

MURDOCK VILLA - TULSA CASE STUDY

Murdock Villa is a high rise public housing complex consisting of eight stories and one hundred forty-four units. The complex is located near a busy intersection approximately one mile east of the Tulsa downtown business district. The donor for the project specified that only physically and mentally handicapped residents were to be housed in the Villa. This donor continues to contribute some of the upkeep costs at the complex. The Tulsa Housing Authority is the administrator for the complex and provides an apartment manager who acts as security for the Villa.

Because approximately 50% of the residents are unable to care for themselves--bathe, feed, and monitor their own medication--they are given a list of home-care providers. The tenant hires a provider from the list. This provider lives in the apartment with the handicapped person. The salary for the provider is subsidized by the Department of Human Services (DHS).

During the spring of 1986, Officer Kay Orndorff patrolled the beat adjacent to Murdock Villa. Many times she backed up officers from the Villa beat. Orndorff, over a period of time, became aware of a large number of calls to the Villa. Most of the calls were vague reports of theft, burglary, drug dealing and in some cases, rape. On her calls to the Villa, Orndorff took mental note of the conditions. The project had a foul odor and seemed to be roach infested. The handicapped residents appeared to be unmonitored and unkempt, and there was no visible security. The front door of the complex was usually propped open with a chair, people who were obviously not handicapped were wandering into the building, and there were usually residents skirmishing on the grounds.

One evening Orndorff backed up Officer Williams on a call of stolen prescription medication in Murdock Villa. Upon arriving at the fifth floor apartment, the caller's provider answered the door. She talked with slurred speech, seemed disoriented and her pupils appeared to be dilated. When the officers stated that there had been a call for help on stolen medication, the provider said that there was no problem in that apartment. Inside the apartment was a 45 year-old woman, Mary Doe, in a wheel chair who was a quadriplegic. The officers talked to the invalid woman who only repeated what the provider had said. As Williams was questioning the provider, Orndorff noticed the invalid woman squinting and blinking her eyes—apparently sending a message to the officers. Orndorff asked the other officer to question the provider in the hall. Ms. Doe then broke down and began begging and crying for help. She claimed the provider had been stealing her medication. The provider was brought into the room, confronted with the information, and then escorted out and told not to return. The services of another provider were sought from the next apartment who agreed to temporarily watch two people until DHS could be contacted. Orndorff called DHS the next day to ask that a new list of providers be given to Ms. Doe for screening. She told them of the problem with Ms. Doe's provider; DHS was apparently surprised to receive this information.

Two months later, Orndorff took the job of Community Outreach Coordinator for the Tulsa Police Department, a position established by Major Drew Diamond, now Chief Diamond. Orndorff was interested in the

the needs of the handicapped and elderly. She was given freedom to assist troubled people in new and creative ways as she felt necessary.

Soon after taking this position, Orndorff received a call from Ms. Doe at Murdock Villa, the same lady who had called earlier about stolen prescription medicine and who was now reporting jewelry theft by her DHS provider. Ms. Doe stated that many of her neighbors had also experienced theft of certain items, including medication. She stated that these providers were threatening to abandon the victims if they told the authorities. Upon arrival at the Villa, Orndorff found that most of the residents were unwilling to talk to her about any theft.

The second provider for Ms. Doe was dismissed and Orndorff stayed with the victim for approximately one week until help could be found. Diamond supported this decision and told the officer to do what was necessary to resolve the problem. Orndorff contacted the victim's doctor the next day. He confirmed that Ms. Doe was a bright person with an exceptional mind and very optimistic. Orndorff also called DHS and met with the victim's case officer who was uncooperative and refused to believe that the providers were stealing. However, the case worker stated that DHS did not screen the providers. DHS simply place their names on a list to be presented to the needy people. The residents would then interview the providers and hire one of their choice.

Phil Steinbeck of the Independent Living Center, located near Murdock Villa, was contacted. Orndorff learned the apparent exploitation of residents at Murdock Villa had become the norm. Steinbeck had registered complaints with the Tulsa Housing Authority. However, the residents who had reported problems to him asked that their names not be used in the complaint to the Housing Authority. Steinbeck stated that these people were fearful of eviction if they caused trouble and did not want to be a problem.

While living with Ms. Doe, Orndorff was supplied names of other tenants. Out of uniform, Orndorff was able to gain confidence of some of the residents. Some alleged that there were two DHS employees other than providers stealing medication within the complex. Most of the victims feared eviction if they reported any wrongdoing. While living in the Villa, Orndorff tried to locate the manager/security guard who lived in one of the apartments. When she was finally able to locate him, he was also unkempt and seemed unconcerned about the tenants' problems. Orndorff also learned that the tenant association was dysfunctional at the Villa as the meetings served only as social get-togethers.

