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Focus on Police and the Community

Features

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The Cover: SAT officers on patrol stop to make friends with a youth from the neighborhood. See article p. 2.

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Safety Action Team

By
ROD ENGLERT



Photos courtesy
of Dean Guernsey

Throughout the past decade, the City of Portland, Oregon, once well known for its natural beauty and peacefulness, experienced a drastic change. Gang violence, fueled by an increased flow of crack cocaine throughout the area, led to an astounding rise in crime rates. Turf battles between rival gangs erupted in once placid neighborhoods.

The Problem

The housing authority projects throughout the area were particularly hard hit by the violence and criminal activity. Specifically, the Columbia Villa Housing Project became notorious for gang-sponsored violence, drug dealings, and drive-by shootings. Turf battles ensued as rival gangs sought to dominate the growing drug trade in the project,

and residents of Columbia Villa found themselves caught in the middle of the turf warfare.

In this environment, crime became a way of life for many. Children acted as lookouts and runners for the drug dealers; some even became small-time peddlers. Teens were pressured to join gangs and commit crimes against other residents as rights of initiation.

Juvenile delinquency thrived. Residents who refused to join the criminal element often found themselves the victims of it.

In addition to the crime problem, residents of Columbia Villa faced a variety of social and economic barriers. Nearly 100 percent of the families in the project lived at or below the poverty level, with annual family incomes ranging from \$2,500 to \$12,000. Many residents lacked high school diplomas and could not read at a functional level, which severely limited their employment potential. Other residents suffered chronic or unattended health problems. Transportation and access to child care were very limited. Few residents possessed job skills or experience, and there was a chronic lack of positive role models.

A Viable Solution

In April 1989, the Housing Authority of Portland (HAP) contracted with the Multnomah County Sheriff's Office to provide police services in Columbia Villa for 1 year. The goals were to:

- Reduce the fear of crime
- Reduce the actual criminal activity in the project, and
- Empower the tenants of Columbia Villa to regain control by building their self-confidence and self-esteem.

The contract stipulated that HAP would provide office space for the deputies assigned to Columbia Villa, while the sheriff's office would assign one lieutenant, three

sworn deputies, and two community services officers (CSOs) to the project. In addition to an unmarked administrative vehicle, the officers used a nine-passenger, marked van and one marked patrol car. The office space for the sheriff's office personnel was located next to the on-site housing authority manager to facilitate information sharing.

Safety Action Team

The group assigned to Columbia Villa was named the Safety Action Team (SAT). Members possessed the necessary professional and social skills that would enable them to deal effectively with the complexities that characterized life in Columbia Villa. In early April 1989, the team went to work to reduce the fear of crime and to help the residents reclaim their housing development.

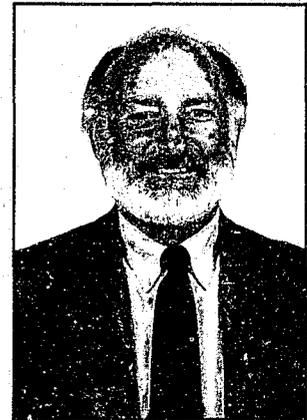
Methods

The Safety Action Team employs specific methods to stem the tide of crime. These include:

- "Walking and Talking"—Each officer and CSO was responsible for contacting five residents per shift
- Working with the maintenance staff to structure parking lots with painted lines and registering residents' vehicles with annual renewable parking decals (only residents would be allowed to park in the lots)
- Identifying criminal elements, particularly the drug dealers and gang members; warning them and their families of eviction for continued criminal activity
- Identifying outsiders who bring problems into the area and begin enforcing trespass ordinances
- Training residents in crime prevention techniques, such as situation avoidance,

“
**The success of the
SAT program...
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the tide of crime.**
”

*Lieutenant Englert is with the Multnomah
County, Oregon, Sheriff's Department.*



burglary proofing, and especially, crime reporting

- Identifying truants and transporting them to class, while encouraging children to stay in school
- Establishing an athletic program, such as the Police Athletic League (PAL), and recruiting off-duty police officers or citizens to assist in coaching teams

In addition to these steps, the SAT organized trips for children to the zoo and other places of interest, made job placement available to youths, and attempted to create an atmosphere of safety for the elderly and handicapped by making the marked police van available to them for transportation to the hospital, store, or work.

SAT on Patrol

The unique geographic layout and size of the housing project presented special problems to the SAT. Since contact with as many of

the residents as possible was a primary goal, and because crime could occur any place within the 77-acre project, SAT personnel quickly realized that the success of their program depended on mobility.

