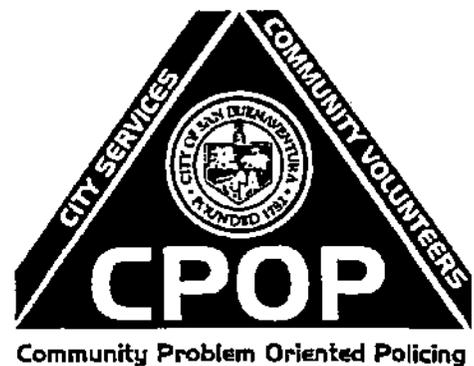




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Excellence in Problem Solving

VENTURA POLICE DEPARTMENT ROMONA STREET PROJECT

JULY 1995
Officer Jim Cubitt
Officer Mark Stadler



BACKGROUND

Ramona Street is situated in the West End of the City of Ventura, in an area referred to as Ventura Avenue. West Ramona Street encompasses about a four block linear area approximately one third of a mile long. (Historically) this street has been one of the most violent areas in the City of Ventura and a center of gang activity for several years.

The area is comprised mainly of low-income housing with several apartment complexes concentrated in a relatively small area. Numerous gang members, parolees, probationers and drug dealers live on West Ramona. This area is also subjected to a constant criminal transient population which preys on the local residents.

In the past, Law enforcement had relied mainly on routine patrol and selected gang and narcotics enforcement to curtail crime on Ramona Street.

With the implementation of Community Problem Oriented Policing (CPOP), a storefront was established on the city's West End and citizens formed a citizen's group called the Westside Community Council. The Westside Community Council and Westside Storefront represents an area of approximately two square miles and with a population of approximately 7,000 residents. The resources were now in place to comprehensively evaluate the problems of West Ventura and develop plans to deal with them. West Ramona Street

was identified as one of the first problem areas to be addressed through the Westside Police Storefront CPOP Program.

 SCANNING

With the establishment of the Westside Storefront, citizens in the Avenue area developed a deeper trust of the police, particularly the two officers assigned to the storefront. Between them, Officers Cubitt and Stadler have twenty-three years experience working the Avenue, and established a rapport with citizens and informants. The number of reported calls for service drastically increased as residents learned the police truly cared about their problems and were willing to help them. Not only were residents of Ramona Street and the surrounding areas' impacted by problems contacting the Project Officers, they were also writing letters to the Chief of Police expressing their fears and concern about life on Ramona Street.

Landlords and members of the Housing Authority and Code Enforcement also expressed concerns and many environmental problems were identified.

 THE PROBLEMS

The underlying causes of the problems plaguing Ramona Street are a combination of an active criminal element and environmental.

neglect. The following problems were identified:

(* Crime^ - the most frequently reported crimes were fights, thefts, burglaries, vandalism, robbery and disturbances.

* Gangs several different gang members, mostly juveniles, were violating drinking^and juv^few ordinances, loitering at all hours of the day, and terrorizing neighborhood residents. Many random physical attacks and fights caused a marked increase in patrol calls for service and generated citizen outcry to help restore safety to the street.

* There were numerous calls of gunshots ^being fired, which terrorized residents.

(Drug sales) were being conducted openly and police needed more information/intelligence to work up cases for narcotics enforcement.

* Ramona Street had the highest rate of postal theft pin the City, of Ventura. This was attributed to the large number of welfare checks mailed into the area.

* Reputation^ - Ramona Street residents suffered from a negative reputation attached to their street from years of publicity focused on gangs, drugs, danger, slum lords and poverty. This reputation had a detrimental effect on the good citizens who made up the majority of the residents. Negative media attention had focused on only a particular element of Ramona Street to the rest of the city.

* People were living (in fear) Residents would not go outside their homes, especially at night, and were in constant fear

for their safety and the safety of their children.

^x
Children V the many young children living on Ramona Street faced continual ~~pressure and influence from the local gang~~ members. Many had three generations of gang members in their immediate family and were subjected to the gang influence from birth.

