

SOUTH CENTRAL PROSTITUTION PROJECT

WICHITA POLICE DEPARTMENT, KANSAS, 1996

- THE PROBLEM:** In the early 1990s, gangs, prostitutes and drug dealers were plaguing South Broadway. Violence, overt drug use, gangs and prostitution made residents fearful and brought economic development to a standstill. Residents complained that drug users and prostitutes in alleys and on street corners were discarding needles and condoms.
- ANALYSIS:** Surveys revealed that of the area's residents were concerned with the area's dilapidated appearance, prostitution, drugs, and crime. Businesses believed they were losing revenues because of crime. Traditional police responses were limited to short-term enforcement and the local ordinances and courts were too lenient on prostitution.
- RESPONSE:** Fives specific areas were targeted to address the prostitution problem including: tougher city ordinances, increased enforcement, police working closely with the courts to ensure cases were properly disposed of, community efforts to prevent and report crime, improving the physical appearance of the neighborhood, and use the media to publicize police efforts.
- ASSESSMENT:** During the 20-week study, statistics indicate that there was an 11 percent decrease in total crime, a 41 percent decrease in drug violations, a 47 percent decrease in prostitution, and a 16 percent reduction in 911 calls to the area. 75% of the area's businesses reported a decrease in prostitution activity. A follow-up residential survey indicated that residents not only felt better about the neighborhood and its appearance, but also felt safer.
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SCANNING

Prostitution has long been a problem for residents who live along South Broadway in the heart of South Central Wichita. By early 1990 gangs, prostitutes and drug dealers started calling South Broadway home.

By the beginning of 1994, the level of violence had subsided as a result of increased enforcement action, but criminal activity

continued to make an impact on the quality of life of residents. Violence, overt drug use, gangs and prostitution made residents fearful of venturing out at night.

Economic development was at a standstill. Residents complained that drug users and prostitutes in alleys and on street corners were discarding needles and condoms. In addition, men (johns) soliciting prostitutes could not tell

the difference between prostitutes and women and children who live in the area.

Crime and the fear of crime were destroying their neighborhood. Two Strong neighborhood associations, the South Central Progressive Association and the South Broadway Business Alliance became increasingly vocal about the situation.

ANALYSIS

During the past 30 years, Broadway Street has gained a reputation as being a hangout for street walking prostitutes. Broadway, formally known as US Highway 81, is cluttered with small motels and neighborhood bars that cater to blue-collar workers and transient guests. These motels are generally family owned and offer cheap hourly rates.

A study conducted by Wichita State University provided information on the ethnic composition, employment, education, and general characteristics of the neighborhood. The study revealed that residents were concerned with the adverse appearance of the area, crime and prostitution.

A survey conducted by the Wichita Chamber of Commerce identified illegal activity, communication with police, access to government services, and neighborhood appearance as the four top concerns of residents in the area. Two surveys were conducted by community police officers, one directed toward business-owners and the other toward residents. Residents identified prostitution and drug dealing as major concerns while over 50 percent of the businesses attributed the loss of customers to prostitution, drug activity and crime.

Surveys were also administered to prostitutes walking South Broadway as a means of viewing the problem from a different perspective. To our amazement the prostitutes provided information on drug use, frequency of sexual contact and length of time they were on the street. A similar survey was developed for “johns” and administered at the time of sentencing.

Between January 1993 and December 1994, Wichita recorded 418 prostitution related arrests. Sixty-one percent of the arrests were made in the South Central neighborhoods. Only 23 “john” arrests were made for the same time period of which seventy five percent occurred in the South Broadway area.

A review of court records indicate that the average fine for both prostitutes and “johns” was 200 dollars and very few offenders were sentenced to jail. We also found a direct relationship between prostitution violations and other crimes such as weapons violations, robberies, and assaults. Prostitution complaints from the public tended to increase during the summer months.

We also did some self-examination of our own role as a department in prioritizing prostitution. Our normal response was to emphasize enforcement when we received a complaint from the community. The effect was a “hit and miss” short-term enforcement strategy. In addition, a survey of police officers revealed that officers were frustrated by the lack of effective ordinances needed to arrest prostitutes who were obviously working.