Orndorff contacted churches to furnish ladies to sit with the victim to allow the officer a break to work on action. Orndorff contacted Ms. Doe's daughter in Georgia to report the circumstances. The daughter expressed great concern but did not have the funds to fly her mother to Georgia. Because the victim's checking account had been depleted by the provider bouncing checks, Orndorff sought to find an agency to help fly her to Georgia. The Hillcrest Hospital Care Service was contacted to help but were not able to do so in this particular situation. Finally, Orndorff was able to supply the plane ticket through the Police Sertoma Club.

Knowing that she had only solved one person's problem, Orndorff **decided to** tackle the system that had supported the victimization of the residents- She began to gather data on calls for service- Over a two year period, there had been over 230 calls for service. These calls included prostitution, rape, theft, drug and alcohol problems.

Diamond and Orndorff attended an administration meeting at Murdock Villa with the Tulsa Housing Authority personnel. Diamond took a list of calls for service as well as individual reports on larceny, rape, burglary, and drug dealing within the Villa. He told the Housing Authority that Murdock had severe problems that the PD could no longer ignore. He also urged that someone monitor security from the Villa's front door.

The response of the Housing Authority to the existing problems at Murdock, was one of surprise. They indicated that there had been no complaints at the Villa, but pledged to check into the problems. The Fire Marshall and Health Inspectors were called in to inspect the Villa and found several violations. The media became interested through a report on drug-related theft in the Villa. Upon questioning different officers and Phil Steinbeck, the media alerted the public of the problems existing within the Villa. The donor of the building had heard through the media of the crime within the Villa. The donor contacted Orndorff and stated that she would seek to close the Villa if exploitation of the residents continued. These events served to turn up the heat on the Housing Authority and DHS.

The Citizen Oriented Policing Seminar (COPS) program was begun during this time in certain target neighborhoods and 15 housing projects. **Its** primary goal was to educate neighborhood residents about crime prevention, and to make resources available to neighborhoods. Officers Debbie Daniels and Nancy Blades worked together with the tenants' association to carry out the COPS program and the Alert Neighbors program. The program specifically set a goal to increase the number of calls to the police about illegal activity by 20% and reduce the fear of retaliation which keeps citizens from reporting illegal activity. Murdock Villa was named as one of the target housing projects.

Orndorff visited the Villa every other day for three weeks, in and out of uniform, gaining rapport with the tenants. Floor monitors who were bright and enthusiastic about needed changes were appointed by the officer. These individuals began attending tenant meetings, identifying problems, and helping to develop solutions. By this time, the Tulsa Housing Authority became more cooperative. The authority implemented a new security system for the door to deter non-residents from freely wandering in. It was suspected that these non-residents were contributing to the drug dealing and theft occurring within the Villa. The Housing Authority responded to the fire code violations with compliance and also began pest fumigation on a regular basis. A strong tenant's association has developed within Murdock Villa which meets on a regular basis.

A group of private citizens--spurred on by an ad hoc committee formed by the mayor to address problems at Murdock--raised \$15,000 to hire a tenant services coordinator at Murdock. The coordinator, who is not under

the Housing Authority's Jurisdiction, has developed an orientation program for new tenants and helped organize the tenant association. In addition, she continually evaluates security problems and is serving to create a greater sense of community among the tenants. To prevent isolation and loneliness of the residents, visits to the Library were arranged so that the tenants could check out books. Religious visits from various churches were established for those tenants of the Villa who so desired. Orndorff also contacted the Meals on Wheels agency to bring nutritious meals to those tenants who had such a need.

Finally, when comparing the fiscal year of 86/87 to fiscal year 87/88, the calls for service increased 28% at Murdock Villa. In addition crime reports increased by 512. It is felt that the COPS program was successful in its attempt to make the citizens of Murdock Villa more aware of crime and less fearful of reporting crime in their complex, thus the large increase in calls for service and crime reports. Murdock Villa was the only target project to exceed the 20X increase goal. Overall for the city, calls for service only increased by 3% and only 7X for all 25 target neighborhoods.

Orndorff adds,

"...this situation had become one the police department could not ignore because of calls for service. It was one that could not be handled with a report and a quick exit. I'm not sure if we as a department could have understood the whole problem from a black and white concept, our understanding came about when the need to have to stay in there (live in there) happened."