citizens while also increasing trust between the citizen and the officer if done properly (Trojanowicz, & Pollard, 1986). This only scratched the surface of the many community policing ideas that can be used to bring the community and the police closer together to achieve the common goal creating and maintaining a safer community. Police agencies should have a Community Services Officer. This officer should be the direct contact for members of the community who want to learn more about how they can get more involved.

Community involvement is an essential piece of the community policing concept. A community policing program cannot survive without involving the community. Two such programs are the Citizens on Patrol (COP) and the Citizens Police Academy (CPA). Members of the community attend a condensed version of the police academy. They are taught from the same lesson plans as cadets are taught from when attending police academies. This opens up the minds of the citizen and teaches them the truths behind law enforcement. Citizens generally have a different idea about community policing and the element involved in policing as a whole (Herbert, 2006). This training also addresses the rumors of law enforcement that a citizen may have. The CPA gives the citizen a better understanding of what police officers do. The COP program allows the citizens to work with the police officer on daily patrols, getting to know the officers and how the system functions. Members of the Citizens on Patrol also patrol areas independently, giving the police department another set of eyes on the streets. Both

programs instill a better understanding and respect for the members of law enforcement by the community. Community Policing Programs should not stop with just the CPA or the COP.

## **COUNTER POSITION**

Community policing programs such as Citizens on Patrol (COP) and Citizen Police Academy (CPA) can be costly to run and maintain. The burden of the programs lay with the police agency and the government entity to fund these programs. Some agencies require the citizen to pay a small fee to join CPA. This small monetary amount may discourage some citizens from getting involved with such programs. Some agencies also require the citizens to furnish their own equipment: flashlights, uniforms, etc. The more costly items in the programs are that of patrol vehicles for the citizen volunteers to use as they patrol their community. In many cases, the citizen volunteer receives a patrol unit that has been retired from the patrol fleet. A patrol vehicle alone is a drain on the budget due to maintenance costs, repairs, and insurance. Some community service programs can put a serious strain on a police department budget. This strain becomes more evident if the police department does not receive adequate funding from the town they service.

While money may not be readily available there are alternatives for funding law enforcement projects available in the form of grants and donations. There is a grant from the United States Department of Justice COPS Improvement Act of 2009. This grant was put into motion during President Clinton's administration to assist law enforcement agencies in hiring more police officers. This grant was also designed to assist in the funding of the development and use of community policing programs.



Other types of funding can come in the form of citizen or local businesses donating items or money to the police department. This alternative funding is used to fund continued training for law enforcement officers, purchase equipment, and supplement current salaries for officers assigned to community policing programs.

In addition to budgetary concerns, some believe that law enforcement officers should police their community with command presence, using only their authority to combat crime. A police officer's presence alone should deter crime in their communities. Surely no one will commit a crime if they know what the consequences are. Police officers should remain standoffish and not get too close to the citizen because some day they may have to issue a citation or even arrest this citizen. In the 1990s, the Seattle Police Chief Norm Stamper was a serious advocate of community policing. He believed so much in community policing that he conducted seminars and invited his officers to attend the seminars (Herbert, 2006). The officers began to refer to the invitations to the seminars as requests to "drink the Kool-Aid." This was in reference to the 1978 Jonestown Massacre, when more than 900 followers of Jim Jones drank cyanide laced Kool-Aid rather than surrender their territory in Guyana (Herbert, 2006). In a survey conducted in Flint, Michigan, officers cited that the strengths of foot patrols fostered trust with the citizen they are taxed to protect and patrol. The trust was gained from day to day contact with these citizens (Williamson, 2008).

Community policing is not a new concept. In the 1800s, Sir Robert Peel, also known as the Father of Law Enforcement, was tasked with forming the first organized police department in England (Bloy, 2002). From the start of organized policing, it was understood that it was important to gain the trust and participation of the community. It

is also understood that police officers need to build relationships with the community. That concept is still being delivered today. Law enforcement organization and training centers should attack the issue of training all officers in the concept of community policing. Implementing patrol tactics, such as foot patrols in neighborhood areas, should be accepted by the officers assigned to these tasks. The program has a better chance to succeed if the officers understand why this type of patrol is being used and understands the impact of his or her efforts.

