

120 E. 18th Street

Neighborhood Improvement Project



National City Police Department

Neighborhood Policing Team

The Neighborhood Policing Team will seek to empower, educate and infuse residents, businesses and neighborhoods of National City to increase their own public abilities.

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City of National City Police Department

SKIP DICERCHIO, CHIEF OF POLICE



April 25, 2002

Herman Goldstein Selection Committee
1120 Connecticut Ave., NW, Suite 930
Washington D.C., 20036

Dear Selection Committee,

Enclosed, please find our submission for consideration of the prestigious "Herman Goldstein Award." Since this award recognizes innovative and effective problem-oriented policing projects, I feel this project will be a top contender.

This project, "The 120 East 18^h Street Neighborhood Improvement Project," was conducted and executed by the National City Police Department's Neighborhood Policing Team. The project exemplifies problem-oriented policing as well as demonstrates the effectiveness of communities and police working together to solve problems.

I want to thank you in advance for your consideration of this project.

Respectfully Submitted,

Anthony "Skip" DiCerchio
Chief of Police
National City Police Department

National City Police Department

Neighborhood Policing Team

120 East 18th Street

Neighborhood Improvement Project

SUMMARY

Scanning:

The residence at 120 E. 18th St. is a single detached home in a mixed residential/business district. This property was responsible for housing a large variety of criminal offenders and an elderly owner who was being victimized at an astonishing rate. Junked cars, trash, graffiti and old furniture were the first things visible at the property. The broken window theory was in full effect related to the property and persons as well. At any given point, six to eighteen people called 120 E. 18th St. home. These factors fostered an inevitably high number of calls for service.

Analysis:

The property had been a problem for over ten years. No past attempts to find a long-term solution existed. Traditional responses by officers only solved the immediate

peripheral problem. Based on statistics gathered and interviews of all parties involved or affected, a response plan was developed.

Response:

Our initial response demanded traditional tactics, such as arrests, so we could make the residence safe for the upcoming non-traditional tactics. Within two weeks, we were able to get other essential personnel involved to address environmental and social changes.

We removed a majority of the criminal offenders however five to seven others wanted to remain. It became clear that the drug and gang activity was just a peripheral problem. The root problem was the elderly owner who was resistant to any change, unable to assert herself, feared losing her independence and any social structure that remained.

A variety of citations were written related to substandard living conditions and building code violations by a variety of agencies. Adult Protective Services and the Public Guardian Office assisted with the elderly owner and eventually took possession of the residence and sold it for her care. We worked with the new property owner to ensure old problems never returned.

Assessment:

The Public Guardian Office is the conservator of the elderly owner and moved her to an assisted living facility. They have control over her money and welfare and as a result she is no longer being victimized.

The best resolution is that the elderly owner is no longer being victimized and has no chance of ever becoming a victim again. A second and more visible resolution is the fact that there has been a 100% reduction in calls for service. This long-term solution has ended one of the city's most known and despised problems that had existed for over ten years.

National City Police Department

Neighborhood Policing Team

120 East 18th Street

Neighborhood Improvement Project

DESCRIPTION

A. Scanning:

1. What was the nature of the problem?

This was a single detached home that had between six and eighteen people living there at any given point. There were substandard living conditions that led to the owner being hospitalized and the house being overrun by a variety of criminal offenders. The backyard was a tent city, which allowed parolees to be sleeping in close quarters with children. These factors created an environment that drained police and fire resources. The criminal offenders were allowed to congregate in and around 120 E. 18th St., which had a negative impact on the surrounding residences and small businesses.

2. How was the problem identified?

This problem existed for over ten years and was known by all officers as a problem house. Officers had learned to accept a certain level of criminal activity from the residence. Early in the year, the drain on police resources reached an all time high. I was

approached by Detective Cordero requesting the Neighborhood Policing Team (NPT) to take a closer look at 120 E. 18th St.

3. Who identified the Problem?

The peripheral problems were common knowledge to all. The root problem was finally discovered by NPT after interviewing the involved parties.

