

The Fresno Police Department's Care Fresno Program

1996 Herman Goldstein Excellence in Problem Solving Award Nomination (Team Award Competition)

Introduction

In 1981 The Fresno Police Department moved from traditional to Community Based Policing and implemented that policy by decentralizing the department and dividing the city into areas of similar size, with geographic boundaries determined by the number of police calls for service. This was done so that a working partnership with the public could be formed. Officers could now be assigned to a specific beat which would allow the beat officer to become more familiar with the crime problems that were unique to a single part of the city. To achieve such a police-public partnership required officers to become familiar with neighborhood characteristics, residents, and problems.

In 1993, the Fresno Police Department shifted its focus towards Problem Oriented Policing, an enhancement of the Community Based Policing model. Whereas Fresno's version of Community Based Policing focused on patrol activities, Problem Oriented Policing transcends all divisions of the department and engages the cooperation of other city departments, public and private service providers, community organizations, businesses, schools, state and federal agencies, and neighborhood leaders and citizens in addressing the underlying causes of crime and quality of life issues.

After adopting Problem Oriented Policing and establishing POP teams to restore neighborhoods, the City of Fresno experienced a new phenomenon. After POP interaction, some neighborhoods would remain stable and would not allow the criminal element back in, but other neighborhoods, especially those consisting of multi family dwellings, would soon return to the previous level of crime, high police calls for service, and resident dissatisfaction. This led to resident frustration with the police department and the return of additional police resources to the neighborhood to address the same problems. It was from analysis of this problem that the Care Fresno concept was formed.

A. Scanning

Within a few months after POP was implemented, the problem of long term neighborhood stability was noticed by several people within the department and citizens in the affected neighborhoods. Deputy Chief Darrell Fifield observed this and began to speak with community leaders to develop alternatives. One of the departments first POP team officers also noticed this and began to comment on it and seek ideas to impact this. The department took a closer look and both the neighborhoods that remained stable and those that did not and made comparisons to the nature of both. Although many smaller problems came to the surface, the main issue became one of establishing long term stability, especially in areas where there were large sections of multi family dwellings.

B. Analysis

A more detailed look at the problem was needed. This was done by resident survey, analysis of police calls for service, and information from the city hall of records, city revitalization division, city permits section, Alcohol and Beverage Control (ABC), Parole and Probation, the local apartment owners association, and several other public and private agencies. Items were looked at such as the economic condition of the neighborhood and the reason for those conditions, and a breakdown of the makeup of individual neighborhoods. How many homes were in the area? Were they owner occupied or rentals? How many multi family dwellings were in the area and who owned or managed them? How many businesses were in the area, and what type of business were they? How long had they been in business at the location? How many area residents were on parole or probation and what was the nature of the violation? Were there neighborhood churches in the area, and how active were they in their community?

Almost everyone living in or working in the neighborhood was involved in the problem in one way or another. Some residents were victims to the theft and actions of other residents. Victims became fearful and would not report the illegal activity of other residents for fear of retaliation. Businesses suffered both directly from theft and vandalism and indirectly as the neighborhood's reputation declined and customers would no longer frequent the businesses as they "did not feel safe in that part of town."

Looking at areas where this occurred, a large factor appeared to be the lack of resident leadership to work on area problems, and ongoing interaction with the police and other city departments. A second factor seemed to be the transiency rate of tenants in the apartment complexes. Managers at these complexes often felt unsupported by their management company and in fact were often fired or relocated for trying to make positive changes. In other cases, management companies felt that the managers were not doing their jobs correctly due to the high turnover or vacancy rates within the complexes. This pressure led to managers renting units to unqualified tenants who in turn caused problems in the area, forcing good tenants to move. The vacancy rate in the complex climbed, placing even more pressure on managers and financial pressure on the owners.

The undesirable tenant often had to be evicted from the complex, or was arrested by the police department for committing crimes. This cycle repeated and there was little opportunity for improvement if change was not introduced. Visual blight was a common condition in these areas, which added to the depressed economics and business decline mentioned above.

Schools in these areas reported that they experienced an average student turnover rate of over 65% during a school year due to parents moving in and out of these areas. School Administrators in these areas stated that they registered or lost as many as 60 children per month during the course of the year. Although these schools were praised for having some of the best academic programs available, they held the worst averages in the school district for student retention. Parent participation in these schools was below average.

It was recognized that there were neighborhood churches present in all areas of the city that did not appear to be very interactive with the rest of the immediate neighborhood at this time. The question became: How could the police department assist these neighborhoods to become interdependent, develop resident leadership and ownership in the neighborhood, and assist the schools while reducing demands for police resources in the area? Obviously, the police department could not do this by itself. An interactive partnership and some basic

community building was needed. Although individual agencies had attempted to impact this problem before, they had done so without a partnership and without resident leadership, and had met with very limited success or with failure.

