

# 6100 BLOCK OF CHARLOTTE PROJECT

## ELIMINATING DRUG AND PROSTITUTION HOUSES FROM A FAMILY NEIGHBORHOOD

KANSAS CITY POLICE DEPARTMENT, MISSOURI, 1995

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- THE PROBLEM:** A drug house and a house of prostitution/massage parlor were diminishing the quality of life for the residents of the 6100 block of Charlotte. Property crimes increased, while property values decreased. Stolen automobiles, burglaries, and larcenies, increased traffic, drug dealing, and gunshots prompted concern and fear among the residents. The increase in calls for police service was compromising the ability of the police to provide services to other areas.
- ANALYSIS:** Officers Smith and Ivey went door-to-door and met with the residents cultivated relationships with them, examined police reports, and gathered evidence. Teenagers, who held loud parties where the use and sell of drugs took place, inhabited a residence owned by an elderly man. The owner was oblivious to the problem's his residence was causing neighborhood residents and refused to cooperate with the police to resolve the situation. The house of prostitution was operating under the guise of a "message parlor" and advertising in local papers.
- RESPONSE:** The police cooperated with area residents, who they trained on crime prevention to gather information about the drug house. The police worked closely with other agencies (DART, Missouri Department of Aging, and City Waste Department) and used the abatement process to sell the house to a responsible owner. The house of prostitution was contacted by phone and an undercover officer entered the house and arrested four suspects for prostitution. The house of prostitution is vacant, but a new tenant is expected to move in shortly.
- ASSESSMENT:** Officers Ivey and Smith organized and mobilized the residents. Property crimes were reduced by 60%. The house of prostitution was closed with four prostitutes convicted, the drug house was sold to a responsible owner, displacement did not occur and most importantly, the residents' quality of life increased substantially and calls for police service were decreased.
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### ASSESSMENT

In Kansas City, Missouri, the residents of the 6100 block of Charlotte Avenue had experienced minor criminal problems in the past. However, nothing had prepared them for the criminal activity that hit their block, in the past year.

The residents watched the problems escalate in a problem house at 6165 Charlotte. Property crimes were increasing and a house of prostitution appeared out of nowhere. The majority of the residents of the 6100 block of Charlotte Avenue were middle-income homeowners with young children. The problems were causing their property values to decline, their homeowner's insurance to increase, and experienced a decrease in their quality of life.

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They were unable to enjoy a quiet night at home, without being disturbed by loud parties, gunshots, or drug dealing.

This problem was also affecting the police department due to the large amount of calls for service on the block. Every time a pair of officers was dispatched to the block, two fewer officers were available to answer emergency calls in other areas. For these reasons, Officer Darren Ivey and Officer Markus Smith targeted this block as a problem-oriented policing project.

In order to combat these problems, the goals and objectives were to organize the block, stop the problems occurring at 6165 Charlotte, attempt to get a new responsible owner into the house, decrease in property crimes on the block, and close down the house of prostitution. By accomplishing these goals, the officers believed that calls for police service on the block would decrease.

## **ANALYSIS**

The first step the officers completed was to talk to Cate Bachwartz, a resident of the block, who had been attempting to close the problem house at 6165 Charlotte for seven years. She informed the officers that the house was owned by a 78 year old man, who had no family in the area and allowed teenagers to stay at the house. The teenagers held loud parties, used and sold drugs at the house, and on several occasions, gunshots were heard at the house. She also noted that the exterior condition of the house was deplorable and the landscaping resembled a jungle.

Bachwartz also noted that police officers were dispatched to the house on a daily basis and noted that the teenagers assaulted officers on a few occasions. She told the officers that a large amount of transient traffic was seen at the house, which is common to a drug house, and on two occasions she had seen large amounts of drugs leave the house.

Mrs. Bachwartz gave the officers several years of documentation, which showed that the residents had requested assistance from the police department numerous times in the past. The police department sent a Community Action Officer to meet with them,

who in turn mediated an agreement with the residents and the owner of 6165 Charlotte, which merely served as a short-term solution. The problems quickly returned. The city sent a Codes Inspector to the house on several occasions to cite the owner for property codes violations, which had no impact.

After the officers received the information from Mrs. Bachwartz, they examined all of the past reports on the house and were able to identify some of the occupants of the house. The officers held a meeting with the block, residents and instructed them on how to detect suspicious activity. They also explained the importance of keeping a written log about the house, to include the license numbers of the vehicles, which were visiting the house.

