

ABSTRACT

The following report on the *Victoria Hills Community Garden* used the S.A.R.A. principals. It is a model showing how the police and community identified a problem in a neighbourhood and were able to jointly problem solve in a proactive manner.

The scanning of the Victoria Hills community was accomplished through the police and the community working together. They jointly identified problems of domestic violence, drugs and substance abuse along with other youth related problems. The analysis suggested that an increased sense of community was necessary to reach harmony between social agencies and community members. In response to the problem, the John Howard Society of Waterloo\Wellington, Waterloo Regional Police Service, and the Kitchener Waterloo Multicultural Centre provided an opportunity for all stakeholders to come together and take action. The assessment was started before the project began and is ongoing today. The first year, the garden's operation was evaluated by a Wilfrid Laurier University student. The police provided computer statistics showing a dramatic reduction of crime.

The real success of this venture is that it was a combined effort of the community, the police, and other social agencies playing collective roles in addressing the problems of this neighbourhood.

INTRODUCTION

What is Crime Prevention through community development from a police officer's perspective? What are the implications? What are the issues? Where does our role as police officers fit? History clearly demonstrates that the reactionary policing model has not been a successful crime fighting model, and that a community based policing model will likely be the alternate model of the future. What percentage of time is spent policing reactively compared to the time spent policing proactively? Which type of policing results in long term success?

Initially, the concept of a community garden as a means of crime prevention seemed unfamiliar, and perhaps even, misplaced for police services. It does make sense, in fact, when one considers that the movement toward community policing encompasses the notion of crime prevention through community development. It is both efficient and effective. The Victoria Hills Garden model encompasses the strategies of both community development and crime prevention through environmental design (CPTED).

This CPTED strategy involved taking a safe activity, and putting it into an unsafe area, which resulted in a reduction of crime.

SCANNING

The Victoria Hills community was identified by the police and community as having problems with domestic violence, drug/substance abuse and youth problems. The lack of Neighbourhood Watch in the area allowed the problems to persist. This was considered a "hot spot" for crime which was very time consuming for police. Computer-generated statistics and information from front line zone officers provided data which supported the communities concerns. At one point, store front policing was established to assist with some of these concerns. The increased interaction with police officers also brought the concerns of the neighbourhood to the attention of police services at all levels. Concerns of the community were prioritized and a strategic plan was developed at the community level.

The Waterloo Regional Police Service's Interest in community policing and crime prevention has become stronger since 1989 when a unique partnership was formed between Waterloo Regional Police Service and the John Howard Society. Cst. Rob Davis was appointed the Division 3 Liaison Officer, and worked cooperatively with Jayne Matzeg from the Community Crime Prevention Program of the John Howard Society. Their joint mission was to attack community problems at the grass roots level. The first task was to locate a geographical area hi Division 3 that would benefit from our joint resources. Jayne Matzeg participated in patrol ride-alongs, gathered information from the front line permanent zone officers and reviewed computer statistics.

The Victoria Hills area was selected due to a high population density and it is a multi-cultural melting pot. Detachment Commanders also identified Victoria Hills as a needy community. It was discovered that many occurrences could have been prevented if residents had communicated with each other or were more strongly connected with their community.

PHASE 1 of this project involved input from several residents who came forth to target safety issues and create ways to deal with them. This first venture experienced limited success. These residents had good ideas, but they needed continual guidance and had trouble connecting with existing services in their community.

In February 1993, the initiative was expanded to include a cross-section of all community stake holders. This expanded members, formed the Safer Community Group of Victoria Hills. This group comprised 20 dedicated people living in, and/or working in the area. The group met monthly to create strategies, and dealt with local safety and social concerns. The focus was on coordinating existing services, and promoting interaction amongst community residents. Members of the Safer Community Group of Victoria Hills included area residents, John Howard Society, Staff Inspector Paul Jardin, Cst. Rob Davis, school principals, local housing authority representatives, social service agencies, and community groups.

The Safer Community Group of Victoria Hills came up with a prioritized list of safety issues that needed to be addressed. The three main priorities were determined to be, increasing parenting skills, increased safe activities for youth and the expansion Neighbourhood Watch, which was very sparse in this area.