Another counterpoint is that the citizens do not need to get involved in the crime fighting role in their communities. They are not trained to perform the job like a police officer is trained. In smaller police agencies, the agency does not pay the money to send its recruits to a police academy. These agencies hire recruits who have already gone through the academy. This reflects that a smaller agency will not spend the money to train the citizens properly either. After all, small towns do not have a crime problem like the bigger cities do. Therefore, the citizen does not have to get involved when there is no crime to get involved with. Citizens have enough to handle with pursuing their careers and taking care of their families. To be involved in the crime fighting in their small community would be a waste of the citizen's valuable time.

While it is true that criminal problems may not be as prevalent in smaller cities, statistics show that crime is moving out of the inner city and into the suburbs (Carlie, 2002). The Uniform Crime Report indicated that violent crimes are down in the larger cities and increasing in the smaller cities. This information was gathered from an informal analysis of statistical information displayed in the Uniform Crime Report from 1995 through 2011 (Federal Bureau of Investigation, n.d.). Some of this increase is

contributed to the fact that more people are moving or migrating out of the larger cities to the smaller suburban areas (United States Census Bureau, 2011). This increase in population in smaller towns brings with it the increase in criminal activity. Criminal offenses committed against people and property requires that there actually be people and property to commit these crimes against. It is safe to say that where there are people, there is crime. More now than at any time in history, there is more of a need for criminal awareness in smaller towns. This need reinforces the reasoning for community policing. With fewer officers on the streets in smaller towns, there is more of a need for community policing and for recruiting the help of the citizens to combat crime and increase awareness in communities. With the introduction of the Internet, by networking with the citizens and business owners, it is much easier to reach out to the citizens. Networking with citizens is a concept that is steadily growing (Williamson, 2008).

## **CONCLUSION**

Community policing will work if issues are addressed that make up community policing: proper funding, community involvement, and officer mindset. Police department heads and leaders in the community should strenuously petition their governing bodies to obtain the funding necessary to properly organize and maintain community policing programs. Police department heads, police training organizations, and police trainers should strenuously petition the Texas Commission of Law Enforcement Officer Standards and Education (TCLEOSE) to place more emphasis on community policing topics in the police academy curriculums. It has been said that community policing as a whole will not work. Some will argue that it is a waste of valuable funding and that the community policing function is simply one idea among

many ideas to improve policing that are pushed into the police environment only to give up on the idea down the road (Alpert & Piquero, 1998).

Applying these changes should ensure success of the community policing concept as it was intended. The programs mention in this paper only scratched the surface of the many community policing ideas that can be used to bring the community and the police closer together to achieve the common goal of creating and maintaining a safer community. In addressing the funding issue with community policing, it needs to be understood where the funding comes from to support such programs. Each law enforcement entity reports to a governing body that controls the flow of funding throughout the different units within the city, county or state. A municipality may be responsible for the funding of a street department, parks and recreation department, human resources and so on. In the current recession, funding is more difficult to come by, which causes the municipalities to cut spending in all units of the town. Law enforcement agencies are forced to seek alternative funding in the form of grants and donations. Applying for grants can be time-consuming and can require the agency to prove why they qualify for assistance from the grants in the form of a written application. However, the time dedicated to completing grants is well worth it because of the amount of funding they may be able to secure. These agencies can apply for grants to supplement the funds needed for salaries, equipment, and training. One such type of grant was recently made available called the COPS On the Beat Program. The grant is also known as House Bill 1139. This is a House Bill created by the President of the United States to assist departments in these struggling times (COPS Improvement Act, 2009).

Wilson (2006) explained about the Contingency Plan, stating it is a characteristic or event that depends on another. The police, the community, and the government entities depend on one another to achieve success in community policing and making the community safe. Wilson continued to explain that an organization is fit when its structure is well designed for the task environment in which it operates. This would suggest that the police, the community, and the government entities need to work together to achieve success in community policing.

Alpert and Piquero (1998) pointed out that there have been struggles with community policing efforts in the past; however, the newer efforts have decreased tension between the police and the community, improved police services, and increased the police's abilities in dealing with community problems. Also, police officers participating in the program are happier to be involved, and the community takes on more responsibility for their community. Because of added exposure and added training, police officers are beginning to accept the community policing concept and are starting to apply it better to their day to day patrol efforts. This same exposure and increased officer efforts are resulting in the community and the police beginning to interact better together. The community is learning more about the duties of the police officer and understanding why and how the police function the way they do.

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