To increase the officers' mobility, two private businesses and the local Rotary Club donated five mountain bikes and accessory equipment. The deputies' uniforms were modified to conform to the needs of cycling, and members of the Bicycle Unit of the Seattle, Washington, Police Department assisted with the training. The deputies learned to tackle running suspects from their bikes, dismount at 25 m.p.h without injury, and ride up and down stairs. Not only did the bicycles enable the officers to contact residents more easily, but the use of bicycles also enhanced the deputies' ability to spot criminal activity. No one expected an officer to be riding a bike.

Results

During the first 4 months of the program, the deputies personally

contacted 1,752 tenants. Through the SAT's efforts, 75 Columbia Villa residents, including many former gang members, gained employment in the Portland area.

Deputies transported tenants scheduled for court appearances to their trials and hearings. Some of the suspects were released by the court back to the supervision of the SAT. The releases were conditional, with many of the defendants becoming involved in cleaning up the parking lots and grounds around their homes.

Pride slowly began to build, and with it, emerged a new atmosphere in Columbia Villa. Tenants, who were first apprehensive about visiting the SAT office, began to request help or offer their assistance. Children began to center activities around the office and looked to the SAT personnel as new role models, replacing the drug dealers and gang leaders.

Calls to the Central Dispatch Center became more detailed as residents of the project took an increased personal interest in ridding the neighborhood of crime. Soon after the SAT program was instituted, a noticeable reduction in the fear of crime had encouraged tenants of Columbia Villa to believe that with their support, criminal activity could be significantly reduced in the project.

As media accounts began to tell of the change taking place in Columbia Villa, the community responded with an outpouring of support and donations. Church groups in the surrounding areas contacted the SAT office wanting to know how they could volunteer

"...an atmosphere of pride began to replace despair in the project."



Book Review

their time and efforts. Area businesses provided free of charge nutritional snacks for the children of the project, fishing trips, basketball uniforms, tickets to cultural and sporting events, even a new microwave oven and computer. In essence, the community got involved.

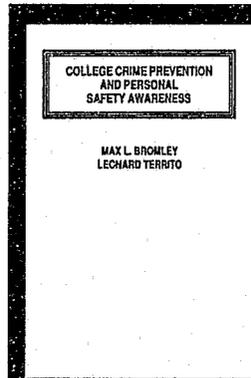
Conclusion

Within the first month of the SAT program, the fear of crime had been significantly reduced in Columbia Villa. As the fear of crime diminished, tenants gradually became confident enough to make detailed calls to the police and sheriff's departments when criminal activity was observed.

Eventually, through the efforts of the SAT, an atmosphere of pride began to replace despair in the project. Because of the mobility of the SAT team and the newly acquired diligence of the residents, open air drug deals are no longer the norm in the project. Gang activity diminished as the gangs were denied new members. Now, the project's youth center activities around the SAT officers.

The pilot program sparked the interest of other law enforcement agencies with large housing projects within their jurisdictions. The success of the SAT program in meeting its three original goals—reducing the fear of crime, reducing actual criminal activity, and empowering project residents to reclaim their neighborhood—demonstrates how law enforcement can take a lead role in reversing the tide of crime.

LEB



College Crime Prevention and Personal Safety Awareness,
by Max L. Bromley and Leonard Territo, Charles C. Thomas, Springfield, Illinois, 1990.

Faculty, students, administrators, and parents have become increasingly interested in the rise in crime on college campuses across the country. This book addresses the wide-ranging concerns of the modern college community, including off-campus apartment security, and helps those concerned to make knowledgeable decisions on how to work with the services in place to better the environment of the academic community. Understanding the statistics, definitions, and variations in reporting practices provides a basis on which to find some common concerns, regardless of population, grounds configuration, and presence or absence of campus law enforcement.

As traditional on-campus dormitories have become overcrowded, many students are turning to nearby apartment complexes

for housing. This creates new challenges for campus law enforcement as these students understandably expect the same security afforded those living in campus housing. The college or university has the responsibility to provide the same standard of information and security to the entire student population, regardless of where the students reside.

The authors choose a whole-school approach with suggestions for policy changes by administration, faculty, and student organizations. Much of the information presented was compiled from questionnaires administered in over 36 campuses across the country. Many suggestions offered come directly from these surveys.

The topic of campus rape is covered in depth, due to the seriousness and rising occurrence of this crime on college campuses. Property crime, the most prevalent campus crime, is also discussed in detail.

College Crime Prevention and Personal Safety Awareness is thought provoking and timely. It stresses a team effort in relieving the crime problem on college and university campuses. It offers practical and viable solutions for administration, students, and campus law enforcement.

Reviewed by
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