Another concern involved several plots of vacant land which were eye sores as they were overgrown and used as a dumping ground. We chose to break ground here by turning a privately-owned plot of land into a community garden. The community garden provided an opportunity to develop a non-traditional Neighbourhood Watch Program. Community members would be keeping an eye on their community while looking after their garden.

ANALYSIS

It was recognized that an increased sense of community had to be developed in Victoria Hills for a collective approach to work. A sense of self-identity within the community was low in the neighbourhoods of Victoria Hills.

The group decided to address the issue regarding the hazardous, vacant lots through the development of a community garden project. The idea of establishing a garden project came from the concept of "safety through environmental design". The group soon realized that a community garden could fulfil a much broader objective in creating a safer community.

The community Garden Project was located on a particularly hazardous vacant lot that had been the focal point of much illegal activity by area youth. It was viewed as an unsafe and negative presence in the community. The criteria used in selecting this strategy was the fact that it was a highly visible undertaking, and it was a relatively non-threatening opportunity for residents to get involved and learn, more about the Safer Community Group. It also provided an opportunity for the police, social service agencies and community groups to work co-operatively. It enabled the participants to address a number of needs simultaneously.

Mooregate Crescent, Kitchener, where the Garden Project is situated, is a neighbourhood of low rent, high density housing. There are more than 1200 people who reside on this street. A substantial proportion of the residents are highly transient which tends to impede the development of a sense of community. Mooregate Crescent had been the site of a very high number of criminal offenses and police were consistently called to this locale for other service calls. In order to effectively deal with the high volume of police calls, a supervisor authorized a store front police station inside one of the apartments to save a cruiser from driving back and forth.

RESPONSE

In 1990, the John Howard Society of Waterloo Wellington launched a community crime prevention program within an area jointly identified with the Waterloo Regional Police Service. The John Howard Society took the lead role in organizing the Safer Community Group of Victoria Hills. The society has been forced to withdraw financial support due to fiscal restraints.

The Kitchener-Waterloo Multicultural Centre Inc. has taken over, providing support and leadership as required. The Safer Community Group of Victoria Hills brings together, on a monthly basis, a wide range of representatives, for the purpose of planning and developing creative responses to safety/social issues that have been identified by the community.

Immediate Objectives

- To get residents actively involved in developing a safer community through participation in a community garden;
- to provide an informal opportunity for the police and other cultures to learn more about each other;
- and to increase the contact of multicultural groups with members of the larger community.

Intermediate Objectives

- To increase resident's awareness of the social causes of crime and their role in the prevention of crime;
- to increase the knowledge/relationship between different cultural groups and the police.
- and to integrate racial minorities into the larger community.

The Community Garden Project is an example of a creative approach to crime prevention. It recognizes that a sense of community had to be developed in Victoria Hills for collective crime prevention approaches to work. The community garden was formed as a tool to educate residents in crime prevention through active participation in a non-traditional setting. This is but one example of the many approaches to addressing crime in a troubled neighbourhood. The police role was to act as a catalyst in this project.

The planning process for the Community Garden began early in 1993. Permission to use this land, rent free, was secured from the owner of the vacant lot. Originally, the organizers hoped that the community garden could operate without funding, but they soon realized that funding was needed to adequately set up such a project. Subsequently, the committee submitted a grant application to the Ministry of the Solicitor General and Correctional Services, Policing and Race Relations Branch. A two year grant was received in March of 1994, to be administered through the sponsor agency, the John Howard Society. After the two year period, plans were for the project to continue on its own without further funding. An initial grant of \$28,000 was obtained and it was extended over three years. The community garden operates today, without further government funding because of this grant.

A variety of tools were utilized to facilitate the police-community partnership. The Victoria Hills community approached the process through community dialogue via a consultative committee, comprised solely of residents from Victoria Hills. This approach was later expanded to include a cross section of all community stake holders. This proved more inclusive and assisted the group in addressing their safety and security concerns. This group adopted the name Safer Community Group of Victoria Hills. The primary focus was on coordinating a variety of strategies to meet the concerns at all levels.