* A large number of parolees and probationers ^{T^*®^6} living or staying in the area. Most all were unemployed and involved in criminal activity. Their presence and the people they attracted increased the feeling of fear and the risk of being victimized.

* Environmental condition^ were poor. Blatant code-enforcement violations had long been neglected. Abandoned vehicles, junk, trash, unsafe streets, sidewalks and* buildings, as well as poor lighting were main contributors to environmental hazards and appearance. The neglected appearance of Ramona Street added to the poor image and feeling of low self-esteem of the residents.

* Landlords would not^ responsibly screen tenants and many housed illegal aliens in overcrowded and unsafe conditions.

* Truancy violations) were not being addressed. Police and school officials needed to become more involved in enforcement.

* Health concerns-^ *No Vaccines* approximately 60% of the population on West Ramona Street is Hispanic. Due to misinformation and fear associated with California Proposition 187, many children were

not being vaccinated or checked regularly by doctors.

- * Health and safety problems were created fty animals' whose owners were in violation of Animal Control regulations.

ANALYSIS

Information was gathered from patrol officers working the West End area, the Crime Analysis Unit, Probation and Parole agents, local citizens and landlords, members of the Housing Authority and other city agencies to determine what the variety of problems were. Activity on Ramona Street had a direct affect on the local residents and their families, surrounding neighborhoods, law enforcement and many City Department resources. Indirectly, these problems impacted the business community and overall reputation of the city's West End. The Project officers developed goals to focus an action plan to address these problems.

PROJECT GOALS

- * Address the crime problems and reduce the level of fear associated with the activities of gang members, drug dealing, probationers and parolees residing in the area.
- * Form a team of agencies united to address the social and environmental problems and neglect that contribute to the poor quality of life in this area.
- * Develop the idea of volunteerism among the local residents and

encourage ownership and responsibility of their neighborhood through involvement in the Westside Community Council, citizen patrols and Neighborhood Watch.

- * Introduce programs to maintain long term support of the West Ramona Street area:



RESPONSE

Once the problems were identified and the goals clarified, the Project officers began the task of engaging people from several different agencies to participate in an organized action response. This process involved identifying the appropriate agencies needed to address specific issues and establish communication between them, the officers and the residents. Organized and directed through the Westside Police Storefront, the Ramona Street Project was implemented in an unprecedented union of multiple agencies focused for a high intensity, four week period on addressing the problems of a single street.

STRATEGIES

The Ramona Street Project was organized into three phases and implemented over a four week period, ¹Phase one focused on a "zero tolerance" philosophy of directed law enforcement in the area, ²Phase two began the implementation of agencies involved in environmental and social issues ³Phase three was directed at

organizing groups of locals to become involved in the long term support and maintenance of Ramona Street. The Project culminated with a Westside Festival, sponsored by the City Fire Department and local residents- The festival included a job faire, health faire and entertainment. The following strategies were implemented:

- * The newly formed Westside Community Council was activated to solicit cooperation for the project. They conducted a door-to-door survey of the residents of Ramona Street, questioning them about safety concerns and recruiting future volunteers.
- * Four patrol officers were reassigned to the Ramona Street area for four weeks of high visibility patrol and enforcement. This was over and above the normal patrol shift deployments.
- * Phase one was initiated with the execution of multiple search warrants and probation/parole searches involving 22 police officers, seven parole agents and six probation officers.
- * Several arrests were made during phase one and officers worked directly with members of the District Attorney's Office to prepare and file cases.
- * Two detectives were assigned to help prepare cases and ensure filings on misdemeanor violations.
- * Gang members were contacted, identified and served with 186.22 P.C. Step Notices, criminal street gang notifications.
- * Letters were given to parents of L.A. Juvenile who were contacted and determined to be gang members or vulnerable to the influence of gangs. These parents were invited to attend a Parent Education Workshop to help them identify alternatives

to the gang lifestyle and help their children.