The analysis revealed the courts were too lenient on prostitution related cases. City ordinances lacked the necessary ingredients to effectively utilize them to reduce street level prostitution. In addition, the Police Department used a short-term strategy to address prostitution and did little to discourage “johns” who were frequenting the area.

The physical environment re-enforced the perception of residents and visitors that criminal activities had gone unabated in the area. Citizens and business owners tended to rely on police enforcement as the main method for reducing crime as opposed to adopting crime prevention strategies.

RESPONSE

Officers worked with the neighborhood associations to brainstorm about how to solve the problems facing the neighborhood. Three main goals were agreed on. First, prostitution

and the associated crime must be a priority. Second, improvement of police-community cooperation through partnerships must be accomplished to be successful. And third, improvement in the appearance of the neighborhood would signal change.

Surveys and statistical analysis of crime data in the area would be used to evaluate our efforts.

Regional teletypes were sent out to cities across the country requesting information on innovative solutions tried by other departments. In November 1994, four officers were sent to the Problem Oriented Policing Conference held in San Diego, California. The information obtained at the conference was beneficial in developing our strategy.

The response to the prostitution problem involved targeting five specific areas: city ordinances, enforcement strategies, courts, community efforts, environment and media. Police officers and community leaders spent countless hours creating strategies for prostitution reduction. A strategic plan was developed along with a time line for implementation. The time line was written and depicted on a 20' by 3' long piece paper and hung on a wall in the community policing office. This helped keep all members focused on goal attainment.

City Ordinance

Community Police officers assigned to the area developed new prostitution ordinances with the help of the Municipal Court, City Manager, and Law Department. One city ordinance was modified to allow men to be arrested for loitering when their intent was to solicit a prostitute. Before this time women could be arrested for loitering with the intent to commit an act of prostitution, but men who were loitering and trying to pick up a prostitute could not.

In addition, two new ordinances were created. The first ordinance created an "Anti-prostitution Emphasis Zone", which increased fines and jail time for anyone who was arrested within specific blocks of Broadway. Prostitution arrest

data was used as the basis for setting the boundaries of the zone. The standard fine and jail time was applied to those arrested outside the zone. Drug offenders were given alternative sentences if they agreed to enter drug treatment and perform community service. A second conviction in the area would result in a jail term of no less than 30 days.

The second ordinance was more controversial. A "mapping area" was established inside the Anti-prostitution Emphasis Zone, which covers the area where the heaviest concentration of prostitution offenses occurred. The ordinance made it illegal for a convicted offender, who was arrested in the "mapping area," to return to the area.

Enforcement

Officers met with Command level supervisors and developed a 20-week strategic plan for the area. The plan called for weekly law enforcement activities in the area even if it was only a few hours in duration. The plan was operational from May 1995 through August 1995, which coincided with our evaluation period. This was considered the most critical time because of increased prostitution activity.

Each week between one and three units of the department would conduct some type of activity in the area. The activities included foot patrol, bike patrol, traffic enforcement, motel register checks, and sting operations.

Officers created a "10 Most Wanted List" for the area. The list consisted of names of prostitutes, drug dealers, pimps, and other offenders who were criminally active in the area. The officers gave the offenders special attention. They walked warrants through the court system and requested high bonds from prosecutors and judges. They talked to parole officers, probation officers, judges, and prosecutors about the offender's actions in the community and requested longer jail sentences upon conviction.

Officers also developed a "Broadway Reference Guide" which listed known offenders in the area. The guide included photographs, which were placed in patrol cars and routinely updated. It

has been used numerous times to identify offenders giving false names.

Officers provided numerous other types of services in the community. Forms were left with each business in the area with instructions on how to document illegal activity and report it. Hundreds of hours were spent on foot patrol walking in the neighborhood. Officers produced weekly typed reports on the activities in the area, which increased communication among department personnel.