During a community discussion which included members from a local church networking agency called Evangelicals for Social Action (ESA) Deputy Chief Fifield-asked the following question: If the police department and other agencies ran the criminal element out of an area, would ESA run the churches in? This suggestion was met with an enthusiastic and supportive response.

C. Response

Several possible alternatives were considered to address this problem, but none seemed to be able to approach the entire scope of the problem or to remain as a long term partner in the area. Individual agencies had addressed parts of the problem, but no one had connected these agencies with each other and kept them in communication. The police department had attempted to establish neighborhood watch programs in these areas, but as resident leadership had not been strengthened, these groups failed or had minimal impact.

Realizing the lack of communication in these areas, and having the support of ESA, Deputy Chief Fifield recognized that effective long term change meant empowering people in neighborhoods to help solve problems. He formed a team consisting of a police officer, members of the ESA staff, and later a police chaplain, who would work together with local churches to recruit volunteers to work in the neighborhoods. The Care Fresno team would train these volunteers who in turn could work as mentors to residents to build community leaders. Those resident leaders were taught to seek stability in the neighborhood and build a vision of what they wanted their neighborhood to be. Other city departments and agencies would be kept in communication with these resident leaders to enhance communication between neighborhoods and city government and services.

The officer assigned to the program was the same POP officer who had raised questions about something being needed to maintain long term stability at some projects, and had even provided empowerment training with successful results to residents in one of her project sites. ESA agreed to provide a staff member and assistance in recruiting churches and offered to house the team at their office. A police chaplain with a history of working well with inner-city churches was chosen to finish out the core of the team.

The issue of separation of church and state was not avoided, and training for volunteers was created to ensure that the issue was kept in perspective. It was also important to all members of the team to recognize the unique potential of church volunteers with regard to their reflection of community values, and ideal use as role models. The use of volunteers was both practical and cost effective. In a little over one year, Care Fresno had just under 200 active volunteers and still functioned with only two paid staff members, the police officer and the chaplain. The officers position is grant funded and the chaplain is funded by the New United Way and the City of Fresno Neighborhood Revitalization Division.

The initial idea was to work with only five large neighborhoods the first year to be able to monitor them closely, but the concept worked so well that the list soon grew to fifteen locations instead of five.

Site selection is based on the recommendations of the POP teams. These must be areas that have shown a history of a high number of police calls for service and have had POP interaction and philosophy applied to them to resolve the problem(s) at the location. These areas have been stabilized, but there is a lack of resident leadership so there is a belief that the area will not remain stable.

The Care Fresno team, in conjunction with ESA, contacts local churches and recruits volunteers to work in the neighborhood. Volunteers are asked to commit to working onsite for one hour, once a week on a regular basis. Churches are asked to commit to working in the area for at least a year, but the objective is to build relationships to foster improvements that will continue beyond a year.

Volunteers are provided ongoing training by the Care Fresno team and are given instructions on appropriate and inappropriate ways to share their faith. The issue of the separation of church and state is dealt with head on and not avoided. Ways for both approaches to work well together are taught.

Apartment owners and managers are approached and are often asked to dedicate a vacant apartment for the use of the volunteers. Volunteers set their own schedule working with residents to bring tutoring for both children and adults, job training, parenting, or other resources to the site as requested by the residents. Residents also donate time at these centers to assist each other. The needs of any site are determined by the residents themselves, not the team or the volunteers. It is the job of all staff and volunteers to assist residents with how to do things for themselves, not to do it for them. Because of this, each and every site is slightly different in approach and direction.

Volunteers are also connected with the school serving the area and may work onsite at the project or at the school itself. The school district is a member of the partnership and works within it. Volunteers working onsite may be tutoring a child that attends the local school. That volunteer has access to the child's teacher and can talk directly to the teacher about the child's needs. Parents are encouraged to join in this interaction. School tests have shown that children involved in this project increased their reading ability as much as two grade levels in as little as four months of working one on one with a volunteer once per week. Parent participation in the involved schools is up by an average of 30%.

A city wide book drive was held and eleven sites were stocked with over six thousand books to build small resource centers onsite at these dedicated apartments. Many of the involved apartment managers use the centers as an advertising point to attract new and desirable tenants, or to keep existing tenants. This has brought praise and support that had been missing in the past to the managers from the owners or management companies. This support allows the manager more flexibility in screening, and they are more likely to deny a potential problem applicant.

Other parties have joined the partnership or have participated from the beginning. Members from the City of Fresno Housing and Neighborhood Revitalization Program (NRP) interact with the Care Fresno team and will come on site if requested by residents. If residents in any area decide to form a formal neighborhood association, they can petition for official recognition from the city. NRP staff will work with the residents to assist them in this process. An advantage to forming an association is that the membership can later seek funding directly from the city to improve physical conditions in their neighborhood that they see as a priority. More importantly, they are allowed as an association to set priorities for spending the money and

are subject to less government spending control. This arrangement is very satisfying to the residents and gives them ownership. They are often surprised that "City Hall listened to us."

