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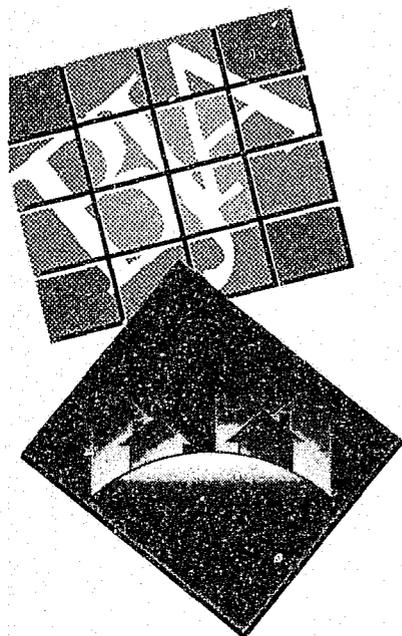


ACQUISITIONS

BJA Community Partnerships Bulletin
September 1994

Working as Partners With Community Groups

National Crime Prevention Council



Bulletin

Community Partnerships

Law enforcement officers are showing that working in partnership with community members and groups is an effective and productive way to address a community's problems and needs. This effectiveness can translate into less crime, less fear of crime, and a greater sense of community power and cohesion. Law enforcement officials have long known that they cannot successfully deal alone with the twin issues of responding to crime and correcting the conditions that generate crime. Partnerships to prevent crime can get something done about an immediate problem, build a base for dealing with future problems, gain new resources for action, and increase or sustain the community's social and economic health. They are among the most promising assets in the ongoing struggle against violence and other crimes.

Partnerships involve law enforcement agencies in relationships based on equality rather than authority. A major challenge for police and sheriffs' departments around the Nation is to develop ways to work effectively in these partnership structures to encourage community involvement. This bulletin provides information on successful partnerships and the factors that contribute to their success.

Groups that can benefit from a partnership with law enforcement include home/school organizations, such as parent-teacher associations; neighborhood associations; tenants' groups; fraternal, social, and veterans' groups; community service clubs (such as Lions, Kiwanis, JayCees, and Rotary); religiously affiliated groups; and associations of homeowners, merchants, or taxpayers.

Potential partners will come from among those groups directly affected by the current problem, those who must deal with its aftermath or consequences, and those who would benefit if the problem did not exist. For example, if graffiti are the problem, those directly affected include business owners and homeowners, other area residents, and highway and park departments. Those who must deal with the consequences include insurers, residents, traffic control personnel, elected officials, and law enforcement. People who would benefit if the problem did not exist include realtors, the chamber of commerce, neighborhood residents, and school and youth programs that could use funds otherwise spent on cleanups. All these people are potential partners.



Effective Partnerships Help All

Whatever the group's reservoir of skills and level of experience, the many assets that partnerships bring together can produce extraordinary results. For example, in a community that is experiencing bias-motivated crimes against young ethnic students:

- A parent-teacher organization could cosponsor a program with newly settled Asian members of the community to introduce cultural sensitivity in the schools.
- The local crime prevention officer could teach the students personal safety skills to help reduce their risks of victimization—simultaneously strengthening the sense of mutual trust among the students, the Asian community, and law enforcement.
- Students could work in language, social studies, art, and music classes to research Asian cultures and customs, learning from their fellow students and broadening their own horizons.

Partners in such a situation all focus on what they can do individually and together to solve problems and improve conditions.

Law enforcement expertise can be especially useful to groups concerned with problems of personal safety, residential security, or crime in the neighborhood. They can become catalysts for action as they provide skills, substantive information, support, and encouragement.

Working With Diverse Groups

Sometimes the groups who form partnerships come from diverse backgrounds and a variety of experiences. Some may never have worked in a group or indeed in any volunteer setting. One key to successful partnership building is to recognize and capitalize on the strengths of partners.

Experienced or established groups like the JayCees or Kiwanis may have a different base or background than an inexperienced one

(such as a newly formed Neighborhood Watch), but the partners need to identify common ground and proceed from there. A novice community organization may look to the more established entity for guidance but meanwhile will develop its own style and character. There is a potential for misunderstanding and miscommunication if the experienced organization does not take care to respect the newer one's independence.

Working with a community organization whose members have mixed levels of experience can present challenges. The chair of one committee may be clear, focused, and prompt but may not understand the dynamics of working with other organizations. The chair of another committee may be late for appointments and engaged in a dozen tasks at once but will prove

to be a fair, supportive, and effective team player.