On more than one occasion officers tracked down children abandoned by their mothers while they worked the streets. Community Officers also provided training to patrol officers on how to enforce the new prostitution ordinances.

Courts

Community Police officers followed up on every prostitution arrest in the area and reviewed the case to insure proper disposition. The prosecutors agreed not to plea bargain cases. The officers also sent out follow-up letters to each offender on AIDS awareness and sexually transmitted diseases. Officers videotaped prostitutes and used the information to educate prosecutors on how the offenders operate on the street. This helped build prosecutor confidence in the officers' testimony.

Community

Several billboards were placed in the area warning potential offenders that prostitution would not be tolerated. The signs were paid for with business donations and a local billboard company provided free space. The signs depicted a stop sign using the acronym "STOP" which stood for "Stand Tough on Prostitution." A Neighborhood Action Group was established which acted as a neighborhood steering committee. The community police officers worked closely with this action oriented group and met regularly to share information.

In 1995 the first Citizen Patrol group recognized by the City of Wichita became active in the South Broadway area. The community police officers played a key role in encouraging citizen

involvement in the program and they helped design the operational procedures, training curriculum, and program guidelines.

The members received training from the Central Inspections Division and the Police Department. They also received instruction on the Neighborhood Watch Program and techniques for patrolling and reporting crime.

Meetings were conducted with 30 motel owners apart from other businesses. The exclusive meeting encouraged owners to share information without the fear of being challenged by neighborhood leaders.

As a result of the meeting the owners established a motel association and developed a networking system to warn motels that offenders were working the area in an effort to keep them from moving from one motel to another. The police department also provided a list of convicted prostitutes at the substation for managers and motel owners to view.

The South Central Recreation Initiative was another component of the plan, which focused on making long-term investments in the area. The area lacked a city operated recreation center. The Wichita Police Department, The Regional Prevention Center, Wichita School District, Cities in Schools, area Churches, and the Wichita Park Department created a steering committee to pool available resources to provide recreational activities for youth.

The concept was aimed at utilizing community resources available in churches and schools more efficiently. Activities were planned using existing facilities at churches so that children would have the opportunity to participate in structured programs. A program was designed to use several church facilities at time when other park and school facilities were closed.

Community police officers also provided "Learning for Life" instruction at Hamilton Middle School located in the center of the neighborhood. Officers spent an hour a week speaking to children about topics such as responsibility, consequences and goals. This was provided in addition to our DARE program. The

program was aimed at bringing community leaders into the classroom to teach life skills. In addition, the community police officers assigned to the South Bureau Substation moved their offices to a vacated classroom in Hamilton Middle School.

Eight community police officers report to the facility on a daily basis. The move has also increased the visibility of police officers in the area and the interaction between middle school students and police officers.

Environment

Community Police Officers organized several cleanups in the area. The focus of the cleanups was on businesses, vacant lots, alleys and homes adjacent to Broadway. Prostitutes and drug dealers were making contact with motorists on city streets and moving to alleys to conduct business. Even though the alleys had street lighting, the trees and brush reduced the effects of the lighting. Officers drove the area at night and prioritized the cleanup projects according to severity.

Officers and volunteers on the blocks advertised the cleanups on fliers, which were hand delivered, where the clean up was to occur. On the day of the cleanup volunteers brought out chain saws, rakes, shovels and weed trimmers to clean up the alleys. City trucks were used to haul the debris away to the landfill. Boy Scout Troops, Neighbor-to-Neighbor members, Neighborhood Association members worked together on the projects.

On several occasions inmates of the local community corrections halfway house were bused into the area to assist with the effort and received community service hours for the project. Area businesses supported the effort by donating food and equipment for the projects. In addition, several paint projects were initiated in the neighborhood to improve its appearance.

The Central Inspections Division in detecting housing code violations trained citizens in the neighborhood. The group, known as "Neighbor-to-Neighbor," would identify housing code violations and send letters to homeowners

requesting the problems to be fixed. City inspectors would get involved when requests were ignored.

