

Community Oriented Policing in Low-Income, Government Subsidized Housing Developments in Daytona Beach, Florida

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Abstract

This paper describes the problems that were being experienced in low-income, government subsidized housing developments in Daytona Beach and the organizational strategies developed and implemented to solve those problems. A description of several programs to promote the community oriented policing philosophy are discussed and the successes enjoyed by police and residents because of this philosophy. Finally, the paper shows that the community oriented policing philosophy can and will work to the benefit of residents and police in low-income, government subsidized housing developments.

Introduction

The current trend in law enforcement is toward community oriented policing and away from the traditional, reactionary, call driven policing. As this trend continues to expand into all aspects of policing, it is only natural that the philosophy of community oriented policing will expand into all areas of contemporary society. A part of this contemporary society is housing projects or developments. This paper will examine the effectiveness of community oriented policing in low-income, government subsidized housing developments in Daytona Beach, Florida.

Daytona Beach is a coastal community of approximately 62,000 permanent residents. It has a land mass of approximately 62 square miles and is situated on the east coast of Florida between Jacksonville and the Kennedy Space Center. The primary industry is tourism (Volusia/Flagler Almanac, 1994). This industry requires a large number of mostly blue collar workers (Volusia/Flagler Almanac, 1994).

In Daytona Beach there are seven low-income, government subsidized housing developments. These developments house approximately 4,000 residents. This is representative of 7% of the total minority population of Daytona Beach. Ninety-eight percent

of those residing in these developments are African-American. Along with this, 90% percent of all public housing family units are single parent, with a female as head of household. Records show that approximately 70% of all public housing adult head of household are unemployed and receive Aid for Dependent Children (Volusia/Flagler Almanac, 1994).

The housing developments in Daytona Beach have been plagued with crime. In 1988, there were 22 homicides in Daytona Beach with most occurring in or near public housing developments (Daytona Beach Public Safety Department, 1988). In addition, residents continually complained of open drug dealing and other violent crime in and around these developments. Drug dealers would move in and establish their territory which created areas where residents of the developments could not enter without fear of injury. Additionally, other undesirable elements were drawn into an already troublesome environment. It became readily apparent that historical police techniques and philosophies had failed to adequately address the burgeoning problem of crime in these housing developments in Daytona Beach (California Department of Justice, 1992).

Community Oriented Policing Initiative

The efforts of community policing in Daytona Beach began in late 1988 with three distinct components: Street Crimes and Directed Patrol, Volunteer Police Chaplain (Ministers-Police Community Relations Association), and the Community Relations/Recreation Outreach Program (Police Athletic League) (Berger, Mertes, & Graham, 1994). At the same time grant requests were being developed to establish a Police-Public Housing Enforcement Unit in the most crime ridden housing development.

Street level crime in the developments was the primary focus of the efforts. A police presence and strong attack on these crimes were the goals. This was difficult at first because of the lack of total support from both the residents and the police. The residents were not totally supportive of the police efforts in this or any other area as historically the police had not been representative of the population served in the developments. The police also had usually entered these developments only when dispatched and never to create or establish dialogue with the residents concerning their problems. Police officers were not totally supportive of these efforts because of the lack of understanding of the residents' problems and the mistrust of the police. In spite of these obstacles, the police efforts to address crime was effective (California Department of Justice, 1992).

Police efforts were hampered by residents' lack of understanding of police procedures and techniques in dealing with crime. Police actions would be misunderstood as harassment of Blacks when actually these actions were to assist the Black community. Often residents would protect the same criminal element that was causing the problems within the developments. The lack of understanding on the part of the residents was overcome because of the participation of the Police Ministers Association which bridged the gap between the police and the residents (Vernon & Lasley, 1992). This ministerial group was composed of predominantly Black clergy. These ministers were from churches in the area and knew most of the residents of the developments. This made it possible for the residents to better understand the mission and purpose for police action. The clergy were very effective in creating an initial relationship of trust between the police and the residents.

Once the most offensive and visible element was removed and residents began an open dialogue with police, the next step was to institute a Community Policing Unit in the most troublesome housing development (Carey, 1994). A decentralized community sub-station was established in the heart of the development with the assistance of the Daytona Beach Housing Authority and the blessings of the residents of the development (Goldstein, 1990). The focus of this initial unit was to create and maintain dialogue with residents and assist them in gaining a sense of pride and a feeling of security in their community. A program called the Defensible Fencing Program was established and federal grant funds were obtained to carry out the program. The aim of this program was to create a sense of territory and ownership for each of the units in the housing developments (Goldstein, 1990). It also had the collateral benefit of keeping out undesirables and eliminating escape routes previously used by criminals fleeing police officers.

The establishment of the Community Policing Unit made a police officer available to the residents on a full-time basis. The officers worked many and varied hours and were

available after hours with pagers. Residents were given the pager number for the officers in their development and were encouraged to call with problems. As the residents became more trusting and comfortable with this arrangement, it was obvious because of increased numbers of reports and police/citizen contacts that a bond of trust was forming between the police and residents (Stipak, Immer, & Clavadetscher, 1994).