Within or among partnering groups, there will be a diversity of interests. Long-time residents and newcomers will have different views of the community's needs and potential. Recent immigrants may still be struggling to communicate in English and to gain access to basic services while their children, more quickly socialized, bring home confusing new customs. The local business community will have different concerns and expectations from the residential community.

This very diversity constitutes the partnership's strength, as each partner contributes its own expertise to complement that of the other partners. One organization may be good at fundraising, another at marketing, and another at recruitment. Working together in partnership, they create a stronger, more effective whole.

One of the first tasks in forming a partnership is helping the partners solidify their shared vision of the neighborhood—of a pleasant, hospitable area where all can conduct day-to-day business and move about with high confidence of personal safety. That shared vision helps focus the efforts of diverse partners on effective community crime prevention strategies.

Overcoming Obstacles

The partnership process is not always automatic or even easy. To begin with, some communities may see the law enforcement officer not only as an outsider but as a mistrusted outsider. In such situations, law enforcement officers face the delicate balancing act of saying



at the same time, "I want to help you solve your problems; I want to work with you" and "If you break the law, I may have to arrest you." Even if law enforcement is given the benefit of the doubt by some groups, others may continue to be skeptical and even hostile.

Frequently, the only cure for this distrust is a combination of time, example, and word-of-mouth—as police officers take time to know people and be known by them in neutral or positive settings; as they show by their actions that they care and will help; and as community members who work with them testify to the benefits of the relationship. Building such trust can start more quickly if police align themselves with a trusted institution or leader in the community—a church, a school principal, or a respected neighborhood organization.

The Lessons for Others

The lessons learned in community partnerships such as those described here can be summarized for the benefit of those just embarking on partnerships.

Acknowledge the reality of fear. If the fear of crime is strong, that fear must be addressed as urgently as crime itself. Even when the actual incidence of crime is not high, the perception of an unsafe environment can create social isolation, which in turn invites even more disorder and crime and eventually leads to dysfunctional neighborhoods.

Overcoming fear can start by encouraging people to take some action, no matter how small, preferably as a group and at a level at which they are comfortable—a

"window watch," for example, or a parent escort to and from school. While these initial activities are taking place, local officials can work on establishing and posting a drug-free, gun-free school zone with appropriate penalties for violators, and then move to educate the community on helping with enforcement. Identify the community's needs or concerns. Crime files, other data from government or private agencies, and surveys and similar instruments can help build an accurate picture of problems in



the community, but other kinds of valuable information can be obtained through surveys, interviews, and discussions with residents about their perceptions and fears. Although crime cases are based on facts and evidence, residents' perceptions of community problems are important factors in understanding what will spur the community to action.

If people say they fear petty theft more than assault, they will be willing to tackle petty theft before they take on assault—no matter what crime analysis suggests. Community action should start with the problem as it is perceived by community residents. If residents be-

lieve that drug dealing is the problem, that should be the starting point; gradually the group can be educated about ways to reduce dealers' profit margins by reducing demand.

Drawing on these needs and concerns, partners can identify both short-term and long-term goals. Beginning to work on short-term goals such as having parents watch children walking to and from school each day can provide incentives for others to act, build confidence, and demonstrate a partnership's effectiveness; such efforts also help forge relationships for the longer term. Beginning to work on long-term goals such as providing a community recreation center at a junior high school with afterschool and weekend programs can provide a vision for the future as well as point to the need for all partners to commit to the task over the long haul.

Agree on a strategy (or strategies) to address the problems. Information from many sources can be helpful in identifying ways that different partners can tackle problems. What others in the community have done about similar problems, what people in other places have done, what resources are available to work with—each of these can help shape or inspire creative strategies. Strategies developed elsewhere need to be customized to the local situation and circumstances. The community's residents should be comfortable with the idea of actually carrying out the strategy they have planned. To the extent possible, partners should draw on or develop talents within the community rather than relying on outside help. Some-



Examples of Partnership Action

All around the country, community partnerships among law enforcement, organized institutions, and informal resident groups have tackled a diverse set of problems that threatened citizen safety.

Discouraging drug dealers in Cleveland, Ohio. A community-based organization helped police remove drug pushers operating on a vacant lot. City officials then pitched in to help the nonprofit group build affordable, owner-occupied homes on the site. Meanwhile, the group used a series of strategies including vigils and rallies to help discourage drug dealers from operating on the neighborhood's main thoroughfare. They also enlisted the support of businesses and residents to tidy up the area and keep it clean.

