

21st Street Community Renovation Strategy

Presented By

Wichita Police Department

Abstract

In March, 1996, an area in north Wichita bordering East 21st North, received it's first experience with community policing due to Citywide expansion of CP within the Wichita Police Department. The mentioned area is roughly 1.3 square miles in diameter and is mostly residential. Violent street gangs had taken over the entire neighborhood and the law-abiding citizens residing in the area were reduced to a sheltered life of fear and paranoia. Children could not play in 3 nearby public parks and the area became a gang battle zone after dark. Families were forced to sleep on the floors of their house so that stray bullets from errant drive-by shootings would not hit them in their sleep. Index crimes for the small area were disproportionately high in comparison to the rest of the City and citizens were giving up hope. Those who could afford to move were fleeing the region and moving to other areas of the City Since this time a transformation has taken place in this neighborhood. Because of strategic planning and problem solving methods, the community in this area has reduced crime, improved the neighborhood physical environment, and regained self-esteem and control of their blocks. Throughout this process, the Wichita Police Department served as a catalyst of change to assist and improve this area.

SCANNING

The emergence of gangs in the late 1980's, became a problem for many communities in Wichita and especially plagued several neighborhoods in the northeast geographic region of the City. By 1993, gangs had a strong foothold in these neighborhoods and the residents felt they were losing control. Crime spiraled to an all time high in Wichita creating fear and the perception that crime was out of control in our city. Gang activity continued to escalate into the mid 90's and the quality of life, for many residents, deteriorated to such a point that they were afraid to leave their homes. Residents complained about uncontrolled crime, inadequate police response and loss of personal freedom. Economic development was at a standstill. Some residents and business owners were motivated to relocate to other areas of Wichita to escape from the violence and socioeconomics of these neighborhoods. Crime and the fear of crime were destroying this community. A handful of citizens from these neighborhoods and community leaders were becoming more vocal and adamant that the City respond and find a solution to their quandary.

ANALYSIS

During the late 1980's, Wichita's northeast neighborhoods began noticing an increase in crime due to the emergence of gangs. The crime rate in this community, as well as in the rest of Wichita, soared to record levels. Index crimes went up dramatically with the most alarming statistics being the number of homicides and aggravated assaults being committed by males under the age of twenty-one. The havoc created by the gangs was seen and felt throughout Wichita.

The neighborhood that suffered the worst devastation are in a 1.3 square mile area that is 13 blocks long and 10 blocks wide. According to the 1990 Census, the racial composition of this area was 92% African-American, 5% other minorities, and 3% Caucasian. The structures in this area are predominately single-family dwellings with a median value of \$35,000. There are 547 single-family dwellings, 3 multiple-family dwellings consisting of 52 apartments. Non-residential structures include 3 churches and 10 businesses. The City of Wichita owns 57 of the 547 single-family dwellings and many of the houses are rented with the assistance of Section 8 government funding. In June 1996, sixty-three (63) single-family dwellings were vacant and abandoned creating an occupancy rate of 88.5%. Also, located seven blocks from this problem area is the City's major public university - Wichita State University. This northeast neighborhood, during the late 1980's, was experiencing negative socioeconomic changes with a growing number of home owners moving out of the area and turning their houses into rental properties. In addition, a survey was conducted by Community Policing officers to ascertain the opinions and concerns of the residents living in the 1.3 square mile area. Due to apathy and/or fear, only 6% of those surveyed responded.

In May 1996, the Wichita Police Department sponsored a community meeting for this neighborhood at a local church. More than one hundred (100) residents were in attendance to discuss their concerns and available alternatives for resolving neighborhood problems. This meeting was a positive step, laying the groundwork for these residents to take back their community. The local newspaper, several radio stations and the NBC affiliate were at the meeting and showed their support by reporting on the innovative strategic plan being initiated through a collaborative effort between neighborhood residents and the police.

Another problem that this community faced was a distorted perception of crime in and around the area. Wichita quickly became known as a city with serious gang problems. In 1993, a barrage of newspaper and television stories fanned the flames to the point that a national television show ranked Wichita as being one of the top ten gang-infested cities. This negative perception culminated in early 1997 when, during a media interview, a Kansas Supreme Court Judge made a statement that he would not "walk" in the area due to personal safety issues. This statement indicated his perception of the neighborhood and lawlessness in the area.

