

# Vanier Project

A Problem-Oriented Policing Initiative on a Drug Hot Spot



## Team Award Submission

Submitted by:

**Royal Canadian Mounted Police**

in partnership with

**Ottawa-Carleton Regional Police Service**

Prepared by:

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Associate Project Coordinator

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# Project Team Members

## Royal Canadian Mounted Police

• "A" Division - Drug Section •

### Undercover Street Team

Sgt. R. Renaud	Project Supervisor
Cst. J. Gagnon	Street Team Member
Cst. J. Jancewicz	Street Team Member
Cst. F Cholette	Street Team Member
Cst. R. Dupont	Street Team Member
Cst. V. Gray	Street Team Member
Cst. D. Ste-Marie	Street Team Member

### Uniform Officers

Cpl. R. Cameron	Community Police officer
Cpl. J. Laramee	Community Police officer

### Planning, Development & Implementation Team

Cst. P. Poitevin	Vanier Project Coordinator
Kimberly True	Associate Project Coordinator
Denis Lacroix	Associate Project Coordinator

## Ottawa-Carleton Regional Police Service

• District 5 - City of Vanier •

### District 5 - Vanier Community Police Centre

Insp. L Givogue	District Supervisor
Sgt. L. Janveau	Community Police officer
Cst. A. Cammaert	Community Police officer
Cst. Michel Hebert	Media Relations / Centre Coordinator
Cst. A. McDade	Community Police officer
Cst. J. Leclerc	Community Police officer

### District5-Patrol Units

A, B, C, D, and E Platoons	Supervisors & Patrol Officers
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### Crime Analysis Unit

Sgt. G. Patterson	Team Leader
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### Research Team

S/Sgt. T. Cheslock	Team Leader
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# VANIER PROJECT

## ***Situational Background***

The Ottawa-Carleton region has a population of 920,860 and is comprised of 27 municipalities. The newly amalgamated Ottawa-Carleton Regional Police (OCRP) services most of the Region including the municipality of Vanier. Vanier is home to 18,950 people living within one square mile located in the center of the Ottawa city boundaries. Approximately 80% of living space in Vanier is comprised of rental units. The city, which is densely populated and predominantly French-Canadian, has encountered many problems involving drugs and social disorder which stem from landlord absenteeism and a lack of property ownership.

Over the last few years, Vanier has developed a dark reputation due to its chronic criminality, substance-abuse cases, dilapidated housing and other social woes. Vanier has been the focus of much negative media attention. All of these problems have led to a decrease in the level of residents' quality of life, causing many of them to live in fear. The OCRP, who have struggled to control crime, established the Vanier Community Based Police Centre. Crime prevention programs and enforcement were utilized by officers working out of the Centre. Vanier's drug enforcement is provided by the Ottawa-Carleton Regional Drug Unit accompanied by ERT (Emergency Response Team).

Drug enforcement in the Ottawa region is also shared by the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) "A" Division. Their 40 member drug section is responsible for all areas of the National Capital Region (NCR) but, unlike regional policing services, the RCMP is mandated to focus on federal drug enforcement. In other words, the RCMP usually concentrates on inter-provincial or international drug issues. However, it came to be realized, that high-level drug investigation resulted in minimal direct impact at the community level due to the ongoing presence of community drug problems in Vanier.

## ***The Answer: Community Policing & Problem Solving***

In 1988, RCMP management directed that community policing principles be adopted by all its divisions across Canada. "A" Division took up the challenge by selecting the Drug Section as the area in which a pilot project would take place. If community policing could work in the federally-mandated, predominantly reactive and repressive drug section, then it could work anywhere in the federal environment.

In May of 1995, drug section members participated in a two-day community policing training course in problem-oriented policing. The training ended with a one-day workshop with residents, members of the OCRP, and others, that focused on developing specific projects to employ problem-oriented policing.

Within one month of the training session and the workshop, the drug section's consultative committee recognized the need to expand the federal drug mandate to include local intervention, community consultation and partnership-building. A new mandate was developed to allow both, high-level drug investigation as well as localized problem solving.

The City of Vanier was selected to be the test for this project primarily because of the negative image that was inherited over the past several years.