4. How and why was this problem selected from among other problems?

The calls for service were so high that officers from every assignment in the department were spending so much time at the residence that other problem areas in the city suffered. The criminal activity generated from this residence was being targeted by state parole and two countywide task forces. This problem stood out in that we recognized this project would allow for significant change in the community. We knew we could get a successful resolution to this problem.

5. What was the initial level of diagnosis/unit of analysis (e.g., crime type, neighborhood, specific premise, specific offender group, etc.)?

This problem was generally limited to 120 E. 18th St. We knew that although crimes were occurring at this address, the people living there were responsible for a variety of other crimes within the city. The group of offenders varied due to the transient nature of people living at the house. We knew if they were there, they were involved in criminal activity.

B. ANALYSIS:

1. What methods, data and information sources were used to analyze the problem (e.g., surveys, interviews, observations, crime analysis etc.)?

We interviewed the neighbors and the small business owners who complained of a loss of revenue due to the criminal element at 120 E. 18th St. We also interviewed other law enforcement agencies (state parole) and human services to fully analyze the root problem. Molli Duker, from our Crime Analysis Unit, developed graphs and charts showing the calls for service. From January 2000 to December 2001, we responded to 39 calls for service and there were 28 additional times when officers were at the residence on self initiated activity. During interviews with officers from our department, we discovered that although the statistics may not show continuous calls for service at 120 E. 18th St., those residents were involved in crimes elsewhere in the city. We also took photos of the property and surrounding area before we started taking any action.

2. History: How often and for how long was it a problem.

The property had been a problem to the community for over ten years. Even if the residence did not generate a call for service on a given day, the fact that gang members, drug dealers, drug users and transients were loitering allowed the broken window theory to flourish on a daily basis. The property had a negative impact on business and residents by putting them in fear of tasks like walking down the street. At the inception of this project, 120 E. 18th St. was consuming an inordinate amount of police resources.

3. Who was involved in the problem (offenders, victim, others) and what were their respective motivations, gains and losses?

Parolees, gang members, sex registrants, drug abusers, homeless and children were all involved but were peripheral offenders. However, it was the elderly female owner, Mrs. Christian, who lived at the residence that was at the root of the problem. Mrs. Christian allowed her grandson to live in a partitioned area of the house. She allowed her daughter and son-in-law to live in a converted garage. Her grandson went to prison and he allowed his friends to move into tents and sheds in the backyard. They in turn allowed their friends to move into additional tents and sheds. The neighbors were encouraged by the police taking action, but were hesitant to get involved because they had never seen any significant and lasting results in the past.

Mrs. Christian's family was motivated by money. They did not pay her any rent and they were stealing money from her bank accounts. The majority of people who lived in the backyard had a place to stay and conduct any activity they wanted without being harassed by the occupants. Mrs. Christian did not want to make any one person leave out of fear of losing the companionship she gained from the family. As a result, she did not call the police regarding any sort of criminal activity.

The greatest obstacle in this project related to what Mrs. Christian perceived she had to lose. She believed she was going to lose her freedom and be locked up in a sordid nursing home. Second, the family members knew they were going to have to find their own place to live and pay rent and would not be able to victimize Mrs. Christian. As

a result, the family members encouraged Mrs. Christian to resist and fight all attempts that would permanently solve this problem.

4. What harms resulted from the problem?

There were two equally divided harms. There was general harm to the surrounding property value and loss of business revenue due to the criminal element loitering in the area. This was complemented by the substandard property. The second harm was the victimization to Mrs. Christian by her family members. At the inception of this project, Mrs. Christian was hospitalized due to an injury she suffered from her debris-covered yard. Her bank accounts were overdrawn due to theft by family members and her bills were overdue since she did not have any money. All of her utilities were soon to be turned off.

5. How was the project being addressed before the problem-solving project? What were the results of those responses?

Over the past ten years, no significant actions had been taken to create a long-term solution for this problem. The responses were generally in reaction to a call for service. At that point the patrol officers would try to solve the problem by telling the individuals to leave and not come back. This would solve the problem for a day or two or sometimes even a few weeks. This was the standard operating procedure for any law enforcement agency that went to 120 E. 18^h St. Although there were some arrests, the solution would be short lived.