As a partnership building step, the officers gave the residents a business card which listed their pager numbers and explained to the residents that they could contact the officers 24 hours a day, seven days a week. This step proved to be instrumental in building trust with the residents, and the residents responded by paging the officers, at all hours, and giving them important information.

The officers conducted surveillance on the house and were able to get enough information to confirm that some type of illegal activity was occurring at the house. On two occasions, Mrs. Bachwartz paged the officers with information about suspicious cars and since they weren't working at the time, she also paged Officer John Wheeler, a district officer who was working at the time.

Officer Wheeler responded and stopped the suspicious cars and on one occasion, he was able to recover marijuana, methamphetamine, and a stolen car. On the other occasion, he recovered marijuana, methamphetamine paraphernalia, and a loaded gun.

Using this information, Officer Ivey and Officer Smith contacted the owner of 6165 Charlotte and explained the problems that were occurring. The owner explained to the officers that he did not have any family in the area and that he allowed the teenagers to stay at the house, so he would have companionship. He also said that he didn't believe that the teenagers were involved in any criminal

activity. While talking to the owner, the officers were able to see the interior of the house and they observed that the house was so unkempt, it was unfit for habitation.

For several weeks after, the officers conducted stops of several teenagers who were leaving the house. After questioning them, the officers learned that the owner of the house had problems with his memory. The officers also found out that the owner had inherited a large amount of money and that he would loan teenagers large amounts of money and forget whom he loaned it to.

## **RESPONSE**

Officer Ivey and Officer Smith contacted the Missouri Department of Aging and explained the problem to them. They sent a caseworker out with the officers and contacted the owner.

The caseworker interviewed the owner and determined that he indeed did suffer from some mental health problems; however, it was not severe enough to declare him incompetent. The officers and the caseworkers attempted to persuade the owner to allow a financial advisor to control his finances, but he declined the offer. They also explained some other options to the owner, like selling the house and moving into a retirement village, where he would have peers his own age that he could share companionship with. Once again he declined the offer.

In the following weeks, the officers continued to stop people leaving the house, and on a few occasions, marijuana was recovered. The owner of the house still refused to believe that criminal activity was occurring.

The officers contacted the Jackson County Drug Abatement Response Team (DART) who agreed to look into the situation. The officers and the DART team conducted a knock and talk visit with the owner and, again, explained about all of the drugs recently recovered from kids leaving his house. They also explained how it would be beneficial to the owner if he no longer allowed the teenagers to stay at the house. The owner still refused to believe that there were any problems and he said that it was

a conspiracy by the residents of the block, to get rid of him. The owner's uncooperative attitude forced the officers to take more drastic measures.

The officers re-contacted DART and asked if they would be able to post and vacate the house due to its numerous city codes violations and uninhabitable condition. The officers were told that they needed to make another narcotics arrest from the residence or a narcotics buy would have to be made from the house. The officers contacted the Street Narcotics Unit; however, all attempted buys from the house were unsuccessful.

The officers continued to meet with the residents of the block and explained the progress already made. They also asked the residents to continue to watch the house and call them with information on suspicious activity. One week later, Mrs. Bachwartz called the officers and said that she saw two "skin heads" entering the house carrying a large shoulder bag. While the officers were in route, the "skin heads" left the house and began to drive away. Mrs. Bachwartz followed them in her car until the officers arrived and after a short chase, the officers arrested them with 5,000 hits of LSD worth \$50,000 and marijuana in their possession.

The officers re-contacted DART and the house was vacated and posted as uninhabitable, for the numerous codes violations. The DART Inspector cited over 30 codes violations and it was determined that it would take approximately \$35,000 to fix the house. The officers met with the residents of the block and explained the situation. The residents stated that they did not want the old owner to move back into the house because he had shown in the past that he would not change his ways.

The officers explained that the only way the residents would be able to deny the owner being able to move back into his property would be to file a civil, nuisance lawsuit against the owner. Kathy Finnell, 49/63 Neighborhood Prosecutor, referred the residents to the Missouri Young Lawyers Association, who agreed to handle the case at no charge.

The officers and the residents were able to locate the owner's niece, who lived in New Mexico. They

explained the situation to her. She flew to Kansas City and attempted to get the owner to move back with her. The officers also met with the owner and explained the situation to him and his available options. The owner decided to sell the house and one day after it was listed, a new owner bought the house for his primary residence. The new owner was told about all of the problems, which had occurred, and he agreed to fix the house up and move in as soon as possible. After the sale was complete, approximately 20 residents and the officers spent an entire day and helped the new owner fix up the exterior of the house.