### ***Implementation of the Vanier Project***

Project implementation was taken on by a team of ten members and two civilians working in the drug section. The team divided into three categories consisting of Uniform Officers, an Undercover Street Team and a Planning, Development and Implementation Team. From the onset, project members identified various objectives which include coalition-building and partnership-building as well as officer visibility within Vanier.

Working within the new mandate, it became imperative that the RCMP develop and maintain a close working relationship with local law enforcement. Project members determined that the success of the project would depend on retaining the full cooperation and commitment of the OCRP, particularly the officers working at the Vanier Community Based Police Centre.

In September of 1995, the team initiated contact with the OCRP and moved to work closely with them. Two uniformed RCMP members were made available to the Vanier Police Centre and were invited to work shifts alongside OCRP members. This is one of the first times that such an event took place. The OCRP - District 5 commanding officer took the opportunity to restructure policing operations in his district to accommodate the new RCMP mandate. As a result, police officers from both agencies worked side-by-side as they consulted with the community to determine their needs and address their concerns relating to drugs. Their job was also to get the community involved in a series of problem-solving initiatives. This endeavor was highly motivating for those on the project and it allowed both agencies to pool their resources and obtain a well-rounded view of problems in Vanier.

The following is one of the first problem-solving initiatives of the Vanier Project, designed to facilitate change and empower residents Vanier.

## **Gardner St. Residence**

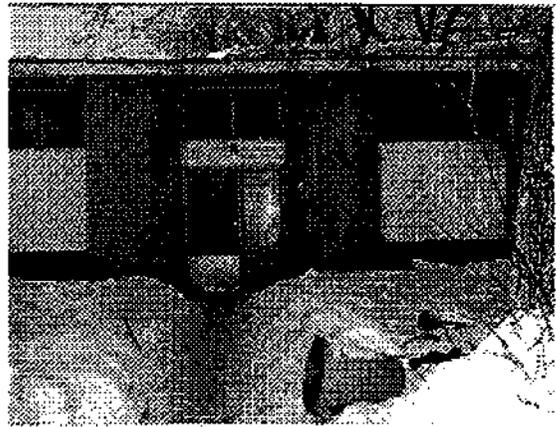
### **Scanning**

The Gardner St. residence was identified as a chronic community problem deemed to be a hot spot. This very large four-apartment house is situated in the heart of a residential community. For several years, the residence has been a frequented by drug users, dealers and

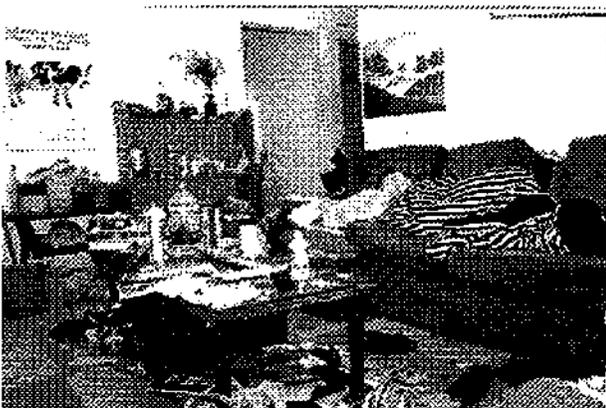
prostitutes. City officials, police and community members have also known for years that it was a 'crack' house and shooting gallery. Many of the undesirables who frequent the residence are known to police as violent repeat offenders who use the residence as a place for refuge as well as a place for business. There are approximately 10 to 20 persons attending at any given time. The owner, who lives in the corner apartment, has been unable to control the situation due to his drug dependent lifestyle. Without any permanent tenancy, the unlocked apartments have become a labyrinth consisting of unlit and dilapidated rooms and hallways which provide an ideal atmosphere for drug use and prostitution. In addition, more recent events and source information indicated the existence of a drug war between two local gangs.

As a result, the area has suffered endlessly from the effects of such a situation. Drug paraphernalia, narcotic activity and property damage have flowed into the surrounding area. Fear has permeated itself into the neighborhood.