NRP also contracts with the California School of Professional Psychology to bring cost free personal empowerment training classes to the neighborhood. Again, the emphasis is placed on showing residents what they can do for themselves, as opposed to others doing things for them.

Representatives from NRP, police department, Care Fresno, school district officials, and ESA meet regularly to make sure that all parties are communicating and that there is little or no duplication of services. Additional partners who work as needed within the projects can include the Department of Social Services, Adult or Child Protective services, the Fresno Fire Department, Veterans Hospital, Community Hospital, local civic groups, city council, various private businesses, The New United Way, and the neighboring community of Clovis.

The goal of all of these efforts is to maintain healthy neighborhoods. Some of the resources used have been listed, but there are others as well. Communication between these groups, and recruiting of additional resources is accomplished by the Care Fresno team.

One of the difficulties encountered initially was the hesitancy of the church members to see their "mission field" as being next door as well as in another country. As the volunteers interacted with residents and shared stories, for the most part, this obstacle disappeared. To avoid the issue of any groups feelings being hurt over "who gets the credit" the answer was easy, *everyone* can take credit for the success of the program, as all partners contribute to it.

D. Evaluation

Police calls for service have been reduced by an average of 70% in targeted Care Fresno neighborhoods, and the nature of many of the remaining calls changed from violent crimes such as homicide and robbery to domestic disputes and a few non-violent crimes, such as theft. Constant police presence is no longer requested or needed in these areas.

Apartment managers report fewer problems and vacancies at their complexes, and most state that the property owner or management company is far more trusting and supportive of them. They feel free to make decisions regarding the complex and tenants, and encourage tenant interaction with management. Managers of neighboring complexes are communicating and not passing their problems to each other. They realize that a problem for one is a problem for all in the area. Homeowners in the area have expressed greater satisfaction with the apartment complexes and feel that the complexes are better neighbors than they used to be. Residents have pride in their neighborhood and work together to remove blight from the area.

Schools report that they are seeing the involved children's grades go up, and parent and volunteerism in the schools has increased. This helps to lighten the burden on school staff, and staff morale is also up.

Economic development is improving and new businesses are opening in these areas. Other businesses that had been planning to relocate are staying as the blighted conditions that made their location unattractive no longer exist.

Residents surveyed have expressed a greater satisfaction with their environment and have shown intent to stay in the area. They have responded that they feel in control of their own neighborhood and know how to deal with different potential problems correctly. They know what they can expect from each agency that works in the partnership, and see these agencies in a

positive light. Schools involved in Care Fresno projects are reporting a decrease in their transiency rate, by as much as 12%. This is the first known decrease in the past several years. The schools are also reporting a 30% average increase in parent participation at the school, with one school reporting a 50% increase.

To date, over a year and a half since the inception of the program, locations remain at about the same level, with little need for police interaction, and reduced need for other services.

The response from volunteers could have been made more effective initially by creating and sharing a written training manual sooner than Care Fresno did. A printed manual was of great benefit to new volunteers or volunteers who at times felt that they had lost their sense of direction.

Displacement of residents was a minor concern as the approach of volunteers was to help existing residents to grow personally. Most residents, when given the opportunity to improve themselves in a way that they had an interest in, chose to modify their behavior rather than move. Some who had no desire to change were arrested for committing crimes or moved from the area. If the offender had a serious criminal background and it was known where they were moving to, the appropriate law enforcement agency intelligence unit was notified. Long term monitoring of sites is now provided by residents themselves, the neighborhood association, or the local church. They know what agency to contact with a need and to make that contact before the problem has a chance to grow. The Care Fresno team assists these groups as needed and works with new groups as well. At the end of two years, Care Fresno hopes to see the initial 15 projects functioning totally on their own, and these projects are well on their way to meeting this goal.

Through volunteers and professionals who have taken an interest in the neighborhood, relationships that at one time were predatory, have been replaced with positive, healthy ones. There is hope and a vision of a better future where at one time there was no thought even given to the future.

£. Philosophy and Organization

This program was initiated by Deputy Chief Darrell Fifield and Officer Vicki Dellone with input from several other department members and the full support of Chief Ed Winchester. It was not presented to the entire department until after it had been in existence for several months so that it could be refined to some extent first. Officer Dellone was a trained POP officer before starting this position and had received POP training from the department. She had also attended the International Problem-Oriented Policing Conference, as an attendee and the following year as an attendee and presenter.

Coordinating Care Fresno is Officer Dellone's full time assignment and she receives standard pay for a special unit officer. She sets her work schedule to match the needs of volunteers working on site.

Care Fresno recently became recognized by the state as a non-profit organization, and formed a board of directors who volunteer their time. The board includes several active members of the community, a member of the Better Business Bureau, a local university instructor, a member of the ESA staff, and Sgt. Dennis Montejano. Deputy Chief Fifield serves on that board and continues to provide guidance and insight to the program.