Between January 1993 and December 1996, the residents living within this small area were victimized and witness to 704 index crimes. Within this same time period, this neighborhood also observed 671 incidents involving drug law violations, simple assaults, and weapon violations. Moreover, police recorded 33 incidents of aggravated assault from drive-by shootings and 10 incidents of vandalism from drive-by shootings during this time frame. During most of 1993 and 1994, police calls made to this area required a minimum of 3 officers for safety reasons. The crime had a direct impact on a local power company that refused to replace streetlights in the area until the individuals who were shooting the lights out were removed from the area. A review of our department's crime statistics revealed that the increase of criminal activities had a direct correlation to the emergence of gangs and their associated activities.

Our analysis revealed that the Wichita Police Department's efforts were reactive and relied on short-term solutions to address gang and drug activities and violent crimes that were occurring in the area. The courts were too lenient on gang members who had been convicted of serious gang-related crimes. In addition, the area had many abandoned houses that were being vandalized and used for gang and drug activities. Residents had inadequate accessibility to private or public telephone service which

prevented them from reporting numerous neighborhood crimes. Many residents who did not have privately-owned transportation were isolated from city services because public transportation was not provided to this neighborhood. The physical environment reinforced 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 community-wide crime prevention strategies.

RESPONSE

Officers worked with neighborhood residents and local community leaders to identify and discuss their concerns regarding issues affecting their neighborhood and quality of life.. **Three main goals were agreed upon by the community. First, enhance public safety by the removal of the gangs and their associated violent criminal activities was deemed a priority. Second, improvement of police-community relations and cooperation which would lead to reclamation of their neighborhood. This would occur through partnerships and open two-way communication to foster the rebuilding process. And third, overall improvement in the appearance of the neighborhood's physical environment would signal a commitment from the residents.** Evaluation of these goals would be accomplished through community surveys, occupancy rate analysis, calls for service, crime statistics, and officer-involved cases.

The response to the gangs, drugs and drive-by shootings involved targeting six specific areas: city ordinances, enforcement strategies, courts, community efforts, environment, and media. Police officers and community leaders, with assistance from a

private agency, spent an exhaustive amount of time analyzing and developing strategies to address identified problems. A comprehensive strategic plan was developed to address their concerns in accordance with an established time line.

City Ordinances

Community concerns were evaluated and it was determined that three quality of life issues could be affected by minor revisions to existing city ordinances. The proposed ordinance changes affected loud music from vehicles, people remaining in the parks after closing hours, and curfew issues. Even though these three ordinances do not pertain strictly to gangs, many gang members were often in violation of them. The necessity for these ordinance changes was to reduce juvenile crime, increase accountability of family, and streamline police operations. All ordinances, in their original form, initially required officers to witness the violations, fill out an incident report, uniform criminal complaint, arrest report and, on occasion, book the violators into jail and impound their vehicle. After the officers filled out their paperwork, they were mandated to call a police department clerk who would then enter this information into a computer data base.

The proposed revisions were presented to the legal department, command staff and, finally, to the city council which did approve and enact all ordinances. The changes allow officers to cite these violators by only completing one form instead of three (3) different forms and their paperwork goes straight to municipal court for processing. The changes reduce the amount of time officers spend citing the violators, eliminate associated paperwork for police records and save the department thousands of dollars. The fines were also increased and can not be dismissed by the court system. Officers

are excited about these changes and citizens see this as a positive step toward improving their quality of life issues.

Enforcement Strategies

The strategic plan called for focusing on gangs and their activities. The major objective of this plan, as agreed upon by the residents and police, was to remove gang members from the neighborhood. Residents in the area expressed a desire for more police presence in their neighborhood. Beat officers were instructed to gather information on the gangs and to use zero tolerance on any criminal act that they were dispatched to or witness thereof. Officers were provided the opportunity to work uniformed off-duty assignments in this area. The off-duty salary expense for these officers was funded by a federal grant supplied by the U.S. Department of Justice "Weed and Seed" National Asset Forfeiture Fund.

In addition, another group of uniformed officers who were specially trained in gang and drug suppression activities was placed in this neighborhood to target gang members. This unit was also used as the enforcement unit of Community Policing. Updated and specialized equipment was supplied to this unit by the U.S. Department of Justice Weed and Seed grant previously mentioned. Undercover detectives and gang intelligence officers monitored gang and drug activities, developed criminal cases, and obtained search and arrest warrants for identified gang members and drug houses. Furthermore, all officers working in the area coordinated their efforts with the two Federal Task Force operations working within the jurisdiction (DEA Task Force and FBI Violent Crimes Task Force). The officers also worked closely with the detectives to develop stronger cases to be given to the prosecuting attorney. Additionally, the

command staff of the department enacted a separate crime classification for tracking gang members and their activities. This classification allows the tracking and identification of individuals participating in gang activities and facilitates stiffer sentences for documented gang members.