Previously, police response resulted in three search warrants for narcotics and one for stolen property by the Ottawa Carleton Regional Drug Unit. Unfortunately, this did very little to improve the situation and all activity resumed, often the next day. Due to the transient nature and the limited presence of narcotics at any given time, criminal activity was unaffected by initial police action and the criminal activity continued. This caused difficulties with prosecution. In 1995 alone, the OCRP patrol unit responded to 75 calls for service involving over 188 officers, making this Gardner St. residence a chronic community and police problem.



**Gardner St. residence - Known 'crack' house.**



**View of one of four living areas located on the upper level.**



**Lower level apartment - One of several rooms used for mainlining.**

In November of 1995, Vanier community police officers, accompanied by the RCMP uniformed members, concluded, that previous actions by the police demonstrated that exclusive enforcement has not been effective and that solutions must involve the community.

## Analysis

After identifying the Gardner St. residence as a priority problem, a strategy was formed in order to ascertain the root cause. The High Profile Uniformed Police Intervention strategy commenced immediately. This entailed saturating the targeted area with officers for a two week period. The purpose was to increase visibility with the intent of preventing criminal activity and to obtain drug information. This aggressive *Saturation Patrol* strategy involved two marked cruisers and four officers from both services, who performed a high degree of nightly intervention. The officers confronted all persons entering and leaving the residence to find out their motivation for attendance and discouraged them from returning. Some tactics include stopping numerous vehicles for traffic violations, the use of every legal opportunity to search for drugs and weapons, frequent checks for outstanding warrants and treatment referrals were offered to individuals who appeared to be victims of circumstance.



**Officers attending Gardner - (Left to Right) Sgt. Janveau (OCRP), Cpl. Cameron (RCMP), Insp. Givogue (OCRP) and Cst. Poitevin (RCMP).**

Police presence motivated many neighbors to assist by offering information or even coffee. Constant communication with neighbors and individuals involved in the activity uncovered much information. Several key suspects who controlled much of the narcotic activity were identified and profiled. Suspect profiles were relayed to the undercover street team who followed up with repression. A profile of the owner of the residence indicated that he was a contributing factor, that he had a record of narcotic violations and pending by-law infractions. Despite his reputation, the owner appeared to be a victim of his own lifestyle. He thanked an officer for the intervention and mentioned that he was concerned for his safety.

During this time, City officials were invited to participate as part of a *Multi-Agency Response* to the problem. Added pressure by City Building Inspectors, by-law officers and the Mayor's office resulted in a coordinated effort to 'clean up' the residence. But, without the cooperation of the owner, all building code offences, clean yard act and health department infractions were ignored. Remarkably, this action prompted all the agencies involved to make the Gardner St. residence a priority. As well, many new partnerships were formed and each were considered a resource for the other.

# Responses

## 1. Saturation Patrol

The *Saturation Patrol* strategy resulted in some immediate success. There was a virtual elimination of narcotic activity and a decreased risk of violence at the residence. The initiative also provided officers with an opportunity to communicate with neighbors directly who conveyed their appreciation for the response. Because the initiative was reactive in nature, it only offered a temporary solution. However, during this time, it was discovered that the root cause was the owners inability to control his situation. Officers felt that a follow-up strategy was needed to ensure a permanent solution.

## 2. Community Rapport and Broken Windows Approach

The High Profile Uniform Police Initiative resulted in developing a rapport with the owner who expressed his frustration with his predicament. In January, 1996, the owner had decided to cooperate with the officers and showed his commitment by evicting all squatters. With authority given by the owner, the OCRP patrol unit teamed up with the Vanier community police officers to conduct routine checks at the residence to ensure that the owner was in fact, keeping his four-apartment house squatter-free.

Following the monitoring period, officers concluded that as officer presence decreased, the problem reoccurred. It appeared that the dilapidated state of the house and the confused and drug dependent condition of the owner attracted the criminal element and drug abusers to return. This was an example of the 'broken windows' theory, which had been discussed during the original community policing training.

It became apparent that an effective follow-up strategy should center around reconditioning the home and helping the owner. As a result, the RCMP Planning and Research Team identified and coordinated alternative options in order to develop a *Renovation Strategy*.