Reducing crime in Norfolk, Virginia. This city has cut homicides by more than 10 percent in each of the last 3 years and, even more impressive, has reduced overall crime rates citywide by 26 percent and in some neighborhoods by as much as 40 percent. A good share of the credit goes to Police Assisted Community Enforcement (PACE), a crime prevention initiative that works neighborhood by neighborhood in conjunction with teams of social, health, and family services agencies (the Family Assistance Services Team, or FAST) and public works and environmental agencies (Neighborhood Environmental Assistance Teams, or NEAT) to cut through red tape and help residents reclaim their neighborhoods.

Campaigning against youth violence in Minnesota. The Minnesota Crime Prevention Officers' Association enlisted the support of families, public officials, and 45 statewide and local organizations, including schools and churches, to wage a campaign against youth violence. Actions ranged from encouraging children and parents to turn off violent television shows to providing classroom training in violence prevention.

Enforcing local codes to reduce drugs in Oakland, California. Residents allied themselves with police, utility workers, housing and other code inspectors, and sanitation crews to help rid the neighborhood of drug activity. They worked to aggressively enforce a variety of laws and codes against drugs, ranging from noise abatement to building codes to health standards.

Providing safe havens after school in Trenton, New Jersey. A partnership of schools, parents, city leaders, and others led to a Safe Haven program in which the schools in the neighborhood became multipurpose centers after school hours for youth activities including sports, crafts, and tutoring. Children have flocked to the centers as a positive alternative to being at home alone after school or being at risk on the streets.

Helping parents get drug treatment in Ohio. A congregation was the focus for efforts to reach

times, however, the help of an outside expert will be valuable.

Secure broad-based participation. Once the plan is in place, other residents should be encouraged to join in the action steps. The greater their level and extent of involvement, the more likely residents will be to develop self-confidence and pride in their efforts. In most cases, greater resident involvement will contribute to success. Recruiting is

easier if there is already a record of success in meeting short-term goals and completing small-scale activities.

Train members of the partnership. This helps build bonds among the partners and develops needed talents and skills. Moreover, volunteer leaders can burn out; without a system that helps develop new leaders, there may be no one to take over. Many organizations like

United Way and the Volunteer Center offer volunteer skills training; law enforcement trainers may be willing to share their expertise in basic or advanced skill areas. Local companies often have training resources that they may be willing to donate.

Effective leadership is critical for a group to work together successfully. The person chosen as group leader should know or be trained in



addicted parents and their children. Tutoring for children, courtesy of the local college, courses on black history taught by church members, and recreational activities helped the spirits and self-esteem of the children rise. The addicted parents were counseled and supported by church members both during and after treatment. The majority of the parents are now holding steady jobs and reaching out to help others.

Preventing campus crime in Columbus, Ohio. Crime near a college campus became an opportunity for a partnership formed by the City of Columbus, the State of Ohio, Ohio State University, the Franklin County Sheriff, and the Columbus Police. The Community Crime Patrol puts two-person, radio-equipped teams of observers into the neighborhoods near the campus during potential high-crime hours. A number of these paid, part-time observers are college students interested in careers in law enforcement.

Reducing crime in public housing in Danville, Virginia. A partnership approach to working with public housing residents resulted in a 53-percent reduction in calls about fights, a 50-percent reduction in domestic violence calls, and a 9-percent reduction in disturbance calls. The Virginia Crime Prevention Association worked with the Danville Housing Authority to bring public housing residents, local law enforcement, social services, and other public agencies together into an effective, problem-solving group. Residents were at the heart of the group, identifying problems that were

causing high rates of aggravated assault in the community and working to provide such remedies as positive alternatives for youth, social services, and counseling for adults and children. Residents developed a code of conduct for the community, spelling out expectations for the behavior of those who live there.

Protecting the elderly in Boston. Boston's Neighborhood Justice Network, in partnership with the Council of Elders, the Jewish Memorial Hospital, the Boston Police Department, the Department of Public Health, and the Commission on Affairs of the Elderly, created a program to help reduce violence and other crimes against older people. It provides basic personal and home crime prevention education, assistance in dealing with city agencies, training in nonconfrontational tactics to avert street crime, and other helpful services that reduce both victimization and fear among the city's older residents.