As the relationship between the police and the residents continued to strengthen and a sense of community pride began to build, the need to leave the stigma of "housing projects" behind was evident. Pinehaven Project, the city's worst, was renamed Mary McLeod Bethune Village in honor of one of the area's and the country's pioneers in education.

The residents soon learned that the intent of the police was not only to rid their development of crime but the police were also available to assist them with other, nontraditional police problems that would enhance their quality of life. These problems included, but were not limited to: trash, poor lighting, noise, landscaping, building maintenance, junked and abandoned vehicles, and insect infestation (Trojanowicz & Bucqueroux, 1990). The police were there not only to address these issues through police methods, but to serve as role models for the youth and assist the residents of the developments to take control of their own destiny. This was accomplished through the establishment of neighborhood watch groups, resident initiative councils, Boy and Girl Scout troops, and the Police Athletic League (Trojanowicz et al., 1990).

The Police Athletic League (PAL) was established with the purpose of reaching the youth of the community by using police officers as coaches and role models. The PAL officers served as role models for the youth and at the same time drew coaches and role models out of the areas the children were from. Facilities were obtained by the Police Athletic League from the city's recreation department to be used as bases of operations for PAL programs. These facilities were located contiguous to the largest housing development in the city. This allowed for the greatest possible utilization of the facility and the greatest exposure for the police officers to public housing residents. Additionally, after-school programs were established at PAL facilities to assist children with schoolwork and provide adult supervision for the many latch-key children that resided in the housing developments and surrounding areas.

Daily street level attacks on crime by the Street Crimes Unit and Directed Patrol were very effective. They greatly reduced the blatant drug selling and buying in the developments. Long term, protracted investigations targeting mid and upper level drug dealers culminated with major sweeps that further removed the drug dealers and other criminal elements from the housing developments (National Institute of Justice, 1987).

The Police-Ministers Program was also effective in creating a vehicle to bridge the gap between the police and the public housing community. The ministers, working side by side with police officers, were able to communicate police roles and missions to the residents. Many incidents that may have ended in confrontations between police and residents were quelled by the ministers who were able to calm tempers and ease fears of the residents with a simple explanation of what was taking place and why (Vernon et al., 1992).

The infusion of police officers into the developments was effective in creating a decentralized police facility that was more accessible and responsive to the residents' needs. The Police Athletic League was a positive influence in creating guidance and

supervision to the youth of the developments. While the community oriented policing philosophy and the other associated programs were instrumental in reducing crime and the residents' fear, they were by no means a panacea to the overall crime problems of the developments. As the success of these pilot programs became evident and their popularity grew, the pressure to expand into other developments became great. Residents in other housing developments who learned of these successes demanded the same police response and attention to their problems (Berger et al., 1994).

In response to the residents of the other housing developments in the city, the Community Policing Unit branched out into other housing developments suffering from the same types of problems that previously befouled the Mary McLeod Bethune Village housing development. Satellite offices were established and much of the manpower previously committed to Bethune Village was redeployed to other areas.

The residents of Bethune Village still had an office in their development, but the police presence was diminished. In an effort to sustain the successes that the police and the residents enjoyed in Bethune Village, officers on the three patrol shifts were encouraged to do "Park and Walks" in Bethune Village and use the office there for report writing, rest stops, interviews, and other purposes (Skolnick & Bayley, 1988). By seeing police activity around the office and in the development, it was believed that the sense of security would not erode and crime creep back into the development. Officers on the patrol shifts were encouraged to use the offices in the other developments.

While tremendous successes were enjoyed by police and residents alike as a result of the community oriented policing philosophy in Bethune Village, when the police presence was lessened, crime did rise, but not near previous levels. The expansion into the other developments had a similar effect on crime as well as residents' perceptions of police and their overall sense of security in their respective communities. Crime in all of the low-income, government subsidized housing developments in Daytona Beach has shown a marked decrease compared to periods prior to the implementation of the community oriented policing philosophy in those developments.

Conclusion

The success of the community oriented policing philosophy in low-income, government subsidized housing developments in Daytona Beach is due to the balanced, multi-faceted organizational strategy employed to implement and sustain it. The desires of the community and the willingness of the police and the community to enter into a partnership to reduce residents' fears and crime while working together to solve traditional and non-traditional police problems was the other necessary element. The community oriented policing philosophy is working in the low-income, government subsidized housing developments in Daytona Beach and, if applied properly, will work elsewhere.

Captain John Power has been a sworn member of the Daytona Beach Police Department since 1972. He has had assignments in the Traffic Division, Patrol Division, and Criminal Investigations as well as supervising the Community Relations Section and Public Information. His professional interests include teaching and training, especially supervisor training for young officers. He is also interested in the professionalism of policing. John has a Bachelors Degree from Rollins College.

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