## 3. The Renovation Strategy

The *Renovation Strategy* involved a partnership plan that focused the refurbishment of the property and home in order to promote ideal occupancy and increased property value. Many agencies were approached to participate in various ways. The partnership included:

- Assessment Services - Provide the owner with voluntary treatment options
- Needle Exchange - Provide supplies, owner to rid house and property of syringes
- Public Works - Remove all garbage and broken furniture from within premises
- Mayor of Vanier - Offered to wave by-law fines to provide an incentive for renovation
- Habitat for Humanity - Utilized own resources and oversee the renovation project

- City Inspectors - Work with Habitat for humanity and bring building up to code
- Can. Trust Bank - Consider a second mortgage for the renovations
- Lawyer - Volunteer to set up a contract - an agreement between owner and the community
- Screening Agency - Screen qualified applicants for ideal tenancy
- BIA President - Acquire materials and supplies through local business contributions
- Clean-up Crew - Members of CARD {Community in Action to Reduce Drugs} are to mobilize the community to help with renovations ie: youth centre, schools, Gardner St. residents, Vanier volunteers

The local Canada Trust Bank manager informed that the bank was supporting a maximum mortgage of over \$130, 000 and that he had not made a mortgage payment for 4 months. The manager also indicated that the owner had been in arrears of his property taxes for 6



**Property manager employed by the bank.**

months. The action of assisting the owner was dropped when it became obvious that he could not meet any obligations that would have been attached as conditions of the deal. The bank decided to proceed with an action to void the mortgage agreement and repossess the residence. The Bank manager deemed the owner a security risk due to the nature of the situation, his financial standing and his pending criminal charges.

In May, 1996, the home was found abandoned and was deemed as a health hazard by the Health Department. The bank took care and control of the home as was considered responsible for any problems. Subsequently, the doors and windows of the residence were secured with boards. Sealing the house received much positive attention from City inspectors, police officers, bank managers, and neighboring residents who gathered at the residence. The sense of victory motivated neighbors to assist where they could. One neighbor participated by lending a power source for power tools and another neighbor offered to mow the lawn.



**Property estimator contracted by the bank.**

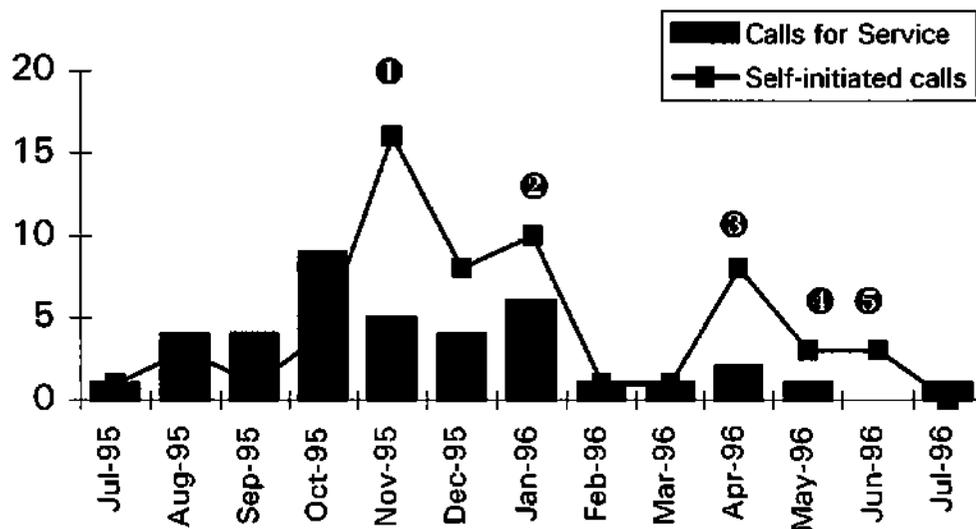


**Neighbor - presently awaiting sentencing for previous narcotics offences.**

## Assessment

Since the closure of the residence, police had responded to a few break and enter calls for service to find squatters using the house for shelter. For the officers, the residence is no longer considered a 'hot spot' nor does it pose a serious threat to the surrounding community. In fact, the reported calls for service dropped from 155 calls in 1995 to 13 calls in the past six months - excluding the *Self-Engaged Calls* initiated by officers. Since the residence was boarded-up, there have been no calls for service resulting from previous related activity.