6. What did the analysis reveal about the causes and underlying conditions that precipitated the problem?

The analysis revealed the people living and loitering at 120 E. 18th St. were not the root cause. The underlying condition had to do with Mrs. Christian. She had some dementia, was lonely and was unable to assert herself She was easy for people to victimize. The usual police tactics used to try to solve the problem were ineffective. Most police contacts resulted in a negative connotation when we were making demands of Mrs. Christian. In order to reach the long-term goals we had envisioned, we were going to need a variety of resources and different expertise.

7. What did the analysis reveal about the nature and extent of the problem?

The statistics gathered by Molli Duker revealed fewer calls for service than anticipated. In the 24-month time period researched, there were 67 incidents of police contacts at 120 E. 18th St. The incidents varied from group disturbances to assaults and self initiated police contacts. When we ran criminal history checks on the people living or contacted at 120 E. 18th St., we found that they were in fact being arrested elsewhere in the city for charges ranging from being under the influence of drugs to possessing stolen property. We asked other criminal offenders if they knew where to purchase methamphetamine. Nearly all knew of 120 E. 18th St. Thus, the extent of the problem was widespread and we were going to have to change longstanding habits.

8. What situational information was needed to better understand the problem (e.g., time of occurrence, location, other particulars re: the environment, etc.)?

The most important factor for us as law enforcement officers to understand was the fear of the property owner: the fear that she was going to lose her freedom, be locked up in a nursing home, lose her companionship and lose her family. Additionally, we had to understand that this elderly owner was being pressured by family members with ulterior motives to decline services and actions because it would not benefit them. We came to the conclusion that we had to remove Mrs. Christian from her home, out of concern for her life, health and welfare.

9. Was there an open discussion with the community about the problem?

We held a couple of different meetings at the police department regarding 120 E. 18^h St. The first involved a large number of resource personnel to discuss their areas of expertise and how they could be of assistance. The groups included city departments such as the Building Inspector, Code Enforcement, Fire Department and the Health Department. Other groups that were able to lend care to Mrs. Christian consisted of local hospital staff, the Public Guardian Office, a psychiatric team and Adult Protective Services. Quality of life issues and long term solutions were discussed.

Our team conducted follow-up meetings with the individual groups to really expand the individual areas of expertise and ensure we were getting the full benefit of the given resource. Follow-up meetings were held at the police department with the family members to discuss what their involvement was going to be to help solve this problem.

C. RESPONSE:

1. What range of possible response alternatives were considered to deal with the problem?

Our first ideas were to provide assistance to Mrs. Christian so the property could be cleaned up, the criminal element could be evicted and the owner could once again live safely in her house. We were going to get parole and probation conditions restricting individuals from being at 120 E. 18th St. A secondary response, if the owner was not cooperative, was to abate the property.

2. What responses did you use to address the problem?

The goal of our initial phase was to identify and arrest. We took a zero tolerance approach to 120 E. 18th St. and its associates. We talked with almost every person that was on the property on a weekly basis. This allowed us to identify who was actually living in the backyard and who was just squatting for a day or two. During the first weeks, we made 17 arrests for a variety of criminal charges. The Code Enforcement Officer abated an abandoned car that was in the frontyard. The Building Inspector and Code Enforcement Officer inspected the property and left notices of violations. The owner was given 10 days to get the trash removed and 30 days to get the building code violations completed.

As expected, none of the violations had been corrected within the given time frame. The Code Enforcement Officer arranged for a private company, Fire Protection Services,

to come in and make the corrections. This company removed all debris, trash and illegally erected shacks and completed the yard maintenance.

The interior of the residence remained uninhabitable. Mrs. Christian was now out of the hospital and returned to her residence. She was sleeping on a couch in the illegally converted garage because the interior of the house had so much debris it was impossible to maneuver around. Based on these factors, we used the assistance of Adult Protective Services. Mrs. Christian refused any of their services. We then got assistance from the Public Guardian Office. This non-traditional response proved most beneficial for this project. Based on our research, this was the first time this office was used in this manner by any law enforcement agency in the county.

The Public Guardian Office interviewed Mrs. Christian who at this point was moderately to severely disoriented from dementia. More importantly, Mrs. Christian did not know how she received her income or how she paid her bills. Based on these interviews, it also appeared she was not willing to make the required changes to the property. If Mrs. Christian were willing, completion would take so long that she would remain in the deplorable and unhealthy conditions for an extended period of time.