The group has also run several other major projects. For example, over 150 people attended an Open House as part of National Night Out, which is an international crime prevention event. This was organized with very little cost to Waterloo Regional Police Service, thanks to the participation of the community and donations from local businesses. Through the effort of officers of Division 3, a closer working relationship with neighbourhood residents was developed. This alliance has opened the lines of communication between the police and the community. Other benefits include people taking pride in and ownership of their community. This is the basis of crime prevention. The Garden Project has been a progressive step for the Waterloo Regional Police Service, toward its mandate of community policing, with the police and the public working together towards a common goal.

The problem of hazardous, vacant lots was effectively dealt with through the development of a community garden project. The impetus behind the establishment of a garden came from the concept of "Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design". It soon became apparent that the community garden filled much broader objectives.

ASSESSMENT

From the lessons that had been taught to us in regard to community development, we considered the evaluation to be an important component from the start of the project. An MSW student was made available to write the first year evaluations. Her program evaluations in 1994 used personal interviews and phone interviews consisting of both measurable quantitative questions and open ended qualitative questions.

Cst. Rob Davis learned from working in the area of community development that the community is the ultimate expert in dealing with their own neighbourhood. One example was in the second year of the garden. Cst. Davis arranged for a farmer to plough the garden area with his large tractor. The community garden residents refused the assistance as they had spent considerable time and effort marking and upgrading their individual plots. They wanted to dig their own plots. This demonstrated a sense of pride and ownership had started to develop. Ownership of their neighbourhood was established.

The police provided computer statistics which showed the following reduction of police service calls in 1996, (as listed below). It should be noted, in fairness, that the reduction of crime in this neighbourhood is not solely attributable to efforts with community garden. It was the combined efforts of the residents and other social agencies which played a collective role in helping this reduction to occur.

REDUCTION OF POLICE SERVICE CALLS

	1993	1994	1995	1996
50MOOREGATE	57	30	43	31
66MOOREGATE	92	111	32	61
80MOOREGATE	187	139	97	46

AGENCY AND OFFICER INFORMATION

This Community Garden of Victoria Hills was a cutting edge project for the Waterloo Regional Police Service in the area of Community development.

The project was initiated by Cst. Rob Davis a patrol officer' at the time who was concerned about the large amount of police calls for service.

Cst. Davis was strongly supported by Superintendent Paul Jardin who shared his vision of this form of Community Based Policing.

Before the project was implemented there was very little training given in the area of problem oriented policing. This project was a catalyst for Cst. Davis to continue his studies at the local universities in the area of Community Development.

Cst. Davis received incentives in the form of Community Support. Initially there was mixed opinions by other officers, but support grew as the project developed into a viable proactive model.

Cst. Davis with his community organization course was able incorporate the S.A.R.A model. This involved the following nine steps:

- 1) Selection of Target Areas
- 2) Identification of the Target Area's Problems and Needs
- 3) Locating the Natural Groups
- 4) Utilizing Reference Groups
- 5) Resource Identification (Internal & External)
- 6) Identification of Leaders
- 7) Conceptualizing the Issues
- 8) Developing an Action Plan
- 9) Monitoring and Evaluation

The problems the police service experienced when first implementing the program related to that of time commitment. As Cst. Davis learned more about community development, he realized his role as a community organizer had to evolve from a full fledged member to a resource person. His status now is one of an occasional guest as the program developed into a volunteer-driven, self sufficient program.

The issues identified of prioritized concerns in the Victoria Hills Community were:

- 1) Overgrown, hazardous, vacant plots of land
- 2) The lack of Neighbourhood Watch
- 3) Limited activities for Youth
- 4) Poor parenting skills and
- 5) Uncoordinated service delivery.

The Safer Community Group of Victoria Hills agreed to address the issue regarding the hazardous, unsightly property as it's first major project by developing a community garden. This issue was chosen as it had a high probability of success. It was a common sense approach and it attracted a wide range of interested people and agencies. It was a non-threatening opportunity for people to get involved and to learn more about their community and their police service. This provided an opportunity for Police, and a variety of social agencies and community groups to work co-operatively.

The John Howard Society applied for a successful Ontario Provincial Government Grant from the Ministry of Solicitor General in Correctional Services. This provided a financial support of Twenty Eight Thousand Dollars for the John Howard Society to hire a part time co-ordinator over two years. This grant was extended into a third year term. Due to financial restraints, the John Howard Society has resigned from the Garden Project.

The Kitchener Waterloo Multicultural Centre has taken over sponsoring the project.

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