Furthermore, Community Policing Officers started working with neighborhood residents by providing information on gang awareness, drug recognition, crime prevention techniques, and how to call 911 and remain anonymous to avoid retaliation. Officers were encouraged to utilize unconventional methods of patrol such as foot and bicycle patrol. Additionally, the Police Department and the Wichita Public School system initiated a "School Resource Officer" program. This effort places a Community Policing Officer inside each public high school within the City. These officers also serve the "feeder" middle schools associated with each high school. The purpose of this enterprise is for the School Resource Officers to act as liaisons between the community, schools, and police department and to enhance the already existing School Liaison and DARE efforts within the school system. This undertaking represents another effort to promote positive relationships between police officers and children from the aforementioned neighborhoods.

Courts

Gang members who are actively involved in violent crime are monitored for any type of probation or parole violation by the Targeted Offender Program (T.O.P.) Unit. This unit consists of 1 officer and three 3 detectives who focus on violent gang members for the purpose of revoking their conditional releases. This unit tracks approximately 320 gang members throughout Wichita, with each of the four T.O.P. Unit's members

monitoring approximately 80 gang members. The gang members are nominated to be targeted by this unit when they commit a violent act that endangers human life or constantly violate their court ordered restrictions through repeated criminal acts. Once a gang member is selected, his/her name is listed in the City's computer and if he/she commits a crime or is a confirmed suspect in a crime the T.O.P. Unit will receive a printed notice the next day. A member from this unit will then contact the gang members probation or parole officer and request the gang member be re-incarcerated. This unit will use traffic citations that turn to warrants or failures to appear for court hearings as a way of revoking the gang members conditional releases.

Another innovative approach was initiated in May 1997. The Community Policing and Juvenile Probation Intervention program combines the efforts of Community Policing Officers and Juvenile Probation Officers in an interactive partnership to reduce juvenile recidivism. In this strategy, Community Policing Officers and probation officers actually designate portions of their respective shifts to develop positive contacts with the juvenile violators and their families. The purpose of these contacts is to solicit family support and encourage offenders to avoid further criminal conduct. Currently, the program is only being utilized in the general area of our nominated neighborhood. If the program continues to show positive results, it will be implemented city-wide in the Fall of 1997.

Community

In early 1996, because of historical problems, the residents exhibited mixed emotions about the increased police presence in their neighborhoods. They vocalized their feelings ranging from anger to apathy to being supportive. At this same time,

Community Policing Officers conducted a survey of 350 residents in the neighborhood with only a 6% response rate. The residents were very apathetic and hesitant to have any contact with police. In the initial phase of the strategic plan, during the May 1996 meeting, the community house concept was presented to the attending residents and representatives from the media. The community house concept involved transforming a vacant city-owned house within the neighborhood to a functional facility that could provide for educational classes, health services, counseling, a safe location for meetings, and access to legal services, including local law enforcement. The community house proposal included having a Community Policing Officer and various patrol officers present during hours of operation. Officers would also use the house after hours for paperwork and to show a continued presence in the area. The local housing authority representative contacted the Department of Housing Urban Development (HUD) and received authorization to utilize a HUD house for conversion into a **Community House**. A HUD representative stated this project was "the first of its kind where a HUD house was donated to any city for use by the community." The house was renovated and opened to the neighborhood residents in October 1996. The Community House has since been the site of approximately 150 meetings, 5 neighborhood events, and many hours of health-related, legal, and counseling services.

The Community House provides office space for the Wichita Metropolitan Family Preservation Agency, Inc. This agency is the steering committee for the federal "Weed & Seed" money that was awarded to the City of Wichita. The "Weed & Seed" money has made a significant contribution to neighborhood law enforcement efforts and to the success of the neighborhood. The Family Preservation Agency also provides classes on parenting skills, teenage peer-resistance, and alternatives to gang lifestyles. This agency brought in staff and equipment to help the residents with their needs. In addition, the

Community House hosts a monthly food share program that provides low cost, high quality food to the community which is packaged and handed out by volunteers and police officers. Furthermore, the neighboring university - Wichita State University - has agreed to provide free shuttle service to area residents to and from campus. The university has also offered free computer training on campus to members of this community. Throughout the response phase this university has remained an active partner and strong ally to this project and the Wichita Police Department. In addition, the local Boys & Girls Club have provided job training services and free membership to youth that live in the focus area.