The Public Guardian Office filed for conservatorship of Mrs. Christian, froze her bank accounts and completed an in-depth financial review. The review showed her checking account was overdrawn. She had thousands of dollars of unpaid utility bills and a second mortgage against the house. Three of the family members living at the house claimed they paid the owner monthly rent but no evidence of that was ever located. After building a rapport with a couple of family members, we learned that two other family

members were stealing from Mrs. Christian. All the family members located had extensive criminal records. They were not suitable to care for Mrs. Christian and definitely not suitable for managing her finances.

Mrs. Christian initially agreed to the Public Guardian Office becoming her conservator, which meant paying her bills and making living arrangements for her. The Public Guardian Office was granted temporary conservatorship of her. Prior to the court hearing regarding permanent conservatorship, the two family members who were stealing from Mrs. Christian convinced her to retain an attorney and resist the Public Guardian Office's attempts to be her conservator. The reason for the family concern was that they were not going to have access to their mother's Social Security and SSI income and they were no longer able to steal from her.

In the meantime, we kept up with arrests and the identification of individuals who frequented the property. We kept in touch with surrounding neighbors and business owners. They were seeing the improvement but were still leery because of past failures to actually solve the problem. During the court hearings, one of the family members made threats against the Deputy Public Guardian's life. This family member was eventually barred from all court proceedings.

After many delays and several court hearings, the Public Guardian Office was awarded conservatorship of Mrs. Christian. She was immediately taken out of her dilapidated house and put into a new and spacious assisted living facility. At this location, she received on-site medical treatment, meals, clothing, activities and companionship. I

interviewed her at the facility and she said she liked living there. She was also beginning to look healthy again.

Eviction notices were served to all individuals determined to be living at 120 E. 18th St. and the house was boarded up. The house was eventually sold to help pay for Mrs. Christian's new living arrangements and this long-time problem was now gone forever.

We continued to work with the Public Guardian Office at this point. Family members eventually went back to their old ways and began stealing items from the assisted living facility where Mrs. Christian lived. Eventually, they were restrained from even visiting with her until they provided reassurance that they changed their behavior. One of the key people involved in this project was Mrs. Christian's grandson, who was in prison for a parole violation and for stealing her car. When he neared parole, I met with Mrs. Christian's conservator and received her input for desired parole conditions. After discussing this issue with the grandson's parole officer, it was determined he would have a "no contact" condition as part of his parole. Although restricting the family from Mrs. Christian for a period of time was dramatic, it was absolutely necessary. The family was a significant part of the problem. If we did not take immediate and swift action to change their behavior, we knew we would not reach the long-term solution and preserve the quality of life for Mrs. Christian.

The response extended beyond the property lines. Even though the problem at 120 E. 18th St. was gone forever, we wanted to ensure Mrs. Christian was never victimized again. Even though she does not live in our city and someone else is responsible for her care, we wanted to ensure a long-time solution to her victimization.

3. How did you develop a response as a result of your analysis?

Based on the interviews with the neighbors and the people loitering in the area, we conducted strict enforcement to deter the criminal element from loitering at 120 E. 18th St. Once we became familiar with what services the Public Guardian Office could provide, our decision to evict everybody and proceed in court was enacted.

4. What evaluation criteria were most important to the department before implementation of the response alternative(s) (e.g., legality, community values, potential effectiveness, cost, practicality, etc.)?

Potential effectiveness was the most important evaluation criterion for our department. As stated earlier, 120 E. 18th St. is a major thoroughfare for the city. The property is within three blocks of four public and private schools. The problem had existed for over ten years. The department wanted to see a long-term solution, not just another short-term fix.

5. What did you intend to accomplish with your response plan (i.e. project goal and corresponding measurable objectives)?

The primary goal was to increase the quality of life for Mrs. Christian, the neighbors and small businesses. The secondary goal was to substantially reduce the amount of resources 120 E. 18th St. was requiring from our department.