**Gardner - Service Calls: July 95 to July 96**



- ① Saturation Patrol Strategy
- ② Multi-Agency Response
- ③ Renovation Strategy
- ④ Closure of Residence
- ⑤ MACRI Proposal

Displacement was found to be minimal in the Gardner St. situation. While several problematic persons were forced to relocate, the actual root cause of this community problem was the residence itself. The house created an opportune situation for criminality and severe drug use. When forced to conduct business elsewhere, the behavior became isolated and sporadic. The house provided a place to conduct continuous activity which caused the Gardner community to live in fear for several years. Problem displacement is not an effect the community has noticed. There is little information which indicates growth of a new community 'crack house' elsewhere in Vanier as a result of the Gardner St. resident closure.

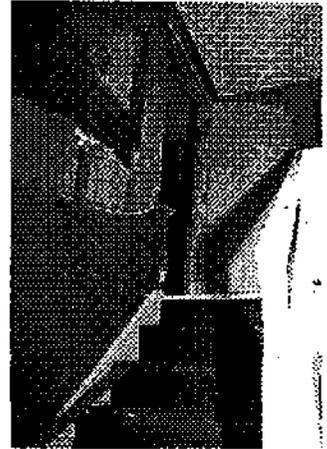
As a result of some disbursement, the Undercover Street Team was able to gather drug and suspect intelligence. The Street Team benefited greatly by this action which forced many drug dealers to other areas within Vanier, leaving them extremely vulnerable to surveillance. Drug users were forced to get drugs elsewhere, which enabled the detection of additional drug 'hot spots' before it became a new community problem.



**Example of delapidated conditions as seen throughout the home.**

Although the bank took possession of the residence, solving the immediate problem, the home itself remained an eye-sore to the neighborhood. Several Building appraisers, who volunteer for Habitat for Humanity, found massive internal damage to every wall, floor and ceiling. The discontinuation of heating over the winter led to plumbing and electrical problems. Appraisers also identified possible structural damage due to freezing of the foundation. Considering

all factors, the assessment determined the building to be worth close to nothing and land was estimated to be worth approximately \$60,000.



**View of entranceway leading to the upper level.**

In June, Habitat for Humanity, a non-profit organization, developed a proposal named the MACRI Project (Multi-Action Community Renewal Initiative). The proposal requested that the bank become involved in the initiative by incurring a partial loss on the mortgage and donate the property to Habitat for Humanity in exchange for \$40,000 cash and a \$60,000 tax receipt.

Currently, Habitat for Humanity plans to demolish, excavate and rebuild the residence with the help of 400 volunteers who specialize in all facets of construction. The initiative should have also included the above mentioned Vanier agencies and community members in order to stimulate community mobilization and empowerment. Members of Community Groups, both the RCMP and OCRP, members of City Council and members of Parliament, all of whom, provided letters in support of the initiative.



Unfortunately, two key bank managers lost their interest in the project and would not support it. However, the media has taken a liking to the initiative and are currently reporting the project. Presently, various interested parties are cooperating with the media in an attempt to revive the MACRI Project.

## **Conclusion**

The Gardner initiative is an excellent example of problem oriented policing. It provided many agencies and community members with the opportunity to share expertise and develop a relationship. Results, which has permeated itself into the problem solving process, initiated by police, are as follows:

- Continued collaborated efforts to identify and prioritize community drug problems.
- Hot spots are analyzed and deployment of resources are initiated accordingly.
- Problem solving is shared by police, agencies and communities alike.
- Community is taking on an active role in restoring a harmonious neighborhood.

Officers have experienced many benefits as a result of the initiative. Police-community relations improved dramatically over the past year. Officers have received numerous, positive comments regarding police intervention from bar owners, businessmen, and residents. Intervention has resulted in arrests, disruption of criminal activity and increased police presence in high crime areas. Through community interaction, community officers have been accepted as a viable police extension of the service. Examples such as Gardner, have added another dimension to police operations.

The unification of both RCMP and OCRP enabled the project to attain a higher quality of intervention that would not have otherwise been attained. City agencies provided resources which contributed greatly to the Projects' success. The community empowered themselves to become involved, which had a direct influence of how the officers view their job.

An evaluation is currently underway to determine qualitative measurements of success. Although quantitative data has it's place, it is important to assess the impact or outcomes of the initiatives based on representative criteria.