During this time, the Wichita Housing Authority provided two houses to Americorp, a welfare reform program, that is providing job training and life skills to women. These women are in a transitional phase of re-entering the work force and ceasing dependency regarding government assistance. The Americorp houses and Community House are located on the same block and assist many residents in this neighborhood.

Furthermore, the residents took a proactive approach by reestablishing a neighborhood association that had been dormant for approximately 5 years. The re-activated neighborhood association also chose to expand its boundaries to include the entire focus area. This same neighborhood association is now assisting another nearby neighborhood in developing their own association.

The neighborhood residents wanted phone service in the residential area. This request culminated in a combined effort between a local phone company and a Community Policing Officer to obtain a public pay phone which was installed outside the Community House. Southwestern Bell Telephone's representative is not aware of any other public pay phone being placed within a residential area consisting of single-

family dwellings in the state of Kansas. In addition to the innovative concept of placing a public phone in a residential area, the phone company agreed to donate a sliding scale percentage of money from the pay phone to the neighborhood association.

Environment

This neighborhood was a prime example of the broken windows theory. As the gangs had taken over this neighborhood, the residents and landlords became increasingly less interested in maintaining their properties or reporting crime. The community spiraled into a blighted, unsafe neighborhood where few wanted to live. A priority was to improve the physical environment and create a sense of pride in the community. The residents, working with various city services and a Community Policing Officer, were able to accomplish 3 neighborhood cleanups. These cleanups served to remove several tons of debris, tree limbs, dead animals, tires and inoperable appliances. City housing and health inspectors, working with the neighborhood, cited many landlords and problem residents for code and zoning violations regarding the poor and deteriorating conditions of their properties. Many residents did not have trash service and were cited with the hope they would then obtain such service. These cleanups also focused on the abandoned and boarded-up houses in the area. These residences were inspected and brought up to City code.

Overgrown trees and high grass in this area created the image of an unkempt neighborhood. The City's Park Department, in conjunction with a Community Policing Officer, cut down and trimmed trees throughout the neighborhood creating a cleaner and brighter environment. The City's Forestry Department then planted new trees in areas that previously had no trees. Vacant properties, where grass had previously been

allowed to grow for several months at a time, are now being mowed and maintained by city services.

The next step was to work on street improvements and the removal of abandoned vehicles. Many preventive street maintenance measures were undertaken to improve the driving and walking surfaces. The abandoned vehicles on the streets and residential properties were impounded. The street lights that were damaged or provided inadequate lighting were repaired and brighter lights were installed. In addition, new lights were installed in areas where gangs had a tendency to congregate.

The environmental efforts have proved productive since some residents are requesting lawn and landscaping classes. Few abandoned cars are left in the area and residents quickly notify beat officers when abandoned vehicles appear. Most residents are taking pride in their properties and are active participants in their neighborhoods.

Media

Members of the police department promptly recognized the importance of developing a partnership with the media following our adoption of Community Policing philosophy in May 1994. During the late 1980's and early 1990's, the media used the sensationalism and growing fear of gangs to increase their readership and viewership. As part of the citywide Community Policing strategy, members of the media agreed to stop many of the gang-related stories. They realized that the media coverage only heightened the prestige the gangs relished/enjoyed due to the exposure of their criminal acts. The media has taken a proactive posture by encouraging reporters to cover the positive events in the community and to downplay the negative stories. The local newspaper, radio stations and 3 network affiliated television stations have focused on the

positive steps this neighborhood is undertaking. The media has highlighted the many partnerships that have formed to make these changes possible. The NBC affiliate and the local newspaper were active from the beginning by covering the May 1996 meeting and many other positive community-enhancing events throughout the year. The ABC and CBS affiliates also provide positive support. The combined local media is playing a significant role in dispelling the negative myths and perceptions of crime and fear of crime in this neighborhood.

ASSESSMENT

A twelve (12) month evaluation period from July 1996 through June 1997 was used to evaluate our efforts. Follow-up surveys were administered in March 1997 and July 1997 to residents and businesses in the neighborhood. The following data was monitored and compiled: crime statistics, number of cases involving assaults on police officers, number of arrests of gang members from the area, and residential occupancy rate. Finally, a maintenance program was specified for the next three years as the result information developed during the evaluation.