6. What resources were available to help solve the problem?

Initially, we knew state parole and county probation were available since they were already spending an inordinate amount of time at 120 E. 18th St. We knew we had our city resources such as the Building Inspector, Code Enforcement Officer and Fire

Department. What we did not know, which turned out to be beneficial for San Diego County law enforcement, was the existence of the Public Guardian Office. The fact that the Public Guardian Office agreed to allocate their resources helped tremendously to solve the problem.

7. What was done before you implemented your response plan?

Much of our time was spent thinking, planning and evaluating the information we had gathered. We wanted to see the problem from all points of view. We wanted to understand why the property had arrived at this dilapidated state.

8. What difficulties were encountered during response implementation?

There were no difficulties encountered as a result of any actions or lack thereof related to the police department. The most troubling difficulty arose from Mrs. Christian's family members. They encouraged Mrs. Christian to resist our efforts which would provide her with a better quality of life and rid the neighborhood of many problems. The family was clearly motivated by greed and other self-serving reasons. During this project, two additional family members took up residence at 120 E. 18th St. They knew they would be evicted once the Public Guardian Office was appointed as Mrs. Christian's conservator. Additionally, these family members had become accustomed to the extra income they had incurred as a result of stealing from Mrs. Christian. Due to Mrs. Christian's dementia and the lack of independent evidence, we were never able to get elder abuse charges filed against the two family members.

9. Who was involved in the response to your problem?

- NPT
- Patrol Officers
- Public Guardian Office
- Fire Department
- Building Inspector
- Code Enforcement Officer
- Health Department
- Psychiatric Emergency Response Team
- Adult protective Services
- + Paradise Valley Hospital
- Department of Corrections

ASSESSMENT:

1. What were the results? What degree of impact did the response plan have on this problem?

The result of our response to this problem was that this long-standing problem in the city is gone forever. Mrs. Christian now lives in an assisted living home which is a clean and healthy environment. This is a far cry from being hospitalized and subsequently living on a couch in a converted garage with family members who are taking advantage of her. Everybody was evicted from 120 E. 18th St. and the property was sold. The proceeds were used to pay off Mrs. Christian's existing bills and to supplement her

lifestyle in her new home. The new owners of the property remodeled the house. A family with vested interest lives in the neighborhood.

The impact our response had was outstanding. The total calls for service went down 100%. The amount of resources the department spends on 120 E. 18th St. went down 100%. One officer worked and coordinated this project over a six-month period. The impact reached further. The small business owners and the neighbors now have a new community member. The police department now has greater standing in the community as well. As a result of this project, I was asked to assist another law enforcement agency in San Diego County with a similar problem. I introduced them to the Public Guardian Office. As a result the Public Guardian Office is getting so many requests by San Diego law enforcement they are evaluating the idea of having a deputy assigned just to liaison with law enforcement.

2. What were your methods of evaluation and for how long was the effectiveness of the problem-solving effort evaluated?

One method we used to evaluate the effectiveness of the response was comparing the calls for service. We looked at quarterly calls for service from January 2000 to present. The calls for service peaked from January to May in 2001. From that point on, there has been a dramatic reduction in calls leading to the present 100% reduction.

A second method was evaluating the status of the property. We wanted to know if the building code violations were fixed and the house suitable for living again. The new owner hired a contractor, made all of the required changes and brought the house up to city code. The aesthetics of the house also improved the quality of life for the small

businesses. No longer do customers have to worry about themselves or their property due to the gang members and criminal offenders loitering in front of 120 E. 18th St. The evaluation period lasted through the remodel and the new owners moving into 120 E 18 St.

3. Who was involved in the evaluation?

Everybody that was involved in the analysis was involved in the evaluation. We interviewed Mrs. Christian, her family, neighbors, officers and neighboring businesses. The most satisfying evaluation for our team is that officers no longer complain about 120 E. 18th St. anymore.

4. Were there problems in implementing the response plan?

There were some problems in implementing the response plan but there were fewer than we expected. Refer to the *Response* section, question #8.

5. If there was no improvement in the problem, were other systemic efforts considered to handle the problem?

Improvement was made in each stage of the project. However, if objectives were not achieved, abatement of the property was considered.