These are just a few of a wide range of programs designed by community groups that are changing the quality of life in small towns and large cities, in neighborhoods and housing complexes, in schools and on playgrounds. These groups have proved that there is strength in numbers and that partnerships can provide the community basis for correcting the problems and conditions that can lead to crime. They achieved success because they developed the skills to work together effectively.

how to maintain order, resolve conflict, and defuse power struggles among group members.

Secure resources. Resources include donations of cash, goods, and services. Many strategies require little money; others demand a great deal. Businesses, service clubs, local foundations, and others can be asked to donate funds, services, or materials. Successful fundraisers have found it helpful to

have a "wish list" that identifies the program's needs and suggests large and small ways donors can help.

Implement the strategies in a sound environment. Group activities require teamwork, patience, tolerance, and a positive outlook. Roles and responsibilities must be clear, and everyone (even young children) should play a part. All should know what their roles are

and how they fit into the total effort. Tasks must be clearly spelled out, and expectations, jobs, and skills should be reasonably well matched.

Evaluate the results. Evaluation provides essential information to help in deciding whether to change course, expand the project, or discontinue it altogether. Evaluation also helps sell the project to the rest of the community, to other cit-



ies with similar problems, and to potential funders. Evaluation need not be an extensive, exhaustive effort. It does need to be focused and objective. Frequently a college or university in the area (or a business or a school system) has someone on staff familiar with the key techniques and willing to volunteer to help set up and even carry out the work.

Celebrate successes. Awards, proclamations, certificates of appreciation, T-shirts, block parties, picnics, desserts, publicity—these are just a few of the ways to build energy, renew commitment, and commemorate progress. The partner groups, their members, and the community itself should be part of the celebration.

Preventing Crime Is a Community Job

As is evident in more and more localities, crime prevention is no longer an adjunct activity of a busy law enforcement agency but a community job accomplished through the efforts and collaboration of many agencies, groups, and individuals, including the police. For some law enforcement agencies working as equal partners with residents and businesses, this means breaking new ground—developing skills in collaboration and, in high-crime areas, identifying and joining with newly empowered groups of residents.

Crime prevention that is problem-focused, based in communities and neighborhoods, fueled by the energies of the people who live and work there, helped appropriately by outside resources, and supported by all levels of government is a model that has consistently produced positive results. It is hoped that more agencies and more residents will work together to extend such partnerships to every neighborhood, town, and city that wants to turn the tide against crime, protect its residents, and enable new generations to thrive.

Resources

Many organizations offer expertise in building partnerships and provide a variety of publications, training, and services that can strengthen local efforts. A sampling follows.

**Bureau of Justice
Assistance Clearinghouse**
Box 6000
Rockville, MD 20850
800-688-4252

Center for Community Change
1000 Wisconsin Ave. NW.
Washington, DC 20007
202-342-0519

**Citizens Committee for
New York City**
305 7th Ave., 15th Floor
New York, NY 10001
212-989-0909

**National Center for
Community Policing**
School of Criminal Justice
Michigan State University
East Lansing, MI 48824
517-355-2322

**National Crime Prevention
Council**
1700 K St. NW., 2d Floor
Washington, DC 20006-3817
202-466-6272

**National Training and
Information Center**
810 North Milwaukee Ave.
Chicago, IL 60622-4103
312-243-3035

Police Executive Research Forum
2300 M St. NW., Suite 910
Washington, DC 20006
202-466-7820

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For More Information

BJA has a range of publications related to law enforcement-community partnerships, including:

- *Problem-Oriented Drug Enforcement: A Community-Based Approach for Effective Policing*, NCJ 143710.
- *The Systems Approach to Crime and Drug Prevention: A Path to Community Policing*, NCJ 143712.
- *Understanding Community Policing: A Framework for Action*, NCJ 148457.
- *Neighborhood-Oriented Policing in Rural Communities: A Planning Guide*, NCJ 143709.
- *A Police Guide to Surveying Citizens and Their Environment*, NCJ 143711.
- *National Service and Public Safety: Partnerships for Safer Communities*, NCJ 146842.
- *Partnerships To Prevent Youth Violence*, NCJ 148459.
- *An Introduction to DARE: Drug Abuse Resistance Education*, NCJ 129862.
- *An Introduction to the National DARE Parent Program*, NCJ 142422.

Call the BJA Clearinghouse at 800-688-4252
to order these publications.

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