Police personnel worked closely with Neighbor-to-Neighbor volunteers and specially trained City Code Inspectors called the Clean Team. Officers met weekly with Clean Team Inspectors and "Neighbor to Neighbor" volunteers to share information on housing code violation cases. Neighbor-to-Neighbor volunteers would attend court trials to monitor cases being heard in neighborhood courts.

The Clean Team Inspectors were routinely called to assist the police department on criminal cases when search warrants were executed. They accompany officers when a search warrant is served and enter the house once the scene is secure to conduct an inspection. The Clean Team has been very effective in closing businesses that are used for criminal activities through building code enforcement.

Media

Officers worked closely with the media to highlight the changes in the neighborhood. The local newspaper highlighted the positive activities occurring in the community. They still reported "john" and prostitution arrests, but in addition they ran stories on the cleanup efforts and reductions in crime. They covered the new ordinances that were passed by the council and showed support for community efforts.

The local NBC television affiliate ran a special report called "taking back Broadway" which included an interview with a prostitute who worked in the area. A prostitute was interviewed about the changes in the neighborhood. The ABC affiliate covered community policing and its effect in the South Broadway community during a local Town Hall Meeting. Two radio stations devoted a considerable amount of time on the issue of prostitution and the effect on our community.

ASSESSMENT

A 20-week evaluation period from May to August was used to evaluate our effort.

Follow-up surveys were administered in September and October to businesses, residents, courts, and patrol officers. Crime statistics were compiled and an evaluation report was completed on November 15, 1995.

Because these strategies were new, we did not want an evaluation period that lasted longer than 20 weeks. We wanted time to review our efforts in December and January when street prostitution activity was low so adjustments could be made for the upcoming year. A maintenance program was developed for the area for the summer of 1996 as a result of the information learned during the evaluation.

During the 20-week study, statistics indicate that there was an 11 percent decrease in total crime. Most notable was a 41 percent decrease in drug law violations and a 47 percent decrease in prostitution. In addition, we recorded an astonishing 16 percent reduction in 911 calls to the area. The South Central area reported greater reductions in property crimes as compared to the other four target areas.

A survey of area businesses indicated that 75% saw a decrease in prostitution activity and 90% felt community policing had a direct effect on the prostitution problem. A follow up residential survey indicated that residents in general reported feeling better about the neighborhood and its appearance. They also felt safer.

Court documents reveal that 26 people have been charged with the new Anti-prostitution Emphasis Area Ordinance and eight have plead guilty. The average fine for the period increased from 200 dollars in 1994 to 1,000 dollars in 1995. Seven prostitutes have been "mapped out" under the new Mapping ordinance along with two johns. Patrol officers arrested four prostitutes for violating the mapping ordinance.

The new ordinances helped reduce prostitution in South Central Wichita. In fact, prostitutes have learned the street boundaries for the enforcement zones and mapping areas and have moved out of the area.

The number of escort services increased during the period, which may be an indicator that street

level prostitutes were changing their tactics. In addition officers have noted more street walking prostitutes working neighborhoods outside the enforcement zone. Displacement of the criminal activity was a concern, but there was a general commitment to focus problem-solving efforts on this specific neighborhood and then broaden our scope if necessary at a later date.

Enforcement activities also increased awareness among officers of the prostitution problem and educated them on enforcement strategies. The appearance of the physical environment improved as a result of police-community partnerships. This collaborative effort helped build the trust necessary for long-term success. In addition, the positive media portrayal of the neighborhood helped reinforce the efforts of the community.

NOTES

1. Prostitution was a problem that has long been addressed by the Wichita Police Department and was recognized as a problem for area residents.
2. Once community policing was implemented in South Central Wichita the four officers assigned to the area used the problem solving skills they received in their two week training course to combat the problem. The officers were equipped with "take home vehicles", pagers, radios, and bicycles with a mission to cut government red tape and solve community problems. They were encouraged by the Chief and City Manager to use creative innovative strategies in addressing the communities concerns.
3. Officers utilized a flexible work schedule to accomplish goals while receiving the same pay as regular patrol officers. The officers were highly motivated, experienced police officers.