An important part of this assessment was a set of follow-up community surveys to measure fear perception and service quality. The initial survey given in this area (May 1996) indicated strong apathy and distrust of police. Only 6% of the surveys were returned during this initial phase, and many had negative comments. Ten months after the implementation of the strategy (March 1997), the community was given a follow-up survey. The results showed astounding change regarding the perception of the affected neighborhood. Signs of apathy and distrust of police had virtually disappeared. Almost all surveys were turned in and most contained comments of a positive nature. There was

strong indication of a resurgence within the neighborhood - 75% advised they were now willing to get involved in neighborhood activities. The surveyed residents resoundingly endorsed the increased police presence. 89% of the residents surveyed felt that crime had been reduced in the area since the strategy had begun. In July 1997, a third survey was administered to measure effectiveness of the approach. 97% of the respondents felt that police-community cooperation would be or is beneficial to their neighborhood. A significant majority advised they felt safe in their neighborhood.

During the 12-month study, the following statistical analysis was completed regarding the impacted neighborhood:

<u>Part I Offenses</u>	July '94 to <u>June '95</u>	July '95 to <u>June '96</u>	July '96 to <u>June '97</u>	YTD Change <u>'95 to '97</u>
Murder	2	3	0	-100%
Robberies	15	7	3	-80%
Agg. Assaults	38	28	17	-55%
- Drive-by Shootings	14	8	3	-79%
Assaults on Officers	22	18	3	-86%
Arrested Gang Members	55	72	61	11%

In addition, residential occupancy rates have favorably increased to show that people are beginning to move back into the neighborhood. Within the last year, 39 of the 63 abandoned properties have been rehabilitated and now house families. The occupancy rate for the entire area has increased from 88% to 96% indicating an 8% increase in occupancy rate. Though this rate may not appear to be a significant

increase, it needs to be pointed out that many people with gang associations were evicted and/or chose to move away and have been replaced with community-oriented families.

Finally, neighborhood residents and supporting partners are working to improve the physical appearance of the areas. Numerous abandoned vehicles have been removed residential streets and properties. The community has initiated and supported 3 trash/debris cleanups and have asked for landscaping improvements/training from city services.

Conclusion

This renovation strategy has exceeded expectations. The gang and violent crimes have dramatically decreased reducing the perception and fear of crime. Crime rates have been significantly reduced. Police-community relations have improved and the physical environment has been greatly enhanced via the working partnership. Overall, the residents have taken back their neighborhood and assumed an active role in assisting other neighborhoods throughout the city.

AGENCY AND OFFICER INFORMATION

1. This project was initiated within the Patrol North Bureau. This Bureau consists of 92 commissioned police officers and supporting clerical staff. All officers assigned to this Bureau assisted with this endeavor through a variety of ways (surveys, foot patrol, enforcement). Detectives and Task Force members also helped with this project. Additionally, the command staff, including the Chief of Police, was kept abreast of contemporary information regarding the effort and supported the project throughout.

2. All officers within the Wichita Police Department have received 24 hours of Community Policing training. The officers who took part in this project were included in this training and had received the education prior to the initiative. Four hours of this training dealt with "neighborhood problem solving" modeled after the Goldstein approach and SARA model.

3. The Community Police officer who spearheaded the effort was allowed flexible work hours and a drive-home car. All officers who helped with the project were allowed some flexibility in work hours. No other incentives were given.

4. I was the instructor regarding the problem solving training received by all Departmental members within the last 2 years. The POP design used was based on the SARA model and information taught in Professor Goldstein's book regarding POP. I also have attended the annual POP conference in San Diego and utilized information and knowledge gained at this endeavor to enhance and guide officers through this project.

5. We experienced no problems with the model itself. The most difficult portion of the method for the officers was proper SCANNING and ANALYSIS. This is where it was difficult for officers to think in a nontraditional sense and to include all available partners in the effort. Police officers are so used to working alone and doing things themselves that it is difficult for them to "share" problems with the community. Once we were into the RESPONSE stage the project effort flowed quickly.

6. We received aid from the Bureau of Justice Weed & Seed office to assist with some increased personnel and equipment enhancement. Minimal departmental overtime was used for the effort, however, we did assign a second marked unit to the area on most 2nd and 3rd watches when we had the schedule strength. Additionally, upon the opening of the Community House within the area, we rescheduled officers from all shifts to take turns staffing the house. This was done so the officers could meet and get to know residents who lived in the nearby neighborhoods.

7. Project Contact Person:

Thomas J. Stolz
Captain
3015 E. 21st. N., Wichita, Kansas 67214
phone: (316)-688-9500 fax: (316)-688-9326
e-mail: tdstolz@feist.com