Immediately after the problem at 6165 Charlotte was abated, the officers received another call from Mrs. Bachwartz. She said that she had observed three suspicious people attempting to burglarize a neighbor's house. The officers responded and were able to apprehend three armed suspects committing a burglary.

Shortly after that arrest, the officers conducted a training session for the residents on crime prevention and home security. They also retrained them on suspicious activity. A week or two later, Mr. Charles Bachwartz contacted the officers and told them about a suspicious man, who appeared to be burglarizing 6165 Charlotte. He was able to get a good description of the suspect as well as the suspect's vehicle. Officer Ivey and Officer Smith spent the next two days investigating possible leads on the case, but were unsuccessful in finding the suspect.

A month later, Officer Joseph Weidler, a district patrol officer, stopped the suspect and was able to identify him. The officer didn't know anything about the burglary, so he released the suspect. Officer Smith and Officer Ivey were checking recent field interview reports, when they found the information on the burglary suspect. They were able to obtain a police mug shot of the suspect and they conducted a photo line-up for Mr. Bachwartz. He identified the suspect and an arrest warrant was issued. The officers advised the district officers that they were looking for the suspect, and two days later, Officer Weidler arrested him. The suspect pleaded guilty to burglary charges. After the arrests of the burglars and the training sessions for the residents, the property crimes on the block decreased by 60%.

The officers and the residents then turned their attention to the house of prostitution. The officers had received information from an anonymous resident that there was a prostitution house operating as a massage parlor in the area, which was advertising in a local newspaper. The officers were given a phone number, but no address. They located past issues of the newspaper and found the advertisements. They called the number and acted as if they were prospective customers.

After the officers made an appointment with the house, they were told that the house was located at 6113 Charlotte. The officers met with the residents of the block and asked them to start keeping a written log of events at the house and write down license numbers of cars visiting the house. While the officers conducted surveillance work in the area, the residents gathered the requested information.

Through the information received from the residents and the information received from the surveillances, the officers were able to obtain the names, as well as photographs of the prostitutes and several repeat customers.

The officers contacted the Vice Unit and explained the situation; however, vice was unable to work the problem due to another investigation. Instead of dropping the matter, the officers met with the residents on several more occasions and explained to them that vice would not be available to work the problem for another month.

The officers explained to the residents that they could shut the house down, but that would leave the danger of the house relocating a short distance away; or they could continue to monitor the situation and wait until the Vice Unit was available. The residents elected to wait until vice was available instead of risking the possibility of merely displacing the prostitution to a nearby location.

The officers kept vice and the district officers advised of the situation and asked for any available information about the house. While waiting for vice to become available, Officers Ivey and Smith conducted more investigative work, in an attempt to save the Vice Unit time. Officer Smith, dressed as a

city trash collector, rode with a city trash crew and collected the trash, which was on the curb in front of the prostitution house. While Officer Smith was collecting the trash, Officer Ivey was videotaping the procedure for chain of custody purposes.

The officers repeated this routine the following week and were able to recover enough evidence to verify that the house was involved in prostitution. After receiving this new information, the Vice Unit started to work the case. An undercover detective went into the house, with a hidden microphone, while Officers Ivey and Smith and vice officers monitored the situation from outside.

When the act of prostitution was proposed, the officers entered the house and arrested four suspects for prostitution. All four suspects pleaded guilty to state prostitution charges and have moved out of the state. The house is presently vacant, but a new tenant is expected to move in shortly.

The area residents honored the officers for all of their work by hosting a special dinner for them and presenting them with an award. The officers nominated Ms. Bachwartz to receive a special award

from the Police Department and from the City Council. The Police Department responded by awarding Ms. Bachwartz the Certificate of Appreciation and the City Council responded by introducing a special resolution in her honor.

After the house of prostitution was shut down, the officers ended the problem-oriented policing project on the 6100 Block of Charlotte Avenue.

## **ASSESSMENT**

The officers were able to achieve all goals and objectives including the following: they abated the problem house at 6165 Charlotte and were able to help get a responsible owner into the house; they closed down the house of prostitution and were able to arrest and convict the prostitutes; and by helping to train and organize the residents, the property crimes decreased by 60%; the calls for police service decreased, which freed up more police officers to answer calls in other areas; and most importantly, the quality of life for the residents improved. They are no longer as fearful to let their children play outside.