6. What response goals were accomplished?

120 E. 18th St. is now a part of the neighborhood instead of being a cause of disruption to the community. Mrs. Christian is now in a safe and healthy living environment. The quality of life was certainly increased for all involved. The calls for service went down 100% to zero.

7. How did you measure your results?

We measured our results by conducting the earlier discussed interviews with all the parties that were involved. The Crime Analysis Unit also assisted us with a comparison of statistics.

8. What data supported your conclusion?

The statistics that the Crime Analysis Unit captured helped support our conclusion. Refer to the following charts for exact numbers. The data that was collected by interviewing the involved parties was also vital. Although Mrs. Christian and some of her family were resistant to our efforts, most agreed the outcome was favorable.

9. How could you have made the response more effective?

We have not discovered a more effective response to this problem. The resources provided by the Public Guardian Office were so effective they surpassed our expectations.

10. Was there a concern about displacement (i.e., pushing the problem somewhere else)?

Displacement in this project was welcomed and figured to be a positive factor. There were anywhere from six to eighteen people living in and around 120 E. 18th St. Most were living there illegally in illegally erected shacks. Displacing these people immediately improved the quality of life within the neighborhood. We believed all of the displaced people would not move together to another location. We hoped there was no

other location in the city that would sustain that sort of lifestyle. Based on the interviews with the patrol officers, the majority of the criminal element from 120 E. 18th St. moved out of National City.

11. Will your response require continued monitoring or a continuing effort to maintain your results?

We will not need to continue monitoring this project because of the permanent solution.

AGENCY INFORMATION

120 E. 18th St.

National City Police Department

Neighborhood Policing Team

120 East 18th Street

Neighborhood Improvement Project

Agency and Officer Information

- 1. At what level of the police organization was this problem solving adopted (e.g., the entire department, a few select officers, etc.)?**

This project was initiated by our department's Neighborhood Policing Team (NPT). NPT is a proactive policing unit that supplements the department's dedication to achieving the objectives of Community Oriented Policing and Problem Solving. Patrol officers also assisted in the efforts by providing continuous enforcement. NPT was then able to conduct more in-depth analyses and responses.

Throughout the project, we had the support of our Chief, Captain and Lieutenant. The civilian staff, such as the Crime Analysis Unit, seemed to have adopted this project as well. We worked so closely with the Public Guardian Office that they seemed to be part of our police organization. They provided assistance and were available to us at any point needed. Due to the success of our project and our referrals of the Public Guardian to other police departments in San Diego County, other agencies have also tapped this resource.

As a result they have become a well-utilized resource, and the citizens in the county are better served as a result.

2. Did officers or management receive any training in problem-oriented policing and/or problem solving before this project began or during its execution?

All members of NPT receive continued training in Community Oriented Policing and Problem Solving. They also have an area of expertise, in which they receive advanced training. A substantial benefit is the education NPT officers can provide to management and fellow officers on the latest problem-solving techniques. Although the concept of COPPS may be new to some, it is the standard in law enforcement today. NPT also attends the annual International POP Conference held here in San Diego.

3. Were additional incentives given to police officers who engaged in problem solving?

Officers were not given any additional incentives during this project. Once the officers saw the progress of this project, their motivation towards problem solving increased. Additionally, officers are regularly encouraged and evaluated on POP projects. Management has allowed NPT officers to rotate with a patrol officer who is involved in a POP project and needs more time to complete it. This way the patrol staff is not adversely affected by the loss of a beat officer.

4. What resources and guidelines (manuals, past problem-solving examples, etc.) were used, if any, by police officers to help them manage this problem-solving initiative?

The major resource used in this project was the Regional Community Policing Institute (RCPI) training manual, which allowed us to direct our efforts according to the S.A.R.A. model. Whereas NPT does follow the S.A.R.A. model, we do not limit ourselves to any set guidelines for every project.

5. What issues/problems were identified with the problem-oriented policing model or the problem-solving model?

None

6. What general resources (financial and/or personnel) were committed to this project, and of those resources, what went beyond the existing department budget?

The general resources committed by this department basically involved personnel. We did not have any financial expenditures in this project. Any bills that were incurred due to the city removing debris or making 120 E. 18th St. a safe structure were later recovered out of the sale of the property.

7. Project Contact Person:

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