- * Code Enforcement, the Fire Department and Building and Safety inspectors walked with police through the entire Ramona Street area, and violations were identified and citations issued to correct them. These department representatives were able to do their work without fearing for their personal safety.
- * Abandoned vehicles were marked and towed from the area.
- * The owners of two burned out houses were forced to demolish the structures and clear their land. These structures were no longer available to gang members or drug dealers/users.
- * Local garbage services cooperated in assisting in the removal of junk and trash.
- * The Humane Society assisted in enforcement of animal regulations.
- * The Housing Authority of the city of Ventura refused any new lease-ups on West Ramona during the month long project. They agreed to solicit the involvement of landlords in restoring integrity to Ramona Street and the Section 8 program.
- * Postal security boxes (delivery and collection pedestal mailboxes) were installed throughout the neighborhood.
- * Meetings were held with members of the school district to revise and address the policy on truancy.
- * City Public Works and Edison worked together to install new and brighter lights throughout West Ramona Street. Street and sidewalk repairs were also made.
- * Red curbs were repainted and addresses were painted on street

curbs.

- * A meeting was held with the local landlords to discuss tenant issues and code violations.
- * Public Social Services was contacted and responded to remove several children from unsafe living environments.
- * "Pride Day" was organized in conjunction with phase two of the Project. The local (JRide Project) and other local agencies organized a massive clean-up of the street. Trash was removed, lawns were mowed, trees and shrubs trimmed. The day ended for all participants with a get-together at Fire Station One, on the end of Ramona Street, with fire department personnel providing refreshments.
- * The Westpark Community Center and- Boys, and Girls Club conducted a youth outreach during phase two. They focused on getting children involved in the recreation opportunities and other resources in their centers. Between 60-100 youths were involved each day.
- * The media (newspaper, radio, local television) were invited to participate in the Project and a variety of coverage was given throughout each phase.
- * The Ramona Street Project concluded with a neighborhood block party. This included a variety of entertainment and refreshments and was provided at no cost to participants and guests through donations. The festival also included a health faire with representatives from a variety of services, such as the Westside family care Clinic, County Public Health, Planned

Parenthood, Drug and Alcohol and more. A job faire provided the opportunity to talk with employers, obtain information on job opportunities and vocational training as well as education information.

 ASSESSMENT

The Ramona Street Project was conducted during May and June of 1995. At the time of this report, new statistics reflecting the current status or change in calls for service in the area is still being calculated. The positive affect of the project was overwhelming and the following results have been substantiated:

- * The strategies employed to combat the crime problem led to the arrest of approximately 50 people. Twenty felony arrests were made and the cases filed. Officers made over 140 different field contacts and provided valuable intelligence to both the Gang and Narcotic Units.
- * Gang activity was suppressed and calls for service reduced.
- * Drug dealers were identified and dealing has been suppressed.
- * As a result of the multi-agency effort to become involved on Ramona Street, communication, rapport and a positive working relationship was formed between the agencies. The specific responsibility of various agencies was identified and accountability for continued enforcement of those responsibilities was acknowledged.
- * Because of their involvement in this project, members of the

Westside Community Council were empowered to expand their role in support of the long-term solutions in keeping Ramona Street safe. To this end, they formed the Local Neighborhood Improvement Association...

- * The level of fear and negative emotions of the area... has been greatly reduced. People are beginning to come outside their homes and interact with one another. Children are playing outside and feel safer with the improved lighting. The fresh, clean appearance of the neighborhood has helped restore pride in the locals and people don't hesitate to phone the Project officers to report, violators.
- * Media coverage was positive. For the first time, other Venturans were hearing and seeing the good things that were happening on the West End of Ventura.'
- * Patrol officers experienced team work and satisfaction from their involvement with this project. Many had their first experience with CPOP through their involvement on Ramona Street and it was a positive learning experience for all of them.

CONCLUSION

As with any project, the work is on-going. The Ramona Street Project served to empower a neighborhood to take control of their standard of living. The awareness it raised and the agencies activated to assist in the process will hopefully ensure that the

area continues to prosper. The beat officers who assisted in this project have recognized the importance of working on a long term maintenance program. This ownership by the officers, coupled with the cooperation of the residents ensures the area won't revert back to the "way it was."